Trio for violin, double bass and piano (1991)
by Ghenadie Ciobanu - an original musical interpretation of some events recorded in the Holy Scripture

VICTORIA MELNIC, CRISTINA PARASCHIV
Performing Arts, Composition and Musicology Department
Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts
Mateevici, 87, MD 2009
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
vicamelnic@yahoo.fr, crispa@rambler.ru

Abstract: During his stay in the Holy Land Ghenadie Ciobanu had the opportunity to visit a lot of places connected with the events described in the Bible what inspired him to create a musical work full of profound significances - Trio for violin, double bass and piano. For Gh. Ciobanu’s creation is characteristic the value of the semantic criterion and that of the content. This appears to be very complex and profound, determined by the philosophical – cultural synthesis of the precursory historical periods, by a specific approach of the musical culture of different peoples (Indian, Chinese and of course Romanian etc) and their integration in the palette of images of contemporaneity. All these specific peculiarities define the unrepeatable aspect of Gh. Ciobanu’s creation and are strongly manifested in his Trio.

Key-Words: Gh. Ciobanu, Trio, musical language, musical form, opposition, numerical symbols.

The present work appeared owing to the composer’s wish to speak about those impressions, feelings and absolutely specific sensations created by his journey to Jerusalem. During his stay in the Holy Land Ghenadie Ciobanu had the opportunity to visit a lot of places connected with the events described in the Bible what inspired him to create a musical work full of profound significances. For Gh. Ciobanu’s creation is characteristic the value of the semantic criterion and that of the content. This appears to be very complex and profound, determined by the philosophical – cultural synthesis of the precursory historical periods, by a specific approach of the musical culture of different peoples (Indian, Chinese and of course Romanian etc) and their integration in the palette of images of contemporaneity. All these specific peculiarities define the unrepeatable aspect of Gh. Ciobanu’s creation and are strongly manifested in his Trio.

The Trio consists of two movements: Indicium and An Almost Biblical Journey on a Little Donkey. Both from the program of the movements and from their first audition one have the impression that they are parts of two different worlds. But taking in consideration the composer's account about this work and after a more profound analysis we can say that there is a close connection between the two movements of the Trio both at the level of idea and its realization. The composer said: “In the Trio I tried to express in a symbolic plan the unity and, at the same time, the border line between the New and the Old Testament, to convey through musical means the course of two periods of time - a real and concrete time and a period that has nothing to do with history, philosophical one.” The names of the movements correspond very well to the content and character of the music according to the author’s own vision. Movement I designates the Old Testament, looked upon in general lines, abstractly. Movement II deals with a historical period that is closer to us, it even conveys a definite event - the escape of the Holy Family to Egypt. According to this program, Movement I seem to be, in some way, more abstract, more indefinable like the sense of the word indicium (in the dictionary it has the following meanings: declaration, confession, proof, sign, confirmation, reflection.). Here predominates an atmosphere of a slow course of cosmic time. The musical means used by the composer are intended to create a sensation of space, profoundness, to bring back to the listener’s imagination some far off periods of time and events that are nearly razed from memory. But we can notice here a description of something transcendental that, in Gh.Ciobanu’s opinion, is in this case, Time and Cosmic Space.

Movement II, on the contrary, brings us back to the “terrestrial dimension”. We accompany the Holy Family in their journey towards Egypt and all the musical means are purposefully used to convey definite events and to create pregnant images.

The Indicium consists of seven episodes that are organized in a concentric form.

A B C D C1 B1 A1

Determining the bounds of the form we, in the first place, took in consideration the obvious change of the texture. Thus, sections A and A1 are monodic, B and B1 contain polyphonic elements, C and C1 are variants of a homophonic structure, but controlled aleatory is used in section D.

A specific feature of the musical language of this movement is the metro-rhythmic aspect. Unlike the well-defined structure of the movement the metre is unstable, variable and some episodes are, in fact, non-metrical (A, D). The use of polymetrical and
polyrhythmical principles (section C) should be specially mentioned here.

