

THREE ROMANCES BY ALEXEI STÂRCEA ON THE POEMS OF GHEORGHE VODĂ: FIGURATIVE STRUCTURE, COMPOSITION AND VOCAL FEATURES

TREI ROMANȚE DE ALEXEI STÂRCEA PE VERSURILE LUI GHEORGHE VODĂ: STRUCTURA FIGURATIVĂ, TRĂSĂTURI COMPOZIȚIONALE ȘI VOCALE

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The article is dedicated to the romances signed by Alexei Stârcea on the lyrics of Gheorghe Vodă – poet, journalist, screen writer and director, founder of the poetic cinema of Moldova. All the three romances – „Winter Watercolor”, „Spring Watercolor” and „Windows” – were written in 1966, during the period of maturity of A. Stârcea who was attracted to the creation of Gh. Vodă by its philosophical depth, refinement of the poetic style, the theme related to the love for the native country, the parental home, the relationship between man and the world around him, the problems of communication between generations. „The magic crystal” of Gh. Vodă’s poetry was embodied in three romances of great artistic value, each being a special miniature with a vivid artistic image and original musical language, attractive both for performers and for the public.

Keywords: Alexei Stârcea, cantilena, musical form, Gheorghe Vodă, romance

Articolul este consacrat romanțelor semnate de Alexei Stârcea pe versurile lui Gheorghe Vodă – poet, jurnalist, scenarist și regizor, fondator al cinematografului poetic din Moldova. Toate trei romanțe – „Acuarelă de iarnă”, „Acuarelă de primăvară” și „Ferestre” – au fost scrise în 1966, în perioada de maturitate a lui A. Stârcea, care a fost atras de creația lui Gh. Vodă prin profunzimea filosofică, rafinamentul stilului poetic, tematica legată de dragostea pentru țara natală, casa părintească, relația dintre om și lumea din jurul său, problemele de comunicare între generații. „Cristalul magic” al poeziei lui Gh. Vodă s-a întruchipat în trei romanțe de o mare valoare artistică, fiecare constituind o miniatură aparte cu o imagine artistică vie și un limbaj muzical original, atractiv atât pentru interpreți cât și pentru public.

Cuvinte-cheie: Alexei Stârcea, cantilenă, forma muzicală, Gheorghe Vodă, romanță

Introduction

Alexei Stârcea’s vocal work in the second half of the 1960s included three pieces on poetry by Gheorghe Vodă (1934–2007), a poet, journalist, screen writer, and filmmaker who founded Moldova’s poetic cinema². Gh. Vodă is one of the brightest representatives of the „sixties” generation. Mihai Cimpoi, who praises the value of his work, states: „The merit of Gheorghe Vodă is that he kept alive the flame of common sense in the poetry of the sixties: he talked with enthusiasm and determination about all things, events, situations, and human activities” [2 p. 5].

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2 Gheorghe Vodă (1934–2007) graduated from the Faculty of Philology of the „Ion Creangă” Pedagogical University of Chișinău (1959) and the Higher Courses for Directors and Scriptwriters in Moscow (1966). Among the documentaries and feature films shot by Gh. Vodă are such films as *Amar* (1965), *De-ale toamnei* (1966), *Se caută un paznic* (1967), *Singur în fața dragostei*, *Maria* (1969), *Vara ostașului Dedov* (1971). Gh. Vodă has published many collections of poems: *Zborul semințelor*, *Focuri de toamnă*, *Ploaie fierbinte*, *Aripi pentru Manole* and others. Worked as a scenarist and director of the film studio Moldova-Film, as a literary consultant of the Union of Writers of Moldova, contributing to the development of young literary talents. Winner of the State Prize of the MSSR (1986) [1].

All the three romances by A. Stârcea on poems by Gh. Vodă–*Winter Watercolor* (*Acuarela de iarnă*), *Spring Watercolor* (*Acuarela de primăvară*) and *Windows* (*Ferestre*)– were written in 1966, when the composer had reached a period of creative maturity. It was then that he became interested in the work of Moldovan poets, particularly singling out Gheorghe Vodă, about whom M. Cimpoi wrote that his lyrics „bear perhaps a brighter spiritual stamp of the fatherland than the poetry of his peers...” [2 p. 3]. A. Stârcea was drawn to G. Vodă’s poetry style because of its philosophical depth and beauty, as well as the fundamental topics of his writing, which included love for his native nation and home, the interaction between man and the world around him, and the bond between generations.

Winter Watercolor(*Acuarela de iarnă*)

The poem *Winter Watercolor* (*Acuarela de iarnă*) is dedicated to the joyful encounter of the first snowflakes slowly falling to the ground and covering it with a white blanket.

