

Laura Manolache

A STYLISTIC OVERVIEW OF THE MUSIC BY TIBERIU OLAH WITH REFERENCE TO *SYMPHONY NO. 2*

Abstract: Tiberiu Olah (1928-2002), Romanian composer, since fifties had studied Enescu's polyheterophony, which he interpreted as a "*new method of organising sonorous material*". By guiding himself after the principle of heterophony, Olah moulded his *Symphony no.2 (Adventures with major chords and pentatonics)* both the proceeding of pentatonics dispersed in space and that of superposition.

Key words: Tiberiu Olah, *Symphony no. 2* , polyheterophony, superposition proceedings, pentatonic, consonance, dissonance.

A short biography of the composer

Born on January 2, 1928 in Arpășel, Romania, Tiberiu Olah studied at the Cluj Conservatory (1946-49). In 1948 he won a scholarship to study in Paris. However, as of 1949 all scholarships for Western Europe were cancelled due to political reasons, and therefore he was granted, as compensation, a scholarship to the Tchaikowsky Conservatory in Moscow (1949-54). Despite Stalinist restrictions, he found there a dependable musical life and together with his teacher E. Messner and his composer colleagues Dennisov, Holopov, Roshdetwensky, A. Wolkonski managed to discover musical realization.

Since his student days, Olah has participated in numerous international seminars, workshops and festivals, such as the Warsaw Autumn Festival (1968, 1971), the "Ferienkursen für Elektronische Musik" organised by the Siemens-Studio in Munich (1966), and the "Internationalen Ferienkursen für Musik" in Darmstadt (1966-73). Since 1954, he has been a professor of composition at the National University of Music in Bucharest.

Olah has been a composer-in-residence at the invitation of the *Deutschen Akademischen Austauschdienst* (DAAD) (1969,1970); holder of a DAAD research scholarship (1978), and a member of *Gesellschaft für Musikalische Aufführungs- und Mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte* member (since 1968). However, he has also experienced some setbacks, including his failure to be admitted to the Romanian Academy in 1971-1972, as his musical style was considered by the communist hierarchy as not being representative enough of their ideals.

His honour list comprises prestigious awards: the "Koussevitzky Foundation" prize - USA (1974) for "*valuable contributions to the music of our days*"; the "George Enescu" prize of the Romanian Academy (1964); two Golden Pelican prizes of the Association of Cineasts (1965, 1971); the Film Festival Award -

Moscow (1972); four awards of the Composer's Union in Romania (1974-75, 1979, 1980, 1986); the Grand Prize of the Composer's Union in Romania (1993) for his entire oeuvre, The Excellence Prize of the Film National Centre (2002) for “*valuable contributions to the Romanian film*”, and The Romanian National Order “Faithful Service” at the rank of Commander for “*valuable artistic contributions and cultural promotion*” (2001). Tiberiu Olah died on October 2, 2002.

First and foremost, I am attracted to Tiberiu Olah's music because of its lyrical expression; its charm; its striking rhythmic character; a certain nervousness that injects force to the discourse, and also by the remarkable timbre and formal intuition. Although each of his pages is at the same time a technical and linguistic experiment, this fact does not presuppose a deficiency, but rather augments the listener's interest. His numerous works cover almost all the musical genres. Some of his important works include the *Cantata* for the women's choir and chamber orchestra (1956) based on old Tschangó texts; *Man's Constellation* (1958-1960), an oratorio for high voice, mixed choir and orchestra – although it was put on the stage and was published in 1971 by Editura muzicala it was subsequently forbidden by the Communist regime due to its poetic ideas -- the *Brançusi* cycle for various ensembles or soloist instruments (1962-68); the *Harmonies I-IV* cycle for various ensembles (1975-81); the *Translations I* (1968), II, III (1973) cycle for strings and winds; *The Time of Memory* (1973) for 9 instruments and 2 pianos; the *Invocations I-III* (1971, 1975, 1976) cycle; *Music for Flute, Clarinet and String Orchestra* (1990); Concerto for saxophone “*Obélisque pour Wolfgang Amadeus*” (1991); *Sinfonia Giocosa* (1995); and the Symphonies I (1955), II (1987), and III (1990).

