THE CLARINET OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN
MARCH FOR SOLO CLARINET
ADAPTATION AFTER MARTIAN NEGREA

Felix Constantin Goldbach
VALAHIA University of Targoviste
18 – 22 Unirii Bd, 130082,
Targoviste, Romania
E-mail felixgoldbach@yahoo.com

Abstract: This study is a monograph containing data about the composer, the literary subject of the work, formal, stylistic and interpretive coordinates, and the analysis of its musical expressivity.

Keywords: Formal coordinates, programmatic motivation, hermeneutic characteristics.

Introduction:

A prominent figure of the twentieth century in Romania, composer Martian Negrea was born in Vorumloc, Sibiu County, in 1893. He started his musical studies with Professor Dobó at the Hungarian Roman Catholic High School in Odorhei (1909-1910), and continued them at the Andreian Pedagogical Seminar in Sibiu (1910-1914) with Timotei Popovici (vocal music and church chanting) and Franz Žižka (violin). He went to Vienna (1913) to study cello with Friedrich Buxbaum, then to the Music Academy in Budapest (1917-1918) where he studied with Zoltan Kodaly (harmony), Viktor Herzfeld (counterpoint) and Pongrácz Cascoh (music pedagogy). He attended the Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna (1918-1921) under the guidance of Eusebius Mandicevski (harmony, counterpoint, fugue), Eugene Thomas (theory and solfeggio), Franz Schmidt (composition, orchestration), then took private lessons with Rudolf Bella (counterpoint), Franz Schalk and Ferdinand Lowe (conducting), Joseph Saphier (piano), Max Graf (aesthetics) and Witz Worwil (singing). Thus, his personality filtered the influences of several cultural centres of great tradition, combining German Neo-Romanticism with French Impressionism, while his knowledge and thorough study of folklore found its musical expression in many orchestral and chamber works on themes of Romanian folkloric origins.


After 1921, M. Negrea becomes a professor at the Conservatoire in Cluj, then artistic director of the Gheorghe Dima Philharmonic Orchestra (1927-1940). During the Second World War in 1941, he teaches harmony at the Conservatoire in Bucharest, where he stays on until 1970. After retirement, he dies in 1973 in Bucharest.


Besides his teaching activity, he composed two rhapsodies, a fantasy and symphonic suites, “Tales from Grui”, “Spring Symphony”, “Concerto for Orchestra” and other works, film music for Across the Apuseni [Western] Mountains, the opera Marin the Fisherman, The Oratorio of the Fatherland, a symphony poem called The Recruit, a Requiem, and choral music.

In the field of chamber music, he composed works for piano, harp, art songs, a String Quartet op. 17 (1949), the Suite for Clarinet and Piano op. 27 (1960).

Martian Negrea is an eternal seeker. In his chamber works we discover a lyrical soul, which expresses itself through a spontaneous, sensitive, sometimes colourful music, other times meditative, strewn with pastoral elements influenced by the Transylvanian environment in which he lived and was originally formed.

His style evolved from his initial Romantic tendencies towards a modalism of folk origins and even towards dodecaphonism.

Attracted by the exceptional personality of Transylvanian philosopher and poet Lucian Blaga¹, as

¹ Lucian Blaga (Lancram, 1895-1961, Cluj - Napoca), philosopher, poet, playwright, translator, journalist, university professor and diplomat, obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy in Vienna. Since he did not join the Communist Party, he was dismissed from his department, and his poems were printed posthumously. M. Negrea’s idea of composing art songs on poems by Blaga was an acknowledgement of his worth.
well as by Viennese culture, (as both artists studied there roughly at the same time), the composer expressed his appreciation by first adapting to music a cycle of Eight Songs for Voice and Piano op. 9 (on poems by Lucian Blaga, Veronica Micle and folklore) composed in 1955 despite the obstacles raised by the regime, and later, in 1969, he wrote 10 Songs on Verses\(^2\) by Lucian Blaga, after his poems began to be published again.

