

**THE GENRE AND STYLISTIC FEATURES OF PIANO CONCERTOS
BY MOLDOVAN COMPOZERS FROM THE SECOND HALF
OF THE 20TH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURIES**

**PARTICULARITĂȚILE DE GEN ȘI DE STIL
ALE CONCERTELOR PENTRU PIAN ȘI ORCHESTRĂ DE COMPOZITORII DIN
REPUBLICA MOLDOVA LA CONFLUENȚA SECOLELOR XX – XXI**

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This article describes some of the most substantial examples of musical works written by the composers of the Republic of Moldova at the turn of the 21st century in the genre of Concerto for Piano and Orchestra. This study focuses on compositions by G. Ciobanu, L. Shtirbu, and Z. Tkach. Their work are analyzed from the point of view of the characteristics of the thematic material, musical language, composition and dramaturgy. The author arrives at the conclusion that these compositions are representative examples of contemporary Moldovan composition art, demonstrate a fruitful collaboration between composers and performers and show an advanced level of development of national composition and performance traditions.

Keywords: *concerto for piano and orchestra, contemporary national music, piano texture, technical pianistic difficulty, musical form, thematic development, the principles of musical form building, orchestration, Moldovan folklore*

În articol se caracterizează unele din cele mai de seamă mostre ale genului de concert pentru pian și orchestră, scrise de compozitorii din Republica Moldova la confluența secolelor XX–XXI. Este vorba de creațiile de Gh. Ciobanu, L. Știrbu, Z. Tkaci. Opusurile lor se analizează din punctul de vedere al specificului materialului tematic, limbajului muzical, compoziției și dramaturgiei. Se ajunge la concluzie, că ele sunt exemple semnificative ale creației componistice moderne autohtone și demonstrează un efect binefăcător al colaborării strânse între compozitori și pianiști-interpreți din Republica Moldova și afirmă nivelul înalt al dezvoltării tradițiilor componistice și interpretative naționale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *concert pentru pian și orchestră, muzică autohtonă contemporană, factură pianistică, dificultăți tehnice, formă muzicală, tematism, principii de structură, orchestrație, folclor moldovenesc*

The edge of XX–XXI centuries was marked by rather notable scaling down of interest with regards to piano concerto manifested by the Moldovan composers. Created during herewith specified time were just a handful of samples of this genre: two opuses composed by G. Ciobanu (in 1984 and 1988 accordingly), Concerto-poem by V. Simonov (1990) *In memory of Arno Babadjanyan*, concertos by L. Shtirbu (1992), Z. Tkach (2002), A. Timofeev (2003) and V. Ciolac¹(2013). According to the statistical data, during two decades: 1992–2002 and 2003–2013 there was not a single composition created in the genre of our interest and following the national composing tradition. Much to our regret presented to the admirers were the opuses composed by G. Ciobanu, L. Shtirbu and Z. Tkach² only. Standing out as the most prominent examples in the sphere of professional performing skills these opuses served as the source of research mirrored in this chapter of thesis. While different by author's concept and means of musical language, nonetheless the aforementioned musical works share certain common features stemming from unique attitude of their authors towards handling of the concerto genre created during the reviewed period.

Compared to the foregoing historic stage, their standpoint has notably changed moving towards categorical denial to follow on the long-standing traditions and canons. It touched primarily on the musical form, which became explicitly personalized. The authors began renouncing on cyclical composition in favor of freely interpreted single-movement. The musical language became much more complicated through the use of modern techniques of writing and engaging Jazz and Pop music vocabulary. Still maintained in the modern piano concerto of Moldovan composers was such important principle of concerto genre as the soloist and orchestra dialogue, which, in its turn, is being manifested with much more pronounced artistic identity. While still bearing on folklore, the native musicians, however, are making it more disguised and mediated. There at the national music canvas is merging both Moldovan headwaters as well as other nations (in particular, Jewish) roots. Analysis of concerto for piano and orchestra composed by G. Ciobanu, L. Shtirbu and Z. Tkach allows us to draw a number of conclusions.

Herewith referred to piano concertos show the important trends that are typical for all of the national musical culture at the edge of XX–XXI centuries. One of such trends is being manifested by *close linkage between performing skills and performing arts*, incases when the musical pieces are composed having in mind the specific musicians. The leading performers encourage artistic endeavors of composers making them create new compositions enriching concerto and pedagogic repertoire. Thus, the piano concerto by L. Shtirbu was composed for pianist A. Sokolova, while the composition by Z. Tkach was intended for A. Timofeev. This trend on the national piano music once emerged has marked a notable increase at that time when the piano pieces by S. Lungul were addressed to L. Vaverko, creative achievements of V. Rotaru were linked with the pedagogic activity of V. Levinzon while creative endeavour of B. Dubossarsky and V. Zagorsky were triggered by sparkling pianism of A. Paley. On the one hand such creative tandems give to the authors a chance to take into account the

1 Concerto-poem *In commemoration of A. Babadzhanian* by V. Simonov, subjected to thorough analysis as part of the research conducted by O. Siganova [1] was not the object of research in the present paper.