The Bucharest-based Editura muzicala has published most of his music but occasionally scores have been picked up by other organisations such as Schott (Germany), Salabert (Paris), Muzyka (Moscow). More than two thirds of his output has been recorded. With the numerous commercially released LPs and CDs he can be found in the catalogues of Electrecord (Bucharest), Erato (Paris), EMI (Germany-Great Britain), Attacca (Amsterdam), Intersound (Munich), Nova Musica (Paris) and Radioton (Budapest).

Commenting upon some of his scores, reputed commentators have stated :“*I listened then to a remarkable Sonata for Clarinet Unaccompanied by Tiberiu Olah, one of the best works in the world that have been written for this solo instrument...*” (Vlad 1964); *One hearing is not enough to answer all questions about a work as new and complex as The Time of Memory, but it was enough to establish that it is a serious, carefully wrought composition, as expert in its workmanship as it is uncompromisingly modern in its idiom. Except for the Schubert, which is a peerless classic, it was the most interesting piece...*” (McLellan 1974).

By successfully joining the composing and musicological activity, after his return from Moscow in 1954, Olah and his colleagues - Niculescu, Vieru, Bencoiu, Stroe, Berger, Marbe, and Ratiu - discovered the last works of Enescu and his use of heterophony. Enescu initiated a new "verticality" that Olah has theorised as a "*consonant development of dissonance*" or an "*emancipation of consonance*". We can notice, in this sense, the conscious intellectual reaction, based on a new technique, specific to Enescu, a reaction to Schoenberg's idea about "the emancipation of dissonance". Olah wrote an article about polyheterophony in Enescu's works. Originally published by *Muzica* (Music Magazine in Romania) in 1982, it was of such a significance that a year later it was translated into French and republished in the same journal. Other important studies belonging to Olah include: *Weberns Vorserielles Tonsystem*, in *Melos* (Olah 1975b); and *The symbol-note of tonal genesis in Schubert's Unfinished Symphony*, in *Muzica* (Olah 1998).

Symphony no. 2

The realisation of the phenomenon of displacement in the perception of the "sonorous object" from the area of detail towards that of agglomeration led Olah to experiment in heterophony. Consequently, in order to obtain complex but malleable consonant sonorities (in the modern sense of the term consonant), Olah resorts initially to applying his own harmonic system, his own superposing proceedings (see below); he generates and superposes a multitude of melodic voices with different tones combinations of a macro-mode, while all the sonorities are consonant. A pure cluster would only seldom be found in his music.

As already mentioned, Olah made a study of Enescu's polyheterophony, which he interprets as a "*new method of organising sonorous material*" (Olah 1982). It is from here that we can infer his opinion that George Enescu's composition technique is based on "*a new vision concerning heterophony, a domain very little known or better said, studied very little in European music*" (Olah 1975a). And the entire harmony of the *Vox Maris* score, "*that is the vertical construction of the opus starts with the first notes, from the beginning, from a trunk, resembling the branches of a tree which grows its boughs in different directions, the trees themselves ending by turning into a forest. This heterophonic construction of Enescu is as analysable - demonstrates the author - as the steadfastly dodecaphonic construction of Webern!*" (Olah 1975a). At the same time, he underlines the priority of the approach, the fact that "*Enescu's pure heterophony and polyheterophony... stand for the first initiative of a superior and conscious organisation of this technique, used as a composition method, within the context of the musical trends of the 20th century*" (Olah 1982). I have quoted these paragraphs, these points of view because, by guiding himself after the principle of heterophony, Olah suggested afterwards his own solution, superposition proceedings, viable for contemporary sonorous art.

After *Time of Memory* (1973) he continued to implement the idea of superposition proceedings but by much simpler means, also using a revaluation of the pentatonic idea - as an archetypal

manifestation of music. Of course, he has not resorted, melodically speaking, to the adjoining black keys of the piano, but to a pentatonic dispersed in space, that is, scattered along several octaves. As a detail, it must be reiterated that the technique of using a language reduced to only a few notes can be traced back to the four notes and their transpositions in part II of the *Cantata* for 2 flutes, strings and percussion on old Tschangó themes from 1956.

Harmonies IV (1981), imagined as a homage paid to the genius of Enescu at the centenary of his birth, deploys a three-section construction: the first belongs exclusively to the strings; the second triggers into the discourse the rest of the orchestra and is superposed with "memories" and fragments from the string material; the third pulverises the anterior material until it reaches quotations from Enescu's *Chamber Symphony*, Enescu's six notes that never transposed and that in Olah's score are intoned in the original order and rhythmic configuration. Nevertheless the quoted material is rendered spatially and brought within Olah's own harmonic system. He then retraces his steps with the gradual elimination of these pillar sounds.

