

Traditional and Innovative Aspects in Gheorghe Neaga's *Quartet no. 3 for Strings*

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Abstract: The present study is an analytical sketch of one of the Gheorghe Neaga's last opuses – *Quartet no.3 for strings*. As a result of studying the two movements of the work we will find that the author remains an adept of tradition while rallying at the same time to the innovations that presents the postmodern period. Between these the main role is given to formal principle, which is found in a double hypostases: old and new. In a bipartite architectural structure – avoiding the classic romantic quadrature –, the creation includes a number of important innovations introduced by the composer based on regularities known for centuries. These include some differences between movements (by number of measures, by sectioning accuracy of forms) and the issue of the lyrical quartet center location. But can not be ignored any other representations of the musical language. Without neglecting the thematism and its treatment techniques, must be mentioned, however, the surprising relationship between polyphony and harmony. And the fact that tonal gives the way to modal techniques, it is not a new for the composer's period of maturity. In this context, although dedicated to a classical genre, the work is further proof that the string quartet has always been a laboratory in which to experiment with new ways of expression, harmony, polyphony, etc. Therefore, being a traditional modernist, Gheorghe Neaga does not innovate so radically the musical language, but uses modern language if necessary.

Keywords: quartet, tradition, innovation, modalism, heterophony

1. Introduction

Instrumental chamber music signed by Gheorghe Neaga (1922-2003) is a fraught repertoire with many representative opuses which sums up the most important features of the author's composing style. As evidences can be regarded his chamber ensembles, among which are to be found some suites for various instrumental groups, two trios for violin, cello and piano, respectively clarinet, violin and piano, and four works dedicated to the quartet groups: three quartets for strings and one for flute, violin, cello and piano.

Among these, *Quartet no. 3 for strings* (2003) is one of the Gheorghe Neaga's last opuses. Representative for the final stage of the author's creation, without being printed, performed in public or musicological investigated, it surely can be considered a model for the ensemble genre.

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“As an artistic band, string quartet is a body as delicate as complex” (Hamza, 1977, p. 9). In this context, Gheorghe Neaga’s work lies in a multilateral process of essentializing sound images on a high level of artistic thinking, whereas, generally, string quartets shows the most profound revelation that chamber music can offer (Cobbett, 1963, p. 252).

Although dedicated to a classical structure characteristic to quartet genre, the work is further proof that the string quartet has always been a laboratory in which to experiment with new ways of expression, harmony, polyphony, etc. (Virtosu, 2013, p. 36). Although the creation includes a number of important innovations introduced by the composer based on regularities known for centuries, avoiding the classic romantic quadrature, Gheorghe Neaga includes in a bipartite architectural structure two absolutely different movements by number of measures and by accuracy of sectioning compartments inside used forms.

2. Gheorghe Neaga’s *Quartet no. 3 for strings*. Analytical highlights

In the order of the above-mentioned, in the format of a cyclical bipartite work, quartet keeps the idea of tradition through intonation and rhythm. And despite the preferences for polyphonic techniques, the composer thinks in this case predominant thematically with accompaniment. Focused on a modal language, Gheorghe Neaga does not adapt the content to stately developments, but gives preference to the heterophony, so in both movements of the opus he acquires the unison frequently. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the author's thinking is based on the integration of the modal relations in a chromatic aggregate, so the formulated sound universe could obtain a significant complexity.

The first movement of the quartet – *Andantino* – contains a chain of three thematic points somehow related – conventionally labeled *A*, *B* and *C* – with reduced developments, returns and, mostly, with retrospective sketches. Although the accuracy of each entrance is obvious, whole part presents a rather free form (see Table 1). A further evidence is the *Andante sostenuto* section from the end of the movement, which, separated by ideational point of view, it can be considered an imitation of a lyrical center of the cycle.

Form	<i>Andantino</i>				<i>Andante sostenuto</i>
	Three-verse form				
Sections / Thematical moments	Introduction	A $a+a^1+a^2+a^3$	B b+punte	C introduction+c+c ¹ +c ² +interlude	$a+a^1+a^2$
Number of measures	17	62	24	69	83
Tonal/modal center	<i>do</i>				

Table 1

The three elements *A*, *B* and *C* of the first compartment, which configures a three-verse form, are preceded by an introduction, which rhythmic, melodic and harmonic components are displayed in the technique of *perpetuum mobile*. Initial sound gradation, obtained by successively entering voices (see Fig. 1), is completed by spatial arrangements of an harmonic group of four notes changed enarmonic (*Eb-A-H-Db* : *Eb-A-H-C#*) (see Fig. 1). Dominated by two intervals (*M2* and *P4*), introduction content could be divided into two elements – *a* and *b* – based on a traditional rhythmic writing consisting of equal shapes (in violin I and cello partitions) or syncopated (in violin II and viola partitions) (see Fig. 1). These thematic elements have as reference a modal formulation returned chromatically¹ (example from introduction – *D-E-Eb-D*) appeared in the first half of the twentieth century through Bartók's music.

