

Analytical Remarks on Harmony in *Salome* Opera by Richard Strauss

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Abstract: Musical discourse's development in *Salome* opera has a particular harmonic mobility. Even though he was permanently committed to the notion of tonality, **Richard Strauss** sometimes used the polytonality and even the atonal dodecaphony for expressive purposes and within limited areas.

Key-Words: Salome, Jokanaan, tonality, harmony, diatonism, chromatism, enharmony, expressionism

In *Salome* opera, **Richard Strauss** performs a musical equivalence of the topic in the spirit of a descriptive programmatism, by the gradual pursuance of the action, provoking at the same time temporal gaps to the past – with evocation role, to the future – with anticipative role.

In this case, one of the procedures of modeling the musical language, programmatically speaking, is represented by the inward experiences and feelings' description by means of the harmonic methods.

The musical performance combines three systems of sonorous organization: the classic **diatonic tonality**, the post-romantic **enlarged chromatic tonality** and the **free dodecaphony**. These systems are used for expressive purposes, having a symbolic function.

Whereas the consonant diatonic harmony always singularizes *Jokanaan*, the chromatic harmony will compose most of the scenes and relationships between characters, personalizing mainly *Salome* with her entire aspiration, anxiety and desire.

In the whole paper, from a harmonic point of view, we can establish:

1. remote harmonic relationships, consisting of the general total plan, at sections' level, from which results the form;

2. direct relationships, consisting of:

- diatonic harmony, where authentic and plagal relationships are cumulated;
- chromatic harmony, consisting of modulations, continuous chromatic evolutions;
- enharmonic modulations;
- remote, surprising modulations, performed all of a sudden at tierce, tritone, small

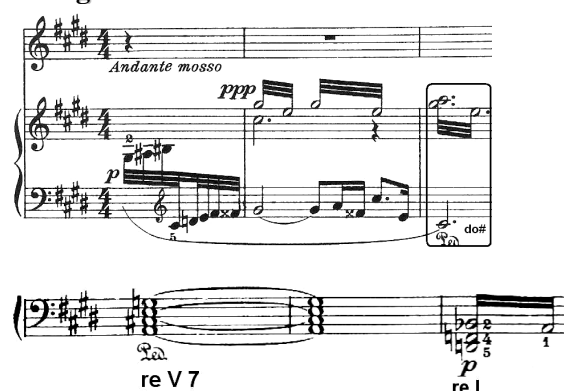
second, which create shock, rupture, surprise effects;

- other series which exceed the tonal system contain mixtures (seventh chords), harmonic structures from the tones.
- structures – atypical overlapping (achordic pedal, layers).

1. The remote harmonic relationships frame both in the romantic and in the classic tonal category.

The small ascending second modulation (*minor do # ~ minor re*, scene I, part 4), is an example of remote harmonic relationship from the post-romantic tonal. The two moments mentioned, having as piles the tonalities *minor sharp do* and *minor re* are orchestral, save that the former anticipates *Narraboth's* discourse, being at the same time a segment of *Salome's* ambiguity motive and the latter informs of soldiers' quarrel (scene I, part 4 – 2 m.).

Fig. no. 1



The relationship between the beginning and the end of the two soldiers' dialogue, respectively *minor re* (He is a saint) – *Lab Major V²* (when I give him to eat he thinks me), suggests their attitude towards the prophet, the uplift that they feel when they are talking about him, achieved by the modulation at reduced quinte from a minor tonality to a major one (scene I, part 5-3 m. / part 16-4 m.).

Fig. no. 2



The 2nd section of the Vth scene presents the first call of the tetrarch, highlighted in harmonic plan by the modulation between the tonalities *Major Mi* – *Major Fa*, which are in relation of small ascending second (scene IV, part 172 + 4 m. / part 176 + 2 m.).

Fig. no. 3



In the Vth scene, on the lines which correspond to the melodic line of the character *Salome* (You were so beautiful, *Jokanaan*), we meet in the harmonic plan a tonal path from *minor flat si* ~ *Major Do #* (scene IV, part 329 / part 333).

Fig. no. 4

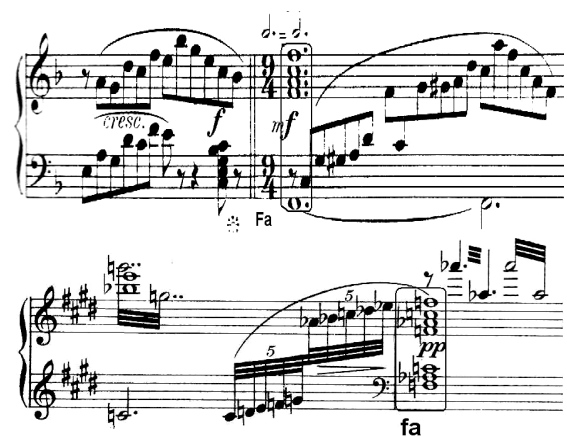


The remote harmonic relationships are based on both the diatonic harmony, but mainly on the remote modulations, on tierce, tritone, small second.

2. Within the **direct relationships**, the authentic and plagal ones form the **diatonic harmony**.

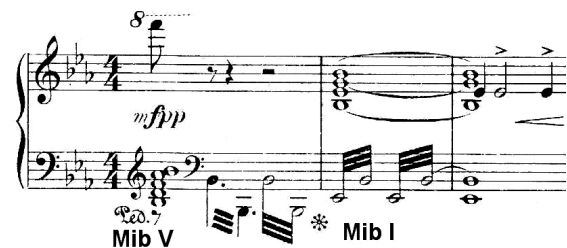
In scene I, we can notice the authentic relationship between *minor fa V* ~ *minor fa I*, the melody belonging to the page who pronounces the lines: *Pale as a dead woman* (scene I, part 3-1 m. / 3 + 1 m.).

