

TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO THE PIANO SONATA IN THE CREATION OF COMPOSERS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA ON THE BORDERLINE OF THE 20TH-21ST CENTURIES

ABORDĂRI TRADIȚIONALE ȘI INOVATOARE ALE SONATEI PENTRU PIAN ÎN CREAȚIA COMPOZITORILOR DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA LA HOTARUL SECOLELOR XX-XXI

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In the present article the author reviews the piano sonatas penned by national composers on the borderline of the 20th-21st centuries. On the basis of the Piano Sonata by A. Fyodorova, the Sonata-Fantasia by V. Zagorsky, the Sonata-Improvisation by V. Rotaru and De Sonata Meditor by G. Ciobanu, one can disclose the principal tendencies of development of the genre referring to strengthening the individualization of treating the artistic concept of each composition, as well as to a growing interest in modern composition techniques. The choice of the analyzed sonatas was determined by the fact that the above-mentioned pieces are now firmly established in both the educational and competition repertoire of the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students of the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts of the Republic of Moldova as well as in the local pianists' concert practice. The inference is drawn that, during the respective period, composers tend to write one-part compositions and treat the sonata concept freely.

Keywords: sonata for piano, composers from the Republic of Moldova, sonata form

În articolul respectiv autorul cercetează sonata pentru pian din creația compozitorilor autohtoni de la hotarul secolelor XX-XXI. În baza Sonatei pentru pian de A. Fiodorova, Sonatei-fantezie de V. Zagorschi, Sonatei-improvizație de V. Rotaru și De sonatei meditor de G. Ciobanu, se relevă tendințele principale în dezvoltarea genului, legate de intensificarea individualizării ideii artistice în fiecare lucrare și de creșterea interesului pentru tehnicile componistice contemporane. Alegerea sonatelor a fost condiționată de includerea acestora în repertoriul didactic și de concurs al studenților, masteranzilor și doctoranzilor Academiei de Muzică, Teatru și Arte Plastice din Republica Moldova, în practica concertistică a pianiștilor locali. Se ajunge la concluzia că, în perioada indicată, se tinde spre compoziții monopartite și spre tratarea liberă a conceptului de sonată.

Cuvinte-cheie: sonata pentru pian, compozitori din Republica Moldova, forma de sonată

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Introduction

S. Tsirkunova, a well-known Moldovan musicologist, was undeniably right in writing that the development of the autochthonous sonata genre (including piano sonatas) manifests several stages. While, during the process, the first periods – covering the 1950s and the 1960s – are still marked by keeping to the classic-romantic genre canon of the sonata (we can cite as examples the *Piano Sonata No. 1* by V. Zagorsky, the *Sonata* by A. Starcea, sonatas by O. Tarasenko and A. Mular, in later time – the 1970s, 1980s and on – the situation is characterized by an uncompromising move away from this model towards extreme individualization of the musical idea. As the researcher wrote, „the unprecedented flurry of activity in Moldovan music in the 1970s and the 1980s is connected with an intensive variability of the sonata genre model, introducing various modifications and transformations leading to a complete rejection of the genre archetype of the classical-romantic sonata. In a number of instances, the title „sonata” given by the author to a composition cannot be taken at all as indicator of the related genre canon, it either testifies that the composition embodies an imaginative system typical of the sonata-symphony cycle, or bears the revived pre-classical meaning of a sonata as an instrumental piece” [1 p. 91].

Further, the purpose of this article lies in exposing the traditional and innovative features in the Republic of Moldova’s composers’ approach to the genre of piano sonata at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. With this aim in view, the piano sonatas of the mid-1980s written by national authors are compared with those written on the borderline of the 20th–21st centuries. The set task is to discern continuity in the treatment of the genre and bring out the individual features of each analyzed opus.

Piano sonatas by A. Fyodorova and V. Zagorsky as traditional examples of the genre in the national music of the mid-1980s

The piano sonata has always loomed attractive to the composers of the Republic of Moldova. It was addressed by E. Coca, St. Neaga, S. Lobel, A. Starcea, V. Zagorsky, B. Dubossarsky, A. Fyodorova, Z. Tkach, P. Rivilis, P. Rusu, S. Buzila, Gh. Neaga, A. Mular, V. Rotaru, Gh. Ciobanu and other composers. Penned in different times, their piano sonatas are various by their individual style and a basic approach to the genre. The most momentous of the piano sonatas created in the mid-1980s by the composers of the Republic of Moldova are A. Fyodorova’s *Piano Sonata* and V. Zagorsky’s *Sonata-Fantasia*. Marked by vivid stylistic individuality, they exhibit explorations in the field of composition techniques, in the sphere of musical language and form, in the approach to the technical and expressive possibilities of the grand piano typical of those times.

