

ARTĂ MUZICALĂ MUSICAL ART

ROCK MUSIC FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: HISTORICAL AND STYLISTIC LANDMARKS

MUZICA ROCK DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA: REPERE ISTORICO-STILISTICE

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This article is dedicated to the evolution of rock music from the Republic of Moldova, starting with the first examples of Moldovan rock in the second half of the 1960s - the beginning of the 1970s, realized in the creation of the "Noroc" group, and ending with the latest achievements of the national rock music of the 2020s ("Zdob&Zdub"). The specifics of each stage of the development of Moldovan rock music are formulated, being divided into the Soviet period (the 1970s - 1980s), the transition period in the 1990s, and the first decade of the 21st century. On the basis of the theory of four semantic codes of rock culture - the verbal code, the non-verbal code, the spatial code, and the temporal code, the author is reforming this concept by combining four codes into two, based on their ontological and epistemological features (verbal - non-verbal and spatial - temporal). Taking into account the features of the semantic codes the following stylistic directions are identified. A stylistic system specific to Moldovan rock music is proposed, which reveals "lyrical rock" (the 1970s-1980s), "intellectual rock" (the 1990) and "neo-archaic rock" of the first decades of the 21st century.

Keywords: Moldovan rock music, lyrical rock, intellectual rock, neo-archaic rock, semantic code, spatial-temporal code, verbal-nonverbal code

Acest articol este dedicat evoluției muzicii rock din Republica Moldova, începând cu primele exemple de rock moldovenesc din a doua jumătate a anilor 1960 - începutul anilor 1970, concretizate prin înființarea formației „Noroc” și până la cele mai recente realizări ale muzicii rock naționale din anii 2020 („Zdob&Zdub”). Sunt formulate specificul fiecărei etape de dezvoltare a muzicii rock moldovenești, fiind împărțite în perioada sovietică (anii 1970-1980), perioada de tranziție din anii 1990 și prima decadă a secolului al XXI-lea. Pe baza teoriei celor patru coduri semantice ale culturii rock - codul verbal, codul nonverbal, codul spațial și codul temporal, autorul reformulează acest concept prin combinarea celor patru coduri în două, pe baza caracteristicilor lor ontologice și epistemologice (verbal - nonverbal și spațial - temporal). Luând în considerare caracteristicile codurilor semantice, sunt identificate următoarele direcții stilistice. Se propune un sistem stilistic propriu al muzicii rock moldovenești, care evidențiază „rock-ul liric” (anii 1970-1980), „rockul intelectual” (anii 1990) și „rockul neo-arhaic” din primele decenii ale secolului al XXI-lea.

Cuvinte-cheie: muzica rock moldovenească, rock liric, rock intelectual, rock neo-arhaic, cod semantic, cod spațio-temporal, cod verbal-nonverbal

Introduction

In the non-academic musical culture of the second half of the 20th century, *rock culture* played an essential role; its basic genres and forms developed in the West - particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, beginning in the 1950s. With its synthetic, complex nature, *rock music* assimilates

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ed various philosophical, political, and cultural trends of the era: ranging from a reaction against the dehumanization and disintegration of the individual in a post-industrial society, and the cultivation of “consumer society” values, to the proclamation of extreme slogans – such as the elimination of moral norms, the liquidation of state and culture, etc., which formed the basis of rock’s “counterculture.” At the same time, this movement tends toward the identification of alternative spiritual values, creating the necessary conditions for spiritual “rebirth” [1 p. 51].

„The *rock* fever that first swept the West in the second half of the 1960s was not merely a symptom of the deepening social contradictions of post-industrial society. The music that emerged at that time, alongside poetry, philosophy, and other worldviews of the youth movement, became part of a spiritual process rooted in a heterogeneous and contradictory society,” states *rock music* researcher Valery Syrov [2 p. 4].

In terms of sound and style, the evolution of *rock* begins with *rock ’n’ roll*, a simplified version of the African-American music genre named *rhythm & blues*, developing from rudimentary, simple forms to complex, multi-genre, and multi-stylistic ones.

Although *rock music* originated in English-speaking countries – the United States and the United Kingdom – it nevertheless quickly spread to new territories, including the Americas, Africa, and the European continent, as well as Eastern Europe (the countries of the former socialist bloc) and the USSR. According to the authors A. Lamb and Ch. Hamm, „Even the USSR had popular groups mixing the musical idioms and instruments of the various parts of, with the rhythmic drive and stylistic clichés of soft rock. None of this reached the world market in sufficient quantity to make an impact. Musically and economically the hegemony of USA and Britain continued, and in those countries, most of the songs popular at any time were national products, with a smaller number imported from the other country. Elsewhere, the pattern was a fluctuating mixture of local repertory with British and American items; it continued to be unusual music for a record from a country other than the Britain or the USA to gain currency in a third country. (...) Local dialects of the world popular music language are thus not central to the development of the genre” [3 p. 119].