Fig. no. 5



We meet an authentic relationship in the harmony which accompanies *Jokanaan's* voice (*Major flat Mi V 7* ~ *Major flat Mi I*) (scene II, part 31-6 m.).

Fig. no. 6



Another category of direct relationships between the chords with coloristic illustrative effects is that of **chromatic harmony**, comprising modulations, continuous chromatic evolutions.

An important role in the chromatic evolution is that of the use of melodic notes.

For instance, moon's strangeness is suggested by ambiguous harmonies, both as total membership and from the point of view of chords' structure, because of the presence of the melodic notes which are tardily solved (scene I, part 1+2 m.).

Fig. no. 7

An instable area from the harmonic and tonal point of view, with continuous chromatic evolutions, belongs to scene no. 4. In the first beats, there is unison overlapping of the chromatic totality, tensed sonorous moment, amplified by means of a pedal and by tierce chromatic mixtures (scene IV, part 164 + 6 m.).

Fig. no. 8

In scene I, we can notice the enharmonic modulation, which creates in fact an authentic relationship between the tonalities *Major flat Mi: I* and *Major Do#: V* (enharmonically treated *flat Mi: IV*). The melodic line belongs to Narraboth, which admires the moon: *It is very beautiful tonight*. For this particular reason the second chord is treated enharmonically: *Do# V ~ flat Mi IV*, suggesting in a metaphoric manner, by the presence of the moon, Salome's ambiguity (scene I, part 8 + 5 m.).

Fig. no. 9

The relationship between harmony and text in scene no V can be interpreted at the level of some harmonically distinct moments, to which suggestive lines are associated. Which is surprising is the harmonic relationship at descendent tierce (*Major Sol ~ Major Mi*), the composer accentuating the contradiction between Salomee's unreal image in

Herod's vision and the surprise produced when hearing the desire of the ignorant princess, who thought that she deserves everything: *What do you want to have, Salome? (Major Sol) – The head of Jokanaan (Major Mi)* (scene IV, part 254 + 4 m., p. 152, sist. 3-4)

Fig. no. 10

We notice that the tierce harmonic relationships are used for a descriptive, illustrative purpose for certain nature features of some characters.

Moreover, we must remark the **deliberately performed difference in using the direct harmonic relationships**. Therefore, whereas in the case of tierce modulations we can notice a certain specific in using them for descriptive purposes, the second ones reveal characters' feelings, their mystery, their psychology, indirectly expressed.

3. In *Salome* opera, **Richard Strauss** also makes use of **chains which exceed the tonal system**. We remark the mixtures (seventh chords) and the harmonic structures from the tones, met in most of the sections and subsections from the part.

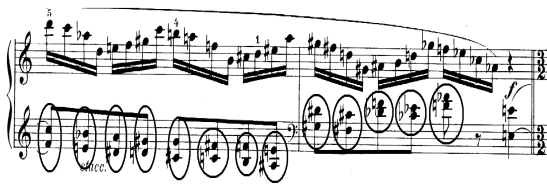
The atonal areas are present, but the harmony at tonality limit prevails, comprising the hexatone, the alert dynamic of the chromatic changes marking the points of maximum intensity in the paper: *Herod's incestuous desires, Herodiada's violence, Salome's delirium moments*.

At the beginning of scene no V, the composer introduces in the harmonic plan a descendant scale by tones - *re - do - flat si - flat la - flat sol - natural mi (flat fa) - re* - which show *Herod's stormy desire for Salome* (scene IV, part 155-2 m.).

Fig. no. 11

A particular harmonic moment which reflects the lack of self-control of Herodiada develops in parallelisms of tierces, quintes, tetrachords (tritones or reduced tetrachords). The words which accompany Herodiada's melody are: *This prophet is a drunk man, I cannot stand his voice* (scene IV, part 222 + 4 m.).

Fig. no. 12



In *Salome* opera we meet structures – atypical overlapping (pedals, achordic layers).

The variable harmony of the sound *mib* with elliptical tierce chords evolves towards an intensive chromatic area, where the chromatic total is layered on harmonic and figural pedal structures (scene III, part 45 + 5 m.)

Fig. no. 13



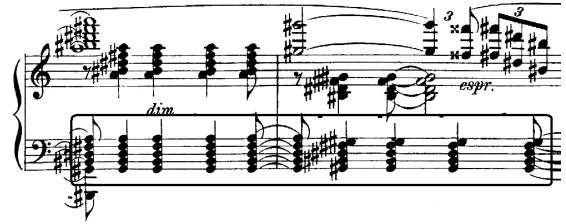
Hebrews' discussion on religion is marked by an ascendant reduced pentachordia (*re - mi - fa - sol - sol #*), which overlaps a chord in minor *re* (scene IV, 189 + 3 m.).

Fig. no. 14



The pedal also suggests *Jokanaan's beauty* in Salome's vision (*Oh! Jokanaan, you were so beautiful!*) (scene IV, part 333 - 4 m.).

Fig. no. 15



Musical discourse's development in *Salome* opera has a prominent harmonic mobility. However, **Richard Strauss** was permanently committed to the notion of tonality, using the polytonality and even the From the elaborated harmonic analysis, a romantic music, whose procedural evolution surprises us from balanced moments to persistent culminations, veritable expressionist cries.

References:

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