Another peculiarity of the composition of this part is the variant principle. It is, first of all, manifested in the framework of episodes B and B₁ that, in fact, represent a cycle that has variants (three in B and three more in B₁). This principle is noticed at the cycle level, due to the fact that not a single re-entry (except the exact re-entries from section D) of the musical material is done exactly what confers the music an uninterrupted course.

In the re-entry sections (especially) we notice the use of the technique named by V. Holopova thematic cohesion, but the composer uses it not at the level of motifs or themes but at the sections level. That is why extrapolating the term suggested by V. Holopova it would be more correct to speak about a cohesion of the sound blocks. An element from the preceding section continues its existence during the following one superposing itself on the rest of the material. In this way, a special continuity of discourse is realized and there is an impression of a slow and unnoticed course of time.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aleatory} & \quad \text{aleatory} \\
C₁ & \quad B₁ & \quad A₁
\end{align*}
\]

The Indicium starts with an improvising monody with a lot of chromatisms and varied rhythmic figures performed by the violin and double bass (episode A). The melodic line, starting from B flat, outlines a sinusoid or two oppositely directed angles that have as reference points the same B flat. The melody is carried on in a range of three octaves through non-rectilinear activity that contains big leaps (example 1).

The next section contains two different “thematic” elements: a cluster that is formed gradually by overlapping sounds in the piano part and a melodic line set forth in the strings as if the activity continues, but with same changes. The activity ends with B seventh played by the strings 20 times in succession. From here the musical narration seems to retreat but, thanks to the transformed re-entries, we realize that it does continue. All the three episodes to follow will have changes, often essential ones, compared to their expositions.

In this way C₁ that coincides with the golden section is perceived more like a continuation or development of the discourse begun in C. If in C the composer outlines just a single sonorous plan (a very short one) in C₁ we see the presence of two spheres: an accordic one played by the piano (unchanged compared to C) and the other one melodic-played by the strings (example 4). Each sphere is very well individualized and outlined. We see a concentration of poles in this episode: polyphony, polymetry and polyrhythm. Towards the end of the section the metric precision is gradually removed (in the string part), the discourse is disorganized and becomes an aleatoric one. A third layer is added to those two present in B in the re-entry of the next episode: aleatoric figures on the violin, as if “left” from C₁.

The last part of the form can be called re-entry only to a certain extent of conventionality. The thematic material from A is not repeated here, but it is the general atmosphere that is reproduced: again a monody played by string instruments. The violin is preoccupied with recovering and reaffirming the sound B flat, from which everything started and with which we expect the Indicium to end. But after so many “modulations” in other spheres, after conquering some other “centres” the discourse cannot simply return to the starting point (one can’t step twice in the same flowing water). Sound C produced by the double bass seems to confer a new quality to section B, a quality acquired on the way. But, at the same time, it can mean a new beginning as well, a possibility of continuing the musical narration (example 5).

As a result of a close analysis we have determined that the sound B flat has the function of a gravitational center in the Indicium and most of the episodes are centered around it. In some episodes local centres appear by this central sound. Thus, in section A the discourse is organized around the sounds B flat and F, in section D it oscillates among B flat, F and D flat, but in A₁ beside B flat is sounding C as well.

If in the Indicium the composer was preoccupied with the creation of space in Movement II A nearly biblical journey on a little donkey he brings the musical action to earth. The listener becomes witness of a real musical journey, in spite of the fact, as the author admits that it was not so important to reproduce the concrete event but rather to convey the impressions and
personal feelings experienced during his journey through biblical places.

In Movement I of the cycle, the form had the main constructive function, the model (pattern) under the conditions of a very free metre, is somehow “unorganized”. In Movement II the composer resorts to the same principle, but “oppositely directed”. It is the metre and rhythm that comes out here as organizing elements of the discourse, all the musical material is strictly metric, the form is free and open. For creating the form the composer uses a principle that is more characteristic of cinematography – a frequent change of “frames”, of images (that seems to be natural when it comes to a journey, even if it is imaginary). The journey has a number of episodes that differ by character and colouring, with thematic material and organizing principles that are new every time. Towards the end of the form (in the last episode but one) there appears, as a matter of fact, a re-entry, but it is strongly extended and transformed having in common with the first section only the characteristic rhythmic figure. The last of the eight episodes, both by the character of the musical material and due to the presence of the only re-entry before it, is perceived as a general coda of the cycle (we’ll come back with more details later), a fact that permits us to treat the form as a seven-part form:

A B C D E F $A_1$ coda

A pregnant folkloric line is evident in Movement II: Some folkloric elements (the improvising character of the monody, the tone quarters) were present in the Indicum too but, in fact, in a latent form. Here they became more “palpable”. The author approaches folklore introducing in the discourse some characteristic folkloric sings such as the aksak rhythm and specific intonations of folk Jewish music.

