

## Aspects of Capitalizing on the Folkloric Source in the Work *Concerto Brevis The Clock* by Valentin Doni

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**Abstract:** Valentin Doni (born 1955), originally from Moldova, is a complex musician, known as conductor, composer and performer. In the general context of contemporary music, he has captured the interest of both melomaniacs and industry critics. The national musical ethos, as the composer mentioned himself, has always been his source of inspiration. He attempted and succeeded at “reconciling” folklore melodies with modern compositional techniques. His extremely personal way of musical thinking has evolved over the years into a perfect use of musical folklore, which he adjusted to his own musical thought and which was ultimately essential in creating original artistic works. Proof of this is *Concerto Brevis The Clock*, which stands out through its structural and conceptual unity, its dynamism, the logic of the musical discourse, and the rich orchestration. The musical theme, on which the musical variations are based, has been taken across from the repertoire of the folk musician Filip Todirascu. *Concerto Brevis The Clock* is a unique example of capitalizing on the folkloric source in the most direct and profound way. Valentin Doni uses a well-known folkloric source creatively, transforming it into a masterpiece of academic music. This is due to his talent to perceive timbre nuances, to orchestrate, and manipulate the musical sonority, as well as his deep knowledge of music and of aspects of traditional violin performance.

**Keywords:** folklore, harnessing, violin, concert, originality, concept of ideas

### 1. Introduction

When it comes to modern musical art, with its many various trends and styles of music, folklore remains a strong creative basis and a source of inspiration for composers. Folk melodies became a stylistic basis for Valentin Doni as well. In the general context of contemporary music, Valentin Doni has brilliantly managed to capture the attention of both melomaniacs and critics as a versatile musician: conductor, composer, performer, and lecturer. The national and foreign press strongly appreciates his artistic personality: “Valentin Doni is great at the art of handling the baton (B. Chelaru; Craiova, Romania); “[he] gave live examples of conducting mastery” (E. Tcaci, Chişinău, Moldova); “his talent and sonority showed a high level of musical

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mastery” (Milan, Italy); “a top-quality performance: *Trio*, a work that premiered from the Moldovan composer Valentin Doni” (France)<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Valentin Doni – biographical landmarks

The musician has gradually acquired a solid theoretical and practical basis, by initially graduating from the *Gavriil Musicescu* Arts Institute in Chişinău (now the Academy of Music, Theatre, and Fine Arts) with a major in orchestra conducting in professor’s Isai Alterman’s class (1973-1978). Valentin Doni then studied composition with professor Pavel Rivilis at the Academy of Music *Gavriil Musicescu* – 1985-1990 (former Arts Institute). He also studied the double bass and the violin. Between 1990-1992, Valentin Doni completed an internship that took place in Romania and Moldova with conductor Ovidiu Balan; and in 1992-1993 he further perfected his skills at the National Regional Conservatory in Rueil-Malmaison, France with Professor Jean-Sebastien Bereau. He also followed training courses in 2000 at the Academy of Music in Lyon and at the Lille Philharmonic in France. He worked as a musician in the folk music orchestras *Folclor* and *Mărţişor*, as well as in the National Chamber Orchestra of Moldova. As double bass player, he collaborated with the *Mihail Jora* Philharmonic Orchestra in Bacău, Romania and the European Symphonic Orchestra in Spain.