The semantical codes of rock-music: theoretical remarks

In her research, *The Evolution of Rock Culture in Russia*, Tatiana Nevskaya examines the specific nature of *rock* from a semiotic perspective, characterizing it as a “semantic unit” [4]. In this context, *rock* culture is analyzed through the four semiotic codes: the *verbal cod*, the *non-verbal code*, the *spatial code*, and the *temporal code*. We will briefly explain the significance of each. The *verbal code* of *rock culture* includes elements of teenagers’ slang, words borrowed from English, as well as the deliberate use of crude and offensive language. The *non-verbal code* emphasizes the spirit of protest through an abundance of metal accessories in clothing design, a look symbolic of *rock culture* and other informal subcultures. The *spatial code* marks *rock*’s specific territory (the venues where festivals and concerts are held, clubs, specialized stores, etc.). Since the 2000s, the *spatial code* has been supplemented by a virtual topography (web pages and social media accounts and groups, clubs, *rock music* streaming platforms, etc.). The *temporal code* is represented by the recurring nature of *rock music* festivals, anniversaries, etc. [4 p. 20].

Although the proposed concept holds some cognitive potential for studying *rock music* phenomena in Moldova, we would like to offer some clarifications regarding it. As can be seen from the meaning of the *semantic codes* formulated by the researcher, the *spatial* and *temporal codes* refer to the external, ontological aspects of *rock culture*, while the *verbal* and *nonverbal codes* pertain to its epistemological, internal core. For this reason, it makes sense to group the four codes into two pairs: *spatial-temporal* and *verbal-nonverbal*.

The evolution of *rock music* in Moldova which covers period between the 1960s and 2020s, – complex, multidirectional, and heterogeneous, reveals some significant trends. Starting from the idea of

two semantic codes of *rock culture* mentioned above – *spatial-temporal* and *verbal-nonverbal* respectively, we draw some important directions regarding the evolution of this phenomenon.

The semantical codes of moldovan rock-music

From a *spatial-temporal* prospective, the history of national *rock music* highlights various trends. Thus, during the Soviet period, the infrastructure of *rock music* was heterogeneous, paradoxically combining certain forms of amateur musicians' activities with the process of professionalization achieved through the employment of *rock* musicians and bands (so called VIA, vocal-instrumental ensemble) within state organizations, which managed the artists' concerts and tours, recordings and film shoots, appearances on TV programs, etc. Thus, there were state-run channels for broadcasting and promoting *rock music* under the guise of the so-called VIA, avoiding the forbidden words – *rock* or *rock-n-roll*.

At the same time, musicians suffered from ideological pressure and censorship, often without any justification, as was the case with bands like rock bands *Noroc* in 1970s or *Modest* rock band in 1980s. Concurrently, there was a parallel distribution channels for *rock music*, which included so called *samizdat* publications, the organization of unofficial concerts and ambulant festivals, and so on. In the 1960s-1970s, rock was treated more as an alternative lifestyle of young generation, type of thinking, a way of spending free time, gradually evolving into a professional activity. Simultaneously, certain elements of professionalism emerged from an oral tradition regarding playing musical instruments and the use of high-performance instruments and sound processing equipment.

In the post-Soviet period, alongside the transition from the socialist economic system to a capitalist one – to a market economy – a distinct infrastructure for the operation of *rock music* emerged, involving clubs, festivals, record labels, arts management agencies, etc., promoting musical activities of local *rock* musicians. This process, however, has faced and continues to face several challenges related to the small market and the lack of a broad audience, as evidenced by the difficulties in producing in 2008 the CD named *Rock in Moldova* initiated by famous Moldovan guitarist Ruslan Țăranu.

The negative trends mentioned above contribute to the ongoing exodus of musicians; as a recent example serving the band *Alternosfera*. In many cases, *rock* remains a hobby, an alternative lifestyle, rather than the artists' primary occupation, which leads to sporadic creative output and the dissolution of several bands.

In terms of *verbal* and *nonverbal* expression, the image of national *rock* also appears heterogeneous and inconsistent. Thus, the aesthetic, ideological, and conceptual aspects of local *rockers'* work have evolved considerably. In the early stages of *rock's* emergence in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, the rebellious spirit of the musicians' messages was completely absent – both in the lyrics of their songs and in their musical concepts.