In Movement II we notice elements of instrumental theatre. The individualized instruments in their treatment become real characters.

A special role in the Journey rests on the piano. After the balanced use of instruments in Movement I, here the piano appears in the foreground, becoming the main character of the action. It is the change of structure in the piano part and the appearance of a new sound image that is realized the division of the musical discourse, into episodes each presenting a new impression from the journey. And only in the coda the piano retreats offering the strings the possibility “of commenting” the things that had happened.

Something new, in comparison with Movement I, is the use of human voices that recite some verses from the Bible.

Movement II of the cycle includes a number of episodes based on different thematic material, creating a mosaic image. Every section of the form contains a key-element around which the musical discourse is concentrated. This key-element is frequently present in the piano part.

In this way, a very pregnant musical image appears in A that is due to the use of the aksak rhythm (example 6). The key-element from episode B is represented by a rhythmic dotted formula with trill (example 7). The next section (C) is again very illustrative through the melodic-rhythmic figures in the piano part (example 8). Episode D demonstrates a certain mechanical character, unique in part II that, due to the active movement and quick rhythm, is associated with a fugue or gallop. Section E introduces an evident contrast by sounding human voices that recite the biblical text (Matthew 2-13, 14). Episode F seems to illustrate the moment of the night (according to the witnesses from the Holy Scripture) when the Holy Family escape from Bethlehem. The melody from the strings part seems to convey the attention and precaution of the fugitives motion while the Jewish motifs from the piano part witness the nostalgia and sadness of separation from the native land (example 9). Section $A_1$ cannot be named reprise in the direct sense of the word because it is much better developed than A (taking in consideration both the form and means of expression). The musical material appears here much more consistent than at the beginning of the movement where it was confined to just one rhythmic-melodic figure. A new thematic element is added to it, it contains an accentuated repetition (27 times) of the accord. B - F sharp - A flat that produces an effect very similar to the end of episode D from Movement I (where the septima b-a is repeated 20 times). The coda is emphasized through an original sonorous realization (at the cycle level), being entirely maintained in pizzicato in the strings.

Some peculiarities of the musical language from the Trio at the cycle level:

Taking in consideration the specific features of the movements we can state that Movement I has a more improvising character, is less pregnant from the point of view of the thematic material. On the contrary, Movement II differs through a more individualized and varied thematism. We discover here a concentration of musical images. In this way, the composition of this cycle is approaching, to some extent, the structure of bipartite constituent-contrasting forms.

An important conceptual principle that involves the use of some specific technical proceedings is the principle of distance reprise. In the Trio the composer often makes use of variants of the same repeated sonorous blocks that are continued
some time later after introducing new musical material. We could compare this phenomenon to reminiscent arches if the conceptual evolution of the discourse were not obvious: the material taken over is always modified. In this context, can be mentioned the variable mini-cycle from sections B and B1 from Movement I (part I), the conceptual transformation of the discourse from episode C an C1, Movement I, and especially the beginning and A1, from Movement II. Unintentionally, there appears an association with the human destiny: nothing is repeated exactly in the same way but every time in a different way, at another level, under other circumstances, from other experiences. The program of the work connected “in some way” with the Bible, permits us to draw a parallel with the Holy Scripture where certain events that were once predicted come true some time later.

We can point out the presence of some leitintervals and leitintonations at the cycle level. The composer uses the seventh and nona and their variant - the second. As leitintervals of the entire cycle can be treated the rhythmic – melodic figures formed of three sounds placed at distance from the fourth and fifth (perfect, increased, diminished) the extreme points of which constitute the seventh, octave or nona (examples 1, 8).