2 These concertos were analyzed in great detail in the papers of the author of these lines [2, 3, 4].

needs and capacities of nowadays piano performing arts. On the other hand, personal qualities of concerto giving pianists and such of the pedagogues affect the general nature of music as well as the choice of technical means, which expand the spectrum of piano's solo instrumental capacities.

Yet another important feature pertaining to herewith mentioned works is the explicit *personalization of each creative concept*. Indeed, concertos for piano and orchestra by G. Ciobanu, L. Shtirbu and Z. Tkach are strikingly different. Thus, the fruit of inspiration of L. Shtirbu is being marked by vital perception, positive wattage, strong influence of jazz aesthetics and language. Musical piece of Z. Tkach produces a truly indelible impression by convincing transfer of tragic emotions, power of embodiment of memorial themes, awareness of being part of the global musical-historical events, and multipurpose use of epochal symbol-themes. Composition of G. Ciobanu is being marked by a tinge of emotional detachment: the author is as if taking a step back in order to imagine the artistic world of his creation, sharing the irony with regards to genre rules of concerto and offering his own vision of reality reflected in sounds of music. Hence, in *Rhapsody-concerto No. 1* one could distinguish emergence of postmodernism features acquiring logical evolution in the subsequent opuses of the composer.

Marking in this piano concerto of G. Ciobanu features of postmodernism as one of the major pillars of modern art, it is worth highlighting the conjugation of this trend with the techniques of intertextuality: all sorts of quotations, allusions, etc. pointing out at the universal link between phenomena of arts. To that end, it is easy to explain the use by Z. Tkach of the following the quotations: themes of I. Belarsky, monograms $B - A - C - H$ and $D - Es - C - H$. By so doing, while abstaining from application of any extraordinary means of expression, which is characteristic of postmodernism period composers, Z. Tkach has managed to manifest her affiliation with this modern musical phenomenon.

Personalization of the creative intent in the works of national authors created at the end of XX – beginning of XXI century is obviously showing a trend towards dissolving the boundaries of genre canon of piano concert and *emergence of cross-genre forms*. By mere fact of giving it the title (*Rhapsody-concerto*) G. Ciobanu highlights pertinence of his composition not only to the concerto having long standing academic tradition but also to the improvisational rhapsody stemming from the folk culture. Concerto trends seem to be likewise organically combined with rhapsody tinges in composition of L. Shtirbu. *Concerto for piano and orchestra* of Z. Tkach opens its genre specifics through synthesis of concert and symphony poem.

Aspirations for uniqueness of each of herewith mentioned concertos are leading in a natural way towards *novations in the domain of composition structures*. It is remarkable that all of them are single-movement. However, this phenomenon of single-movement is of different nature. Taking the lead as the shape-forming basis of the concerto of G. Ciobanu is the freely interpreted sonata form, modified due to expanded development and converting it into a series of orchestra sequences alternated with solo cadenza. Remarkable that his piano concerto No. 2, *Nostalgia for a Holiday* (1988) is also a single-movement one. Similar approach could be traced out in his *Concerto for marimba and orchestra*, composed two decades later in 2009: it appears as a monocyclic composition comprising eight contrasting sections. In particular, this feature was referred to by E. Mironenko in his analysis of the aforementioned score: “the concerto is far off from the canonical form common for this genre without the slightest hint of sonata. The eight sections are arranged in a clear succession following free mounting nonlinear succession in which, however, one could disclose light tonal call over as well as some elements of parallel dramaturgy and recapitulation. /.../ Insofar as the interpretation of genre is concerned one could say that it is all-around individual” [5, p. 204]. Also starting out from classical sonata form, Z. Tkach manages to transform it creatively by repeating with changes development and recapitulation, introducing elements of rondo form and, at the end of the day, creates structural configuration, which we called double sonata. L. Shtirbu in his composition combines single-movement of sonata type with massive block cycling quadrupling.

An illustrative instance demonstrating individual approach taken by each of the composers to one

of the most important genre features of a concerto lies with *interpretation of solo piano cadenza*. The most traditional approach to solving this issue was taken by Z. Tkach. By placing cadenza at the border of reprise and coda, saturating it predominantly with tonalities of main theme, the author is treating this section of form as a specific preparation of the last section of form where concentrated are the most important tonality-thematic “events”. G. Ciobanu proceeded to splitting up piano solo into three independent structures and placing such into theme development section. Alternating such with orchestra episodes produces the effect of maintaining dialogue and amplifies attraction of form towards the onset of new joint, i.e. reprise. L. Shtirbu is not aspiring for innovation from the standpoint of thematic loading and location of cadenza. Its originality and uniqueness, as already mentioned before, lies with timbre possibilities. Taking part in it percussion instruments serve to activate internal energy of music thus supporting and supplementing the soloist in his masterly person.

