

***Epitaph I. Das Kreuz in der Steppe* [Epitaph I. The Cross in the Steppe] by Hans-Peter Türk, in Memory of a Lost Hope**

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Abstract: *The following study was prompted by the late-2022 song cycle commemorating the tens of thousands of ethnic Germans (Swabians from Banat and Transylvanian Saxons) from Romania who were deported to Russia after World War II for so-called “labour work”. Hans-Peter Türk’s Das Kreuz in der Steppe, on lyrics by Rudi Gross, is the opening piece in the vocal cycle Epitaph, in which the composer sets literary texts written by people deported to Russia to music. This study presents brief data on the creative context of the Epitaph cycle and the reception of the premiere. The introduction of the study is completed by a short biographical portrait of the composer Hans-Peter Türk and his spiritual anchoring in the Transylvanian Saxon cultural environment. The analytical part of the study dwells on two aspects relevant to Türk’s creation, which are also reflected in this mature opus: cyclical thinking and proportions based on symmetry.*

Keywords: *Hans-Peter Türk; Rudi Gross; Das Kreuz in der Steppe; Epitaph; Russian deportations; cyclical thinking; symmetry in music;*

Introduction: Motivational Impulse

The search for inspiration by composers is as exciting as it is arbitrary. The selection of the source does not necessarily consider historical significance, since it directly reflects the composer’s artistic sensibility, which comes from a certain cultural background. An inscription carved in stone, a few lines from a diary, a phone number, dreams, all these are sources which have, at one time or other, turned into music in the minds of the Transylvanian composers. But when the source of inspiration is strong enough, when it contains the necessary force to penetrate the spirituality of the culture of the place (not just to invade the sensitive space of the composer’s imagination), then the new opus becomes, more than a work of art, a symbolic manifesto of spiritual self-identification.

The concert organised by the Transylvania State Philharmonic in Cluj-Napoca was an opportunity to pay homage through music to the victims of war, through two works that refer to the same cruel period for the suffering of the ethnic German community in Transylvania at the end of the Second World War, as a message of remembrance. The Philharmonic’s Symphony Orchestra and Choir (the latter trained by Maestro Cornel Groza) gave their first performance on 9 December 2022 under the baton of the conductor Gabriel Bebeșelea – two large vocal-symphonic works which refer to a terrible period in Romania’s history, but which still stand today under the sign of a menacing present: *Symphony no. 6* by Paul Richter and *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* [The Cross in the Steppe], the first movement of the cycle *Epitaph* by Hans-Peter Türk. Paul Richter’s *Symphony no. 6* was composed between “Oktober 1946 – 1. Januar 1949”,

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an extremely difficult period in the composer's biography, as two of his sons were deported to Russia.² In that grim January 1945, more than 70,000 Romanian citizens (all men aged 16–45 and women aged 18–30), ethnic Germans from Transylvania and Banat, Saxons and Swabians, were sent to camps for “war labour”³. In 2022, more than seventy years later, Hans-Peter Türk completed the new cycle *Epitaph*⁴, conceived for several years in solidarity with the “collective trauma of the Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians”⁵, and it is the first movement of *Epitaph*, written for solo voice (performed by mezzo-soprano Viktória Cormoş), choir and orchestra, which was heard at the concert.

This year, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* was awarded the Prize of the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union. From the presentation made by the composer himself on the occasion of the prize – kindly made available to us by the organist and musicologist Erich Türk – we learn that *Epitaph* comprises a total of four movements based on verses by ethnic Germans from Romania deported to Russia (Rudi Gross' *The Cross in the Steppe*; Jakob Wolf's *Spouses at Their Child's Grave*, Helene Scherg's *What We Cannot Understand*, *Potholes in Russia* and Ilse Göttl: *You, Land of Incomprehensible*). Also, the composer reveals the long creative process and the motivation for choosing these libretti: Writing a vocal work on the theme of deportation has been a preoccupation of mine for many years, without knowing exactly which text to choose. It was only when (on the occasion of the 50th commemoration of the deportations) verses by former deportees appeared in our German press that I started first attempts, but only recently I have reached an end (the first movement of which is today receiving the Composers' Union Prize). I do not know the biographical details of any of the four authors of the verses (...) but the