Valentin Doni is currently known as an excellent conductor, particularly manifesting his talent in orchestration. He started his career as a conductor in the folk music orchestra *Folclor*, which was associated with the state company “Teleradio – Moldova” (1986-1989). Between 1991 and 2004 he was permanent conductor of the Symphonic Orchestra at the National Philharmonic of Moldova, and from 1998 to 2004 he also held the position of artistic director and chief conductor. With his orchestra, he toured Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, France, Austria, Ukraine etc., totalling a significant number of concerts, in which he presented masterpieces of world music as well as contemporary pieces in first audition. Moreover, Valentin Doni accompanies with the orchestra both established artists and young performers, and is recognised for promoting the works of contemporary composers in various festivals such as *Mărţişor*, The New Music Days, The Pianistic Nights in Moldova, as well as The International Week of New Music (2011, 2012) in Romania. Since 1993 he has conducted philharmonic orchestras in different cities in Romania, such as Bucureşti, Iaşi, Bacău, Constanţa, Ploieşti, Sibiu, Arad, Târgovişte, Botoşani, Braşov, Timişoara, Cluj, Oradea, and others. He has also been invited to conduct orchestras in France, Italy, Slovakia, Russia, and Bulgaria. Currently, Valentin Doni works as permanent conductor of the *Mihail Jora* Philharmonic Orchestra in Bacău, Romania. For outstanding

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<sup>1</sup> Reference provided by the composer.

merits and remarkable achievements in the musical arts, Valentin Doni was awarded the title of Master of Art in 1999 by the President of the Republic of Moldova, and in 2002, the French government gave him the title of *Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters*. Moreover, he is a member of the Union of Composers and Musicologists in both Moldova and Romania.

### 3. Valentin Doni – compositonal landmarks

Even if his repertoire of composed works is not as impressive as that of other contemporary composers, Valentin Doni has a well-defined style. The most representative musical works were performed in concert halls in Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine and France. Valentin Doni's creative achievement includes symphonic, instrumental, chamber and vocal works. The most characteristic amongst those are *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (for violin and symphonic orchestra), *Trio for violin, piano and bass*, *Music for string orchestra, piano and timpani*, *Variations for piano*, *Sonata for piano*, *Balkan Fantasy* (for piano and symphonic orchestra), *Dance* (for string orchestra), *Nocturne (Owls Night)* (for symphonic orchestra), *Pastoral Symphonic Pictures* (for symphonic orchestra), and *Symphonic Triptych*.

Valentin Doni is highly selective with regards to the spectrum of technical means offered by various contemporary trends, creatively using only those that correspond to his aesthetic concepts at the time. With regards to national musical ethos, as the composer mentioned himself, it has always been a source of inspiration. Continuing the tradition of Romanian composers from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as of Bessarabian composers (Ștefan Neaga, Eugen Coca, Gheorghe Mustea, and others), Valentin Doni successfully managed to “reconcile” folklore melodies with modern composition techniques. His extremely personal way of musical thinking has evolved over the years into a perfect use of musical folklore, which he adjusted to his own musical character, which is ultimately essential in creating original artistic works. “Writing music based on folkloric themes is a beautiful endeavour, and writing compositions based on them is even more beautiful. It's important, however, that these works bear a distinctive and original character, based on a well-defined personality” (Axionov, 1996, p. 48).

Capitalising on the value of folkloric sources in composers' works has several approaches to it. These were highlighted and categorized by different researchers. Some examples are: the quote; the use of musical language elements; approaches at the conceptual level or semantic level; approach in a postmodern or neo-folkloric context (involving irony, entertainment, imaginary folklore, quasi quote); the archetypal mode; the mixed mode etc. (Ghilaș & Chiseliță & Badrajan *et al.*, 2009, p. 705; Badrajan, 2015, p.138; Bunea, 2015, p. 131; Mironenco, 2014, p. 34). These are also found in the works of Valentin Doni.

