

## 19. WORKS FOR CONTRABASS BY CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN COMPOSERS. MUSICAL NOTATION AND INTERPRETIVE STYLE

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**Abstract:** *The process of studying musical works consists in going through similar stages of interpretation for any musical work created in any stylistic period, delimited categorically throughout the history of European music.*

**Key words:** *musical notation, contrabass, technique and style in Romanian creation*

### 1. Introduction

We will present some works for contrabass by Romanian composers from the contemporary period who have performed in terms of musical notation and have led to the development of the technique and the interpretative style at contrabass.

### 2. Iancu Dumitrescu. MOVEMUR V for contrabass soloist

Composer, conductor, pianist and music critic, Iancu Dumitrescu (born in Sibiu in 1944) attended the music courses of the Music Conservatory in Bucharest, having as masters the composers Alfred Mendelsohn, Alexandru Pascanu, Zeno Vancea, Aurel Stroe, Stefan Niculescu or the musicologists Ovidiu Varga and Octavian Lazar Cosma. Founder and conductor of the Ensemble "Hyperion" in Bucharest and "Hyperion International" – bands with which he toured all over Europe – it was natural for the musician to turn his attention to the investigation of those more modern means of creation in the rendering of contemporary musical phenomenology, with infinite openings. Among his reference scores, which highlight a gradual transition from traditional echo compositional formulas to increasingly innovative creative methods - moderns one can cite: *Apogeu I; Music for 22 blowers and three percussion groups for the orchestra*, opus printed in Paris, Salabert Publishing House; *Reliefs for two orchestras and piano; Egloga*, play for big orchestra; *Aulodie mioritică III range for big orchestra; Multum impravo for big orchestra*, etc.

Unquestionably, however, the composer seems to be attracted by chamber genres where, until now, he has signed about forty opuses, designed for various instrumental combinations to which he always adds other unconventional – synthesizing sound sources, crystals, metallic objects, manufactured objects, etc: *Perspective la movemur; music for string quartet* (Paris, Salabert Publishing House); *Zenit; Music for a percussionist* (Paris, Salabert Publishing House); *Cogito – Trompe l-oil*, piano piece, 2 contrabasses, Genoese gong, crystals and metallic objects (Salabert Publishing House); *Medium III for Fernando Grillo* contrabass soloist (Berlin, R.Z. Publishing House) *Nimbus for 3 trombones, percussion and synthesised tape* (Berlin, R.Z. Publishing House) *Harryphönie alfa for contrabass, Harryphonie for contrabass, harryphon, Genoese gongs and percussion* (Berlin, R.Z. Publishing House)

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The work *Movemur V* was composed in the period 1976-1977 and is part of a cycle of compositions started in 1975. All the plays contain the designation *Movemur* in the title: *MOVEMUR – for violin, for viola, for cello, for contrabass* and for string quartet *PERSPECTIVES AU MOVEMUR* written in 1990. Another part of the cycle is the work *LES NOMBRES DIVINS*, completed in 2005. All the above-listed scores are based on a composition technique based on the two fundamental elements characteristic to the creation of Iancu Dumitrescu: *the spectralism*, – the iridescent play of natural harmonics – and the exploitation, for the purpose of ordering and generating sound messages, symbolic and expressive valences of numbers. In this way, the auditor can exercise an inconspicuous conducting/modelling of the improvisatoric status of cantilena and the "form" of such a musical discourse will result from a temporal-spectral, dynamic and agogic proportionality of sound frequencies meticulously controlled.

The compositional approach has as expressive purpose what George Enescu called a music capable of rendering the "the struggle of the soul, with its secret ruffles"<sup>107</sup>. The same ethos was found by Bela Bartok in the Romanian Doina of Transylvania called *long folk song* or *long Hora* by their anonymous creator. Both artistic mentalities – the abstractionist-professional and the idiomatic-zonal – use practically the same principle of compositional thinking: the continuous variation of some "musical algorithmic formats", complex sound cores that gradually come to light throughout the musical discourse.

ESTATICO IMPROVISANDO

Ex. no. 1 Iancu Dumitrescu, "Movemur V for contrabass soloist"

It is a technique of writing similar to the one it has reached, in successive stages, starting from the unprocessed folk quote – see *Romanian Poema. Symphonic suite for orchestra* op. 1 or *Romanian Rhapsodies* op.11, etc. – to the integral-original essentializations of the musical substance, "recreated" in the spirit of ethno-phonetic music, George Enescu – *Sonata no. 3 for piano and violin in Romanian folk character*, in A minor, op. 25 or the *Suite for violin and piano "Impressions from Childhood"* op. 28. Starting from a principle similar to that of "recreation", the music from *Movemur V* written by Iancu Dumitrescu also targets another dimension of the sound universe: that of acoustic-spectral harmonies. The stylistic approach of the composer, which was innovative at the time of the appearance of the score, stirs the modalities of pythagoreic-numerological systematization of harmonics, a process that also becomes the central vector in the coagulation of the architectural parameters adapted to the requirements of his music.