² Hans-Peter Türk. 2022. “Paul Richter. Simfonia nr. 6, p. a. a.” [Paul Richter. Symphony no. 6, first performance]. In *Program de sală al concertului Filarmonicii de Stat “Transilvania” din 9 decembrie 2022* [Programme note from the Transylvania State Philharmonic concert on 9 December 2022], Cluj-Napoca: 5–6, pp. 5–6. For general information about the deportation of German ethnic groups in Transylvania, see: Michael Kroner. 1993. “Deportation in die Sowjetunion” [Deportation in the Soviet Union]. In *Lexikon der Siebenbürger Sachsen*, ed. by Walter Myß, 98–99. Thaur bei Innsbruck: Wort und Welt Verlag, pp. 98–99. For new findings about the historical context of the deportations, see: Michael Kroner. 1983. “Wie kam es zur Deportation der Rumäniendeutschen zu Zwangsarbeit in die Sowjetunion (1945)? Aufschlußreiche Dokumente zu einer noch wenig erforschten Frage” [How did the deportation of Romanian Germans to forced labor in the Soviet Union (1945) Come About? Revealing Documents on an Under Researched Question]. *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 6 (77): 156–168; Michael Kroner & Horst Göbbel. 1994. *Vor 50 Jahren: Flucht – Deportation – Enteignung – Entrechtung. Die Siebenbürger Sachsen – 23. August 1944 bis 1947* [50 years ago: Fleeing – Deportation – Expropriation – Disenfranchisement. The Transylvanian Saxons – August 23, 1944 to 1947]. Nürnberg: Landsmannschaft der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Deutschland e. V. Kreisgruppe Nürnberg-Fürth-Erlangen.

³ Michael Kroner & Horst Göbbel. 1994. *Vor 50 Jahren: Flucht – Deportation – Enteignung – Entrechtung. Die Siebenbürger Sachsen – 23. August 1944 bis 1947* [50 years ago: Fleeing – Deportation – Expropriation – Disenfranchisement. The Transylvanian Saxons – August 23, 1944 to 1947]. Nürnberg: Landsmannschaft der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Deutschland e. V. Kreisgruppe Nürnberg-Fürth-Erlangen, p. 42.

⁴ In 2020, Hans-Peter Türk was awarded the Honterus Medal in Braşov. A news report of this event, which featured two speeches by the Philippi family (organist Ursula Philippi and conductor Kurt Philippi), also announced that Hans-Peter Türk had finished composing an oratorio in memory of the victims of deportations to Russia, a project he had been working on for more than twenty years. See the unsigned article, containing the presentations of Ursula und Kurt Philippi (“‘Er besteht nur aus Essenz’. Dr. Hans Peter Türk nahm die Honterus-Medaille 2020 entgegen” [“It consists only of Essence”. Dr. Hans Peter Türk Accepts the Honterus Medal 2020]. *Hermannstädter Zeitung*, 2732, July 30, 2021. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://www.hermannstaedter.ro/2021/07/er-besteht-nur-aus-essenz/>).

⁵ Hans-Peter Türk. 2022. “Hans Peter Türk. *Das Kreuz* din *Epitaph*” [Hans Peter Türk. *Das Kreuz* from *Epitaph*]. In *Program de sală al concertului Filarmonicii de Stat “Transilvania” din 9 decembrie 2022* [Programme note from the Transylvania State Philharmonic concert on 9 December 2022]. Cluj-Napoca: 3–4, pp. 3–4.

primary concern of all of them is neither hunger nor imprisonment, instead the foci are death, longing for their homeland or hope in God, as he alone counted their tears⁶.

1. Hans-Peter Türk. Biographical Notes

The importance of this new work by composer Hans-Peter Türk can only be fully appreciated with some knowledge of his biography. Like his Transylvanian Saxon ancestors, Türk “lived” the hardships of history. Born in Sibiu in 1940, Hans-Peter Türk attended elementary school in Codlea (1947–54), then continued his schooling at the Honterus Gymnasium in Braşov (1954–56). Between 1956–59, he was a pupil at the Popular School of Art in Braşov, where his musical foundations were laid by the organist of the Black Church, Viktor Bickerich (1895–1964), the city’s most outstanding musician of that time. A defining stage in Türk’s development as a musician was his composition studies at the Gheorghe Dima Music Conservatory in Cluj, in the class of Sigismund Toduţă (1959–65).⁷ Here, he studied both the classical music of the past, whose rules he had already learned in Braşov, as well as the new languages of modern and contemporary music. In 1966, Türk became a professor at the Cluj Conservatory at a time when the advancement of ethnic minorities in the university hierarchy was less than encouraged. Thus, despite numerous proofs of scientific professionalism⁸, he held the modest position of university lecturer until 1990. During the communist era his works consisted mainly of chamber music, symphonic music, choirs inspired by Transylvanian Saxon traditional music, even religious choirs “camouflaged” under other names – counted as boldness in those days.⁹ Since then, he was unreservedly promoted to the position of university professor and has subsequently been actively involved in the musical life of Cluj, both as a founding member of the Sigismund Toduţă Foundation, of which he was president (1991–96), and as a director of the Romanian Bach Academy (1992–99). Until recently the most representative opus of Türk’s work was considered to be the *Transylvanian Passion for Good Friday* (2005), a large-scale work composed as a sequel to Rudolf Lassel’s *St Matthew Passion for Maundy Thursday* (1901) for choir, soloists and organ, completed more than a century ago. Türk’s work stands as a testimony not only to the Transylvanian Saxon community, but also to the composition school in

