

The *Baby canary* lied by Felicia Donceanu, compositional analysis

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Abstract: Over the years, the composer Felicia Donceanu has distinguished herself in contemporary Romanian composition by using an original sound language, which combines traditional techniques with modern ones under the influence of her creative versatile artistic spirit. The “Baby canary” lied for soprano and viola da gamba or lute is part of the cycle of lieds “Singing with Ienăchiță Văcărescu” made by the composer between 1983 - 1984 on the lyrics of Ienăchiță Văcărescu, this being the first in the series of four that make up the cycle. The present study represents its compositional analysis.

Key-words: compositional language; form of the work; harmonic structure; metro-rhythmic structure; timbre and dynamic features

1. The cycle of lieds “Singing with Ienăchiță Văcărescu” - the poetic significance

Singing with Ienăchiță Văcărescu represents a cycle of lieds made by the composer Felicia Donceanu on the lyrics of Ienăchiță Văcărescu, an artistic creation made out of the desire to pay homage to the poet who marked a crucial moment in the evolution of the Romanian literary language, but also to ennoble through music the dowry of the Romanian culture left bequeathed by the great literary values of our people. It is well known that the poet, historian and philologist Ienăchiță Văcărescu made great contributions to consolidating the grammatical rules of Romanian literature, ideas also debated in the dissertation *Romanian Grammar* published in 1787 at the printing house of Râmnicu Episcopate, but also in Vienna, Austria, in the same year.

Ienăchiță Văcărescu's poems paint certain erotic features and Romanian folk accents, their lyrical themes being centered around the female character and not only. This was primarily due to the characteristics of those times of society, in which love lyrics, full of pathos, circulated written on epistles among young people in love, but also due to the freedom of literary and artistic expression quickly directed to describe the sentimental side. “In the field of poetry, Ienăchiță Văcărescu cultivates various ways; escaped from the constraint of rigid, scholarly prosody, his poems nevertheless cultivate a certain expressive conventionalism, but they also show the freshness of the living contact with folklore.”²

1.1. The cycle of lieds “Singing with Ienăchiță Văcărescu” - compositional data

The cycle of lieds *Singing with Ienăchiță Văcărescu* was made by the composer following a request addressed by the chamber group Grupetto, a band that surprised the audience due to its instrumental composition (soprano, flute, viola da gamba, spinet) and the chosen repertoire, but especially due to the remarkable performances, highlighted in the Romanian interpretative art over time. It consists of four lieds: I. *Baby canary*, designed for soprano and viola da gamba or lute; II. *Bitter dove* written for soprano, viola da gamba and

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² Iulian, Boldea. 2009. “Premodern Romanian poetry. Văcărești Poets”. In *Romanian Language Magazine - 30 years since its founding* no.5-6: <http://limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=385>

flute; III. *In a garden*, designed for the entire chamber and instrumental ensemble and IV. *Tastament*, composed for soprano, viola da gamba or lute and tom - tom.

2. The *Baby canary* lied - literary theme

The lyrical theme of the poem "You are a baby canary" describes the metaphorical image of the seductive woman, able to win the heart of anyone. The use of the metaphor "baby canary" in shaping the female image, suggests the idea that she hides her feelings, closing in on herself as in a cage, leaving the mystery to hover over the person with whom she is in love. "Love is a <halter> or <magnet>, and the woman, nourishing hearts, is a canary"³.

3. The *Baby canary* lied - the compositional language

The musical language is dominated by modal thinking, a diatonic, heptachordic one, having a functional freedom that makes it difficult to choose the main centre (the final and as such the structure of the mode).

3.1. Form of the paper

Following the formal development together with the modal centering, two main centers are clarified - the first on E and the second, central on B, the final return from the coda looking to find the initial E, as such the song is centered on an aeolic mode on E. For the situation in which another interpretation of the conclusion of the song (Coda) is chosen, the song becomes one open with the end on a different centre than the initial one, a situation perfectly possible both for the literary text, with evolutionary aspect, and for modal thinking in general - especially in the popular type solutions, in fact taken over in multiple cases by Felicia Donceanu.

Regarding the form, the construction is a free one, having a scheme of the type: Introduction A B C Coda. This analytical conclusion is based on the musical, modal and thematic structure, which constitutes a free, continuous evolution, without rounds, without elements that would allow an approach to the classical forms. The song can also be analyzed as a double-bar structure, with introduction and coda, if we take into account two aspects that bring together structures B and C, transforming the scheme initially presented as follows:

free form - Introduction A B C Coda

double bar - Introduction A B1 B2 Coda

The two unifying elements are the modal structure, both B and C being centered on an aeolic mode on key of B (but treated differently, as it will be seen from the argument of the initial solution), respectively the text, C resuming the text B, which then continues with new elements: B begins with "you don't eat sugar, not even hemp" and C uses in the first phase the text "you don't eat sugar, not even hemp" continuing with "but you feed a heart ... which you sacrificed to you... baby, what are you going to do with it ... what are you going to do it doesn't know ... baby."

