

Homenaje a Miguel Hernandez para soprano y piano, de Luis de los Cobos Almaraz (I)

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Abstract: *The lied is music and word alike, and in order to be properly received by the public it is important that the lyrical artist be equipped with the appropriate means of interpretation for this kind of cult song. Being a combination of structures (music, text, gesture), the lied becomes one of the complex and simultaneously challenging artistic events. The present paper aims to analyze the first two lieder of the Lieder cycle “Homenaje a Miguel Hernandez para soprano y piano” by Luis de los Cobos Almaraz, with the emphasis on some aspects of their interpretation, of vocal pedagogy, the theoretical notions being presented in close connection with their practical applicability. The purpose of this analysis, further to the paper published in No. 7 of this Journal, is to provide a system of evaluation and verification of performance in vocal art by examining the factors that determine the real success of an uninterpretation, model of the Lieder cycle “Homenaje a Miguel Hernandez para soprano y piano”, op. 6, composed by Luis de los Cobos Almaraz in 1953.*

Keywords: *lied; music-interpretive analysis; vocal-interpretive skills;*

● Introduction

The style of the performance is aimed at all the resorts of stage realization, both musical and scenic. The correct interpretation of a lied, which organically brings together the word and music,² means to take into account both musical and literary requirements, relevant in meaning being the elements of cohesion, the relations of interdependence, interaction, coherence, compatibility, between the elements that compose it.

The lied, a genre of cultic music, born in classicism, crystallizes and develops in romanticism at the beginning of the XIXth century, being considered one of the genres that characterize the thinking and sensitivity of this era that promoted the cult of nature, lyricism, fantasy and freedom of expression. The singer and teacher Consuelo Rubio de Uscătescu wrote in her pedagogical work, the *Art of singing*, that: “The theme of vocal hermeneutics lies in the gestation, structure and evolution of the lied an absolute reference element necessary for any professional of the song who pursues pedagogical perfection and a complete musical formation”.³

Anca Mihuț, in the treaty *Contributions to the history of the Romanian lied*, states that “to study the song, popular or cult, of a people means to make an X-ray of its mentality, psychology and spirituality.”⁴ Music has been extremely important to Iberics throughout their history, and the events of the early XXth century are largely documented by song, this cycle of lieder being an eloquent example in my opinion.

In the autumn of 1997, when I was a student in the fifth year at the “Gheorghe Dima” music Academy in Cluj-Napoca, I had the opportunity to record in the studio four cycles of

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² Grigoriu, Theodor. 1986. *Muzica și nimbul poeziei*. București: Editura muzicală. p. 167-172.

³ Rubio de Uscătescu, Consuelo. 1989. *Arta cântului*. București: Editura muzicală. p. 58.

⁴ Mihuț, Anca. 2006. *Contribuții la istoria liedului românesc*. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință. p. 10.

songs (op. 1, 6, 27 and 30) by composer Luis de los Cobos Almaraz. Then I had the opportunity to find out from the composer himself, present for a few days in Cluj, a lot of information about the structures and degrees of expressive manifestation of the works I was going to perform.

This analysis is aimed at applied research and involves an educational approach. The training and development of the skills of students and masters of the Musical Interpretation-Canto specialization in stylistic-esthetic research is desirable in a career development, and the design, organization, conduct and valorisation of theoretical researches in artistic creation, both through the development and use of tools of a theoretical-informative and practical-actional nature, as well as implementing a training model for a future concert of lieder, it is essential.

- **Luis de los Cobos Almaraz, short biography**

The composer, the conductor, the violinist, the professor and not least the Spanish lawyer Luis de los Cobos Almaraz, was born on 20th of April 1927 in Valladolid, Spain. He studied violin, composition and law in his hometown, before continuing his studies in Madrid, Paris, Vienna and finally in Geneva, where he studied to become a conductor with Bernardo Molinari in Rome, Eugène Bigot in Paris and Igor Markevitch. In 1944, he was imprisoned for a short time because he took part in the protests against the Franco government. This event is also due to the fact that after the completion of the studies in 1949, he could not engage anywhere in Spain. He decides to exile himself and establishes in Switzerland, at Geneva in 1952 by obtaining citizenship. Having a PhD in law, he taught disciplines in this field at the University of Geneva, while acting as a free-professional musician. He wrote cycles of lieder (*Canciones en el estilo popular* - op.1, composed in 1950; *Homenaje a Miguel Hernández* - op.6, 1953; *La voz a tédida* - op.?, 1985; *Canciones para mezzo y guitarra*- op.30b, 1985; *Cuatro piezas blancas para soprano y dos clarinetes*-op 30, 1986), Opera, Ballet, Orchestral (Symphony orchestra, String orchestra, Chamber Orchestra), Concertante (Cello, Piano, Guitar, Violin), Chamber music (Duos, Trios, Quartets), Solo (Guitar, Violin, Cello), Choral (with orchestra, a cappella), Vocal (with orchestra, with chamber ensemble, with piano, with other solo instrument), Electronic music.⁵ Although we notice that he was a prolific author, many of his compositions will remain in his office drawer in Geneva for several decades, only in his last years of life the public, including the one in Romania, will have the opportunity to hear them. He died on 16th of November 2012 in Geneva, Switzerland.⁵