⁶ “A scrie o lucrare vocal-simfonică pe tematica deportării m-a preocupat și pe mine de mulți ani, fără să știu concret spre ce text anume să mă orientez. Abia în momentul în care (cu ocazia comemorării a 50 de ani de la deportare) au apărut în presa germană de la noi versuri ale unor foști deportați, am demarat primele încercări, dar abia de curând am ajuns și la un final (a cărui primă parte se bucură astăzi de Premiul Uniunii Compozitorilor). Nu cunosc date biografice la nici unul dintre cei patru autori de versuri (...), dar toate pun în prim plan nu foamea, nu detenția în lagăr, ci moartea ori dorul de pământul natal ori speranța în Dumnezeu, singurul care le-a numărat lacrimile.” in Hans-Peter Türk, *Presentation at the Award Ceremony of the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union*, manuscript.

⁷ Hans-Peter Türk. 1995. “Mein Lehrer Sigismund Todutz” [My Professor Sigismund Todutza]. In *Siebenbürgen und das Banat. Zentren deutschen Musiklebens im Südosten Europas. Konferenzbericht Coesfeld-Westfalen 7.–11.10.1995*, ed. by Karl Teutsch, 101–106. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.

⁸ Collaboration as co-author on Toduţă’s monumental project on the analysis of the works of J. S. Bach (Sigismund Toduţă & Hans-Peter Türk. 1973. *Formele musicale ale barocului în operele lui J. S. Bach. Vol. 2: 15 invențiuni la două voci, 15 invențiuni la trei voci*. București: Editura Muzicală); author of the first Paul Richter monography (Hans-Peter Türk. 1975. *Paul Richter*. Bukarest: Kriterion); obtaining a PhD with the thesis *Contradominant in the Creation of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (1978); author of a bilingual monography on Gabriel Reilich (Gabriel Reilich. 1984. *Geistlich musicalischer Blum und Rosen-Wald*, ed. by Hans-Peter Türk. București: Editura Muzicală), and other smaller musicological publications.

⁹ Helmut Loos. 1995. “Über die geistliche Musik von Hans Peter Türk”. In *Siebenbürgen und das Banat. Zentren deutschen Musiklebens im Südosten Europas. Konferenzbericht Coesfeld-Westfalen 7.–11.10.1995*, ed. by Karl Teutsch, 147–158. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.

Cluj, whose foundations are a thorough analysis of the styles of past eras, a basis that allows a judicious assimilation of the new of the present. *Epitaph* is a long-prepared “swan song” that adds to the world music repertoire, aligning itself with works commemorating war victims such as Arnold Schoenberg’s *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947) and Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* (1961).

2. *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* by Rudi Gross. Brief Summary

Das Kreuz in der Steppe, the opening movement of *Epitaph*, was based on lyrics written by Rudi Gross in 1946, a talented young poet who met his end at the age of 20 in the Donbas deportation camps. Little is known about this young hope of Transylvanian Saxon lyric art. He graduated from the Honterus Gymnasium in Braşov, and at the beginning of 1945, like many ethnically German Romanian citizens, met his end in Russia.¹⁰

Weite tiefverschneite Steppe, hie und da ein Strauch, ein Baum. Johlend an der öden Stätte Heult der Ostwind in den Raum.	Stepă necuprinsă, înzăpezită, îci colo un tufiş, un copac, un ținut sterp cu hăulitul vântului din est.	Wide snow-covered steppe, here and there a shrub, a tree. Hooting in the barren land Howls the east wind in the land.
Dunkle graue Nebelschwaden Geistern schattenhaft umher. Drüben gleich an fern Gestanden, steht ein Kreuz im Schattenmeer.	Neguri de ceață cenușie agită umbrele fantomelor, iar țărmul înzăpezit, în văltoarea umbrelor: o cruce.	Dark grey mist Haunt shadowy around. Over the same distance, Stands a cross in the sea of shadows.
Hebt sich scharf vom weissen Grunde, Treu hält es die Totenwacht, dem der seine letzte Stunde fern der Heimat hat verbracht.	Se conturează tăios pe fundalul alb, credincios ține priveghiul celui ce și-a trăit ceasul din urmă departe de-al său pământ natal.	Rises sharply from the white background, Faithfully it keeps the death watch, Who has spent his last hour Far from home.
Anfangs stand das Kreuz alleine Heute stehen viel an Zahl, die im Abendsonnenscheine grüssen als ein stummes Mal.	La început, crucea singură stătea, azi e mare numărul lor, stau în amurgul soarelui, trimițându-și salutul de pietre funerare.	At first the cross stood alone Today they stand many in number, Which in the evening sunshine Greet as a silent mark.
	Translation from German by Hans-Peter Türk	Translation from German by Iulia Mogoșan

