

The power of the word in the mirror of music, in the work *Psalms*, op. 66 (1992), for the mixed choir by Carmen Petra Basacopol

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Summary: *Carmen Petra-Basacopol is a composer whose contemporaneity honours us. Born in 1926, in Sibiu, Carmen Petra-Basacopol crosses the entire 20th century and part of the 21st century with a creation open to stylistic and spiritual experiences. The sacred music enriches and personifies the componistic profile of Carmen Petra-Basacopol, her concerns focusing on symphonic music, chamber music - instrumental, vocal and choral. The work *Psalms*, op. 66 (1992), for the mixed choir, reveals, through a chain of three psalms (22, 129, 46), a thorough and inspired musical science.*

Keywords: *Carmen Petra-Basacopol; Psalms; lied; choral music, neoclassicism, modernism.*

1. Introduction

The personality of the composer Carmen Petra Basacopol reveals the figure of a talented, prolific, tenacious musician who belongs to the heritage of the Romanian musical culture. The joy that comes out from every work, interpreted or received, gives us the opportunity to build a profile that reveals its value. She is a composer whose contemporaneity honours us and opens the way to the Romanian music from multiple perspectives, of modernism and postmodernism. Born in 1926, in Sibiu, the composer crosses the entire 20th century and part of the 21st century, with a creation open to original stylistic experiences of secular, but above all spiritual essence. The composer engaged in a neoclassical aesthetics, often with impressionist nuances, reveals a modern-moderate attitude, amplifying the genres of cult music (sonata, concert, opera, ballet), balanced musical structures (lied, sonata, rondo) from which the Romanian ethos, often conjugated to the Byzantine one, comes through.

2. The creation of the composer Carmen Petra-Basacopol

The sacred music, a steady stylistic attitude of composer Carmen Petra-Basacopol. In over 160 opuses, the sacred music occupies a consistent percentage in her creation. The genres that integrate the Byzantine music are the instrumental and vocal chamber music, choral music and symphonic music. In the lyrics with a spiritual charge of David's Psalms or the poems of poets like Mihai Eminescu, Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Mariana Dumitrescu, Ioan Alexandru, the composer reveals referential works, from which I enumerate: **Instrumental Music** - *Seven Visions of Prophet Ezekiel*, op. 78 (1998) for the organ; **Invocation**, op. 110 (2005), for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, piano, violin, cello, percussion and voice (bass); **Chamber Music - Vocal** - *Hymns*, op. 65 (1993), for soprano and piano, lyrics by Ioan Alexandru; *Files of acatist*, op. 68 (1993), for voice and flute, lyrics by Valeriu Anania; *Lieder for Serious Voice and Piano*, op. 70 (1993), lyrics by L. Blaga and M. Eminescu; *The Prayers of King David*, op. 77 (1998), for bass-solo, harp and percussion; *From the Psalms of David*, op. 84 (2000), five lieder for soprano and piano; *Hymns II*, op. 93

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(2002), four lieder for soprano and piano, lyrics by Ioan Alexandru; *The angel shouted*, op. 96 (2002), three lieder for soprano and piano; *Confessions*, op. 104 (2003), for the mezzo-soprano and piano, on the lyrics of the Psalms 101, 142, 144; **Chamber Music - Choral** - Psalms, op. 66 (1992) for mixed choir; *Sacred songs*, op. 90 (2001), for mixed a cappella choir; *Sacred hymns*, op. 112 (2006), for male a cappella choir; *Psaltic Tryptic*, op. 116 (2007), for female a cappella choir; *Ritual songs*, op. 119 no. 1 (2007) for violin and cellos. **Symphonic Music** - Concerto no. 2, for harp and orchestra, *Rituals*, op. 75 (1996).

The choral creation of composer Carmen Petra-Basacopol. The genre of choral music is present in her creation, even if numerically it is not consistent, but brings together works to which the composer is very close. We observe in the first three refined opuses the modal intonations of the Romanian folk melos: *The girls, sisters*, op. 16 no. 2 (1960), women's choir, lyrics by Sanda Stefan; *Seasons*, op. 45 no. 2 (1979), children's choir on two voices, four-composition cycle, lyrics by Carmen Petra-Basacopol; *The Salute of Peace*, op. 48 no. 2 (1980), women's choir on two voices, lyrics by Veronica Porumbacu.