The use of percussion instruments in cadenza of piano concerto by L. Shtirbu as an exclusive, outstanding, extraordinary method could be deemed as a special case of a more general order: *enhancement of the role of percussion instruments in modern days’ music*. Indeed, in the orchestral scores of all three concertos the number of these timbres is substantial. Their role is especially impressive in compositions of L. Shtirbu and G. Ciobanu. The dynamics and emotional fervour serve as a background supported by this group. Moreover, the use of percussions specifically as well as supported by such amplification of metro-rhythmic pulsation gives to the music of herewith mentioned compositions the jazz colouring. Altogether different situation is in case of Z. Tkach’s concerto when the sole engagement of kettledrums with chimes and using such in the most important conceptual instance serves to amplify its emotional effect by converting this time span into semantic epicentre of the composition.

Innovations in the domain or orchestration bearing on herewith considered piano concertos are not limited to the enhancement of the role played by percussion instruments. An important feature of timbre dramatic art becomes *endowment with solo function of certain instruments and orchestra groups*. This applies primarily to opuses of G. Ciobanu and L. Shtirbu, in which in line with the real “coryphaeus” the listener is offered a chance to appreciate the individual qualities of other orchestral voices. The specificity of bringing up front a number of soloists in a concerto is due to two reasons. One of these refers to establishing grounds for genre dialogue, which later on evolves into poly logics. Yet serving as another explanation could be direct or indirect influence of jazz, in which, as we know, each of the instrumentalists is getting a chance to manifest one’s leadership.

Herewith mentioned concertos are indicative from the standpoint of certain features of musical language, speech and thematic. In-depth attention to details of music text, bringing up front separate tonality-thematic elements, cells, links allow to show in herewith mentioned scores explicit features of *microthematism* and specific methods of its transformation, resulting in predominance of dynamic procedural generation and throughput development over the fragmented stratification and static fractionality. This feature is primarily characteristic of concertos composed by G. Ciobanu and Z. Tkach, which makes them more contemporary and sophisticated as compared to the opus composed by L. Shtirbu standing out for traditional presentation, democratic nature and accessibility. Thereat, the feature of micro-thematic development allows the composers to arrange their thematic plan of composition so as to bring its different tonality components in kinship, similar to the versions of a single constructive archetype. Herewith highlighted compositional technique produces about the same impression as that, which in classical-romantic style music was associated with the notion of monothematism.

All of the three herewith specified concertos are alike with regards to *interpretation of piano texture*, thus reflecting both firmly rooted characteristics of clavier works of the XIX century as well as innovations and achievements of XX-XXI century. In the opuses composed by G. Ciobanu, L. Shtirbu and Z. Tkach there are no such textural discoveries that would enter a new page into the history of development of expressive and technical capacities of grand piano. Likewise missing from such are the deliberately compli-

cated technological techniques of framing up the musical canvas. The composers are using habitual types of homophone harmonic, polyphonic and heterophonic textures in different combinations of such.

The textural innovation delivered by herewith considered compositions lies with combining generally accepted varieties of piano textures with new means of musical language: special type of melodies, harmonic vertical, rhythmical parameters and timbre findings. Thus, the influence of jazz vocabulary in L. Shtirbu's concerto produced a rather bright reflection onto the *quasi*-improvisational texture of the soloist performance; contrasting interaction of active rotational tonality element with a broad cantilena was marked in composition of Z. Tkach and always marked by well thought out coding of certain musical symbols; while the postmodernist trends in G. Ciobanu's *Concerto-rhapsody* have manifested themselves through mosaics and somewhat kaleidoscopic nature of its textural solution. In that context I. Sukhomlin-Ciobanu has pointed out that in this composition "...one could notice the desire to expose the heart beat of inner life of a modern man through the prism of collision of various imaginative spheres" [6, p. 140]. Thereat she continues by mentioning that "...the like concept /.../ has been unwound by the author in a rather inventive form: the core conflict in the rhapsody is off-shifted at the interface of form sections – between exposition and development, contrasting sequences, cadence and recapitulation, recapitulation and outro" [6, p.140–141].

Thus, concertos for piano and orchestra by G. Ciobanu, L. Shtirbu and Z. Tkach serve as an illustrative examples of modern national performing skills, proving the fruitfulness of close cooperation of the Moldovan authors with piano performers while manifesting high level of national composer and performance traditions.

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