Table 1. *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* by Rudi Gross

The poem describes the hostile and static nature of the cold steppe, which mirrors the mood of the poetic persona, manifesting itself not only individually but also collectively. The static image of nature is disturbed each time by a dynamic one: the snow-covered steppe is marked by the wind’s howling (“Heult der Ostwind in den Raum”), the white and moving waft of mist is riven by a solitary cross, a funerary symbol whose hyperbolisation – the agglomeration of crosses (“Heute stehen viel an Zahl”) – finds its counterpart in an eerie silence (“stummes Mal”). The whole poem revolves around a few topos: the wind (kinetic topos), the fog

¹⁰ Hans Königes. 2017. “Zweiter Tag: Wieder ein bunter Programmstrauß” [Second day: Again a Colourful Bouquet of Programmes]. *Zeidner Gruß. Heimatblatt der Zeidner Nachbarschaft*, 64 (123): 6–7, pp. 6–7. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://docplayer.org/77882098-Zeidner-zeiden-codlea-feketehalom-bei-kronstadt-brasov-brasso-in-siebenbuergen-rumaenien-frohe-weihnachten.html>.

(monochromatic topos) and the cross (geometric topos) – which manifest themselves as “focal points”¹¹ for the expressiveness of the musical discourse.

3. *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* by Hans-Peter Türk. Musical Analysis: Structure as Development and Symmetry

Formal sections	Introduction	First verse	First interlude	Second verse	Second interlude	Third verse	Third interlude	Fourth verse	Coda
Bars	1–21	22–31	32–43	44–59	60–70	71–86	87–123	123–142	142–148
Musical writing style		Chorus	Symphonic	Choral	Chamber writing	Voice solo	<i>Funebre</i> Solo clarinet	Choral	

Table 2. *Hans-Peter Türk. Das Kreuz in der Steppe (formal structure)*

3.1. Structure as Development

The above table of formal structure shows us the content of the musical writing, but it does not give us any clues as to the thematic substance of the musical material itself. The following analysis shows that all these segments of form are dependent on a single leitmotif (α -motif), which is present in the first two bars of the piece, from which the musical ideas draw their “sap” in various forms of expression.¹²

Rudi Gross, 1946

Fig. 1. *Hans-Peter Türk, “Das Kreuz in der Steppe” from Epitaph, bars 1–2 (α -motif)*

The α -motif (Figure 1) executed by the celesta and vibraphone manifests itself as a passacaglia-bass in the first 15 bars of the piece, but the counterpoint from the other instruments

¹¹ Ștefan Anghi. 2008. “Hans Peter Türk: Trei coruri pentru cor de femei și orchestră de cameră pe versuri de Ana Blandiana. Investigarea sintagmelor retorice ale discursului” [Hans Peter Türk: Three Choirs for Female Voices and Chamber Orchestra to Lyrics by Ana Blandiana. Investigating Rhetorical Discourse Syntagms]. In *Fotografii la minut din atelierile compozitorilor clujeni*, vol. I, 458–484. Cluj-Napoca: Arpeggione, p. 464.

¹² This conception of musical construction in Western-European tradition was also appreciated and deepened in Sigismund Toduță’s composition class. See Dieter Acker. 2011. “Maestrul Toduță, în amintirea unui discipol din München” [Maestro Toduță, in memory of a disciple in Munich]. *Lucrări de muzicologie*, 26 (1): 5–10, pp. 5–6.

of the orchestra and the subsequent variations indicate that its origin is in fact these generative intervals: the perfect fifth, its inversion, the perfect fourth and the minor second. If we consider, from a melodic point of view, that the generating interval in this introduction is the minor second, as an obvious reference to the traditional sighing figure; from a harmonic point of view the perfect fifth and the perfect fourth ensure the stability of D as a tonal centre. Starting from the α -motif, the musical discourse is organised in a staged obstinate way (once the new instrument has exposed the motif, it is repeated until the end of the phrase), by adding new timbres (flutes, bassoon and strings, clarinet, oboe) and by adding different rhythmic configurations, which have only one “common denominator”: the minor second as a generative interval. The harmonic path of the introduction section ensures the stability of the tone D in the first two musical phrases, but the third phrase (bars 17–21) is characterised by the alternation of the D centre with the “chromatic shifting” of the perfect E_b and A_b fifths, two choices of the composer that once again originate in the α -motif. The harmonic conflict is obvious, being caused by the persistence of the tonal centre D, sustained also by the revolving in the bass around D by the double bass and bassoon ($C\# - E - D$), contrasted with the most distant harmonic structures in the tonal quadrant (5-6 fifths apart): $E_b - B_b$ and $A_b - E_b$.