- **Poet Miguel Hernández Gilabert, short biography**

The poet and playwright Miguel Hernández Gilabert (1910-1942), considered one of the leading representatives of the XXth-century Spanish literature, was born in Orihuela, Spain, on 30 October 1910, in a large family - seven brothers - and low-income devoted to raising animals. Self-taught, from an early age, while caring for the family's goat herd, reads works by most classical Spanish authors. Soon he began writing his first poems and became a Member of a local literary cenacle. At the age of 20, in 1931, he received his first and only prize, from Sociedad Artística del Orfeón Illicitano. In 1931, for the first time, he traveled to Madrid in search of a job, but without success, and after a short period of time, he returned home, where he continued to write. The year 1933 brings him, after the publication of his first book, *Perito en Lunas*, to employment as secretary and later editor of the *Los toros* encyclopedia. In Madrid he befriends the painter Maruja Mallo, the poets Vicente Aleixandre and Pablo Neruda,

⁵ Ardelean, Nicoleta-Mihaela. 2021. *Cuatro coplas*, by Luis de los Cobos Almaraz. p. 26-27 in the 7th volume (No. 1/2021) of the *Învăţământ, Cercetare, Creaţie*, periodical of the Faculty of Arts of the University "Ovidius" from Constanţa, Romania.

Neruda's influence on Hernández was evident through Marxist ideas and his messages increasingly devoted to social and political issues of those times. In July 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out, Miguel Hernández, as a Member of the Communist Party of Spain, voluntarily enlisted in the Republican Army. During the war, he actively participated in the battle fronts of Teruel and Jaén. This period is also a prolific one for his art: The volumes of poems *Viento del pueblo* (1937), *El hombre acecha* (1937-1938), *Cancionero y romancero de ausencias* (1938-1941) and *Nanas de la cebolla*, 1939; the plays *El labrador de más aire*, *Teatro en la guerra*, both in 1937. In April 1939, at the end of the war, the poet returns to his native lands, but not long after, he is arrested, imprisoned in various prisons until he dies in Alicante prison on March 28, 1942, due to tuberculosis. Although he had a short life, through his literary work, Miguel Hernández remained in the consciousness of Spanish culture as one of its most authentic poets.⁶

- **The Cycle of lieder Homenaje a Miguel Hernandez para soprano y piano, by Luis de los Cobos Almaraz**

Luis de los Cobos Almaraz had a very diverse creative activity, characterized by stylistic pluralism, expressiveness and inventiveness, defined by a refined synthesis between different languages, extricating certain rhythmico-melodic patterns from the music of Iberian origin, which he metamorphoses into new constructions, subject to continuous transformations. In the creation of lied he follows the same path, characterized by stylistic plurality, but also by the concern for finding that fine balance between tradition and innovation. In this article we propose for analysis the score of the first two lieder of the *Homenaje cycle of Miguel Hernandez para soprano y piano*, OP 6, composed by Luis de los Cobos Almaraz in 1953, on the lyrics of the poems *Nanas de la cebolla* and *Bocca arrastra mi boca*, by Miguel Hernandez.

1. Nanas de cebolla

A poem written in 1939 during his detention and published in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after the writer's death. It is written after receiving a postcard in which his wife, Josefina, writes that she eats only onions with bread. The central theme of poetry is the family, which he cannot protect and which he feels he will never see again. Dedicated to his son, it is intended to be a message of encouragement to his boy. He sees onions as a labyrinth signifying the infinite or like the Egyptians, who considered it sacred and worshipped it in temples. The text of the lied is only a fragment of the poem written by Miguel Hernandez, the second, third and fourth stanzas: „En la cuna del hambre mi niño estaba. Con sangre de cebolla se amamantaba. Pero tu sangre escarchaba de azúcar, cebolla y hambre. Una mujer morena, resuelta en luna, se derrama hilo a hilo sobre la cuna. Ríete, niño, que te tragas la luna cuando es preciso. Alondra de mi casa, ríete mucho. Es tu risa en los ojos la luz del mundo. Ríete tanto que en el alma, al oírte, bata el espacio.”⁷

This first lied debuts in the tone b minor, tempo andante dolce, the measure of 2/4, kept throughout it, this mode being a singular one, because in the next three songs, the composer uses an alternation of measures. Initiated in the pianissimo, the lied is composed in a binary measure, starting with a melodic formula that repeats itself, to provide that comfort, that silence of the lullaby.