However, the change of tempo and metrics, as well as the writing, are, in my opinion (supported by any first audition of the paper), changes far too important to accept the consideration of the two sections as being of the same type. As such, I will present the structure in the free type solution (the initial one).

³ George Călinescu. 2003. *The history of Romanian literature from its origins to the present*. Bucharest: SemnE Publishing House, p. 73.

The introduction, in length of 11 measures, proposes a period of two sentences related thematically and as writing. The first, in length of 5 measures, proposes a seemingly monodic motive for 2 measures, but which, by keeping the *la* from the beginning of the second measure, proves to be a heterophonic syntax (of the Byzantine accompaniment type - logical reference to the cultural context of the time in which the author of the text lived and created), followed by a second of three measures (asymmetry is a proof of freedom and avoidance of the classical-romantic squaring) homophone, articulated from two submotives, highlighted by the drawing of the song, which repeats an ornament around E sound.



Fig.1. measures 1 - 5

This initial dualism, with two paradigmatically different entities, proves to be a mode of construction by repetition in the second sentence. It begins again monodically, at the sixth measure with anacrusis, stopping at the end of the first submotive on an interesting final chord (a A minor chord with a small seventh, in the third overturning, which seems to unify the *la* of the accompaniment of the initial motive with the chord of C major of the second motive), commented on in a second submotive by simple ornamentation (seventh measure, change of status of the chord, presented in fragments), the answer coming again homophone, on the chord of C major, this time with the seventh, then evolving harmoniously to a A minor. Compared to the first exposition, in which the homophone syntax benefited from the space of a three-measure motive, in this second exposition the composer operates a reduction to a one-measure submotive. The second sentence ends with a synthesis motive, beginning heterophonically (at the ninth measure, with the *la* pedal in the bass and the melody related to the original motive on the soprano) and continuing homophonously by placing on a E minor (actually aeolic) and ending on a specific modal “dominant” (minor, on B).

The A, the first section with voice (and text), is anticipated by an onomatopoeic vocal gesture (sung with closed mouth, on the consonant “m”, at measure 12 with anacrusis), which states the modal centre on B (with which the initial structure ended), followed by a broad and complex development. The sung text includes a gesture related to the original one (also onomatopoeic - “turitu”), suggesting the song of the bird and a single verse: “You are a baby canary”, the two linguistic entities alternating. The use of a minimal text helps to clarify the formal structure (thus delimiting the A) and gives a preparatory character, of entering the atmosphere of this section (which does not clarify, at the level of the text, the poetic message).

At the syntactic level, a much more complex and diverse, more alert writing is observed (by reducing the rhythmic durations), having a homophonic preponderance, but also clear elements of polyphony, of superpositional type. Two melodic structures are perceived in many moments, that of the voice and another of the piano (most often in the acute register, but also below the solo voice, also in internal voices of the piano writing), each evolving seemingly independently, but collaborating very expressive to harmonic richness and rhythmic complementarity.

The B, from measure 33 with anacrusis, benefits from a short gesture of piano preparation, which anticipates melodically and rhythmically the melody of the human voice. It is observed from the beginning of the anacrusis the change of the modal structure by the appearance of C#, for the time being the centre seems to be a G (lidic), which will slide after

three measures on the real centre, of aeolic B. Another change that helps the structuring is a rhythmic dynamization, present from the beginning, the predominant pulsation being that of 16-s, which has the role of preparing the speed and agitation of the next section.

The construction of the period is one of two sentences, the first of 4 measures, with two motives, the second one of seven measures - the amplification coming from the existence of a third, conclusive, three-measures motive, with which the structure ends.

The first motive is an agitated one, which proposes a hexachordic melody to the voice with a predominantly ascending drawing, counterpointed by a piano melody to the voice of the sopranos, more interesting and richer intonationally and rhythmically, linking the two motives, which became joint. The second motive is obviously related to the first, but it still evolves freely, on the evolutionary text, sliding downwards in harmony from the first to the sixth stage. What constitutes the main interest of this first sentence is the combination of the two voices from the superpositional polyphony, both at the intonation level and in the internal organization, of the subsegment breaths, which can be expressed schematically as follows:

Vocal melody 2 measures + 2 anacrusis measures

Piano melody 1 measure + 2 anacrusis measures + 1 anacrusis measure

The second sentence (from measure 37) has a bar microstructure (related motives 1 and 2, differentiated motive 3), in which the first two motives use only the vowel "A" and the conclusive motive the onomatopoeic element ("turitu").