The slow introduction contains the essential, cyclical building blocks of the piece. The *Misterioso* indication is intensified by the choice of the lower register, from where the musical discourse will evolve cumulatively and developmentally, occupying a larger and larger space, both in terms of register and musical dynamics (from *pianissimo* to *forte*). The three instrumental phrases of the introduction develop from the α -motif, built on the symmetry of the cross symbol. A closer look at the development of the thematic material reveals compositional mastery, making use of traditional techniques to layer musical ideas. All the new motifs in this introductory section, once exposed, are repeated in an ostinato manner until the end of each musical phrase. Musical structures are built up gradually, accruing multiple layers along the way, whose tonal substance is claimed by the same α -motif. The introduction therefore presents various variants of the α -motif, in a formal composition based on ostinato and the multi-layered structure of the palimpsest, using a traditional language based on motivic development. It does not astonish or shock, but reveals itself instead as solid, statuary, monumental music.

Fig. 2. *Hans-Peter Türk, Das Kreuz in der Steppe from Epitaph, bars 9–13*
(vibraphone, timpani, bassoons, clarinets, oboes)

Originating from a single melodic cell, thus ensuring a uniform intonational colouring, monotony is avoided by diversifying other musical parameters. From a rhythmic point of view, the motifs springing from α -motif are extremely varied, generating a necessary contrast, at metric and rhythmic levels, which is also underlined by dynamic contrast (Figure 2).

Starting from the same α -motif, the melodic and harmonic analysis of the first stanza reveals striking similarities (Figure 3). The harmonic quintessence from which the choral harmonisation is composed means both that D is preserved as a tonal centre (plagal this time), and that the E_b sound is held, but most importantly there is an intervention from the brass with accents in *fortissimo*, at the end of each phrase, through two chordal structures presented in Figure 3: $A_b - C - E_b$ (bar 26) and $E_b - G - B_b$ (bar 31).¹³

¹³ The harmonic exposition as synthesis is characteristic of Hans-Peter Türk style. See the “original eruption” and the “chord-comet” from the first chorus of the cycle *Three Choruses for Women on Verses by Ana Blandiana*. In [Hans Peter Türk: Three Choirs for Female Voices and Chamber Orchestra to Lyrics by Ana Blandiana. Investigating Rhetorical Discourse Syntagms]. In *Fotografii la minut din atelierele compozitorilor clujeni*, vol. I, 458–484. Cluj-Napoca: Arpeggione, p. 466.

The musical score for 'Das Kreuz in der Steppe' from Epitaph, bars 22-27, features a chorus and brass. The brass instruments (Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, and Timpani) play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the vocalists (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) sing the lyrics. The score is marked with dynamics like 'ff sub.', 'ff', and 'sf', and includes performance instructions like 'a 2' and 'Pesante'. The lyrics are: 'Wei - te tief-ver-schnei - te Ste-ppe, hie und da ein Strauch, ein Baum, joh'.

Fig. 3. Hans-Peter Türk, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 22–27 (chorus and brass)

Taking up the poetic image of the wind in the last line of the poem's stanza, the first instrumental interlude (bars 32–43, see Table 2) "creates" waves of string tremolos from low to high, which reach up to the highest register (Figure 4). The descending chromatic line of the soprano voice is sometimes detached from the harmonic pattern, emphasising rhetorically the poetic text ("heult der Ostwind" in bar 29). The same original modal structure in α -motif becomes illustrative of the "east wind" in the first instrumental interlude (bars 32–43). Ascending and descending waves, with the same scale as the first two bars of the piece, conquer the tonal range, winding towards the string part under the impulse of the brass, repeatedly returning to the same chord in a pole/anti-pole harmonic relationship preserving the tonal centre (A_b major to D).

Fig. 4. Hans-Peter Türk, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 29–32
(chorus and strings)

The accompaniment of the chorale melody in the second stanza also states the α -motif. The balancing minor seconds in the lower register, which, in close connection with the text, metaphorically illustrate the image of the grey mists of the Siberian landscape (bars 44–46, 48–50, 56–59), alternate in the accompaniment with the musical representation of the “east wind” from the preceding instrumental interlude (bars 47, 51, 53, 55), see Figure 5. Even the harmonisation of the choral chant in long notes – a diatonic melody embodying a stylised Protestant chant – hails from previous harmonic progressions, consisting mostly of the alternation of the D minor chord with an E \flat major chord (itches which are themselves derived from the α -motif).