The Romance (4/4, *Andante poetico*) is written in a complex three-part form with a shortened reprise (*AB A₁*). The first part, *A*, reveals a three-part structure, *a b c*. It opens with a two- bar piano introduction. The descending arpeggiated chords lead the listener into an image of winter peace created by the flow of falling snowflakes (the author’s note: *lontano, uguale* – ital.: *from afar, evenly*). The first bars of the vocal part repeat the introduction’s descending melodic line and, according to the author’s directions, should be sung very melodiously (*ben cantabile*) and *legato* (**Example 1**). While the first line begins with *p* and sounds distant (*Primii fulgi din lunga depărtare* – (*First snow flakes from the long distance*), the second phrase is intended to increase the dynamics (*Cad încet, pământ acoperindu-l... –Slowly falling, covering the ground...*).

Example. A. Stârcea. *Winter Watercolor* (*Acuarela de iarnă*)

In section *b*, there is a gradual increase in tempo (*poco animando*), which, along with the upward movement of the chords in the piano part, reflects a change of mood: the desire of children and adults to catch the first snowflakes in their hands (*Și prin ei aleargă mic și mare... –And through them run the small and the big...*). The concluding eighth measure of the first movement (*c*) contains a dynamic ‘fork’ of *crescendo* – *diminuendo*, the peak of which represents the first culmination of the romance; it contains the tone *f* (meas. 26) and the change of size (9/8 in the piano part and, at the same time, 3/4 in the vocal part). The first section concludes with descending arpeggiated chords, which form a textured arch with the introduction.

In terms of form, the piano four- bar part has an interesting functional significance: as an instrumental link between *b* and *c*, it both architecturally continues the *b* section (5+4) and anticipates the *c* section (meas. 18-19). However, both sections, *b* and *c*, are based on similar pitches, and in this regard, the whole first section reveals features of melodic variation.

The second movement (*B, Pocopiù mosso*, 4/4) introduces features of contrast. The poet compares the first snow to a carnival: the earth rejoices, and people, along with the wheat in the field, are laughing. The part opens with a two-bar piano introduction whose harp-like chords emphasize the

upper voice (a^2-a^1), which sets the tone for the vocal part. The first two phrases of the vocal section are elements of the ascending sequences (*D Mixolydian* and *E Mixolydian*); the third (*più mosso*) is built on relatively new material, reflecting the fun of a carnival: *Râde omul prins în joc pe stradă... – The man caught dancing in the street is laughing...*

Furthermore, in order to give the form a rounded contour, the composer changes the second quatrain of the poetic text by excluding the last line and using it as material for a different reprise of a complex three-part structure, A_1 : *Grâul verde râde în câmpie, în câmpie... – Green wheat laughs in the field, in the field...* In the reprise (*Tempo iniziale*), the section from the first movement is repeated, but, expressed by a diminished fifth interval higher, it sounds here with greater emotional uplift. The rising dynamic intensity prepares the main culmination of the work: a vocal rise on g^2 for a *crescendo* to *f* (v. 49). This is followed by the coda played on piano. It first builds on ecstatic accented chords, and then suddenly, *subitop* incorporates material from the first movement. The descending arpeggios on *pp*, *diminuendo* and *allargando* produce the appearance of gradually fading and dissolving features in the watercolor image.

The romance is built on a melodic chant, implying that the vocalist possesses good cantilena. In the vocal part, there are almost no wide interval leaps, but, at the same time, there are passages on not very comfortable intervals (ext. 4, ext. 2, dim. 5, min. 7). In general, the vocalist's part is written in the middle register; the melodic line rarely rises above e^2 , and only near the end of the piece does g^2 on *forte* nuance. In this regard, the author's double version of the coda draws attention: one contains only the piano part, and the other, apparently designed for more trained singers, includes a vocal part with high sounds such as ges^2 , sung on *piano* and *diminuendo*. Such a technique requires special training.

Spring Watercolor (Acuarela de primăvară)

The short poem *Spring Watercolor (Acuarela de primăvară)* tells about the time of the year when nature awakens from its winter sleep, shakes off the rains and cold, and everything rejoices in flows of light and spring fragrances, encouraging man to work.

The Romance (6/8, *Andante sensibile*) is written in a simple two-movement form with an introduction and a grand coda. The seven-bar piano introduction begins with a slow melodic line in the right-hand part on *p* with a gradual, dynamic progression. It is noticeable that, in addition to the 6/8 marked in the key, the author uses groupings typical of 3/4 and 12/8, thus, a capricious accentuation arises in the melody due to the variability of meter. Arranged chords in the left-hand (*legatissimo*) compliment the melody, composed in *e-moll* tonality, with alternating chromatic semitones. The introduction ends with an arpeggiated dominant chord on the fermata, preparing the singer's introduction (*Example 2*).