Among the aforementioned works of Valentin Doni, there are ones based on elements of folk music, including, for example, *Music for string orchestra, piano and timpani*. In this case, the conceptual approach is combined with the use of musical language elements. The premiere of this work took place in Lyon (France) in November 1992. In 1996 the text was revised. This last draft is considered to be successful, becoming a fundamental work in the composer's portfolio relating to national heritage. The content of the work reflects the composer's view on the Transnistrian conflict. Valentin Doni elaborates on this concept, arguing that it is essentially an expression of inner tensions, of his personal feelings, and of the repercussions of this conflict. The oppressive tension and the strong inner experiences are encoded in the tragic and suggestive *leit-theme* – called *Grave* – which also represents the beginning of the work. This theme gains a primordial role, because it's the source from which the work itself derives. The variational principle is the fundamental process of the theme. The folkloric substrate of the theme manifests itself through the modal structure, especially through the presence of the second chromatic and the mobility of the tierce (E flat and E natural in c-moll). This oscillation, the downward movement continuously expressed by the strings, as well as the *Grave* tempo, give the music a tense nuance. We can also mention the *Balkan Fantasy* (2011), which embodies the composer's own perception of the melodic and rhythmic elements present in the balkano-carpathian cultural space. These are presented in a stylized vision, using the piano and the symphonic orchestra as a medium of artistic expression.

### 3.1. *Concerto Brevis The Clock*

The work that particularly interests us is *Concerto Brevis The Clock* for solo violin and symphonic orchestra (2000). It belongs, in some ways, to an array of instrumental works dealing with a universal theme. Both the image of the clock with its mechanical functions, as well as the suggested philosophical symbolism (the passing of time, the perpetual motion in the universe, human existence etc.) are present in various works of universal music. For example, a known piece of this sort is *The Clock*, written for harpsichord by pre-classical French composer François Couperin. It is a programmatic piece illustrating the phenomenon of continuous mechanical motion. The composer resorts to different compositional techniques in order to musically execute the programmatic idea. These techniques include the variational method, the perpetual rhythmic motion and the permanent presence of a primary sound impulse. In the London symphony *The Horologe* D-dur (No. 101), Joseph Haydn treats the subject in a polyvalent manner. On one hand, the ideas incorporated in the work relate to the expression of eternal movement and the indestructible quality of the existential order. On the other hand, especially in the second movement – *Andante*, written in a rondo form with elements of

variations, with a special orchestral mastery, as well as finesse in handling the dynamic nuances and the rhythmic design – the composer creates a unique sound image of the working clock. Ludwig van Beethoven creates, in the second movement of the 8th Symphony *Allegretto scherzando*, a brilliant parody of the rhythm *giusto* belonging to the early classicist movement, reminding us of the aforementioned second movement of the London Symphony D-dur by Joseph Haydn. The main theme of the *Allegretto* was later used by Beethoven as a theme in a humorous canon dedicated to the inventor of the metronome – Malzel. Moreover, Johann Strauss Jr. transfers the idea of the clock's perpetual motion into the popular music of the 19th century, composing the famous polka *Tik Tak*, op. 365.

The theme of the clock is also widespread in Romanian traditional music, and is characteristic particularly of the fiddlers' music. Instrumental pieces related to the theme of the clock earned a special place in their repertoire. The pieces represented an instrumental improvisation based on already known melodic structures. Each fiddler created their own interpretative version, using different sound tricks to emulate the mechanical sounds of a clock (be that a pendulum clock, a cuckoo clock, or a defect one), creating listening pieces of great virtuosity. Creations of this kind became known through the interpretation of famous past and current musicians: Grigoraş Dinicu, Filip Todiraşcu (original work, preserved in the folklore archives of the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts), Nicolae Botgros, Vitalie Grib and others. Moldovan contemporary composers have built on the idea of the clock and developed it, putting it through their individual compositional prism, and creating unique artistic works as a result (Vladimir Rotaru, Constantin Rusnac, Oleg Negruţa etc.).

Valentin Doni's *The Clock* is inspired by fiddlers' creations. This way, it suggests a general association with virtuoso fiddler creations, which entails the expression of rhythmic beats and the continuous movement implied by the clock. This is achieved by constantly underlying the eighths in the two quarters measure on the cello and bass. The conceptual essence of the work, however – which is expressed by exposing the musical material, language, orchestration, etc. – reveals another sphere of ideas: the impression of a sunrise, its freshness, the fairy-tale nature, the country life which gradually resumes its pace. As if performed in a single breath, the Concert stands out through the rich orchestration. In order to create the sounds effects and illustrate the atmosphere of a morning in the countryside, the composer resorts to different instruments capable of producing colourful sounds, as the xylophone, triangle, castanets, harps, etc.