⁶ Honig, Edwin. 1990. *The unending lightning, the selected poems of Miguel Hernandez, translated from the Spanish by Edwin Honig*. New York: The Sheep Meadow Press. p. ix-xv.

⁷ My child lay there in his cradle of hunger and and nursed on the blood of an onion. But your blood was a frost of sugar on onion and hunger. Dissolved into moon, a dark-haired woman lets trickle spill over the the cradle. Little one, laugh, you can eat up the moon whenever you want. I awoke from being a child: you never waken. My mouth is sad. You always laugh! In your cradle always defending laughter feather by feather. Honig, Edwin. 1990. *The unending lightning, the selected poems of Miguel Hernandez, translated from the Spanish by Edwin Honig*. New York: The Sheep Meadow Press. p. 23-25.

The debut of the singer, with a melodic line that has a narrative character, is supported by the same rhythmic formulas, which use values of fourths, in the left hand of the accompaniment, so that in the accompaniment of the right hand we notice an equal quaver pace. In the fourth measure we encounter values of small notes, of thirtyseconds, an eighth with a point followed by two thirtyseconds, on the word *cradle*, which wants to create the shape of the infinite, represented graphic by the loop of return toward the end of the drawing.

However, the aparent simplicity of the musical discourse of the work conceals special technical requirements, such as a very clear articulation and dictation of the poetic text. The character of the musical phrases that transpire from the poetic text as well as the musical one, must be rendered by a vocal color that expresses sadness from the mother's sweet voice.



The strophic form ABCA, manages to capture the audience through continuity and a perfect combination of all the constituent elements of the musical language offered by the composer: melodic line, rhythmic, musical and chromatic formulas, poetic text, piano accompaniment. Initiated in the tone b minor, following a crescendo and decrescendo, carried out on a four-measure stretch, cadence in the tone D major. The weight of the first time is better marked with the help of pedals and accents, which are otherwise noted by the compositor in the didascale. The tenth measure repeats, with an aufтакт, the melodic line pattern at the beginning of the lied, and prepares, through an ascending melodic passage, the transition to the most acute note, b2, which corresponds to the word *azucar*. The lowest note corresponds to three words: *estaban*, *amanteba* and *hambre*, as if suggesting mother's care to feed her child with the best and sweetest food.

Throughout the soprano melodic line, the composer uses a wide range of shades, ranging from pianissimo to forte.

Measures 25, 26 and 27, in a tempo *andante dolce* and with the indication *molto arpeggiato*, as if suggesting mother's caresses, in the tune of the F# major, with the fifth step lowered, passing through the tonalities a minor and C major, with a constant use of seventh chord, getting into the pianissimo on the note and from the central octave, then returning to the beginning, b minor tonality. Arpeggiated chords, in which shadows and lights alternate in the game of major and minor, create the impression of the sounds of a harp.



Part B, initiated by the vocal melodic line in the e minor tone, in the piano shade, this time without pianistic support, for the duration of a whole measure, it brings back the sweetness and tenderness with which the mother comes to pour her love upon her precious and addresses the child, offering him the moon in the sky in exchange for a smile, a smile that remains forever in the mother's soul and ear and makes her tremble every time she hears it. This is rendered by the syncopated walk from the accompaniment (measure 30).

The image shows a musical score for soprano and piano. The vocal line is in E minor, and the piano accompaniment is in a syncopated 2/4 rhythm. The lyrics are: U - na mu - her mo - re - na re - suel - ta en lu - na. The score is marked with a piano (p) dynamic and includes a copyright notice for REDMART PRO CO. MADRID.

In measure 35, *se derramahilo a hilo*, the composer, through a trioleta, underlines mother's attention towards her child. Rietenin is the line corresponding to measure 40, wanted by the composer in piano nuance, tonality E major suggests the child's smile and happiness when seeing his mother (tonality B major), corresponding the word luna, returning to the tonality from the beginning of the lied, e minor, *cuando es preciso*, trying to protect him whenever he needed it. In this second stanza the sharpest note (e2) corresponds to the word *morena*, and the lowest (d#1), to *preciso*. If we are to make a parallel between the highest and the lowest sound, we can actually descifre the meaning of the phrases: mom will protect you everytime you need it!