The melody is a trichord (E-F#-G) with an ornamental role around F#, which is then repeated and sequenced with a sixth below (G-A-B), being sung in pianissimo, in the acute register, having a clear Spanish influence, with impressionistic elements given by the blocking on the arpeggiated chord of the seventh part of the sixth stage (which slides in the second motive on the fifth stage, without a dominant role (the specific modal-diatonic sonority is obvious). The two motives are separated only by a breath noted by the composer at the beginning of the second time of measure 38 (for reasons of physiological precaution, given the length of the two motives), they being constructed to be imagined as a single entity. The last motive (from measure 41) brings to the solo voice more restricted, more restrained gestures, the end being almost identical with the end of the previous motive, but the speech is led by the melody of the soprano voice of the piano, which freely imitates the melodic structure of the voice for the first two motives, succeeding practically to reunite the two trichords in a single pentachord (E-F# - G + G-A-B, becoming the pentachord E-F#-G-A-B), strengthening through the melodic-rhythmic figures the Spanish character of the moment.

The C (measures 44-84) brings as first changes elements of temporal - metric nature, passing from time - quarter to time - optimal and from the metric alternation of measures of three, four and five quarters to the measure of three optimals (having rare, but still significant changes in two, four or five eighths), respectively the tempo, much more moving (from the fourth=58 in the second period of the A, to the fourth with a point=184, represents a hurry almost five times). Another interesting element is the clarification of the centre on B, which becomes a certainty at the end of the first sentence of the section (from measure 49), the other previous sections using unstable modal structures that had the oscillating centre (or less convincing anyway). In addition, after resuming the text of the B, the C continues with a new text: "but you feed a heart, which you sacrificed to you, what are you going to do with it, what are you going to do it doesn't know", between these verses interposing elements already used - the onomatopoeic gesture "turitu" and the vowel "A", also the appellation "baby". All these elements of novelty, to which are added melodic, harmonic and writing differences (syntax) are arguments of the formal division adopted at the macrostructural level (with reference to the differentiation of B from C).

A last element of differentiation is the simplicity of the writing, generally implying a maximum of three simultaneous attacks (one on the voice and two on the piano) and a highlighting of the solo voice, without the small moments of polyphonic syntax, also based on the superimposability technique, being able to claim an importance of the piano melodic plan close to the vocal melody.

The Coda intervenes strictly instrumentally, after more than a pause measure with dramatic effect, from measure 86 with anacrusis, in the form of a sentence of two motives, constructed similarly. The first motive begins monodically (actually in octave dubbing) with an anacrusic gesture, which is an ornament around the sound and, stopping on a repeated chord, G-C-E-B, explained above. The second reason evokes, on the sound of the mentioned chord, the most interesting melodic segment of the song, resuming with rhythmic and intonation licenses the initial motive of the third sentence of c2 and / or c3, to then repeat the final chord.

Beyond the freedom that pervades the construction, there is a certain importance of ternary thinking in the form, through the existence of three sections, of their division into three (for example C), of dividing the periods into three sentences and them in three motives, without reaching an imposition of principle, a ternary constructivism. It is interesting the presence in several rows of the bar and counterbar forms at the level of subsections and in the microstructural construction.

3.2. Harmonic structure

Regarding the harmonic structure of the song, the beginning is one without clarifications, after a heterophonic motive centered on la, the second remaining on a C major harmony in the second overturning, the second sentence continues with a synthesis harmony (la minor with the seventh, in the third overturning it is in fact the cumulation of the two previous entities), which is placed on a A minor, in order to stop on a more convincing E minor, in fact aeolic (thus performing a clearer first cadence, plagal type), so that the end of the structure slips on the “dominance” of the mode, in turn minor, consecrating the modal (and unstable / unclear) character of the introductory section.

The A keeps the appearance unstable, undecided, but can be considered focused on a frigid mode on B, due to the beginning and end of the first period on this final. The use of the Do major chord with the seventh, in the second overturning (measures 16-17), which recalls the sonority of the second motive in the introduction, has a chromatic effect, in this frigid mode, approaching the Spanish influences of the Neapolitan chord. These influences are also visible in section C, where the composer uses chords with added sounds (with added sixth, but not only), as for example in section c2 (measures 53-67), also built on the sonority of the second step lowered of the respective mode (in this case on the natural do sound of an aeolic mode on si). The peculiarity of C comes from the use of chords without generating interval, such as the one from measures 55-57 (C-F#-G-A), possibly analyzable as a diminished chord in the second overturning with added second (solution non-existent in classical-romantic tonal harmony) has either an argumentation of the thinking of the chords obtained by the overlapping of thirds with added note (practiced intensely in jazz) or an approach to the impressionistic modal freedom (to which from the auditory, expressive point of view, it seems to approach more).