Fig. 5. Hans-Peter Türk, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 41–44
(chorus and strings)

A final exposition in this analysis of a new variant of the α -motif is related to the melodic symbol of the cross itself.¹⁴ The poetic text “Hebt sich scharf” (literally “stands out sharply”, a cross is implied), intoned on the cross-motif, settles on the balancing semitones in the accompaniment. The appearance of the cross, as a poetic and musical symbol, leads to a funereal turning point in the musical dramaturgy (note here the composer’s choice of the trombone in bars 79–86, this being the preferred sonority in Western musical literature for funeral repertoire, or the following clarinet lament in bars 91–107). The melodic line is taken as material for large ostinato segments, over which imitative dialogues take place between various instrumental parts in multiple configurations. Interesting to note is the link created between the mezzo-soprano’s voice and the trombone: their melodies are almost identical, but small rhythmic “discrepancies” create the image of a shadow closely following the leading melodic profile. Such moments in the score, in which the development of the material is reduced to a single, essential musical formula, reinforce and prove the conviction of many connoisseurs of Hans-Peter Türk’s work that *er besteht nur aus Essenz*¹⁵ [it comprises essence alone]. In this piece the α -motif can be reduced to just a single bar, and look how far it can be developed!

3.2. Structure as Symmetry

The formal structure (see Table 2) of the piece is closely related to the poetic content and it is clear that it appeals to the composer’s long-standing interest in symmetrical constructions.¹⁶ In fact, the composer’s tendency towards symmetrical structures in general is evident in this composition on several levels: in form, in modal structures (both melodic and harmonic), in melodic profiles, and even in the intervallic relationships themselves.

The setting of the poem’s lines is a clear-cut alternation between complete verses and instrumental interludes, the latter often perceived as a descriptive representation of the preceding or following poetic text; but the epicentre of the piece is the mezzo-soprano solo (bars 71–86), the third stanza of the poem, towards which the tension of the musical discourse tends. This is the moment in which the lyrical self turns its attention away from the static and hostile landscape of nature towards its inner dimension, that of the man who finds his last hour away from home, “dem der seine letzte Stunde / fern der Heimat hat verbracht” [who has spent his last hour / Far from home]. The setting of the third stanza for solo voice is flanked by the chorale setting of the second (bars 44–59) and fourth (bars 123–142) stanzas, which establish two pillars in the musical form, two distinguishable landmarks which anchor the work in Protestant musical

¹⁴ For a concentrated aesthetic overview of the cross as a symbol in Türk’s music, see Ștefan Anghel. “Hans Peter Türk: Trei coruri pentru cor de femei și orchestră de cameră pe versuri de Ana Blandiana. Investigarea sintagmelor retorice ale discursului” [Hans Peter Türk: Three Choirs for Female Voices and Chamber Orchestra to Lyrics by Ana Blandiana. Investigating Rhetorical Discourse Syntagms]. In *Fotografii la minut din atelierile compozitorilor clujeni*, vol. I, 458–484. Cluj-Napoca: Arpeggione, pp. 471–477.

¹⁵ “‘Er besteht nur aus Essenz’. Dr. Hans Peter Türk nahm die Honterus-Medaille 2020 entgegen” [“It consists only of Essence”. Dr Hans Peter Türk Accepts the Honterus Medal 2020]. *Hermannstädter Zeitung*, 2732, July 30, 2021. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://www.hermannstaedter.ro/2021/07/er-besteht-nur-aus-essenz/>.

¹⁶ Hans-Peter Türk. 1984. “Simetria intervalică parțială în creația lui Bartók” [Intervallic Partial Symmetry in Bartók’s Creation]. *Lucrări de muzicologie*, 15: 91–99; Hans-Peter Türk. 1985. “Organizări ale materialului sonor în baza proporționalității intervalice” [Organisations of Sound Material Based on Interval Proportionality]. *Lucrări de muzicologie*, 17–18: 87–97; Hans-Peter Türk. 1986. “Structurarea dimensiunilor verticale și orizontale în baza proporționalității intervalice” [Structuring Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions Based on Interval Proportionality]. *Lucrări de muzicologie*, 19–20: 33–45.

culture. The first choral intervention (bars 23–31) describes the violence of nature, this time expressed descriptively in verse, impersonally, through the choir’s tearing interventions. The dramatic plot of the poem (from the objective description of nature to the personal emotion of the lyric self) is supported musically by a descending dramatic line, starting from external brutality (first stanza) and ending with its expanding into the subjectivity of the lyrical self (third stanza).