The vocal interpretation of this lied requires discreet nuances of the voice, obtained with the help of slight variations in intensity, which will create small accents of shadow and light. The piano line, having the important role of commenting and supporting the text, contributes significantly to the deepening of the image through the harmonic effects and changes in the musical nature.

Part C, corresponding to the third stanza, uses the same arpeggio accompaniment that suggests delicate harp chords, lasting five measures, but this time in optimal values on the right hand, passing through the tones a minor, e minor, b minor and D major with the crown in measure 51. After this crown, the syncopated pace is continued, in the same key. The low intensity required by the composer, the measure of 2/4 and the syncopated pace, suggest the child's rocking by his mother. Measure 59 is identical to the beginning measure (53) of this stanza, which is amplified by a crescendo that uses exceptional divisions, the quintet, in the key b minor, increasing in intensity to A major and cadence in the key F # major. The sharpest note in this third part, f #, corresponds to the word *alma*, and the lowest note, d1, *alondra*.

At the end of the lied, the composer resumes the melodic line of the first part. The indications in the caption are: crescendo, decrescendo (performed over a range of eight measures), nuances from pianissimo to forte, crowns, expression legato, pedals on the accentuated notes of the measure, molto arpeggiato, chained syncope, highlighting the swing song.

A peculiarity of the composer's musical writing is the use of the repetitive principle, at the motivational level, of the musical phrases, as well as the repetition of some words and expressions. The text-music relationship in this lied is constituted separately and this, in my

opinion, due to the verses of a rare complexity and symbolism, and musically, by amalgamating some components of the language, determines the aesthetic-expressive particularities and consequently the interpretive ones. The penetration into the depth of the poetic and musical meaning of the lied, allows the relief of the artistic expression.

2. Boca que arrasta mi boca

Poem written in 1938 and published posthumously (with verses in which, like the heartbreaking cry of a bird in a cage, it talks about love, the difficulties of life, freedom, death), is the basis of the second lied composed by Luis de los Cobos Almaraz. The poem has thirteen stanzas, but the composer uses only the first and last four: „Boca que arrastra mi boca: boca que me has arrastrado: boca que vienes de lejos a iluminarme de rayos. Alba que das a mis noches un resplandor rojo y blanco. Boca poblada de bocas: pájaro lleno de pájaros. Canción que vuelve las alas hacia arriba y hacia abajo. Muerte reducida a besos, a sed de morir despacio, das a la grama sangrante dos fúlgidos aletazos. El labio de arriba el cielo y la tierra el otro labio. Hundo en tu boca mi vida, oigo rumores de espacios, y el infinito parece que sobre mí se ha volcado. He de volverte a besar, he de volver, hundo, caigo, mientras descienden los siglos hacia los hondos barrancos como una febril nevada de besos y enamorados. Boca que desenterraste el amanecer más claro con tu lengua. Tres palabras, tres fuegos has heredado: vida, muerte, amor. Ahí quedan escritos sobre tus labios.”⁸

Composed in the key of g minor, tempo andante mosso, it is of a special complexity, both due to the alternation of measures of 7/4 (rarely used in the compositions of master Los Cobos), 4/4, 6/4 (in measure 15), and especially for that in the last part we are witnessing a combination of all the measures encountered so far and this in order to highlight the text. The values of notes encountered are generally sixteen, eighth, fourth, two, but exceptional rhythmic formulas are used, such as the triplet of eighths, often encountered (m.16, m.29, and m.40). It uses a wide range of shades, from pianissimo to forte, through crescendo and descrescendo. In the first three measures, of 7/4, the melodic line of the soprano is located in the central register, suggesting the turmoil and suffering she goes through, only to later ascend in a crescendo to the g2, like a cry of hope, made by an ascending chromatic pace.

⁸ Mouth that pulls at my mouth. Mouth that has pulled me along; mouth that comes from afar with beams to illuminate me. Dawn that fires my nights a red and white radiance. Mouth crowded with mouths: bird full of birds. Song winging its way upward and down. Death that subsides into kisses, into a thirst to die slowly, you give the blood-stained grass two wingbeats that gleam. The upper lip, sky, the lower lip, earth. I sink my life in your mouth. I hear the booming of space, and infinity seems to have poured itself over me. I shall return to kiss you, I have to return, and falling sink with the centuries descending into the deep ravines like a feverish snowfall of lovers' kisses. Mouth that with your tongue drew out of the earth the brightest dawn. Three words, three fires you have inherited: life, death, love. There they abide, inscribed on your lips. Honig, Edwin. 1990. *The unending lightning, the selected poems of Miguel Hernandez, translated from the Spanish by Edwin Honig*. New York: The Sheep Meadow Press. p. 17-18.