The **technical processes** predominantly extended are materialized on each string of the contrabass (in the solo type tuning F#, B, E, A), considered as fundamental sounds. This is how groups of natural harmonics are built. These *harmonic* combinations can be achieved today thanks to the exceptional development of new instrumental techniques: the performance of *sul ponticello*, with smaller or larger variations of the distance from the gag, suppleness of bow

<sup>107</sup> Bernard Gavoty, *Amintirile lui George Enescu*, Bucharest, Editura Muzicală, 1982, p. 95



### 3. Lucian Metianu. "EVOLUTIO 73" – Sonata for contrabass soloist

The composer and professor Lucian Metianu (born in Cluj-Napoca in 1937) consistently showed his double passion for music and positive sciences during his intellectual development. He graduated the Music Conservatory in Bucharest as a disciple of great masters – I.D. Chirescu, Paul Constantinescu, Zeno Vancea, Tiberiu Olah, Alfred Mendelsohn – and later, Faculty of Electronics of the Polytechnic Institute of Bucharest. Consequently, in his entire work, the "classicizing" compositional processes (folkloric archetypal motivational combinations) are naturally combined with the electronic, structuralist-modern ones, all this doubled by a thorough logical concern for the sound detail, the variation of the timbral emissions or the accuracy of the formal project.

Considered a perfectionist artist, Lucian Metianu composed vocal-symphonic music – *Chamber Cantata for mixt choir and orchestra* lyrics by Tudor Arghezi; *Contexts for recited mixed choir and orchestra* lyrics by Ion Barbu; – symphonic music – *Symphony no. I Evolution*; *Symphony no. II*; *Byzantin, for chamber orchestra* – film music, electronic music – "*Pythagoreis*" – chamber music – two string concerts; A quintet for string and piano; *Incantation, for organ and saxophone*; Sonata "*Copernic*" for piano trio and others. The composition methodology focused on mathematics allowed him to increase a certain degree of unpredictability, in the handling of musical symbols and affective meanings precisely because of the rigor of the principles taught. Some of these principles for the edification of the sound discourse are also found in the structure of *EVOLUTIO "73"*, Sonata for contrabass soloist<sup>109</sup> by Lucian Metianu, composed in 1973.

As the title suggests, the score represents a transition from one mood to another, a move in a sound space between two opposite poles. "...starting from a seemingly disorganized sound space, in which the durations and heights of the sounds seem to have no connection between them, imprinting them a certain deployment in time, they will gradually organize themselves, reaching an area with certain logical features"<sup>110</sup>.

The construction elements of the work were generated using the computer. In the case of Lucian Metianu, mathematization becomes a process of optimization of musical processes, for finding the most direct ways through which the sound structure to be formed with maximum efficiency and economy in the carrier of information or, conversely, directing the information, the musical text being the one that should be transformed according to the artistic intention. The mathematical references used by the author allow us to make a logical ordering of the musical elements, on the one hand, and their concretization in particular musical structures, on the other hand. Regarding the possibilities of organizing the audible material, there is a tendency to reduce them to some principles with a value of generality, which concern the organization of durations, the height of the sounds and the way of attack.

The beginning of the work appears as a timeless random space in which the sound events are to be prefigured. The short and powerful sound, obtained by a

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<sup>109</sup> There is also the *Evolution II* variant for an extended formula 1, 1, 1, 1; camp, vibr., 3 bgs, 3 t-tom, 3 ptti, t-block, trgl., legno, camplli, camplli, c-cci; vnoI, vno II, vla, vlc., contrabass soloist, completed in 1976, whose first audition took place in 1977, in Cluj-Napoca and was played by "Ars Nova" band.

<sup>110</sup> According to the presentation made by the composer in the score.

quick pulling of the bow, applied on the side of the gag, reminds us of the gong that precedes the plays and the harmonics that follow, its reverberations.