This orientation of the musical form towards an introspective side of the lyrical self is also reflected in the instrumental sections of the piece: while most of the instrumental segments are perceived as having a symphonic orchestral timbre and volume, the moment of proximity to the solo voice is configured as chamber music, the mezzo-soprano solo voice taking the place of the full choral sound. The supporting “pillars” represented by the chorale melody (second and fourth stanzas) direct the poetic content towards a theological-transcendent zone, the only one in which the soul can find peace, or, as the composer wrote in his presentation of the piece when receiving the award from the Composer and Musicologist Union in Romania, towards the “hope in God, as he alone counted [the victims’] tears”¹⁷.

Intervallic symmetry is a principle that guides the motivic construction of this piece right from the very beginning. The α -motif itself comprises two musical cells, the second of which being an intervallic variation of the first. They are both symmetrical, in terms of intervallic content, and mirrored, in terms of melodic direction, as seen in Figure 6.

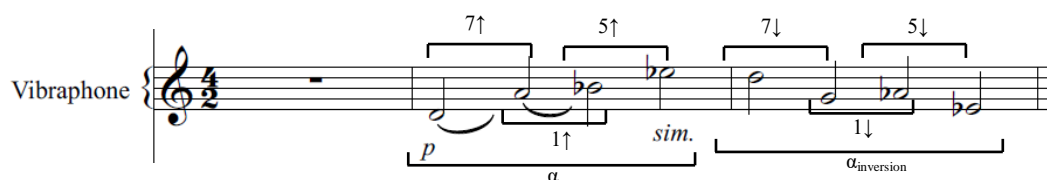


Fig. 6. Hans-Peter Türk, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 1–2
(α -motif and α -inversion; the numbers represent the semitone content)

Another favoured level at which the composer applies the principle of symmetry is the modal one, and we shall now look more carefully at moments where the numbers of semitones between the mode’s pitches form a pattern which is symmetrical, either repeating, in which the numbers of semitones between pitches recur until a full octave pattern is formed (similar to Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition, which Türk knows thoroughly¹⁸), or being palindromic.

The complete modal structure of the entire introduction is revealed in its second musical phrase (bars 12–15) where the mode presented follows the semitone pattern 1 1 1 4 1 1, whose sonorous ambience will be preserved until the next segment of the form, where the chorus enters with the first stanza of the poem (Figure 7).

¹⁷ Hans-Peter Türk. 2023. *Presentation at the Award Ceremony of the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania*, manuscript.

¹⁸ Hans-Peter Türk. 2006. *12 Lecții de compoziție bazate pe limbajul muzical al lui Olivier Messiaen*. Cluj-Napoca: Academia de Muzică „Gheorghe Dima”.

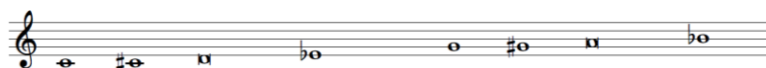


Fig. 7. *Hans-Peter Türk, Das Kreuz in der Steppe from Epitaph, bars 12–15*
(Mode 1 1 1 4 1 1 1)

New symmetrical modal patterns are discovered around the “emotional epicentre” of the piece, the third stanza, in which the symphonic ensemble is reduced to a chamber ensemble. The interlude preceding the third stanza is made up of two of the piece’s symbolic motifs: the motif of wafts of mist (see Figure 5, bar 44), first exposed as an accompaniment in the second stanza (“Dunkle, graue Nebelschwaden” [Dark grey mist]) and consisting of a semitone oscillation on various rhythmic configurations in the lower register (bars 44–50), and the motif of the cross (Figure 8), which is implied as a subject in the poetic lines (“Hebt sich scharf vom weissen Grunde / Treu halt es die Totenwacht” [Rises sharply from the white background / Faithfully it keeps the death watch]).

Fig. 8. *Hans-Peter Türk, Das Kreuz in der Steppe from Epitaph, bars 71–72*

From analytical observations related to the modal aspect of three sections here (second interlude – third stanza – third interlude), we discover a variational and additive path taken regarding modal content. Where a first segment is built around the symmetrical mode 1 4 1 4 1 4 (bars 61–63, Figure 9), it is followed by another symmetrical mode 1 1 2 1 1 2 1 1 2 (bars 71–72, Figure 10, when the mezzo-soprano solo enters) created by adding pitches to the original.