Historically, the *Piano Sonata* by A. Fyodorova came first – a large-scale canvas exposing the inner world of a deep and complex personality whose soul is a battlefield of discordant feelings. One-part in form, combining sonata-inherent qualities with variation and variable elements, it embodies the mono-intonation principle. Its compositional logic is dominated by the idea of juxtaposition, and its dramatic moving power lies in the contrast of two figurative-emotional spheres. One of them personifies stern implacability, forcefulness, the other – confusion and search for spiritual support. Their initial appearance and subsequent clashes make up unequal blocks of variable scope, „with every succeeding one excelling the preceding in its emotional charge”, as S. Tsirkunova describes them [2 p. 182].

The sonata’s composition includes introduction, exposition, development, reprise and coda. The slow introduction counterposes two intonational-thematic elements – improvisational and toccata ones. The exposition raises the contrast to a higher level: the forceful main theme is replaced by angular linking and lyrical incidental ones. In the development, block-like in structure, where the familiar thematic elements are joined by new ones, six phases are emphasized; they can be characterized, going from their dramatic functions, as accumulation of a great volume of deep-lying energy – which can be perceived in the indomitability of the rhythmic ostinato and the active nature of the replicas. The reprise carries on the line of the dramatic rise, while the coda, divided into two phases, escalates the

line further, to move into the culminating solemn apotheosis at the end. A. Fyodorova's *Piano Sonata* requires the pianist to possess a mature musical mind combined with high technical ability; it can be included in the repertoire of undergraduate and graduate students of music colleges as well as in solo programs of concert performers.

The Sonata-Fantasia by V. Zagorsky was written two years after A. Fyodorova's composition. As L. Reabosapca comments, the *Sonata-Fantasia* „...is stamped with improvisational elements. Its harmonic plan is rich and variegating, its structure is creatively different and modern, uniting classical and modern tendencies, which brings forwards the mastership of the composer”. The *Sonata-Fantasia* by V. Zagorsky is a demonstration of stylistic evolution of its composer's brainwork...” [3 p. 111]. The *Sonata-Fantasia* consists of two parts: a pensive and dreamy first part (except for the dramatic development) and a turbulent, vividly dynamic finale.

The first part (*Lento. Dolcissimo. Poco rubato*) is written in the sonata form and opens with a soft, slightly melancholic tune of the main theme. The more active lateral theme (*Poco piu mosso. Inquieto*) breaks into the music's serene flow with its advancing movement. The subtle and tender tune of the finishing theme is developing on the background of triplet figurations in the middle voice, and wide lines in the bass voice. The author's note *Piu mosso. Agitatosi* proclaims the beginning of the development based on the material of the lateral theme, the middle section of the development (*Vivace. Deciso*) becomes the culmination of the form: owing to the use of the extreme registers of the instrument, the sound acquires special power and volume. The mirror reprise (*Come prima. Inquieto*) sounds more impregnated and dynamic compared to the exposition.

The compositional scheme of the second part of the *Sonata-Fantasia* – played without a pause, *attacca* – also carries sonata features (without the development). It should be noted that there is no defined meter for this part, nor there are any bar lines. A well-developed imperative introduction leads into a melodious main theme resembling Moldovan folk songs in intonation. The lateral theme (*Risoluto e con passione*) is somewhat forceful in character; developing it the composer uses principles of counterpoint polyphony. A bright and taut culmination evolves into the reprise which sounds like a natural continuation of the previous dramatic line. A vast toccata-like coda (*Poco piu mosso*) makes the conclusion and the culmination of the part. The sonata ends with triumphant chords. The second part of the sonata can be performed as a separate piece. Under the title *Fantasia* it was offered by V. Zagorsky as a competition piece for pianists-participants in the 8th Inter-republican Contest of Young Performers held in 1988 in Chisinau.

Search for modern means of musical language and form in the piano sonatas by V. Rotaru and Gh. Ciobanu

There is only a short time-span between the piano sonatas by A. Fyodorova and V. Zagorsky and the compositions by V. Rotaru and Gh. Ciobanu, but the latter two opuses clearly demonstrate a very different compositional treatment of the sonata genre canon, a bolder use of modern means of musical language and non-standard solutions of the structure of the pieces.

