



# RHAPSODY-CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA BY GHENADIE CIOBANU: DRAMATURGY AND COMPOSITION FEATURES

## RAPSODIA-CONCERT PENTRU PIAN ȘI ORCHESTRĂ DE GHENADIE CIOBANU: PARTICULARITĂȚILE COMPOZIȚIEI ȘI DRAMATURGIEI

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**Abstract:** *Articolul reprezintă un studiu dedicat Rapsodiei-Concert pentru pian și orchestră semnat în 1984 de Ghenadie Ciobanu. Autoarea oferă o analiză detaliată a opusului în cauză, subliniind aspecte ce țin de dramaturgia muzicală și de compoziția acestei creații, tratarea mijloacelor de expresivitate muzicală.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *concert, rapsodie, structură tripartită, tratare pianistică.*

The first composition by G. Ciobanu in the genre of Piano Concerto, which dates back to the year 1984, is distinguished by the presence of its own concept that is important to analyze and to word. It is necessary to mention at once, that there are some discrepancies in the interpretation of the basic idea of the work. As Elena Mironenko affirms, the main feature of Rhapsody-Concerto is "the complexity and the depth of artistic concept" [1, p. 29], in which the "composer invited to explore the Universe of modern life in all its complexity and diversity. Teetering on the brink of antagonistic spheres involved in a struggle between good and evil, the hero in this fight is looking for his own identity, and his final choice is made in favour of the forces of good" [1, p. 29]. Thus, the researcher emphasizes ethical and philosophical issues of the work.

This interpretation echoes (but is not exactly the same) with the opinion of I. Sukhomlin-Ciobanu. The author writes in his article: "In this work, there can be observed a desire

to expose the pulse of inner life of a modern man through the clash of different shape areas. Such a concept which is generally traditional for major works of the symphonic genre is solved by the author quite ingeniously. The main conflict in the Rhapsody is shifted to the line between sections of the form – between exposure and development, contrasting episodes, cadence and reprise, reprise and coda" [2, p. 38].

As would be natural to assume, as a result of communication with Mr. Ciobanu, that both statements were made in the late 1990's. Today, the composer himself, when thinking about this composition, slightly put different accents. Both subjective and objective reasons may influence on his opinion. These are: a fairly long historical perspective, 30 years' experience of composing music, gained by the author to the present moment, personal and stylistic genre identification and evolution of G. Ciobanu. On the other side, a dramatic change of style and aesthetic context of the compositional practice itself was ta-

king place during this historical period. In the composer's interpretation of the Rhapsody-Concerto, he emphasizes the lyricism of the work, coupled with the irony of its general concept. Namely in the irony he sees some premises of postmodernism as well, even if he still had no idea of it during the creation of the opus. Despite this, he intuitively gravitated to it early in his career of composer.

G. Ciobanu's compositional thinking is based on the general three-part in the framework of one-part structure, this fact referring to the realization of structural regularities of a romantic concert of joint-cyclic type. We should remind that his Concerto № 2 "Nostalgie pentru sărbătoare" (1988) also differentiates by one movement, as the leading researcher of G. Ciobanu's creative works – E.Mironenko [3, p. 35] – , and the Concerto for Marimba and Symphonic Orchestra, being created two decades later, in 2009, is a "one-part score, including eight contrasting sections" [3, p. 35]. The presence of one movement can be regarded as one of the traits of a composer's individual interpretation of the genre.

Another manifestation of the individual interpretation of the genre seems to rely on the similarity to sonata, however, treated very freely. The first theme of Concerto performs the function of a peculiar principal part, mainly in the framework of a sonata exposition, untypical for the classic and romantic Concerto. Grace to the diatonic selection of musical material by the composer, it can be characterized by an open and melodic lyricism. The **principal theme** combines two elements. The first is based on the melody's "jumps" (e.g., descending fifth in orchestral conducting

of the theme, large intervals of pure octaves, minor and major sixths in the piano part on the p.4). The second element of the theme is chromatic second course with the domination of soft-sounding descending seconds). Hereinafter, these two tonetic complexes will lead to the construction of musical matter of the Concerto.

The main theme undergoes a significant tonetic development through the use of rhythmic variation, adding continuances (as in the Prokofiev's and Bartok's works), "the capture" of different registers. Each time, this broad melody is harmonized by the chords of fourths and seconds structure, acquiring more tone. This type of harmony, according to the composer's affirmation, is performed from the modal structure of the theme. One such example can be stand chords of the accompanied quarto-second structure (c. 2, pp. 7-8), which are called by Mr. Ciobanu himself "the diatonic clusters".

Originally modal, naturally flowing melody of the main themes of the Rhapsody-Concerto is carefully built, "designed" by the composer. Namely modality determines the structure of chords, main principle of the latter being a quarto-second one, i.e. the chords are "harvested" from the sounds forming the melody, and, consequently, the melodic system is like to be "encrypted" in the chords.