In the following opuses, the musical images draw our attention because they are like the words of the *Old Testament* Psalms, with hieratic sense and load, an expression of the Byzantine psalm music: *Psalms*, op. 66 (1992), for mixed choir; *Sacred songs*, op. 90 (2001), mixed choir a cappella; *Sacred hymns*, op. 112 (2006), for male a cappella choir; *Psaltic Tryptic*, op. 116 (2007), for a cappella choir, female voices.

3. The Davidic Psalms

David's 151 psalms, of which 150 canonical and one non-canonical, contained in the Old Testament, are the essence of devotion to the Divine. The connection that King David created with Divinity through psalms, through the blending of word and music, becomes a model. The work offered to people for spiritual help is a philocalic, praiseful and grateful laboratory. It is equally a philology workshop, in which the chosen words seek the primacy of revealing their various meanings, but always the same to glorify the Lord.

Also, the *Old Testament Psalms*, by the old Hebrew texts, and not in the Romanian translations, are among the oldest recorded musical testimonies, particularly important, of the universal musical culture, being mentioned the existence of some instruments of the time – **bineghinot** (Hebrew) a string instrument, or a flute-like instrument, **el-hanechilot** (Hebrew), with which King David expressively supported the lyrics. Also, the presence of some timbral indications in the psalms, such as: **alamot** (Hebrew) - soprano high voice, **al-haşeminit** (Hebrew) - thick voice, **sela** (Hebrew) suggested a voice exaltation, **mizmor** (Hebrew) - rhythmic song, **sir** (Hebrew) - the psalm must be sung not recited. Thus, through the Davidic *Psalms*, we have a new way of vocal interpretation, **the intoning**, as an osmosis between the *quasi* monotone recitation and the singing, without a precise, measured rhythm, following only the tonicity of the word and lyric.

4. *The Psalms*, op. 66 (1992), for mixed choir

The *Psalms*, op. 66 (1992), for a mixed choir of four voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) reveals, by linking the three psalms (22, 129, 46), a thorough and inspired musical science in the service of the Divine inspiration. The succession of the three compositions, like a suite, reveals an original way of praying in a modal language close to the psaltic language. The intonational system is the modal one, the Doric Re being the way that creates unity in diversity to the work.

The first work of the cycle is *the Lord is my Shepherd* (Ps. 22). The text of the work is a selection of Psalm 22, the one known as the *Good Shepherd*. It is one of the biblical

hymns that is distinguished by the feeling of joy, gratitude and trust of the psalmist for the shield that the Divinity offers. *The Lord is my shepherd, I've all that I need, (Lord), Lord, Lord, He makes me lie down/Where the pastures are green/ Beside quiet waters/, He fed me, (Bis), The Lord is my shepherd, And I will not be afraid, / A-A---. / And I will walk through the valley of death / (bis) I will not be angry, I will not fear / You are with me / You are with me, my shepherd / And I've all that I need, / (bis), the Lord is my shepherd / the Lord is my shepherd, my shepherd.*

The composition is conceived in a cursory metric, 3/8, in a consistency of the Doric Re mode. The early tempo is *Allegretto*, but the optimistic meaning of the lyrics often leads to the emergence of the terms of agogic (*poco meno mosso, poco misterioso, poco rit ad libitum*). The structure of the work reveals a succession of four periods, a, b, c, d and the return of the first period in the end: **a** (*Allegretto - Doric Re*), **b** (*poco meno mosso eolian La - Doric Do*), **c** (*Tempo primo - Doric Re*) **d** (*A tempo - poco misterioso eolic La- Doric Sol - Doric Re*) **a** (*Tempo primo - Doric Re*). The lied is a genre that is constituted as an archetype, with well-structured rules and patterns. The archetype is considered by C. Jung to be "an unconscious content that awareness and perception alters, that is, in the sense of that individual consciousness in which it appears." (Jung, 2014,13) But there are also exceptions like the one present in the present analysis, "there are also less balanced constructions, which are the free lied forms. They may have different constructions: ABCA, ABCDCBA, etc." (Teodorescu-Ciocănea, 2010, 130)