The tenth song was also written for solo flute. The existence of programmatic indications facilitates the understanding of the primary source of inspiration.

1. Problem formulation

The poem “March” is part of the volume Poems of Light by Lucian Blaga, written in 1919 and dedicated to Cornelia Brediceanu, his future wife. “These are not poems and it is not light that masters them. They are slices of soul, sincerely captured at all times and conveyed with superior musicality in verses which, broken as they may be, meander according to the very movements of the soul. This elastic form makes it possible to convey even the most delicate nuances of thought and the finest urges of sentiment.”\(^3\)

The poem depicts the beginning of spring through existential metaphors, transposed into free verse, conveying the sadness of nature shivering with cold in the absence of light, as a metaphor of the poet’s loneliness, bereaved of his beloved, whom he compares with light.

_March_ (1919)

Out of a tangled flock of clouds  
the wind spins 
long threads of rain.  
Fickle snowflakes 
would land on the mud,  
but as they loathe it -  
they rise again  
and fly to find 
a nest of branches.  
It’s windy and it’s cold -  
and the buds  
too greedy for light  
now muffle 
their ears in their collars.

(Lucian Blaga, _Poems of Light_, 1962, Tineretului Publishing House)

\(^2\) Poems: _Fiorul [The Thrill], Visătorul [The Dreamer], Primăvara [Spring], Sus [High Up], Liniște [Quiet], Stelelor [To the Stars], Melancolie [Melancholy], Magurii [The Buds], Stalactita [The Stalactite], Marte [March]_ written by Lucian Blaga in the volume _Poems of Light_, printed in 1919.

\(^3\) Nicolae Iorga – _Neamul Românesc [The Romanian People]_, periodical, 1 May 1919.

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March for solo clarinet was rewritten by the composer Martian Negrea in collaboration with clarinettist Aurelian Octav Popa so that it might be performed at the _Prague Spring International Music Competition_ in 1959, where the competitor won the first prize. Martian’s Negrea inspired style and his musical imagination, as well as the technique and masterful interpretation of the great clarinettist, who advised him on some specific technical and performing characteristics, resulted in this musical gem, which enjoyed great success.

2. Problem solution

The work is an excellent study for solo improvisation. Its programmatic support facilitates the understanding of the semiotic sphere of work. The metaphors, the concepts suggested by the title and the poetic text become musical events. The development of the primary ideas occurs freely and unexpectedly, in impromptu style, enhancing the charm of the structure. Although he was very familiar with the compositional techniques of the twentieth century, the composer did not abandon the classical musical notation. Thus the score contains precise indications: the notation of metre, tempo, pitch and duration complies with the classical system. This small-scale work begins in simple triple metre, 3/4, in _Larghetto_, while other metric units are added by and by – 4/4 and 2/4 (bars 19, 31-33). The tempo accelerates towards the end (accelerando poco a poco), in the Coda, but it slows again (poco ritenuto) and the work ends in the initial tempo. The interpreter must adopt the _parlando rubato_ style, derived from the oral style.

The diversity of expression results on the one hand from the variety of manners of developing the motifs, through antitheses of melodic origins especially between rhythmic pulsation units, the order of their appearance being chosen by the composer. On the other hand, the interpreter plays a decisive part in achieving that diversity through dynamic windings between the vigorous climaxes and the moments of elegant delicacy, through subtle constructions in which the suppleness of nature and metaphorical meanings evolve in arabesques akin to Impressionist outlines, through the alternation of the melodic substance with the agglomerations of cadenzas, performed with ease. The composer has imagined-, and the performer highlights-, the rows of dualities in which the logic of the score must produce a continuity of the arch of becoming, a feature characteristic of nature and of the music which depicts it. The images do not appear in the order that they have in the poetry, but seem to be first captured in their entirety, as in a cinematographic
film, and then individualised, brought to the fore at random, in an order other than the written one.