The image displays a musical score for four instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is organized into three systems. The first system shows the initial entries of the instruments. Violino I and Violoncello play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while Violino II and Viola play a syncopated version of the same pattern. The second system continues this polyphonic texture. The third system shows the instruments playing together, with some notes held as half notes or whole notes, creating a dense harmonic texture. The notation includes various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and rests, indicating a complex chromatic and modal structure.

Fig. 1

Reminding about the composer's polyphonic preferences, the beginning suggests a fugato passage, while in fact, it shows like a free polyphony between three ostinato voices. This is followed by a reversed counterpoint process found in harmonic episodes, in which occurs a subversion between a

¹ The concept is detailed by Gheorghe Firca, in *Bazele modale ale cromatismului diatonic* (Firca, 1967).

melodic voice and other harmonic voices (see Fig. 1). Namely, all processes observed in the introduction deployment will cause the thematic, rhythmic, melodic and structural developments of the whole first part and, occasionally, of the second movement of the cycle.

Regarding the three-verse form, configured by *A*, *B* and *C* elements, it is appropriate to mention the kinship between the identified sections. So, ostinato exposure, *perpetuum mobile* technique, heterophonic episodes, modal frame with polyphonic fragments, and especially the thematic contents, whose roots are found in the introduction, all suggests certain similarities. Hence, ignoring the idea of three-verse framework, it may be found a potential structure of a second plan set out by variation principle.

Section *A* debuts with *Allegro subito* indication and presents itself as a string of mainly square phrases divided into four phases. The theme – accompanied harmonically by a ostinato formula – it is the *a* element from introduction (for comparison see Fig. 2 and 1) and often holds a solo character, even in patches it is doubled and tripled in different partitions. After several sequential exposures at different notes, sometimes under reversed counterpoint, the two sentences of phrase *a* end with a contrasting moment through rhythmic division (see Fig. 2).

The image shows a musical score for four string instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked 'Allegro subito'. The score is written in 7/8 time. The Violino I part features a melodic line with a sequence of notes: Bb, B, Bb, B, Bb, B, Bb, B. The Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello parts provide harmonic accompaniment with rhythmic patterns. The score is divided into four measures, with the first measure containing the initial melodic phrase and the subsequent measures showing its development and interaction with the accompaniment.

Fig. 2

The following three phases – a^1 , a^2 and a^3 – are developing according to variation principle. Într-o factură a partiturii increasingly denser score, more extensive and transfiguring thematic sequences are accompanied in a contrasting polyphony by different rhythmic and melodic formulas suggesting harmonic consonances. In a large register, where each partition tends toward extreme sonorities, section *A* ends in a melodic major tono-modal system opened to a total chromatic centered on *C* (*do*).

Much less by number of of measures, the following division of the three-verse form – *B* – is a relatively new theme (see Fig. 3), whose accompaniment is borrowed from the previous section. In fact, namely the manner of it's expression is the factor that ensures the unity of the compartment and provides sufficient arguments for replacing the three-verse scheme (avoiding *Andante sostenuto*) to a variational one.

Fig. 3

In a different modal key, Gheorghe Neaga insists on the minor character of the content. Treated by the same principles, the melody keeps the interval's composition, but it contains a division of the first rhythmic beat (see Fig. 3). This is an important change for the quartet's ideatical profile. After a square phrase – of which cadence are represented by contrasting figures encountered in *A* too –, the composer provides a passageway to the third section of the movement via some consonances centered on *C* (*do*) and *G* (*sol*) alternated

with sporadic exposures of the element *a* from introduction. The same process will be found at the end of the section *C* too, which debuts in a ternary complex meter (6/4) with an modal introduction centered on either Ionian or Dorian *C* (*do*). Bipolarity highlights in both violins partitions, while the other two instruments draws a transfigured variation of the element *a* from the debut.

The itself content of the last section of the three-verse form reminds about the author's polyphonic thinking and consists of three phases. Each of these suggests three fugato episodes formulated on a relatively new melody (see Fig. 4). Thus, founded intervals (2, 4), altered sounds and, mostly, the ostinato formulas from the accompaniment, all come from the same thematic source from debut.