The other works that use superposition proceedings are, for example, *Rhymes I* for clarinet and tape, dedicated to Romanian clarinetist A. O. Popa; and *Rhymes II for the revelation of time*, written for French saxophone player Daniel Kientzy. The *Sonata* for violin, percussion and tape is also based on the same principle of pentatonics dispersed in space. The latest essay that pursues these pentatonic ideas, together with its simpler form the major chord, is the *Symphony no.2 "Adventures with major chords and pentatonics"*.

The score moulds in the same frame both the proceeding of pentatonics dispersed in space and that of superposition. Part I, named *Genesis*, deals with the evolution of major chords that start from a "primary", "pure" stage.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. Each system consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a guitar chord diagram below it. The first system's chord diagram includes the following chords: M_6 , M_6 , M , M_6 , M_6 , m_4 (marked "roaman"), M_6 , M_6 , M , M_6 , M_6 , M_6 . The second system's chord diagram includes: $3M$, $6M$, $6m$, M_6 , M_6 , M_6 . Below the second system, fretting patterns are indicated: 3231 , 2121 , $2212+3$. A circled number "38" is present in the bass clef of the second system. The notation includes various musical symbols such as accidentals, slurs, and dynamic markings like "etc."

Example 1

By means of superposition (in fact, micro-modes), these major trichords join afterwards, observing certain rules, within the frame of a macro-system, the duration of their superposition accelerating gradually up to the end of the part. The idea of pentatonics appeared in m. 57 - the birth of a motif.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a section of a symphony. It consists of several staves. The top three staves are for string parts, labeled 1, 2, and 3. The next two staves are for woodwinds, labeled 'fl' (flute) and 'cl' (clarinet). Below these are two staves for brass, labeled 'tr' (trumpet) and 'tb' (trombone). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key markings include 'p' (piano), 'mp' (mezzo-piano), and 'pp' (pianissimo). Performance instructions like 'l.v. al morendo' (ritardando) and 'non vibr' (no vibrato) are present. The notation is dense and characteristic of a composer's working draft.

Example 2

The conjoining of "pentatonics dispersed into space" observes the same provisions as the conjoining of major trichords; in other words, it happens in the perimeter of the same macro-mode. The result of the globally perceived sonority is consonant.

The musical discourse in the *Symphony* no. 2 is based on the awareness of the relativity and dynamics of consonance and dissonance, and of their dependency on the context (duration, tempo, register, intensity, timbre etc.). The agglomeration of major trichords continues at such a speed that the

succession of major articulations could arguably be perceived as dissonance, as opposed to the initial idea of consonance.

In terms of musical poetics, all ends tragically, similar to a roar of the earth or, if you wish, the image of a man trying to break off from the gravitational force. But does he succeed?

Summary

Tiberiu Olah (1928-2002) is one of most prominent Romanian composers in 20th century. In his large oeuvre, which covers almost all the musical genres, every piece is at the same time a technical and linguistic experiment. Some of his important works include the *Cantata* (1956); *Man's Constellation* (1958-1960); the *Brancusi* cycle (1962-68); the *Harmonies I-IV* cycle (1975-81); the *Translations* I (1968), II, III (1973); *The Time of Memory* (1973); the *Invocations I-III* cycle (1971, 1975, 1976); *Music for Flute, Clarinet and String Orchestra* (1990); Concerto for saxophone "*Obélisque pour Wolfgang Amadeus*" (1991); *Sinfonia Giocosa* (1995); and the Symphonies I (1955), II (1987), and III (1990).

In fifties, Olah and some of his colleagues discovered the last works of Enescu and his use of heterophony. Olah made a study of Enescu's new "verticality", so-called polyheterophony, which he interprets as a *new method of organising sonorous material*. By guiding himself after the principle of heterophony, Olah moulds his *Symphony no.2 (Adventures with major chords and pentatonics)* both the proceeding of pentatonics dispersed in space and that of superposition. The musical discourse in the *Symphony* no. 2 is based on the awareness of the relativity and dynamics of consonance and dissonance, and of their dependency on the context (duration, tempo, register, intensity, timbre etc.).