The most widely used musical ideas are motif 1 (bar 1/1-1/3 first quaver) and motif 2 (bar 2/1-2/3 first quaver). The melodic and rhythmic constructions combine several dualities that occur throughout the work, in different proportions:
- Melodic cell M1 opposes motif M2;
- The rhythm of M1 (minim - quaver) in contrast with the rapid rhythm in M2 (demisemiquavers - dotted quarter);
- Crucic rhythm in M1 as against anacrusis in M2;
- The cell made of neighbouring sounds as against the motif made of neighbouring sounds and leaps; or the difference between the bichordic scale and the heptatonic mode (A - B - H# - D - Eflat - E - G#; mode 964 is obtained: 1-2-2-1-1-4-1);
- The smallest interval (the semitone) as against the range which exceeds the octave (augmented ninth);
- A straight melodic outline in M1 as against the sinuosity of the arabesque in motif M2;
- The calm cantabile cell in M1 opposed to the aggressiveness and impatience of motif M2.

Example: motifs 1-5: 8/1:

M1: bar 1:

\[ \text{Larghetto} \]

\[ p \quad m^f \]

M2: bar 2:

\[ \quad \]

M3: bar 3 beats 2 and 3:

\[ \quad \]

M4: bar 5 beat 3:

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\[ ^4 \text{Vieru, Anatol. O carte a modurilor. Catalogul structurilor modale [A Book of Modes. The Catalogue of Modal Structures]} \]

\[ \text{Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1980.} \]

The composer chose the technique of the variations on a theme for the rich possibilities of development that it offers, because it allows for the permanent renewal of the original thematic patterns. We have singled out the theme and five variational segments. Just like the complete work, the inner sections are short, but not equal:

Segment A: a....av1.....av2....av3....av4....av5
Bars:.........1....4/3.....10......18......25......35-40

The 40 bars of the study develop the five motif entities:

1. By inverting the melodic cell of the semitone with asymmetric rhythm, marked as M1, the composer obtains a major seventh (very frequently used), and other times he uses a minor ninth (perceived as one semitone over the octave, in bars 3/3-4/2) and a diminished eleventh (perceived as one semitone over the tenth, in bars 27/3-28/1) instead of the original figure. An example of the variations on motif one:

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In one instance he brings together two such cells, adding a grace note (bars 3/3-4/3), but the grace note can leap (bar 10).

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Here is motif 1 in the two hypostases presented above:

The figure also appears with diminished rhythm (bars 7/3 last quaver - 8/1 first demisemiquaver, 11/3 last semiquaver - 12/1 first quaver; 19/3 last demisemiquaver - 20/1 first quaver).

Example: Diminutions of motif 1, bars 7/3-8/1,19/3-20/1:
The inverted interval appears in bar 18; in bar 25, the second sound gets a grace made of a semiquaver triplet. The significance of this cell must be sought for in the key-metaphor conveyed by poem, “sadness” (“cold”, lack of “light”).

Example: Motif 1 inversed and developed rhythmically (bars 18, 25):

In other instances it contains a fluctuating number of inner steps (bars 17 / 3, 23 / 2, 33 / 2, 34 / 3, 36 / 1.) Example: Expansions of motif 3 (bars 17/3, 23/1):

The dissonant sonority which it produces cumulates tension. The musical structure suggests a short motion, for instance that of the clouds, of the wind, a change of direction in the motion of snowflakes, or the buds which “muffle their ears in their collars”.

3. The motif that comes after the semitone cell, marked as M2, is formed of arabesques with ever-modified structures (bars 2/1-2/3, 5/1-5/2, 11/1-11/3, 26/1-26/3, 29/1-29/2); it is also altered through inversion (bars 31-32). It is synonymous with other metaphors in the text which suggest wider movements: “rain”, “the wind spins”, “long threads of rain”, “fickle snowflakes” and “they rise again and fly”. Example: Hypostases of M2 (bar 29/2):

4. The melodic pattern whose intervals move in zigzag, gradually expanding the inner intervals, M4 will also be altered by sequencing and expansion (bars 14/3-15/2, 29/2-31/1, 32/2-34/1). It produces latent harmonies, which build the auditory perception of a tense harmonic march and convey the sensation of motion as well.

