

The music wrote for the theatre show "Emoticon skin"

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Abstract: *One of the main fields of my composition activity is stage music, especially writing incidental music for theater shows. I have written the music for both state theaters and independent projects in the last seven years and this helped me develop my language and my cultural knowledge. All the arts are society's mirror, but the performing ones are more anchored into it. The theater is, by definition, a performing art that has one of its main the purpose to reflect the world that we live in an either subtle or straightforward way. „Emoticon skin” is a show that puts into a humorous light the „language” of nowadays teenagers with their emoticons and all the abbreviations they use when they type or speak. I tried to emphasize the gap between virtual and real world through a polystylistic approach, using different sounds and techniques.*

Key-words: *music composition; stage music; incidental music; theatre; online versus offline; postmodern; fusion*

1. Introduction

This theatre show staged in Constanța, România was initiated by an independent organization called "Georgiana Rusu Cultural Association" in partnership with State Theatre of Constanța and County School Inspectorate of Constanța. It was one of the four projects co-financed by the National Cultural Fund Association from România that were held in the fall of 2018. Also, i wrote the music for the other projects. Its purpose was to enhance the interest of teenagers for theatrical production by giving them free access to the performances. It had twelve performances between October 1st until November 8th.

The show is based on playwright's Cristiana Bojte Keresztes text which is directly addressed to younger generations and it gives a concise research on nowadays society, emphasizing the fact that today's social medium creates the proper situation for emotional and sentimental atrophy. This happens because the youth spends way too much time online, overlooking the inner self, the real way of living. The parallel between real and virtual world creates a radiography of society's psychological transformation in the last twenty-five years, from a social, political and cultural point of view.

Iulian Enache directed the show, Lăcrămioara Dumitrașcu was the scenographer. The actors that played were one way or another linked with "Ovidius" University, Faculty of Arts, theater department. Dana Trifan Enache is associate professor, Alexandru Medveghi and Georgiana Rusu are alumni while Alexandra Teodorescu and Robert Teodor Dobre are still students. The project had a significant success, every performance had full attendance with students from the most of important Constanța's highschoools.

In spite the fact that most of the show is treated as a comedy, it has a deep meaning that raise some important questions to younger and older generations altogether. This rather philosophical subject with apparently lighter approach gives a vast list of options for a composer to choose from. The main problem and question as an inventor of music, just as Igor Stravinsky says, is what you pick from the table full of options. This was my seventeenth theatrical project that I worked at and more than a half of them were made in collaboration with Iulian Enache. Just like in film projects where directors and composers form a creative

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duo, having a long collaborator in theater domain helps both of them to calibrate more easily in working field. This kind of collaboration is very effective especially when it comes to projects that need to be ready in a short amount of time. And this happens many times, if not most, in theater.

2. The main musical theme

After some brainstorming like sessions with the director and couple rehearsals that I've attended, I knew that my main objective was to delineate in terms of music this two major gaps between real and virtual world, between older and younger generations. The show starts with some strongly vivid images projected on a large screen in background. These cinematic like images set the emotional foundation of the whole theatrical architecture. In the recent years I have been flirting with the idea of using two or more musical modes in the same theme, especially those that are in major-minor opposition. From an aesthetical point of view, this type of musical blend between major and minor modes would have offer the perfect conflict to represent the differences aforementioned. I started working on a mixolydian A mode thinking of a way to incorporate a minor mode into it and then I realized that a mode with a permutable third would be more feasible:



The main theme of the show was created on this pattern:



Finding the right balance for this type of musical theme was essential for the entire musical score. The music that sustains another type of art is quite hard to reach a great complexity in terms of structure and many times in what regards texture. Either film or theater, the composer must reach a convenient compromise to what a director demands and what he, as a creator, desires to elaborate. Of course, this is a general rule and it should be considered that every project is unique in terms of dynamic between the two, director and composer. Also, we must think as an exception those cases where the music represents the starting point of a project. In my personal experience as a stage music composer I have found it a bit difficult to create works with more than two themes considering the fact that the development of the whole show it doesn't allow your music to grow on its own, to expand each and every motive or phrase. Based on the same principle and inspired by the pace of the images projected I created an oeuvre that blends a Satie like flavor and the style american film composer Thomas Newmann.

Andante

Piano

p

ppp

Ped.

5

Pno.

Ped.

I double-exposed this introduction of eight measures with small ornamental and harmonic changes. This type of reveric mood emulation is in my opinion the most suited musical path to express both the state of trance in which younger generation experience web 2.0 and, in the meantime, it goes hand in hand with the images projected.

Although the starting point of this introductory piece was that more like static, meditative atmosphere that listener can find into Satie and Newmann aswell, my instinct told me that I needed to put the music on wheel, I felt the need to amplify this theme. For this transformation I chosed the string orchestra to take the lead. The third repeat of the theme brought a countermelody to the low strings while the violins and violas took the accompaniment role. In measures number twenty-four and twenty-five the conclusion of the theme is played by the violins that announces the change met in the following measures. The main idea was to maintain the major-minor flexibility of the theme, only this time is brought in *forte* and the modulations occur more often than before. The theme is played by the violins in octaves:

Largo

f

f

The dialogue presented couple of measures before is continued. So, the double bass and cello in measure number thirty-seven

and the viola and cello in measure thirty-nine

I first brought a major scale on A with a basic cadence I-V-I and used this pattern to deceive the listener by bringing a minor scale at the return of I chord. I wanted to weak even more the tonal substance by adding a minor dominant chord, all these done in four measures from twenty-sixth to twenty-ninth. So, the structure is:

measure twenty-six	measure twenty-seven	measure twenty-eight	measure twenty-nine
I – major chord	V – major chord	I – minor chord	V – minor chord