Example 2. A. Stârcea. Spring Watercolor (Acuarela de primăvară)

The musical score for 'Spring Watercolor (Acuarela de primăvară)' is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is for the vocal line, and the bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (E-flat major/C minor), and the time signature is 6/8. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Andante sensibile' and 'mp'. The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'Se scu - tu - ră na tu - ra de plo - aie și de frig.' The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and arpeggiated chords in the left hand, with some triplet markings. Dynamics are marked as 'p' and 'mp'.

The vocal line is based on cantilena singing. The author has not given phrasing leagues, but, depending on the singer's desire and technical ability, the musical phrases can be sung either in a single breath, 4 measures each, or divided into two phrases of 2 measures each, according to the division of the poetic text: *Se scutură natura (v) de ploaie și de frig – The nature is shaking (v) off rain and cold*. The second phrase, in which the sentence *Și omul e gata de muncă – And the man is ready for work* is sung twice, is structured in the same way. The piano echoes the singer's melody with harp-shaped chords that 'hang out' on the fermata at the end of sentences.

After the piano ligament (*pocoritenuto*), the second part *b* begins, sustained at a more moderate tempo, *sostenuto*. It is a segment consisting of short vocal phrases separated by one-measure piano parts (*Lumina răsare / din cele patru zări – The light is rising / from the four horizons*). The piano, whose part repeats the structure of the introduction, acts as a vibrating background for the vocal melody while also engaging in a dialogue with it. At the end of the part, the main idea of the entire work is presented: the key word *Primăvară! – Spring!* –so, there is a smooth transition to the coda of the romance.

Coda's main idea is reflected by enthusiastic exclamations: *Primăvară! E Primăvară! E Primăvară! – Spring! It's spring! It's spring!* it begins due to the bar with a high vocal note g^2 in the fermata. The next phrase explodes on *f* and marks the culminating point of the entire piece (the vocalist has a s^2 note). The coda alternates between the 4/4 and 3/4 measures, and the *Allegro estatico* in the final section it has dynamic tension and a change of tempo. The second section of the coda ends also in major as an apotheosis of rejoicing at the coming of spring.

In the romance, the musical text clearly dominates the poetic text: Gh. Vodă's quite modest in content and size poetry is enlarged by A. Stârcea through inner structure, giving specific phrases the meaning of key phrases and enlarging the musical form through repetition. The piano part plays an important role in the development process since it not only offers an emotional atmosphere but also serves an architectural purpose by executing scores, connections, and adding dialogue interchanges. E. Stepanidina writes about it as follows: „The multitude of semantic layers of the literary basis brings to life the polyphony of the musical structure, the development in the instrumental part of its own image sequence” [3 p. 17].

Windows (Ferestre)

The Romance *Windows (Ferestre)* is distinguished from other works on G. Voda's poems by its dramatic content. The poem's central theme is windows, as a symbol of the parental home, accompanying a person throughout his life. The windows are like sleepless eyes, glowing with love and waiting for us at any time of the day or night. And we come too late: the fire has gone out in the windows that did not wait for us, and only the stars burn in them like tears.

The Romance (4/4, *Lento ma non tanto*), written in a simple three-part reprise form (*a b a₁*), opens with a four-stroke piano introduction. The slow pace melody line in the alto register, which sounds like a chime, as well as the accompanying triplets and fifth deep in the bass, should be played quietly and softly (*molto espressivo, sempre legato*), immersing the listener in a nostalgic mood. Subtly, on a nuanced *p* begins the 'exposition' in the vocalist's part (*Ferestre părintești, / Ferestre... – Parental windows, / Windows...*). (**Example 3**). The piano part serves as both a harmonic background for them and an intonational support, echoing in many voices.

The harmonic structure of section *a* is intriguing, with distant tonalities introduced through juxtaposition: *h-moll, es-moll, and g-moll*. Similar tonal plans can be found in such romances by A. Stârcea as *Spring Watercolor (Acuarela de primăvară)* on the poems of Gh. Voda *Illusions (Iluzii)* and *Waiting for You (Te aștept)* on the poems by A. Gujel, and in the earlier works –in the pieces *The day is becoming evening (День вечереем)* and *Evening (Вечер)* on the poems by F. Tyutchev. The composer uses, among other things, an enharmonic substitution of sounds for a convenient connection of tonalities: *fis = ges*.¹

¹ A similar technique of enharmonic substitution is used in the romance *Evening* [4 p. 101].