The second part, from the 9th measure, resumes the beginning of the first part, with the fourth part in the piano, the key of g minor, along the way modulates towards c minor, C major and proposes a spoken melodic line, in which the accompaniment draws a melodic line simple but intense, on the same note d1, which suggests a deep emotional tension, which is calmed by the descent on the note c. The lowest note corresponds to the word *boca*, on the note c1, and the most acute, g2, to the word *alba*. The color palette varies from shades of pianissimo, sung softly and with a clear diction, to fortissimo, keeping the same accuracy and intelligibility of the text. Through the repeated alternation of the measures, its harmonic plan and the use of the expressive nuances of the minor tonalities, the melancholy, the sadness is restored, the composer wanting to highlight the turmoil, the desire, the longing for the person. Breathing between phrases should be performed quickly so as not to interrupt the legato of the melodic line.

The third part, in an allegro tempo, is in an obvious expressive contrast to the previous stanza, a contrast produced at the level of all the parameters of the musical discourse: melody, harmony, rhythm and dynamics. All this reproduces the dramatic load of the poetic text, discovering its hidden sides: the emotionally intense experience and the oscillation between suffering and despair.

The key used is g minor, quarter values, on a range of 5 measures, in which the melodic line of the piano, through sustained chords, in a crescendo to fortissimo, has the role of creating a dramatic load. The text performed by the soloist is like a plea, *hundo en tu boca mi vida*, a text that is repeated with a quarter above, and led to the sharpest note, at b2, singing the word *boca*, just to reproduce the drama of the cry of despair.

The last part of this lied, preserves the key of g minor and offers a return to the early atmosphere of the lied, using shades of pianissimo, *He devolver a besarte*, as a last confession of love with a kiss, remaining forever engraved on the lips of lovers the three inherited words: *vida, muerte e amor* (life, death and love).

Throughout the lied, with the form A,A*,B,C,C*, the composer, in the desire to highlight some syllables, notes pedals in accompaniment. The alternation of measures, the superb harmonies, the melodic line, with an ambit from c1-to b2, the difficulty in articulating the words on the vocal passage area, make the approach of this lied to be a complex one, full of traps, both technical and and interpretive.

Consequently, the difficulty of interpreting this lied consists in rendering the lyrical-dramatic disposition, alternating with vocal passages delicately marked by the timbre color offered by the interpretation of the text and a vocal support, made both by a legato from one sound to another and by a legato of expression.

● Conclusions

As I said before, the theoretical dimension of vocal art research should not be neglected, as it is as important as the practical one. This analysis, representing a possible training model, tries to lead to a better understanding of the role of the vocal soloist in terms of interpreting the lied as well as mastering some basic musical concepts.

Luis de los Cobos Almaraz aims in this cycle of lieder to consolidate this genre in Spanish culture, the identity between the accents of the text and those of music, varied in content and unitary as a musical expression.

Characteristic of these first two lieder op. 6 is the chromatic gait, the quite frequent use of the septacord, the alternation of measures of 3/4 with 2/4, specific to Spanish music and tempos related to the theme of the lied: the first - andante dolce, and the second - andante mosso.

In the interpretation of the lieder, special attention is paid to the vocal passage area, but also to the melodic line, the tonal harmonic colors and the irradiated meanings from the combination of the text and the music, the soprano's mission interpreting these lieder by Luis de los Cobos being the deciphering of the constituent elements of the pieces and their rendering to the listener, but to be true, she must train her inner strength, which is related to the spirit, and the ability to exhibit in artistic form and not just to reproduce sound relationships. In vocal interpretation, for each form there is an aesthetic requirement, and for each requirement there must be a method of applying specific techniques, because for the vocal-musical act to represent artistic creation at the highest level requires discipline and full mastery of the voice, in the absence of which one cannot speak of a real interpretation. The composer-performer-audience relationship and the feedback-type interconnection are the essence of the musical phenomenon we serve.

It should be noted that the set of instructions and the order by which the training of a lied singer is carried out are at least as demanding and technically specific as those supported by the lyrical opera artist, and that although the vocal ambition used is not very extensive, c1- at b2, the weight in interpretation consists in the intonation of a melodic line that always uses a chromatic gait, an enharmonic script, which seeks and manages to highlight the quintessence of the words, the emotions suggested by them.

The composer Luis de Los Cobos offers, through this cycle of lieder, XXth century musical creations that deserve to be fully addressed, works that excites and which I approached with utmost seriousness during those years of end of the process of systematic training and professional development within the national Academy of music "Ghe. Dima" from Cluj-Napoca and starting of career.

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