The zones of the main and the secondary parts in Rhapsody-Concerto are revealed quite clearly. The secondary theme (it comes firstly in the orchestra, then in the soloist's part) is in the same lyrical plane as the main one, so we can say that it has a derived character. Here the rhythmic features and a certain mismatch of rhythmic thinking are revealed even

more explicitly. That is how this topic is characterized by G. Ciobanu: "If there are the attempts to keep the rhythmic grid in the orchestral part, then the piano part is focused on "leaving" this rhythm all the time. The sense of rhythm is maintained by the obviousness of the theme's three-share, the lack of rhythmic discreteness, the presence of the pulsation in the sixteenth, and the presence of certain rhythmic formula as well, which can be observed in the main part" [4]. These common elements include a soft rhythmic pattern in triple meter – a quarter-half, common to both parts and making a topic to be graceful and easily-danceful, as hora.

Like the main one, the secondary part is set out initially in the orchestra, in the parts of wood wind instruments (1 and 2 clarinets and flutes (from the page 12)), where the folk origin of musical themes is emphasized by the typical melismatics. I. Sukhomlin-Ciobanu wrote about a special technique of using in his Rhapsody-Concerto the imitation of the "sound of folk instruments (flute associated with fluer, piano – with cymbals)".

Then in the remark *A piacere, molto rubato*, p. 16, the secondary theme is carried out in the soloist's part (piano). Here the composer enhances the percussive properties of the sound, inherent to cymbals. According to composer's affirmation, the percussive nature of the theme also tells us about the influence B.Bartok's style. The development of texture in the piano part is carried out through the use of doubling, parallel fifths, rhythmic variation (for example, increase the rhythmic theme of the main part in the c.2 in the orchestra, mentioned by I. Sukhomlin-Ciobanu) [2, p. 42].

After the secondary section a new one is coming – *Un poco rubato*, p.24, the one that develops the ideas of the main part (this section can be described as a zone of the final part, built on the material of the main one). In the piano part the passages of sixteenth notes appear, combining lyricism and impulsiveness, courage and resilience of the main theme. The variant transformation of the theme in the piano part is achieved by reducing it, then the clarinet theme starts (*Un poco rubato*, p. 24), followed by xylophone and piano. The xylophone part, duplicating the piano's one, enhances scherzo theme by its timbre. There can be noticed harping of second intonations of the main part at the piano in the last section of the final part and in the virtuoso passages the improvisation reveals brighter because of the small notes' length.

During the development of the main part (since c. 6), it becomes "more symphonic" and the rhythmic figure of the "triplet – eighth notes – quarter" start playing a dominant role. The development is a complicated, complex structure: the composer uses the device of intervention, implementation and "switching" functions.

The development is built of three distinctive phases, each of which is "broken" by the episodes. In the first and the second phases of the development the role of such episodes perform two solo of saxophone (firstly in c.10, accompanied by piano, and then, in c.51 – in the solo exposition). The third phase is based on the same principle of intervention, but with two other "players" – piano and orchestra. Three interventions of the orchestra are interrupted by three solo piano cadences, thus dramatizing

the musical discourse. Let's consider the development more detailed.

The first phase of development performing dramaturgic role begins from the page 41. Here the triplet character is dominant, the resonance of different instruments based on the known rhythmic formulas occurs and the initiative intercepts to drums. According to the composer's affirmation, it is like "an answer of the group of intoning percussion instruments to non-intoning ones: timpani, tamburin and those drums, that have an exact pitch. They seem to try to do something similar to the sounds of piano part" [4], thus introducing an element of competition, typical to Concerto genre.

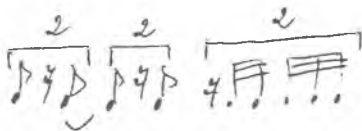
The section which follows the a/n one, and which can be defined as the **first episode** is performed by solo saxophone (*solo molto sentimentale*, c.10). It can be considered as a small cadenza for saxophone, which connects very naturally lyricism and percussiveness, irony and parody. Actually, the entire concert is inspired by the spirit of parody. At the time, the author, in his own words, was trying to get rid of the ideological and stylistic clichés of his time, even if he didn't know how to do it. The irony is present in all the themes, even in the main one, ironic and lyrical as Prokofiev's. It seems that it sounds lofty, but at the same time, feels to be almost cartoonish and detached.

The saxophone theme *molto sentimentale* is a continuation of the above mentioned sentiment: "it seems to be a beautiful theme, – the author said, – but in fact – sounds like a relic, an anachronism, there is a little removal, even mockery" [4] (the note "ironica" is even written by the author in the score). The music of this episode, there is a one-time contrast of lyrical

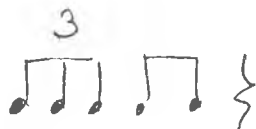
and ironic themes. The percussion with the Prokofiev's spirit as a means of transferring the author's ironic attitude is treated by the composer in a peculiar way: percussive sphere wins and in the end of the episode the saxophone starts playing "*con nervozitare*".

Another innovation by G. Cioabanu, genetically going back to the rhapsody presentation of material, implies the empowering orchestral instruments with soloist's functions, this fact leading to the solo pieces' inclusion in the score. Here, each instrument can have a written out solo, depending on the composition of the orchestra.