**EVOLUTIO "73"**  
Sonată pentru contrabas solo  
(1973)

LUCIAN MEȚIANU



Ex. no. 4 Lucian Metianu, EVOLUTIO "73" - Sonata for contrabass soloist

From the moment the music surpasses the sphere of timelessness and is subject to "perishable" incidence of measurable sonorities from a psychological – interpretative point of view, it acquires the dramatic accents proper to the developing section of the sonata form. However, the constraints are not categorical; despite the metric obligation (4/8), of the tempo precisely indicated (eighth=60) the author also leaves the instrumentalist a margin of involvement due to the agogic mention he makes available: *rubato*. However, freedom is limited; the meter and tempo once stabilized as parameters make it possible to run proportionally the duration of the modules, now precisely delimited in the text. Depending on the musical needs arising throughout the text, the sound effect contained in the mode - obtained by different instrumental processes, clearly stated in the preface of the work - is considered finished (exhausted) when both its role and its musical meaning are fulfilled. This creates the possibility of natural passage (keeping the musical continuity) to the next element.

Dynamic contrasts are sometimes violent: the F sound played in *pp* (m. 1) is interrupted from the beginning by another, very short sound, identified to be the highest possible, issued in *fff*. The resulting contradictions, due to the different energies imprinted by the ever-changing means of attack, as well as the acceleration produced in the execution of the harmonic string (at its second appearance), announce further developments of high intensity. It is remarkable that from the first phase of the organization of the sound space (initially random), the frequent-sound connections, even of the antagonistic ones, are carried out under the sign of the musical continuity of the musical discourse.



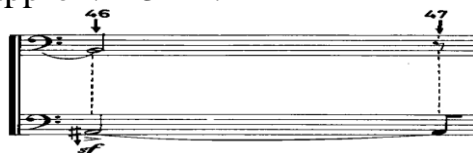
Ex. no. 5 L. Metianu, EVOLUTIO "73" - Sonata for contrabass soloist

Initially, the low sound from the beginning of the staff, in continuous timbral transformation, seems to keep with difficulty the distant natural harmonics in its gravitational field. Gradually, it will gain height and will approach (integrate) the sound effects in continuous diversification. Also, by doubling, it will put itself in antithesis with the new resulting sounds (m. 29, 44, 46, 54, 60-61, 69). By m. 70, this fundamental sound will fulfill a true role as the *backbone* of evolution:

**Conventional and extended technical processes** converge to the reproduction of Sonata's sound material. Starting with the first sound, the extended technical procedures, the motion parameters and the contact place have a great contribution in achieving a substantial energetic surprise. But immediately, the contrasts, also on these parameters, are imposed and as the fundamental sound gradually gains in height, the timbral palette of the sound effects is enriched. It is

interesting to note that a part of these timbral-instrumental "inventions" belongs to the composer; they were subsequently taken over and integrated into the category of emissions with real expressive capacity of contrabass, some of them marking a certain similarity with electronic sound effects.

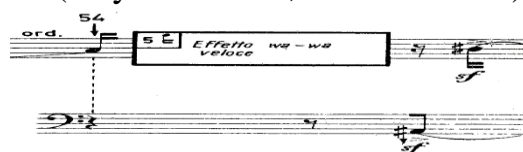
A corollary of the solid interdisciplinary knowledge (physical and acoustic mathematics) that the composer holds results also from the solution found for reproduction, on the instrument, of the phenomenon of *beatings* (oscillations occurring at the collision of two sounds with close frequencies). The practical way to achieve this effect is to sing a quasi unison on the strings III and IV on the B sound. The following phrasing is recommended: Finger 3 presses on the E string producing the B sound, the thumb presses on the A string with the ultimate goal of playing the same B sound, this time with one or two comes higher. By superimposing the two sounds executed on adjacent strings, visible in the following example (m. 46), we managed to obtain and maintain a *beat* cycle with a very low and stable frequency, of approx. 2-3 Hz.



Ex. no. 6 L. Metianu, EVOLUTIO "73" - Sonata for contrabass soloist

Although the pressure and speed remain constant when pulling the bow, in addition to the two long overlapping notes, a regular low-frequency rhythmic oscillation is clearly distinguished. There follows another unique sound effect that can also be associated with the sounds of electronic music; it has been called onomatopoeic with the phrase *wa-wa* and is used by the composer for the first time, at m. 54.

Its instrumental execution (as a technical process delimited in the area of the parameter of the **contact place** of the left hand) is not difficult from the technical point of view. The resulting effect is amazing. The technical modality is similar to the production of artificial flageolet (the thumb works like an artificial connection and fingers 2 or 3 touch the string superficially) except that as the hand descends, the chosen initial distance (may be of third, fourth or fifth) shall be kept the same.



