

19. A PROGRAMMATIC VISION IN THE CREATION OF VLADIMIR SCOLNIC - *WAR AND NOSTALGIA FOR SOLO CONTRABASS*

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Abstract: *The creation of the contrabass throughout the history of music and the evolution of musical instruments is quite limited. In the 20th century, the attention of composers was also towards this instrument, as evidenced by new and original creations.*

Key words: *musical creation, contrabass, instrumental technique*

1. Introduction

Vladimir Scolnic was born in Ukraine in 1947 and soon, in 1948, he settled in Romania where, in 1972, he graduated from the specialization courses in composition at the National University of Music in Bucharest in the class of university professor Anatol Vieru. In 1977 he emigrated to Israel. Here, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem awarded him the title of Doctor of Music (Suma Cum Laude) for his doctoral thesis on the subject of the Organization of pitches in the aleatory counterpoint of Lutoslawski's music composed in the 1960s, in 1994. V.Scolnic currently teaches composition and music theory subjects at the Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. Between 2000 and 2001 he headed the composition, conducting and music theory department at the Academy. Also in this institution between 2005 and 2008 he was appointed dean of the Faculty of Theory, Composition, Conducting and Music Education.

2. Discussions

V. Scolnic wrote works for symphony orchestra, chamber orchestra (with or without soloists), flute orchestra, children's choir, scores for various chamber ensembles (non-traditional or traditional instruments) for solo instruments, for voice or educational music. The composer was also awarded the Award for Excellence in Composition, Research and Education by NYU & the International New Music Consortium (New York) and the 2004 Composer of the Year Award, given by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. His creations have been presented publicly, recorded and broadcast on radio and TV, in concerts but also in international contemporary music festivals in countries such as: the United States of America, Spain, Italy, Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Moldova, Thailand, New Zealand, France and Israel.

War and nostalgia for solo contrabass was composed at the beginning of 2001, in the socio-political context generated by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and is a score that expresses an unacknowledged meditative-programmatic atmosphere. The composer, settled in Israel for about twenty-three years at the time, wanted to reproduce through this musical work, a psychological-poetic idea based on the highlighting of two emotional states: that of war in contrast to that of a quiet soulful meditation (nostalgia). All the feelings of deep melancholy experienced by the











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author were often brutally interrupted by the violence of the shots that induced a state of fear and insecurity, a violent-emotional psychological balance experienced by the musician with an intense introspective-analytical lucidity.

Musical creation with narrative accents dedicated to *the contrabass War and nostalgia* surprises with a sound discourse full of moments spaced to extremes, able to sample the entire creative force of V. Scolnic. The choice of the contrabass, as an actor in this monologue, proves to be exemplary because this instrument demonstrates acutely dramatic technical-expressive possibilities, in-depth and ingeniously highlighted by the composer.

3. Results

The work has an episodic form (A, B, C), without being subordinated to the symmetry specific to classical forms, which results in an undisguised rhapsodic character. By choosing this syntactic formula, all musical ideas, presented in a programmatic development, are chained on the principle of capturing the uniqueness of the temporal moment. The scheme of the form is presented, simplified, in the following table:

A				B			C	Termination
a1	a2	a3	conclusion	b1	b2	development	c1	c2
								
1-12	12-17	18-26	26-31	32-38	38-46	46-60	61-67	67-75
								
								75-final

Ex. 1: Vladimir Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*, scheme of the form of the work

The indication “r” designates the marks written above the beginning of each staff, to the left¹⁶¹. They do not represent measure numbers but mark sound events produced within each staff. Taken separately, each subsection has the role of exposing certain musical ideas, but sometimes also that of preparing the next moment. The tempo is specified by the composer through the indication of *Rubato*, namely the fourth equal to the metronome pulsation of about 50. Otherwise, the entire piece should last approximately 9 minutes in total, according to the indication noted at the beginning of the score. The sections and subsections displayed in the table regarding the structure of the form will be presented in detail, from the point of view of the morphology and expressiveness of the musical text.

The beginning of the entire poem is made by repeating the *G* sound (which on the contrabass can also be played by vibrating the first free string, counting the number of free strings from the frequencies from the acute to the low register). The relatively short duration of this sound, which at the same time must be sung as accentuated as possible, jerky and in the shade of *fortissimo agitato*, with the explicit indication *con molta forza*, differs continuously, from the first rhythmic formula – the thirty-second quintet – to the second – octolet, of thirty-sevenths – or at the third one – the sequence of a formula of octolet, of quintolet and two triplets where all the sounds have the value of thirty-sevenths – which clearly demonstrates the composer's intention to suggest the shots.