The second period of the A seems to alternate a center of E (aeolic) - by the cadential stops from measures 23-24 or 30, with moments of placement on the chord of the fourth stage, specifically plagal, modal (in measures 21, 28-29), with a G one - by the cadential stops from measures 26, respectively from the end of the section, measure 32, which continues, practically

in conjunction with the first section of B, which sits clearly, at the end of the sentence (measure 35) on a centre of B, which seemed essential for section A, in its first period.

B represents a fairly stable moment at the harmonic level, even if it still leaves room for possible interpretations, being built in an aeolic mode, centered on a clarified B by the end of the first sentence, but also by the end of the third one, which ends the period (measures 41-43). During the section, a seventh chord of the sixth stage alternates with one of the fifth stage (minor, in the form of a trison in a direct state), a relationship that is limited to the modal specificity of harmony.

The C, similar in clarity of the modal structure (the same aeolic on B) and of the chord structures used, not as simple, however, brings elements of chromatic interest and chord construction without generating interval that we have already mentioned.

The Coda proposes a return to the initial intonation structure, with the do natural sound in the composition of the final chord (starting with measure 88), but with an open expressiveness finality, of modern type, already analyzed at the beginning of the presentation, in the paragraphs on the structure of language.

3.3. Metro-rhythmic structure

Regarding the metro-rhythmic structure, there are multiple elements of interest, starting with the metrics of the work. The first sections use alternative measures, mostly four-quarters, with moments in five-quarters or three-quarters, without any algorithm proposing a complex metric ordering. This metrical sequence, which covers the introduction and section A is free, being determined (in conditions of a very slow tempo and a suggestive "poco rubato" indication) by the very lack of continuous rhythmic pulsation, of the discontinuous character of the speech, with multiple dramatic stops, breaths, moments of reverie that are thus exploited by the composer. The rhythmic durations used in these first two sections are diverse, also without a constructive logic, following the lyrical-dramatic route of the discovery of the literary subject, only in the last period of A seeming to clarify a continuous pulsation of eighths (being present other durations too, even continuities of 16s), but which is interrupted by longer durations (measures 26 or 29) or by crowns (measure 28).

B continues with metric alternation, eliminating the five-stroke structure, taking as a basic element the measure of three quarters, which it alternates with four quarters and two quarters, in a faster section and with a pulsation that can be followed continuously, of quarters, appearing on wide spaces and continuities of eighths or 16s. The majority character of the segment, of giusto-syllabic type, is given by the presence of the 16s in the melody, alternating with the secondary plan, of the piano, creating a moment of rhythmic ascent to the moment of maximum temporal tension, section C. It appears with a pulsation obviously "giusto", with an indisputable continuity of eighths, proposing the organization with alternative measures, which this time betrays a constructive algorithm in metrics: segments of three eighths alternating with moments of eight eighths (3 + 3 + 2) written as alternating of measures or using the measure of five eighths next to the predominant one of three-stroke. The Coda returns to the rhetoric of the introduction, taking over its temporal logic.

3.4. Timbre and dynamic features.

An important observation regarding the timbre and dynamic peculiarities of the use of the voice in this paper concerns the moment from measure 37 (and the following), within section B, a

negative culmination, with an indication of pianissimo in the acute register of the voice, which will be probably performed on the head voice, having a very special expressive effect.

4. Conclusions

The musical language is dominated by modal thinking, a diatonic, heptachordic one, having a functional freedom that makes it difficult to choose the main centre (the final and as such the structure of the mode). One can observe a certain centering, on large spaces, which corresponds to the formal structures (corresponding to the logic of the classical-romantic tonal construction). Thus, the introductory structure of the piano proposes an aeolic on E, followed by a frigid on B in the first section with voice (A, measures 12 with anacrusis - 32, but which oscillates with aeolic moments on E), then an aeolic on B in the second section (B, measures 33 - 43), which is kept in the next section (C, measures 44 - 84). The Coda (the last 7 measures) returns to a composition close to the initial one (the same component sounds), but the stop is undecided, on a seventh chord in the second overturning, which can be interpreted as a lidic ending on C, aeolic on E (with E note added) or as an ionic on G (harder to accept).

Certain chromatic elements appear, especially in section C, such as the second step altered downwards (natural do, in the immediate vicinity of do#), having a suggestion close to the Neapolitan chord (used here in the direct state). In fact, influences of Spanish music but also of an impressionistic nature (rather from the Iberian space than from the French one), can be spotted at the audition of the work.

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