Example 3. A. Stârcea. *Windows (Ferestre)*

The musical score for 'Windows (Ferestre)' is presented in two systems. The first system features a vocal line in 4/4 time with lyrics 'Fe - re - stre pă - rin - tești, Fe' and a piano accompaniment marked 'molto espressivo' and 'p'. The piano part includes triplets and a 'Sempre legato' instruction. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics 're - stre... Ochi tot - dea - u - na tregi' and the piano accompaniment, maintaining the triplet patterns and legato performance.

The core of the second half *b* is the most developed part of the poem, which includes the ‘drama setting’: *Când am fost mic, / Când am crescut, / Când am îmbătrânit... / M-ați așteptat, / Cu lumina trează, / V-ați întuneca, / Și eu n-am mai venit...* (When I was little, / When I grew up, / When I grew old... / You waited for me / With the light bright, / You went dark, / And I never came...). The hero’s vocal phrases are constantly interrupted by pauses, as if he is gasping with joy, recalling his family home and waiting for his kid after many years away. „Most of A. Stârcea’s romances, – writes Z. Stolyar, – are characterized by a developed and expressive vocal part. However, the composer’s desire for a broad cantilena and for the melodic material to be sonorous does not exclude the use of recitative” [5p. 7]. A. Stârcea’s ability to communicate the meaning of Gh. Vodă’s *Windows (Ferestre)* poem relied on the recitative character of the melodic line.

In terms of structure, the part retains the qualities of the previous section, but it is marked by a deep organ point, a register rise, and a dynamic intensity that culminates at the end of the section. Insistent, massive, accentuated triplets (*marcando*) on *ff* and multi-voiced ‘hanging’ chords on *sf* in the piano part, exclamations in the vocal part with ascending leaps – first to sextag¹– *e*² and then to decima *e*¹– *g*²– complete the middle part of the three-part form. It highlights the composer’s use of the ‘quiet culmination’ approach on the decima, which specifies the performance of the high sound *g*² with a dynamic nuance *p*: the parents’ windows have been shuttered as they wait for their son.

The reprise brings back *Tempo I*. Again, there are short vocal phrases against triplets of the accompaniment. At the same time, the original *h-moll* is replaced by a more tense-sounding *b-moll*. The ‘tocsin’ melodic line develops; along with the author’s *doloroso* statement, it represents the bitterness of loss when witnessing the faded windows: (*Am venit / Acum în amurg... / Ard în ele / Lacrimile – / Prelinse stele. (I came / Now in the twilight... / Burning in them / Tears – / They licked up the stars...)*). The composition finishes with a three-stroke *fis*² *ad libitum* in the vocalist’s part, followed by a rising, layered piano chord *morendo*, evoking the picture of window stars ascending to the sky... In this transcendence, we may see a mirror of the image of flight, which is distinctive to Gh. Vodă’s work, and about which T. Butnaru writes: „Flight is a detachment from earthly things; it symbolizes tirelessness of creation, reaching towards pure realms of the spirit, represented by „the highest art”. The lyrical hero of Gh. Vodă’s poetry explores his own earthly state through flight” [6].

Windows (Ferestre) is one of the few romances by A. Stârcea deprived of light lyrical colors. The poem’s topic undoubtedly affected the work’s musical language. The hero punishes himself for his

selfishness and indifference towards those closest to him. That is why the romance does not lose its relevance, because the theme of relations between generations, fathers and children is important to this day.

Vocally, the piece is remarkably written, with occasional top notes and leaps to wide gaps. Fractional phrasing does not require wide breathing, making singing tasks much easier. At the same time, the vocalist must express the features of the recitative-declamation style while also paying close attention to diction, which is significantly affected by the content of the text and is critical to the perception of the romance.

Conclusions

1. A. Stârcea's three romances and Gh. Vodă's poetry, written in the same year, differ in their imaginative and emotional structures: *Winter Watercolor (Acuarela de iarnă)* is an airy landscape image of early winter; *Spring Watercolour (Acuarela de primăvară)* is a cheerful hymn to nature reviving after winter sleep; *Windows (Ferestre)* is a dramatic monologue with sombre views on the past and present.

2. The romances are divided into two or three parts, with a variety of reprises. A. Stârcea structures the form based on the semantic content of the poetic text, not necessarily maintaining the verse structure but adapting it to the architectonics of his musical concept. Unlike a number of previous chamber-vocal works from the 1960s, the composer doesn't use the genre type of the song-romance, instead enriching the pictures of Gh. Vodă's poetry by personalizing the form and musical language.

3. The vocal side of the romances is not particularly difficult, although sometimes the composer sets specific tasks for the singer in the form of high notes or passages on wide intervals – this mainly occurs in the culmination parts. The singer's overall melodic line is dominated by a cantilena melody, yet it sometimes gives yield to the stylistics associated with recitative declamation.

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