The sonic violence characteristic of firearms followed by total silence, as well as the gradual decrease in the duration of the sounds of the three rhythmic formulas,

¹⁶¹ The composer, out of the desire to create a free musical discourse, gave up the measuring bars; therefore, the numbering of the "measures" in the diagram above, within the existing landmarks at the beginning of each staff, is critical. Clarification is done by explaining the musical moment and examples.

induce the feeling of traumatic horror specific to war situations. In the score, the indication of the production of the sounds of each rhythmic formula on a particular string (I—on G, the first string and II—on D, the second string) is also indicated in the score, as well as the combination of the two strings during the third formula where, on the triplets of thirty-eighths, the composer imposes on the performer the manner of playing on both strings simultaneously.

The bow feature for playing these percussive sounds is that of *gettato* (*jettè*). The programmatic effect sought by the composer is to suggest to the auditor the proximity of these firearms. The motives of the shots, more distant or closer, are inspired interspersed with motives of silence which, in the configuration of any musical work, have an overwhelming dramaturgical importance. Judging by the indications of an instrumental nature, the author proves a thorough mastery of the technical possibilities of the contrabass.

Ex. 2: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

After these brutal signals, the motif of nostalgia also appears (r. 5), followed by the auditory suggestion of the appearance, within the course of the programmatic action of the poem, of other elements of military technique - flying machines - described here through surprising timbral processes such as *distorted pitches* doubled by a massive dynamic *ff agitato*, sudden bow changes, nuance variations, all converging towards the display of another rhythmic formula corresponding to the motif of the shots.

Ex. 3: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

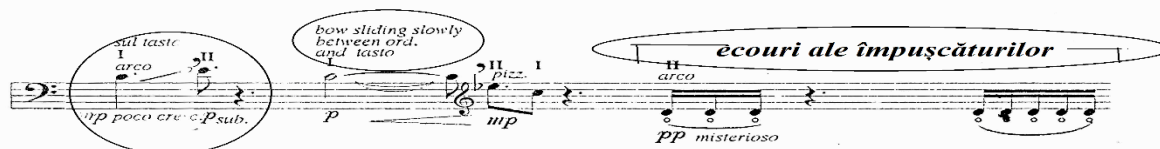
It is now outlined by two sounds played simultaneously, placed a split second apart; this dissonant interval amplified by the dynamic *ff furioso molto crescendo*, as well as by the extensive technical procedures (*sul poncicello* or *slow. irreg. vibrato* and *gliss around the pitch, col legno*) present on the last portion of the introductory section (m.1-m.12), becomes the expression of tension, horror, paroxysmal violence, a state constantly maintained throughout the introductory section (from the beginning to this moment).

Ex. 4: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

As an appropriate timbral indication for the sound intention described above, I have determined that the 3rd note in the musical example above (A flat) should be played on the second string (II). The last sound, E flat, indicated in the manner of *pizz.*, represents the echo of the gunshots that still lingers in the listener's memory,

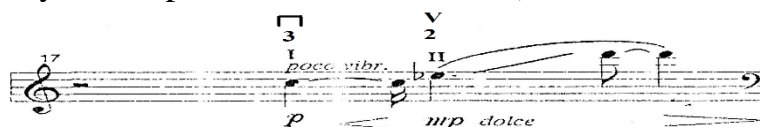
vibrating through two more staves.

There follows a break¹⁶² of three beats with a well-defined role, of transition to another group of ideas (a new subsection), at which point the first cramp of nostalgia themes appears. The very often chosen technical procedure to evoke the feelings of meditative sadness is the glissando, combined with other ingeniously chosen extended technical procedures, such as the alternation of *ordinario* and *sul tasto* sonorities but also the rapid change of strings, revealing their color differences. How they are combined can be clearly seen in the example below:^v



Ex. 5: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

Next, after another pause of two beats, the last sound event of sections **a1** and **a2** is presented: the two contrasting musical ideas are stated before entering the developing module of section A. Here (respectively in **a3**) it was established a certain fingering and indicated the arch features necessary to achieve, with maximum accuracy, the expected semantic effect (a constant sadness).



Ex. 6: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

Section **a3** (Development of A) begins with the obsessive two-beat pause that anticipates, in an oxymoronic manner, the exposition of a dense amalgam of simultaneously experienced feelings (fear, pain, revolt). The composer suggests them through a varied color palette, which abounds in extensive technical procedures, resulting in ample sonorities that will evolve towards the acute register with the appearance of the B section. This **a3** is made up of a transitive moment:



Ex. 7: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

and an evolution, where the short melopee also has the role of conclusion, for which the glissando will also be shortened in duration.

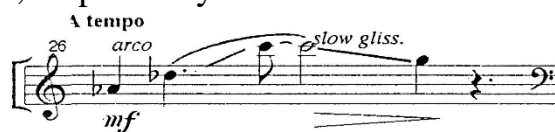


Ex. 8: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

At the end of the A section (respectively the **a3**), by introducing a new tempo indication (*Inquieto* quarter=60), there is a calming, a quieting of the sonic rush developed up to this point; it is played through a *slow downward glissando* starting from the note do, from the second octave, which, on the contrabass, represents a higher maximum of its register and the playback is done by pressing the first string

¹⁶² It is known that the pause is an essential means of expression in rendering semantic tension.

at the end of the instrument's tongue. Moreover, the composer, throughout the entire score, mainly explores the acute register (using sounds a semitone or even a tone higher than this note do, respectively the sounds do#/re⁻ or re natural).