An integrating element of the work is the coda of the second movement as well which, as it was mentioned before, is perceived more as a coda or a post- scriptum of the entire cycle (example 10). At the level of the second movement, the somehow abstract and indefinite character of the coda (and especially the interval of the increased fifth C – G sharp that ends the Journey) could be treated as an expectation or prediction of the event that was to come true 33 years later – Christ’s coming to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (also riding a donkey). Through the timbre of the strings the coda forms an arc with the beginning of the work. In a conceptual thematic plan it could create some conformity between the first man who committed a sin (at the beginning of the Old Testament) and the one who will bring him salvation (in the New Testament). On the other hand, the coda of the second part corresponds to the end of part I (through the strings timbre). In this sense, we could say that there is a parallel between the end of an Eon and the approach of the end of the millennium, the witnesses of which we are all at present.

The complementarity, opposition and as a result the remarking of the unity is obvious both at the cycle level and that of the elementary constituents of the musical discourse. We’ll analyze the work of this principle at the cycle level.

At the cycle level we see both an opposition of the order-disorder type and complementarism which is manifested in the very character of the parts.

**Movement I**
- Principle of undeclared order:
  - unorganized metro rhythm, closed form;
  - arbitrary, accidental, aspect:
  - use of aleatory;
  - non-evolutionary principle: thematic repeats,
    varying aspect of development;
  - passive energetic type: slow tempo, thematism of character improvising, less expressive compared to the one from Movement II

**Movement II**
- Principle of declared order:
  - strictly organized metro rhythm, open form;
  - adaptation to the public:
  - use of genre signs, intonations and folkloric rhythms.
  - evolutionary principle: succession of different thematic episodes;
  - active energetic type: a quicker tempo, thematism of dynamic, impulsive character, pregnant thematic material.

Therefore Movement I can be specified as having its character that is more irrational, unstable, passive while Movement II demonstrates a rational, active and impulsive character. Uniting these two movements in a cycle the composer realizes dialectically the unity of the opposites.

The analysis of numerical symbols in the Trio offers us very interesting results. We have noticed that in this work Gh.Ciobanu uses preponderantly the numerical symbols 2, 3 and 7 (the latter is often represented by different variants of the combination of the first two: 2+2+3; 2+3+2; 3+2+2) that show compositional levels.

Digit 2, at the cycle level, could symbolize the two books of the Holy Scripture. This symbol manifests itself through: two movements, two timbre groups (piano and strings), two instruments that begin and end the work. In Movement I digit 2 is realized through 2 elements in episode B, a 20 time-repetition of the 2 sound-interval at the end of D (the moment of the golden section), two gravitation centers in A1.

Digit 3, at the cycle level, could symbolize the family (the Holy Trinity or Christ’s heavenly family in Movement I and his earthly family in Movement II) and manifests itself through three instruments, through melodic-rhythmic figures consisting of three sounds. In Movement I the symbolism of digit 3 is conveyed through three variants, in B and B1, the repetition of the aleatoric fragment from D, through three melodic lines in C1, three sonorous layers in B1. At the level of section B, we can see that the first three sounds, both in the piano cluster and from the
violin melody in all three variants, remain unchanged.

Digits 2 and 3 “work” together in more rhythmic formulas from Movement II.

The numerical archetype manifests itself at architectonic level. In this way, we find the seven-part form structure of both movements: ABCDC_{1}B_{1}A_{1} in Movement I and ABCDEFA + coda in Movement II.

Digit 7 symbolizes the unity between 3 and 4, that is between the terrestrial, dimension, material (4) and celestial one – spiritual (3).

Finally we would like to mention that for Gh. Ciobanu’s creation is characteristic the value of the semantic criterion and that of the content. This appears to be very complex and profound, determined by the philosophical – cultural synthesis of the precursory historical periods, by a specific approach of the musical culture of different peoples (Indian, Chinese and of course Romanian etc.) and their integration in the palette of images of contemporaneity. All these specific peculiarities define the unrepeatable aspect of Gh. Ciobanu’s creation.
Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 8

Fig. 9