5. The motif which develops chromatically, on adjacent steps, ascending up to the third, originates in the initial cell, the semitone, and is a possible variant to it. But the specific development that it undergoes prompts us to consider it an independent motif, marked as M5 (bars 8/1). It is developed by exceptional divisions (13/3), by iteration (17/1-17/2), by sequencing (19/1-22/1), and by combinations with other motifs (31-32/1). Through its internal oscillation between the minor and major third, this motif builds latent consonant harmonies. Example: motif 5, latent harmonies and modal and metric oscillations (19/1-22/1):

2. The arpeggio in motif 3, on the same stretch of major seventh or its equivalent, diminished octave and even ninth (the original cell inverted; bar 6/1 last quaver - 6/2 first quaver, 12/2-12/3, 16/1, 16/2, 16/3-17/1, 27/2-27/3, 30/3, 34/1-34/2) is widely used. Example: Motif 3, augmented seventh and then ninth (bars 12/2-12/3, 30/3):

The formula also appears in an inverted version (bars 6/1) or placed in a chain of descending sequences (bars 6/3-7/3, 15/3-16), with widened range and progressively more dynamic (bars 33-34). Example: Inversion, chain of sequences (6/3-7/3, 15/3-17/1): Example: Range widening and progressive rhythmic boosting (bars 33-34):
Although there is no second melodic line anywhere, as the clarinet is not a harmonic instrument by design, we detect a tendency to build two planes of sound through the wide gap between the registers, which leaves the impression that the parts (voices) are layered. At other times a dialogue is established between the registers (bars 8-9, 12-13-14, 21-22, 27-28, 29/2, 31-32). This pattern recurs often, its inner structures modified. Its significance is related to the idea of “budding” expressed by the “buds” and “nest of branches”, but the journey becomes painful (espressivo molto e dolente, bars 19-21).

The logical continuity of the musical discourse, maintaining the impression of improvisation in the parlando rubato style, and the naturalness in the flow of the musical phrase are the most difficult features for the clarinettist. The interpreter must imagine a dynamic hierarchy of the phrases, designed so as to gradually build the four major dynamic curves: the first one leading to bar 15, the second to bar 18, the third to the low register in bar 23 and the last to the top high register of the instrument in bar 31. Example: The culmination in bars 29-32:

Conclusions:

In this study, the metaphorical meaning generated by the title requires a lot of imagination in conceiving the sounds proper, especially since the instrument is able to convey a wide range of meanings. It is ideal for each interpreter to master and use these instrumental tools. Thus, he can choose matte or buoyant, soft or strident sonorities, shrill or deep, rich in overtones. The way he conducts the flow of sound can convey agitation or calmness, impatience or peace, according to the pressure of the emission, the quality of the instrument and of the reed, the clarinettist’s skill and interest, to the states of mind he experiences and conveys.

The same passage can be performed in different ways, with varied sounds and can generate a new perception every time (for instance M2 in bar 2, repeated in bars 5, 11, 23, 25, 29; or arpeggio M3, bar 3/2, repeated: 6/1, 6/3-7/1, 12/2, 15/1-15/2, 15/3-16/3, 22/2, 23/2-24/1, 25/2 27/2, 27/3-28/3, 30/1-30/3, 33/1-34/3, 35/3-36/1, 36/3-37/1, 37/3-38/1, 39/3-40/1). There are moments in which the sonority has to be changed abruptly, with an astonishing effect (forte - piano, bars 3, 18-19). It takes probing, trying out numerous types of emission and sound level, a precise identification of breathing caesuras and as accurate and elegant a performance as possible.
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