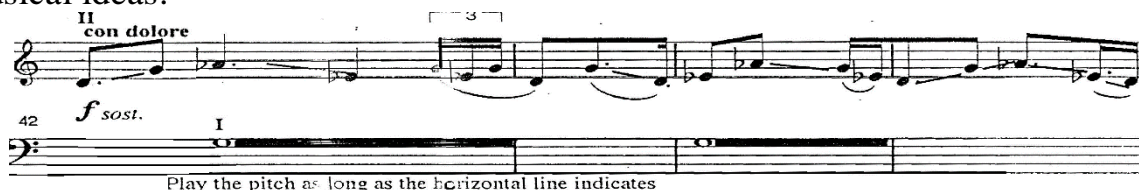


Ex. 9: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

The de facto development of the entire musical work (i.e. section B) starts from the indication *Piu mosso* (quarter=60), a moment placed in the middle of the portative indicated by the reference 30, approx. m. 32, which lasts until *Tempo primo* (quarter=approx. 50 portable landmark 60). It is made up of two sections: the first is transitory and is formed, in turn, by the two subsections, **b1** and **b2**.

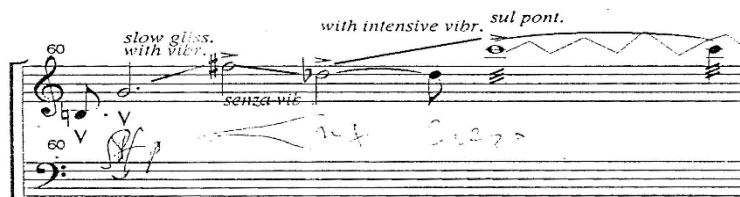
The end of the second subsection represents the exposition of the nostalgic idea, suddenly brought back to the fore, at the end of the bar with marker 38. It reverberates like a superb lamentation showing certain modal influences. This ontological-semantic ambivalence is the result of the direct anchoring of the composer's sociocultural roots in both national cultures (Romanian and Israeli).

The harmonic writing through which the theme is supported by the second voice, like the *ison*, consists of the sustained bass, achieved by maintaining the G sound (first free string). The dissonant sonority, doubled by the timbre of the singing on the first two strings of the contrabass, bring to the music, at this moment, an intense melodramatic content, creating a sharp contrast between the divergent musical ideas:



Ex. 10: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

Next, with the indication of *Molto Agitato* (point 46-60), the point of maximum tension of the Development is stated (in its second section), which captures the unfolding of the struggle, the triggering of all the conflicting energies. Here the composer proves a real mastery in the use of multiple mostly extended technical procedures, managing to present to the performer and implicitly the audience, an intense state of delirium, hopelessness, negative psychic frenzy, emotional experiences maintained throughout this dynamic apocalyptic ascent. The dosing of sound effects, very ingeniously done, is abruptly completed at the last moment (r. 60) by an upward jump “with intensive vibrato” in the manner of *sul ponticello*.



Ex. 11: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

In order to achieve maximum expressiveness, the sustaining of the last sound will be suddenly interrupted and the performer will mark a consistent moment of silence correlated with a gesture of freezing, of stopping any movement. This

complex gearing of technical-expressive procedures competes for the transmission of the semantic message suggested by the composer and also for achieving the contrast of ethos necessary to move to the last big section of the poem, the concluding section C - the last episode. The first of the three subsections (C1, C2 and Ending) suggested by V. Scolnic to be performed in the same tempo in which the work debuted – *Tempo primo* (quarter=50) begins with a musical idea in the piano tone:

Ex. 12: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

to recall the main motifs appearing in the first exhibition – the sound metaphor of war (the gunshots) and the theme of nostalgia present here through 4 isons – Re, Re, Re and La. From a harmonic point of view, they build a minor chord characteristic of the state of sadness.

Ex. 13: V. Scolnic, *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*

The reappearance of the nostalgia theme (at r. 67) marks the beginning of subsection C2 which is actually a melopea now developed without the preceding sequential pulsations, a procedure used in order to calm the musical discourse but also to make the connection with “The End” (r. 75). It conveys a state of tranquility through the prolonged cadence of the mi sound in the bass (free 4th string).

4. Conclusions

This is how V. Scolnic concludes his emotional, introspective and unspeakably sensitive musical-programmatic “story”, the score *War and nostalgia for solo contrabass*, integrating, through the fantasy and accuracy of the reproduction of sound imagery, into the series of contemporary musical opuses of real value, with formidable expressive load.

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