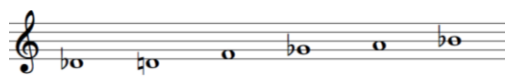


Fig. 9. *Hans-Peter Türk*, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 61–63
(Mode 1 4 1 4 1 4)

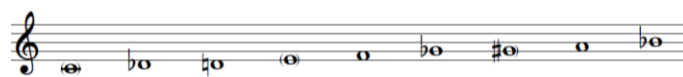


Fig. 10. *Hans-Peter Türk*, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 71–72
(Mode 1 1 2 1 1 2 1 1 2)

The evolution of the musical discourse tends towards a polyphonic agglomeration, and the symmetrical modal structures evolve until a point where we lose perception of them. The section marked *Funebre* (bars 87–91, mode 1 2 1 3 1 2 1), in which the flutes' melodic line is accompanied by chords making use of a leading note attraction (i.e. the semitone, superimposing the perfect fifth on F minor with an F# minor chord), introduces rhythmic formulas based on polyphonic proliferation (creating an illusion of a funereal dotted rhythm at bar 89) but when the same musical idea is repeated later (bars 108–117) we do *not* find variations to the symmetrical modal structure 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 (Figure 11). The additive, variational spirit generally is maintained until all twelve pitches are reached at the end of the third interlude, a moment we interpret as a culmination of modal tension before the entrance of the fourth stanza with the diatonic chorale chant line – a direct confrontation at the level of pitch content, a possible metaphor for the conflict between two opposing worlds.

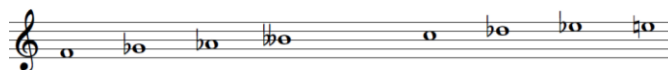


Fig. 11. *Hans-Peter Türk*, *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* from *Epitaph*, bars 87–91; 108–117 (Mode 1 2 1 3 1 2 1)

After this chromatic accumulation the last stanza sees a return of the diatonic melody, written in the manner of a Protestant chorale, from the second stanza. Indicated *Grave*, a deathly silence is suggested, in which the musical symbol of the cross appears to us in the oboe solo. The recurrence of this austere material focuses on two key concepts: “das Kreuz” (bar 125) and “stummes Mal” (139–142). The entire stanza is performed *piano*, *sotto voce* and the last words of the poem “ein stummes Mal” are the only words the composer repeats from the poem. The Coda (bars 142–148) exhibits sober harmonic oscillations, in *piano* and *pianissimo*, but the chromatic congestions of the last four bars aim to be a last cry of despair; a rhetorical, varied, resigned reprise of the main motif.

4. Conclusions

Starting from the poem *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* by Rudi Gross, we discover descriptive images, which depict the hostility of nature in the Siberian landscape, focusing his illustration on three coordinates: the mist as monochromatic image, the wind as kinetic variety and the cross as a symbol of death. Composer Hans-Peter Türk takes these motifs and turns them into musical

leitmotifs, anchoring each one in a different musical dimension. The mist as monochromatic topos is depicted musically by the construction of whole sections from a single structural element, the α -motif, from which most of the musical ideas originate. The wind, as an element of the movement in the static landscape, becomes the carrier of variational dynamics in music (giving rise to the numerous variations of the α -motif) and of the diversity of musical expression (choral[e] harmonisations of transcendental expression, funeral march, lament). The cross, symbol of the funeral, embodies in the music the geometrical principle of balance and symmetry found at the formal, melodic and modal level. The form is symmetrically configured, having at its centre the third stanza, the peak of the lyrical tension, an image which is “flanked” by an austere and transcendental image of the Protestant chorale. At the melodic level, symmetry as a generative principle is reflected in mirror configurations of musical intervals or in juxtaposed intervals, as exemplified in several iterations of the α -motif. Finally, the principle of symmetry manifests itself in the configuration of the modal skeleton, the intonations of which preserve a colouring over extended sections of the piece. On this point, it is pertinent to reflect that more than forty years ago the composer, when discussing the principle of “partial symmetry” in Bartók’s work, cited Gerhard Nestler, who predicted a promising future for proportionally organised musical structures: “Among Busoni’s laws of proportion, the most important for the future will be that of sound juxtapositions. Proportionally organised sound juxtapositions will give music a new form.”¹⁹ *Das Kreuz in der Steppe* is a prime example of this understanding of musical structuring.

Last but not least, the decision of the institution and performers to bring to the spotlight a contemporary opus, so rarely present in big concert halls, in an evening dedicated to the sufferings of the ethnic German minorities in Romania, is exemplary and worth following. We had the opportunity to witness a musical tribute to the victims of war, small heroes and their lost hopes, who, through their little art that reached us, became big heroes, and bearers of collective crosses.

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¹⁹ *Apud* Hans-Peter Türk. “Simetria intervalică parțială în creația lui Bartók” [Intervalllic Partial Symmetry in Bartók’s Creation]. *Lucrări de muzicologie*, 15: 91–99, pp. 98–99.

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