First, the structure of the creation represents the form-theme with variations, and second, it features a tripartite form. This creates a type of

structure called „supra-impresiune”<sup>2</sup>. The musical theme on which the variations are based is of fiddler origin (Blajinu, 2002, ex. 71). The work begins with a small introduction that anticipates the ideas and images to come. It begins with a pedal on E in the third octave, played *pianissimo* by violins I and II. Gradually, melodic formulas in eighths are overlapped, separated by pauses, and played on the harp, flute and clarinet, with short replicas of sixteenths played on the piccolo, which alludes to the singing of birds. The six eighths measure of the introduction (the rest of the piece is written in the measure of two quarters) creates the impression of swinging and gradual awakening. The progressive increase in sound intensity towards *mezzoforte* leads to the exposition of the theme (no. 1-3) (Fig. 1), followed by an interlude of 8 measures on pedal E, second octave, played on solo violin. This reminds us of the atmosphere created in the introduction. Variations I (no. 4-7) and II (no. 9-11) are joined by an interlude which intensifies the movement of the entire orchestra (no. 7) (Fig. 2). This creates a micro-culmination, followed by a bridging element, which expresses a perpetual movement, played on the violin. Variation II is followed by a solo cadence which is an improvisation in the fiddler style of the theme (Fig. 3). Variation III (no. 11) has the function of a dynamic reprise. The whole orchestra is gradually involved in the development of the action, which leads to the culmination of the entire work (no. 13-14) – example 4. The Coda (no. 15) brings back the initial theme through a solo rendition, supported by a pedal in E in third octave on violins I and by three eighths formulas on the flute, which reminds us of the introduction. *The tutti* on *fortissimo* sound at the end shatters any allusion to the atmosphere in the introduction, highlighting the perpetual whirl of human existence.

#### 4. Conclusions

*Concerto Brevis The Clock* is a unique example of capitalizing on the folkloric source in the most direct and profound way. This stands as proof of existence for an inexhaustible area of further exploration, despite the controversies in contemporary musicology suggesting that all ways of using folk music have already been exhausted and that this interpretative and conceptual source has been surpassed. Valentin Doni uses a well-known folkloric source creatively, transforming it into a masterpiece of academic music. This is due to his talent to perceive timbral nuances, to orchestrate, and manipulate the musical sonority, as well as his deep knowledge of music and of aspects of traditional violin performance. Problems may occur when it comes to academically trained violinists, who unfortunately can't always perform traditional songs, as well as express the conceptual essence of these melodies,

<sup>2</sup> „Supra-impresiune”, term used by Pascal Bentoiu (1999) *Capodopere enesciene* [Enescu's masterpieces], p. 28, București: Editura Muzicală.

in a way that only a traditional, authentic artist, with an innate sense of music, can do.

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The image displays a page of a musical score for Valentin Doni's *Concerto Brevis The Clock*. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. At the top, there is a rehearsal mark '1' and a measure number '95'. The instruments listed on the left include Piccolo (Picc.), Flutes 1 and 2 (Fl. 1, Fl. 2), Oboes 1 and 2 (Ob. 1, Ob. 2), Clarinets 1 and 2 (A Cl. 1, A Cl. 2), Bassoons 1 and 2 (Bsa. 1, Bsa. 2), Horns 1 and 2 (Hr. 1, Hr. 2), Baritone Trombone (Bn. Tpt.), Tuba (Tuba), Timpani (Timp.), Xylophone (Xyl.), Trigonon (Tigl.), Snare Drum (S. Dr.), Bass Drum (B. Dr.), Harp (Hp.), Violins 1 and 2 (Vln. I, Vln. II), Viola (Vln.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score features various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *p* (piano), *pp* (pianissimo), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). There are also performance instructions such as *con due mani* (with two hands) and *acc.* (accents). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, and some measures contain complex rhythmic patterns or rests.