Fig. 4

With indication *Andante sostenuto* starts a content which, as was mentioned previously, could be the lyrical center of the quartet. Thematically, it's intonations are coming from the introduction's elements and from the previous triphasic section. The most substantial difference, which can be easily detected visual and hearing, refers to the direction of both melodic components *a* and *b*. At the beginning they were both ascending, but here they are in opposite orientations: converged or diverged (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 5

In a rhythmic writing based on predominantly equal figures, the author keeps the centering on *C* (*do*), approaching the locrian mode. However, these tono-modal parameters are fluctuating in the context of compartment's structure, which, as in the case of the previous structure, it may be studied both as a three-verse form and a variational one. Whatever option is chosen, these

three thematic sections present a substantial development. In this regard, the original modest musical frame gives the way to a more intense polyphony, and along the way can be found imitations, double mobile counterpoint, inversions and thematic enlargements.

Namely in this way the first movement of the *Quartet no. 3 for strings* ends. Thereby, Gheorghe Neaga leaves suspended the whole movement's form question and focuses on other components of musical language. Still, to provide an integral vision on the structure, it may be taken into consideration a conventional decoding of the architecture under the variational principle commonly found in the composer's repertoire. In this way could be solved the issue of separation of the two compartments, the contents of which are not absolutely different. More, it seems that the variational principle would coexist with the rondo one. This is because the rhythmic and melodic elements from introduction return frequently transfigured or even in its original form throughout the whole part.

The second movement – *Allegro con brio* – is halved in size compared to the first part and shows an obvious precision in respect of form. Thus, the several sections can be divided into three compartments and configures a three-verse form with reprise and coda (see Table 2).

Form	<i>Allegro con brio</i>			Coda
	Three-verse form			
Sections / Thematical moments	A	B	A ¹	29
		b+b ¹	a ^d +a ¹	
Number of measures	16	36	31	
Tonal/modal center	<i>do</i>			

Table 2

One with the debut of the first section, it can be observed a kind of retention of the previous ideational spectrum. And due to the accompaniment's content from the viola and cello partitions – ostinato development on *pizzicato* formula – gives the impression of the continuing string of variations from the first movement. Still, the 7/4 meter and the theme without fourths – the interval which assures an original sound here is the third one – provide to this compartment a relatively new context (see Fig. 6).

As it can be seen in the example above, the composer approach again the doubling of the melody. But, unlike the exposures from the first movement, often found in unison, here it happens that doubles or triples the exposed melodies in opposite ways – converged or diverged. These relationships offer some component sounds that form consonances according to which can be found a centering on a particular sound (like *C (do)* from the beginning). Also,

these suggest an eventual mode: minor for the first proposition and major for the second.



Fig. 6

The medial compartment – *B* – includes two sections in which the author ignores any harmonic features and combines through a contrasting polyphony two absolutely individual layers (see Fig. 7). Both are taken more or less from the second and fourth phases of the section *A* of the first movement's three-verse form. Treated according to a range of polyphonic principles – imitations, inversions, double mobile counterpoint, contrasting and layered –, to which are added converged exposures, the two elements are also accompanied by some melodic variations rhythmically transfigured which were replacing cadences from the first movement. Especially during the section *b*¹, they submit substantial labor and play an important role gradually replacing one of the two elements and contributing to dominance of the second element.



Fig. 7

The reprise can be considered initially a sequel of the medial compartment, due to a main change that Gheorghe Neaga offers to the theme. In a new metric (4/4), rhythmic și intonational formula, it can be identified only due to third interval from the beginning (see Fig. 8). Only later the author

returns slowly to the original contention, so that the second section presents itself in a similar to the debut form.



Fig. 8

The movement's coda, under *molto pesante e meno mosso* indication, has a traditional role, namely the conclusive one. Nevertheless, the composer is not limited to this issue, but borrows some rhythmic melodic components also from the first part. Thereby, it can be observed an enumeration of all exponential elements from each section of the quartet. Hence, this method is frequently applied in most Gheorghe Neaga's works.

3. Conclusions

Finally, after an analytical sketching of one of the Gheorghe Neaga's last opuses – *Quartet no. 3 for strings* –, we will find that the author remains an adept of tradition while rallying at the same time to the vehemence of innovations that presents the postmodern period. Between these the main role is given to formal principle, which is found in a double hypostases: old and new. But can not be ignored any other representations of the musical language. Without neglecting the thematism and its treatment techniques, must be mentioned, however, the surprising relationship between polyphony and harmony. And the fact that tonal gives the way to modal techniques, it is not a new for the composer's period of maturity.

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