The Sonata-Improvisation by V. Rotaru is a very bright in its emotional impact composition¹. Written in 1991, it is a one-part composition with no defined key or meter, combining sonata quality and double variability. The composition is built around two themes, which are repeated unflaggingly, interspersing and replacing each other at various pitches with certain rhythmic, textural, tempo and dynamic alterations. The first theme (*Allegro con fuoco*) sounds vigorous and even dramatic; it abounds in accents imparting a determined and even stern character. When it appears further on, it is played in an octave double with bright triplet insertions, presented in the light transparent texture of the whistle register, enriched with elements of imitational polyphony and so on.

¹ A great interest evinced in the *Sonata-Improvisation* on part of performers gave rise to its transcription for another line-up of performers – bassoon and piano – created by the composer.

The second theme (*Agitato*), emotional and tempestuous, adds plenty of dynamic movement to the sonata's drama. Despite the passionate character of the music, it must be played strictly in rhythm. It is noteworthy that, by the end of the composition, undergoing development, the theme acquires distinct dramatic features, thereby eliminating the contrast between the two main thematic images and creating a vivid manifestation of the dialectic principle of the unity and struggle of opposites.

The last composition presented in this article is *De Sonata Meditor*. According to the musicologist E. Mironenko, it „stands alone in the evolution of Gh. Ciobanu's musical creativity since it is pivotal for the compositional paradigm which turned from avant-garde into post-modern” [4 p. 69]. The name of this opus by Gh. Ciobanu can be interpreted as „meditations on sonata”. It is intended to show that what the composer offers is not a classic-like sonata, but the author's vision, a subjective impression of the genre, embracing its previous historic development. The sonorous palette of *De Sonata Meditor* – in keeping with post-modernistic trends – is filled with stylistic allusions and a peculiar interpretation of music from different epochs and styles. Gh. Ciobanu remarked: „This composition definitely carries no exact Beethoven text, but there is an allusion to the Beethoven intonation with iambic up-beat rhythmic” [quoted 4 p. 96-97].

Going from stylistic allusions, as well as from dynamic, agogical signatures and the texture pattern, one can recognize three main parts in *De Sonata Meditor*. The first part, which may be taken as a kind of *homage to Beethoven*, conjoins homophonic-harmonic and polyphonic features in its texture. The second part (*leggiero, dolce e trossognato*) is grounded on the variable development of the intonation material and evokes C. Debussy's piano works. In the third part (*Una sonorita spaziale*) one can discern stylistic projections to the music of the 20th century composers A. Webern, J. Cage. Here piano-sounding shakes and tremolos dominate. Such a texture creates very fine sound vibrations that, in the composer's design, make for the so-called „quiet culmination” of the composition and the summing-up of meditations-cum-allusions to the sonata.

The texture of the piece can be defined as a complicated one, conjoining homophonic-harmonic and polyphonic features. This is the so-called „integrated sound fabric” (definition by L. Gakkel [5 p. 29]) which is an individual characteristic of Gh. Ciobanu's piano music. It must be noted that this particular style of composing evades a lot of traditional performing problems of working out the piano texture, because it deletes boundaries between thematic and non-thematic elements, configurative and background compounds. A distinguished dramatic concept, abundance of associative links, freshness of musical language allowed *De sonata meditor* to expand the notion of the piano sonata genre in the creative process of the Republic of Moldova composers to a significant extent.

Conclusions

The reviewed piano sonatas by the Republic of Moldova composers at the end of the 20th – the beginning of the 21st centuries display a number of clearly outlined trends bearing witness to the fact that national composers realize the importance of the problem of **traditional** and **innovative** approaches. One aspect of it refers to a tendency towards **individualization** of the creative process, which reveals itself in the richness of imaginative and idealistic concepts, in the plurality of compositional techniques and musical means of expression, in the freshness of compositional and dramatic solutions.

Another indicative feature of the modern state of the piano sonata genre in the music of the Republic of Moldova composers is the advent of a **mixed genre** – sonata and fantasia, sonata and improvisation, sonata and ballad. In its turn, it leads to the transformation of the compositional structure of musical pieces: individualized, non-classical treatments of the sonata form are predominant, there is a marked inclination to one-part constructions on the part of composers.

Finally, one can clearly discern **stylistic variety** in the approach to the piano sonata genre that is explained mainly by the composers' priorities. Alongside the predominance of neo-romantic musical orientation (evident in pieces by A. Fyodorova and V. Zagorsky) we can see examples of neo-folklore stylistics (V. Rotaru), an example of post-modernism (Gh. Ciobanu).

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