There are two elements by which the composer supports the unity and originality of the work: the Doric mode (the juxtaposition of two minor tetrachords) and the presence of the rhythmic formula that is constant all the time in sections a, b, d, c, regardless of the present mode:

Allegretto 1). DOMNUL E PĂSTORUL MEU (PS. 22)

mf Dom-nul e păș-to-rul meu

p Dom - nul, Dom - nul, Dom - nul, Dom - nul,

Dom nul, Dom nul, Dom - nul, Dom - nul,

Fig. 1. Psalm 22, measures 1-4

The accompaniment, the way of sustaining harmony, taken from the Byzantine chant, is present in each section, the composer proposing the technique of psaltic singing, to all voices, in turn, or compound, to the four voices.

The second work, suggestively entitled *A song of Ascents* (ps. 129), has the structure of a tripartite, but atypical lied, not abiding by the conventions: A (1-10, Frigic Mi) B (measures 11-18 Doric Do) Bridge 19-31 Eolic Mi) A (32-40, Frigic Mi). Psalm 129 is part of the Psalms section of the steps, joining those between 119 and 133.

The physical, but especially metaphorical ascent is expressed through the composer's own language elements. The *Andante* tempo, meaning walking leisurely, suggests a cadence in thought, a reconciliation with God, to forgive mistakes. The measure of $\frac{3}{4}$ is conjugated to the tempo, highlighting the intention of a quench of consciousness, propitious to prayer: *From deep down I cried / Lord hear my voice / Lord hear my voice. / You will look at lawless, / Who will suffer, O Lord, O Lord, Lord.* The alternation of the Frigic Mi with the Doric Mi

means inner suffering, the successive return from prayer in despair and again in the faith of divine benevolence.

The first section, **A**, has the span of a period. The composer thought the texture of the lyrics in the Frigic Mi way, in the measure of $\frac{3}{4}$. The downward meaning of the tenor line, on the vowel *o*, suggests the true prayer that gnaws from the depths of the soul. Ioan Gura de Aur emphasizes the meaning of the first verse *From the depths I shouted*: "But it springs from the depths of my heart with great ardor and zeal, from the depths of the soul." (Gura de Aur, www.scribd.com, 320). The prayer rises, even after each despair, like the line of the descendant tetrachord, which always recovers his peak note from the beginning of the work, *Si*.

Andante 2). DINTRU ADÂNCURI (PS. 129)

Din-tru a-dău-cu-ri am stri-gat

Din-tru a-dău-cu-ri am stri-gat

o, o, o, o,

o, o, o, o,

Fig. 2. Psalm 129, measures 1-4

The insistence in prayer is emphasized by repeating the sounds, conjugated with the necessary and sufficient isorhythmic technique, on the expressiveness of the verses, *Lord, hear my voice*.

Doam-ne-a-uzi gla-sul meu, Doam-ne-a-uzi gla-sul

Doam-ne-a-uzi gla-sul meu, Doam-ne-a-uzi gla-sul

Doam — ne gla-sul meu, Doam-ne-a-uzi gla-sul

Doam — ne gla-sul meu, Doam-ne-a-uzi gla-sul

Fig. 3. Psalm 129, measures 6-8

In the Bridge section, for twelve measures, the composer changes the ternary metric into a binary one, $\frac{2}{4}$, a sign of the intensification of prayer:

poco più mosso e risoluto

și pă-nă la noap-te

și pă-nă la noap-te

ștra-ga di-mi-ne-tă și pă-nă la noap-te

ștra-ga di-mi-ne-tă și pă-nă la noap-te

Fig. 4. Pssalm 129, measures 25-28

The third work of the cycle, *Raise, Voices* (Psalm 46), is, like Psalm 46, a fluent composition that calls for the virtuosity of all voices, generating beneficial emotions, soul satisfaction, sincere gratitude for the removal of a difficult stage in the life of a people. Psalm 46 belongs to the chapter of the Exodus, which brings together liberating songs, and is a hymn of joy, generated by liberation from bondage. *Raise, Voices / High Chants / Shout, strongly/ Voice of joy.* "The psalm commands both actions, to applaud and to shout. What do we need to understand from here? Nothing, except that the symbol and the joy of victory are shown." (Gura de Aur, www.scribd.com, 135)

Like the other previous two, the third composition of the cycle has a modern, unconventional architecture. Because the tone plan is the same, Doric Re, with slight modulating inflexions, without stabilizing anywhere, we consider it a monopartite lied. Thus, section A is repeated three times, each time with melodic variations or vocal interventions.

The lied is thought in the measure of 6/8, in a fast tempo, *Allegro grazioso*. The isorhythmia of the lied, equal quavers, allows an easier understanding for the meaning of words. The rhythmic-melodic construction indicates the liveliness of speech, consciousness and sense, when joy encompasses the nature. The female voices show the central motif of the lied, which, consistently, will follow in a polyphonic manner, and the male voices, in measures 6 and 8:



Fig. 5. Psalm 46, measures 1-4



Fig. 6. Psalm 129, measures 6-8

The last two measures of the first section A, augmented by crotchets followed by quavers and crotchets with dot, cadence on the second stage, through a minor agreement on Mi fundamental, strengthening the meaning of the words *And Strong King*. For so, Ioan Gura de Aur argues the greatness of God: "But He is the King in truth. A really great King is He who made the whole world heaven and gave the barbarians wisdom and encouraged them to imitate the angels." (Ioan Gura de Aur, www.scribd.com, 140)

Și Îm-pă-rat Ta-re
 Și Îm-pă-rat Ta-re
 Și Îm-pă-rat Ta-re
 Și Îm-pă-rat Ta-re

Fig. 7. Psalm 46, measures 15-16

The second section A (*Tempo primo*) echoes the same reason, but to men's voices, a sign of victory, calling the whole world to the praise of what happened. "(Ioan Gura de Aur, www.scribd.com, 135)

mf
 Lim-bi-le să sal-te Cu cân-tări î-nal-te
 Lim-bi-le să sal-te Cu cân-tări î-nal-te

Fig. 8. Psalm 46, measures 17-18

In the third resumption of Section A, the composer suggests the height of joy through sounds in the high register, allowing the high voices, the soprano and the tenor, to lead the motif:

a tempo
mf
 Lim-bi-le să sal-te Cu cân-tări î-nal-te
 Cu cân-tări î-nal-te

Fig. 9. Psalm 46, measures 26-27

At the end of the song, the composer brings back the verse *the voice of joy*, correlating it with appropriate language elements, accelerating the tempo, spreading the rhythm, crotchets alternating with quavers, the homophone support of all the voices:



Fig. 10. Psalm 46, measures 31-33

5. Conclusions

Ioan Bradu Iamandescu, a doctor and psychologist, says that music is able to express our emotional interior and modulate our soul condition, even in the absence of words. "Through the music, man is able to discover his own inner world, to better anchor in reality and to secure its interiority!" (Iamandescu, 2010, 260) At a time or together, any of the four elements of the sound can convey emotions. The height, through the melodic tender or enthusiastic lines, the rhythm, entertaining or isochronic, the dynamics, through mild or intense nuances, the timbre through the varied colour, are as many possibilities to stir up emotions.

The work *Psalms*, op. 66 for mixed choir by Carmen Petra-Basacopol through the language used and proven stylistics confirms the hypothesis of our study of being a projection of the authentic and valuable personality of the composer. The emotional load sustained by the modal harmony of psalms inspiration, the balance of the interventions of all voices, the modern architecture of the songs, the expressive joining of the words with the music, are the proof of an original 20th century work of choral chamber music.

6. References

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