Fig. 1 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment)



The image displays a page of a musical score for Valentin Doni's *Concerto Brevis The Clock*, specifically a continuation of a fragment. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves for different instruments. At the top, a box with the number '2' indicates the start of a second system. The instruments listed on the left include Piccolo, Flutes 1 and 2, Oboes 1 and 2, Clarinets 1 and 2, Bassoons 1 and 2, Horns 1 and 2, Trumpets, Trombones, Timpani, Snare Drum, Cymbals, Triangle, Steel Drums, Bass Drum, Harp, Violins I, II, and Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The score contains various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). There are also performance instructions like *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *acc.* (accents). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is presented in a clear, professional layout with a white background and black ink.

Fig. 1 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment), continuation

8 7

Fl. Pic.  
Fl. 1  
Fl. 2  
Ob. 1  
Ob. 2  
A. Cl. 1  
A. Cl. 2  
Bas. 1  
Bas. 2  
Hr. 1  
Hr. 2  
B. Tpt.  
Tuba  
Timp.  
Xyl.  
T.B.  
Tig.  
S. St.  
B. Dr.  
Hp.  
Vla.  
Vla. I  
Vla. II  
Vcl.  
Cb.

Fig. 2 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment)

8 9

The musical score is a continuation of a piece by Valentin Doni. It features a large ensemble of instruments. The woodwinds (Piccolo, Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons) and strings (Violins, Viola, Violoncello, Contrabass) play intricate, fast-moving passages. The brass section (Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, Tuba) provides harmonic support and rhythmic accents. The percussion (Timpani, Xylophone, Snare Drum, Cymbals, Bass Drum) adds to the rhythmic complexity. The harp provides a delicate accompaniment. The score is marked with various dynamics, including fortissimo (f), mezzo-forte (mf), and mezzo-piano (mp). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. A box containing the number '8' is located above the Piccolo staff, and the page number '9' is in the top right corner.

Fig. 2 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment), continuation

16

16

Picc.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

A. Cl. 1

A. Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Hr. 1

Hr. 2

B. Tpt.

Tuba

Timp.

Xyl.

T. B.

Trgl.

S. Sc.

B. Dr.

Hp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vcl.

Cb.

Conductor by Laurence Dreyfus

Fig. 3 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment)

Pic.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

A Cl. 1

A Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Hr. 1

Hr. 2

Bn. Tpt.

Tuba

Timp.

Xyl.

T. B.

T. Bgl.

S. St.

B. Dr.

Hrp.

Via.

Via. I

Via. II

Via.

Vc.

Cb.

Fig. 3 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment), continuation

The image displays a page of a musical score for Valentin Doni's *Concerto Brevis The Clock*, specifically measures 13 and 14. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves for different instruments. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes parts for Piccolo, Flutes 1 and 2, Oboes 1 and 2, Clarinets 1 and 2, Bassoons 1 and 2, Horns 1 and 2, Trumpets 1 and 2, Trombones 1 and 2, Snare Drum (S. Dr.), Bass Drum (B. Dr.), Harp (Hp.), Violin 1 (Vln. I), Violin 2 (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The score features various dynamics such as *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *sf* (sforzando), as well as performance instructions like *rit.* (ritardando) and *pizz.* (pizzicato). The page is numbered 23 in the top right corner.

Fig. 4 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment)

24

Flc.  
Pic.  
Cl. 1  
Cl. 2  
A. Cl. 1  
A. Cl. 2  
Bsn. 1  
Bsn. 2  
Sax. 1  
Sax. 2  
B. Trpt.  
Tuba  
Timp.  
Snl.  
Trb.  
Trg.  
S. St.  
B. Dr.  
Hr.  
Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
Vcl.  
Cb.

Fig. 4 Valentin Doni – *Concerto Brevis The Clock* (fragment), continuation