Table 1. *Harmonic progression in measures twenty-six – twenty-nine*

In measure twenty-nine I used the countermelody played by viola and cello as modulation path to a new scale. This scale created on note B, a transposition of the original scale, was first brought with minor third and then with major third. In terms of harmonic structure, from measure thirty to measure thirty-five is the most tonal part with following chords:

measure thirty	measure thirty-one	measure thirty-two	measure thirty-three	measure thirty-four	measure thirty-five
I – minor chord V – major chord	I – minor chord	I – major chord V - major	VI – minor chord II – major chord	I – major chord V – major chord	I – major chord

Table 2. *Harmonic progression in measures thirty – thirty-five*

Although, by this time, the listener must have been accustomed to the manner I have used the major-minor switch in the whole piece, based on the fact that in measures number thirty and thirty-one I brought the most eloquent tonal sequence in *forte* played by the whole orchestra, I created another unexpected turn. By using only violins in *divisi* in *pianissimo possibile* in measures thirty-two and thirty-four I have swapped once again into major third of the scale. Also, the surprise comes from deceptive cadence between major V chord in measure thirty-two and by VI minor chord in latter measure followed II major chord. The *coda* of the piece is played by piano in a remindind the beginning of it.

I have created two more pieces using the same *leitmotif*. The first one entitled “Binary” serves as a soundtrack for the choreographic moment of digital virus personification. As an introduction I utilized an atonal theme played by synthesizer:

Allegro ♩ = 120



The third used of the main theme is on the track called “Clubbing”, and, as its title says in paints a typical social interaction of young generation.

3. The second theme

Another important theme I have used is the one that has a significant role at the end of the performance. The piece named “Polyphonos” is, as the name itself says, a polyphonic work that had quite an impact on the director, who nicknamed it “the requiem”. It was written for a trio consisted of violin, viola and cello. It appears at the very end of the show, when the young couple lives on their own and are simply stuck into their wifi connected gadgets and the music has the conclusive role. The starting point of it was the work of baroque maestros, especially Johann Sebastian Bach, although it, obviously, does not get close to their level of skills and craft. This time I used the tonal scale and it starts in C minor. The musical theme, the subject, being played first by the viola:

Andante ♩ = 90



The second entrance of the theme is being made by the cell at the upper 5th in measure number nine:



At measure number seventeen, the violin takes the lead and plays the subject in the initial tonality:

When the violin finished playing the musical theme, in measure number twenty-five, the development section started in A minor

but it lasted only four measures. The tonal modulation and the its result, the instability are the main coordinates of this development. The recapitulation came in measure number forty-five and after the three instruments presented their final performance of the theme, the coda appeared in measure number seventeen with chords that announce the end of it. The *fine* is on a picardy cadence.

The concept that lays behind this rather unusual approach into a theater show that speaks about technology, social media and the so called intergenerational has a strong argumentation. By the way i wrote this musical theme, it gave me a strong feeling of more than light sadness, of melancholia. At some point i knew that this theme would represent a „swan song” to real human interaction. A second version of this leitmotif is presented in the piece called „Routine”. My inspiration was the minimalist movement, especially the american composer Steve Reich, which i admire a lot. I have found very suitable to use the repetitive musical concept to display the modern, the twenty-first century man. In terms of complexity, this musical piece was not intended to rival „Polyphonos”. It is a more like static and monotonous version of the aforementioned oeuvre. Sometimes, in film and theater, as in other artistic fields aswell, less is more. I have adapted the theme to a binary structure:

The timbral factor plays a key role in here. The theme is initially played only by the harp and ondes martenot. They are rhythmical accompanied by acoustic guitar that serves as a percussion instrument. In measure number nine the male choir and in measure number twenty-five the boys choir join the two instruments. Later on, the ondes martenot play a

countermelody like and the violins create an accompaniment. There was no intention to create some sort of a harmonic structure, you simply cannot have all the time very complex and structured pieces into theater shows. You must find some ballance between complexity and simplicity, between what a director wants from you as a composer and what do you want to do.

3. Other musical themes

There are couple of more pieces that i have created for this theater show:

- Loop – a minimalist piece with some modal harmonic flavor, written in a strongly consonant manner;
- Pseudo Trap – my way of mocking this upgoing trend in mainstream music; i used only drum machine samples to create a very simplistic melody and some basic electronic rhythms met in the electronic and pop music of the last twenty-thirty years;
- Chillax – a very light piece of music that has a persistent fragrance of caribbean/african party music.

I have written stage music for nearly twenty shows now, and i think i'm starting to have some experience in this field of activity. Besides that, i am really happy to see that actors involved in those projects aswell as other people enjoy my work and appreciate it. What i am sure of is that this project is not the most important nor the biggest one i was appointed for. But, what i do know is that It has been one of the most fun and interesting projects til date. The energy exchange that happened between the whole crew was something really special and it definetely influenced my mood. This state assisted me into creating one of the most exciting and joyful works i did in theater domain. This eclectic and heterogeneous work holds a particular place in my opuses catalog. One of the reasons i love working with movie and stage directors is this freedom to do all kinds of different, weird, strange musics that, if would have been taken out of the context, they could not stand on their own. But, somehow, in the context of the text, of the direction and the other elements, it works like charm.

4. Bibliography

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