**The second phase of development** (p. 48, c. 12) is opened by an expressive orchestral fragment, based on the strong theme with the dominative eurhythmic and not lyricism: as in the piano part, as in the winds' parts the composer uses very successfully rather complex rhythmic patterns on the basis of doubles in the monorhythmical exposition:



In the strings' parts a more lapidary and simplified rhythmic pattern containing triplet is present. It is not superfluous to remind that the most important building block of the Concerto was firstly introduced in the final part of exhibition *Un poco rubato*.



Accentuated percussive, rhythmical accent of this fragment beneficially shade the appearance of the **second episode** – the sax solo senza metrum. It combines a narrow-scope, second steps in the melody, decorated by the melismatics of a quasi-folk genesis and wider intervals, derived from the main theme (upward and downward jumps in perfect fourth and perfect fifth). Despite its short size, the cadence is characterized by the dramatization of the discourse (it seems like lyrical intonations are “washed out”, instead the passages of sixteenths, motivic fragmentation, chromatic half-tone gravitation are coming). It is not occasionally that the author put the notation con nervozita.

The third phase of development consists of an alternation of three orchestral sections and three piano cadenzas. G. Ciobanu brings the cadence to the strong emotional intensity by connecting the orchestra; the soloist takes a breath – but only for few times, because of a new wave. Thus the attribute of a Concerto genre dialogic of the musical logic refracts. The queerness of this decision is that solo cadenza is not often used in such quality. They perform a completely different function, and the orchestral “forces” do not interfere with a soloist’s statement, the latter consisting in the sphere of influence belonging only to the soloist. Therefore, the author reviews the functions of cadence in the musical form: in the classical and romantic concert the cadence is usually placed on the boundary of the cycle parts or sections of the form inside the part, but here it becomes an instrument of dynamisation of musical form, a musical drama factor, the role of the latter consisting in the influence on

the processes of development of musical material very actively.

The first orchestral statement of the theme (p. 53, c. 13) has a synthetic character referring to the thematism: here the intonations of secondary themes are organically linked with the final theme’s triplet character. The following **first piano cadence** (p.56, *presto*) combines the intonations of the main and the secondary parts, but grace to the device of variance, the main party sounds different every time. The cadence’s textural features consist mainly of combining different graphical lines – divergent movement concords in both hands of piano part with a predominance of the octave and sixth vertical and martellant techniques that the composer has already used in the second element of the secondary part (a piacere molto rubato). It is very curious and unusual that the third chord structure has been used by the composer only once throughout this cadence (5 times on tenuto the chord E-A-C-E repeats), but the entire rest of the hierarchy is based on intervals.

The **second statement** of the orchestral material (p. 57, c. 14, *presto*) is based on almost the same principle as the ratio of the first orchestral fragment and the first cadence: sharply- rhythmical musical material develops the idea of triplet movement, shading the following cadence of soloing piano.

In the **second piano cadence** (p. 59, *presto*) the composer makes the instrumental statement be more dynamic by bringing the intonation elements of octave-chord texture. Here are also combined the first element of secondary part (including soft rhythmic pattern similar to the hora’s one), triplet figures in both hands, performed

by the lessened octaves and producing acoustic-dissonant, “teasing” effect. For the sake of fairness it should be mentioned that here the chords character of thirds structure is used more actively than in the previous cadence, thus providing a great sound density if compared with interval “layers”, contributing to a more multi-faceted interpretation of the solo instrument.

The **third statement** of orchestral material (p.60, *Sempre espressivo*) is very succinct and sparing by its material: it seems that in this fight of orchestral “mass” and solo instrument the superiority is on the side of the latter. Orchestral parts are reduced to the performance of certain chord progressions, followed by the third piano cadence (p. 63, *sempre marcato e accentuato*), the final cadence in the chain of development that separates the development itself from the reprise. Then the dominant importance belongs to the martellant texture, enriched with individual patches of ostinato (short sixth pedal). Thus, all three cadences are three different phases of a single musical thread; they all, according to G. Ciobanu, include

“a series of intonation and textural elements borrowed from the previous sections: clusters, triplet figurations, intonation of downward second with a dominating pointillistic texture” [4].

In the Concerto’s **reprise** (*tempo del Commincio*, p. 65, c. 16) E. Mironenko emphasizes the dance features, I. Sukhomlin-Ciobanu notes that the composer used the device of “textured – dynamic tonal germination” in the secondary part (c. 18) [2, p. 142].

The **Code** (*Giocososo* p. 72 c. 19), according to the researcher’s affirmation, represents a “dance in triple time, reminding Sârba, supported by aksak rhythm on bass drum and cymbals” [1, p. 32].

According to all the material analyzed above, a conclusion can be made. In the Rhapsody-Concerto G.Ciobanu significantly updates the canons of Concerto genre, by proposing individual solutions, arising on the interface of two virtuoso genres of professional academic tradition – Concerto and Rhapsody, as well as on the intersection of various composite structures and structural logic.

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4. According to a private conversation between author and composer, which took place in May 2009.