On the contrary, the classics of Moldovan rock, the band *Noroc* led by Mihai Dolgan, are regarded as the heirs to the worldview of iconic British rock band *The Beatles*, through their search for and proclamation of human values (all-encompassing love, rejection of violence, etc., as expressed in *The Beatles'* phrase – *All You Need Is Love*) that are characteristic of the *Apollonian* side of rock as part of the *Dionysian-Apollonian* binary system. This concept is developed in many scientific papers of international scientists (such as Walter Breen, Alla Porfiryeva, as well as the author of this article), as one of the essential aesthetics features of *rock-culture* [5, 6, 7]. The *Dionysian* nature, in turn, is fully realized in *A Night on Mount Presov* by M. P. Mussorgsky in the sound vision of the rock-band *Modest*.

At this stage, in the local *rock* scene, the postmodernist concept takes central place, one that resolves the conflict of binary oppositions by introducing ambiguity, the decentering of discourse, decanonization, irony, as well as the hybridization of various genre features, the carnival, playful logic etc. All these qualities are fully manifested in the most innovative and talented literary, musical, and visual works of contemporary *rock* created in the Republic of Moldova. Nor can the ethical aspect of Moldovan *rock culture* – the worldview of its adherents – be overlooked. Continuing the struggle of

the young protesters of the 1960s and 1970s against consumer society and the impoverishment of human spiritual life under the pressure of pragmatism or ideological dogmas, the new generations of local *rockers* emphasize the importance of human values such as freedom, altruism, integrity, and love, exemplified by the compositions of bands like O'CHAD, *Snails*, *Alternosfera*, *Zdob&Zdub*, and others.

In our view, the creation of local *rockers* is based on a conceptual multiculturalism, legitimizing tolerance toward other cultures, peoples, and civilizations – a hallmark of universal *rock* at this stage – thereby contributing significantly to the cohesion of Moldovan society in the early decades of the 21st century. Examples include the incorporation of elements of music orientalism into the songs of the band O'CHAD (famous composition *Zoulekha*) or the multilingual spoken lexics in the lyrics of *Zdob&Zdub*'s songs.

Conclusions

As in the global *rock music* scene, the local *rock* movement has undergone a marked stylistic evolution – from simple examples of early rock or the VIA style, to *art rock* and *jazz rock fusion*, which became the most notable, visible, and appealing directions for Moldovan *rockers* during the 1970s and 1980s, and starting in 1990s, *folk rock*, promoted by the *Zdob&Zdub* band, became the undisputed stylistic leader.

The *folk rock* movement emphasizes elements of national folklore, reflecting in its own way the patterns of national consciousness, as well as the stylistic and genre folk idioms. Since this band has become a trendsetter in contemporary Moldovan *rock music*, such an approach can be found in the most diverse phenomena of contemporary national *rock music* (e.g. compositions written by *Snails*, *Via Dacă* and others). At the same time, stylistic processes of a synthetic nature also took place, namely, the assimilation of universal *pop music* idioms: here, the influences of *disco*, *jazz rock fusion*, and the *electronic music* of that period (rock group *Plai*) take center stage. It is worth noting that it was not until the second half of the 1980s that the first true *rock* bands emerged, namely *Modest* and O'CHAD. Furthermore, their work introduced the *art rock* movement into Moldovan *rock* scene, a trend that was generally absent in *rock* musician's artistic production in the preceding period. The quality and variety of verbal, sound, and visual concepts manifested in the most representative examples of national *rock* from the post-Soviet period serve as evidence of the maturation of the phenomenon in question and the creative assimilation of the most important ideas and trends belonging to universal *rock*. As working terms, we can introduce three definitions related to the evolution of Moldovan *rock music*, which underpin three conceptual varieties: *lyrical rock*, *intellectual rock*, and *neo-archaic rock*. *Lyrical rock* (the VIA era, *Noroc* band) is built on the fusion of *rock* idioms with the stylistics of the so-called VIA, that is, with *pop music*, with a clear predominance of VIA stylistics.

The second variety, *intellectual rock*, is a phenomenon from the 1990s – more developed, mature – which, while remaining outside the main pursuits of contemporary local *rockers*, has left behind undeniable artistic achievements – both from the conceptual standpoint of literary text and from the standpoint of sound concepts (the bands O'CHAD and *Modest*).

And the third variety — *neo-archaic rock*, or *folk rock* (in the postmodern sense of the term) – which bears very little resemblance to the American *folk rock* of the 1960s. *Neo-archaic rock* was invented and promoted by the *Zdob&Zdub* band, shaping archaic structures, timbres, and rhythms, and integrating folk genres into the typical conceptual and stylistic context of *rock music*.

Thus, having emerged as a youth subculture and initially viewed primarily as a negative, marginal phenomenon from a historical and cultural prospective, today, *rock culture* and *rock music* in the Republic of Moldova has become one of the most significant driving forces. At the same time, by aligning itself with global trends in the *rock* movement, this phenomenon not only established itself in the Republic of Moldova but also offered an authentic take on *rock music* within the broader context of universal musical culture of non-academic orientation.

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