Ex. no. 7 L. Metianu, EVOLUTIO "73" - Sonata for contrabass soloist

These *glissandos* are made up of acute, and short harmonics, whose downward movement is repeated, (they appear as some "falling" sounds followed by immediate replays from a higher rung). The acoustic result will be shorter and faster repeated if the distance between the two fingers used is smaller (third). So in case of choosing the third interval, the vibrations will be shorter and will be very fast: in case of choosing the fifth they will be longer and will have a slower succession.

Other extensive processes encountered in this work are the quarters of the tone, ways of expression possible to achieve only after the interpreter has correctly mastered the traditional diatonic intonation emission, way of broadcasting used in other conventional works.

#### 4. Ana-Maria Avram. "Axe VII" for contrabass soloist

Graduate of the Music Conservatory of Bucharest where she had as teachers the composers Dan Constantinescu, Alexandru Pascanu, Stefan Niculescu, Nicolae Beloiu along with the valued theorists Victor Giuleanu, Dinu Ciocan, Dinu, Liviu Brumariu, Vasile Iliut, Ana Maria Avram (born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1961) turns out to be a talented composer who ingeniously approaches musical genres of wide diversity – Ballet in an act *Happy Prince*; Chamber Cantata "*La portile dorului*", on lyrics by Lucian Blaga; *Concerto for violin and orchestra*; suites, instrumental sonatas, choirs, lieds on lyrics by Romanian and foreign poets.

Written approximately recently (in 1997) as a sequence with a prominent timbral identity, integrated into a cycle comprising several opuses for string, soloist instruments combined in various ensembles – the cycle was opened in 1996 with a page for cello solo – score "*Axe VII*" for contrabass soloist is a concise creation, made of nervous audible "touches". Hard to classify as belonging to a certain post-modern stylistic trend it can be located on the territory of spectral experiments, the sound material from which it is modeled is the one located in the ambiguous-delimitable area between sound and noise.

Remembering the way of elaboration of the *Formers* of the composer Stefan Niculescu, the work displays a background of amorphous, undifferentiated vibrations that, subjected to reagents with high transformation speed, ends up resonating on the acoustically determinable frequencies of the instrument's free strings. The experiment, marking the evolution from noise to musical sound, is accompanied by the use, discovery and invention, with overflowing fantasy and ingenuity, of a wide range of extensive timbral effects: "the beats" resulting from imperfect unisons or distortions obtained when using various ways of applying the bow on the strings, often reaching the boundary between sound and noise, are some of them. The title of the work sends us into an artistic promenade that gravitates on a symmetrical path around *axes* which are nothing but the free strings of contrabass.

**" Axe VII "**  
pour contrebasse solo  
**MYSTERIEUX, TRES LIBRE**

**Ana-Maria Avram**  
1997

The image shows a musical score for contrabass soloist. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff has the following instructions: "direct pe calus, sunet alb" (with a *pppp* dynamic marking), "cu presiune mare, pe marginea calusului" (with a *gliss oblic* marking), and "flautando, miscare circulara, dincolo de calus, pe toate corzile, irregulara" (with an *enchain* marking). The second staff has the following instructions: "sunet alb" (with a *pppp* dynamic marking), "gliss oblic, pe latatura calusului", "flautando, miscare circulara, dincolo de calus, pe toate corzile, irregulara", and "foarte presat, line arecul cu doua maini, miscare circulara" (with a *subito* marking).

Ex. no. 8 Ana Maria Avram, "Axe VII for contrabass soloist"

The work consists of two unequal but symmetrical "functional" sections. The first coagulates around the G chord and ends with the maximum untuning of the E chord, soon followed by its tuning; the second structure is formed around the D and A, because in the end, after 3 of the 4 strings of the instrument are untuned, the sound content to end "circularly" with the beginning, that is, with the soundly indeterminate area of "white sounds". Extensive instrumental technical procedures are used: - left hand movement parameters - *glissando*, *pizzicato*, *pizzicato mouth harp*, or right-hand movement parameters – *gettato*, *flautando*, *ricoché col legno*, *bariolage sul tutte le corde*, *gettato ricoché* – alternating with the effects produced by the left hand, of type - contact place on the instrument, and pressure, all of which have the role of inducing distortion effects. The composition in its entirety is

circumscribed by a range of semi-graphic aspects whose careful study by each interpreter is undoubtedly imposed.

## **5. Conclusions**

We presented some scores - creations of postmodern Romanian composers who composed mainly for contrabass and we extracted some examples of notation specific to contemporary music. The implications are on sound, technical and interpretative effects.

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