

# Myriam Marbe: Concerto for Daniel Kientzy and Saxophone(s) and Orchestra

Thomas Beimel

1. *Ploița curată*. Bucharest, 22th may 1986. There was rain, *Ploița curată*, a shower of pure rain.

The image shows a musical score for Saxophone (Sax. A. in E<sub>3</sub>) and Violoncello/Contrabasso (Vlc. Cb.). The saxophone part is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: "Plo - i - ță cu - ra - ță". The tempo/mood is marked "lontano" and the dynamics are "p (comme une voix de fausset)". The cello/contrabasso part is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The score shows the saxophone playing a melodic line with lyrics and the cello/contrabasso providing a harmonic accompaniment.

It was raining inside of Myriam Marbe, the work at the concerto for saxophone and orchestra was just finished, the air became purer: now one can breathe again. In three movements gearing into one another it flows along, broader than half an hour. From the first solo of the baritone saxophone onwards great waves are coming into being, are attacked, "flash", are enlivened by a wild, excessive tarantella. Clotted in a pulse the music is chilled, then revives again, tries to concentrate, becomes united and the end is unlimited.

The music unrolls like a dream, it glides along. There is always something which is joined by something else, slowly, little by little, rising acoustical landscapes, as broad as the time the music is asking for. Scarcely there is a distinct pulse, a metre, which is not the herald of something good.

But this is only the surface of this music. The idea of this work is the continuation of an older one: the (*Ritual pentru setea pământului*) *Ritual for the Thirst of the Earth* for 7 or 14 voices, choir of responsory and percussion after Romanian folk poetry. Written in 1968 it takes up ancient rituals which survived in the Romanian folklore.

Magic to call the rain: *Ploaie cu găleata/să uzuie vatra/ploaie cu ciubărul/să uzuie măru* (it is raining out of buckets to disperse the fire, it is raining out tubs to split up the apple). So are the voices in the "ritual" calling and so it is written in the score of the saxophone concerto: in and above the parts: a speaking music which believes that there is a power in its words. By that way the saxophone becomes an orator, calling all the others, entreating them to join him.

It is a rich music, nourished by many traditions, above all the Romanian folklore. Apart from seizing ritual verses we hear in a moment of convoking the wind instruments

playing the same signal, evoking the impression of a *bucium*<sup>1</sup>. To the end of the work the soloist plays simultaneously on soprano and alto saxophone, a *cimpoi*<sup>2</sup> - effect; roughly this peroratio steps into the listener. More important than those reminiscences of the colour of Romanian folk instruments is that this music is grown under the influence of modal traditions. This is proved by the shape of their melodies and the harmonies. It is an embossed music with its proportions according to the laws of the medial section.

2. "I think also that our bodies are in truth naked. We are only lightly covered with buttoned cloth; and beneath these pavements are shells, bones and silence."

(Virginia Woolf - *The Waves*)

Myriam Marbe does not use rituals; the rituals are living in her work. She relies on their power and on the power of her speech: and that is audible.

Of course there is no rain magic in modern life any more, although the composer lets us know that several times there was rain after a performance of the *Ritual for the Thirst of the Earth*; the situation is more difficult. And it is no acceptable solution to escape from the raggedness of our times into a world of blind occultism. Yet we are all waiting for a rain to lead us to purification and for a rain which may nourish us. In ourselves it shall rain, *Ploaia curată*, a rain giving us clearness.

So the "rain" and the interwoven rituals of the saxophone concerto are more than a metaphor and more than a material animated by a specific poetical charm: this music asks for a spiritual attitude which is implored by the saxophone or, in the final section, by the bells asking for concentration.

The path used by the saxophone concerto is the same like in the "ritual". After a period of warming up and presentation the music is leading to a moment of complete extroversion. Therefore the second movement of the concerto is determined by the rhythm of the tarantella, creating an utmost enthusiasm which leads to ecstasy: "cri de joie".

Asked for the origin of that part Myriam Marbe tells the history of the tarantella: bitten by the tarantula the people had to dance, savage and with passion, to get rid of the poison. The idea of this movement: to write a great tarantella against the madness of the world. Away with the poison before we are decomposed by it, before we are going crazy: an exorcism through music.

At the culmination the music stiffens in a rigid pulse, the massive sound is fixed on one point: the moment of death, the execution. And here the tide has turned: the direction of the music changes.

What was outside becomes introverted. Now it is possible: the highest concentration, the prayer. The whole third movement is determined by this attitude.

"*Să facem colaci/ să dăm la săraci...*" let us make *colaci*<sup>3</sup> to give it to the poor. All are beseeched to come together. The individual begins to pass over his borders. Nobody lives alone; unity is existent. By contemplation it becomes possible to overcome the limits of our existence. The soloist mingles the sound of his instrument with his voice.

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1 Bucium: the Romanian variant of the alphorn

2 Cimpoi: the Romanian variant of the bag-pipe

3 Colaci: a special ritual cake prepared for the feast of the Christmas, New Year (Anul Nou).

Sax.  
B.  
in E $\flat$

ord...

*sf* ... *più legato*

1'15'

Voix

Hearing it we have to ask: who plays? Are we still here or on the other side, delivered from harm and pain? In the last moment all the remaining voices are melted in one single tone. We came to ecstasy and found perfection, for the time of one breath. Everything is done with the exception of the last gesture. The conductor finishes that work with an upward movement: everything lies open in front of us.

3. "And somewhere a drum starts to beat, in the beginning unperceptibly, than louder and louder, pressing, threatening. But the music does not react with violence but goes very quiet onwards. (...) The threatening of the drum has no power, it cannot take roots"\* this is a remark of Myriam Marbe concerning her string trio *Trommelbaß* (1985). Together with the saxophone concerto it belongs to a series of compositions with a more direct reference to the situation in Romania. All have a very special attitude in common. The question was what should be done: "Should one cry, or moan or just go further, quiet but very strong?"<sup>4</sup>

And this question is uttered in her works. The titles of the three movements of the *Sonata per due* for flute and viola, also written in 1985 are "*strigăt-bocet-glasuri*" (cry, lament, voices). In the last movement there are only two voices going imperturbably their way, they neither stagger nor waver and at the end they combine with "a deeply intimate but strong softness". In the middle part of the *Requiem* finished in 1990 the solo-voice shouts: "Don't stagger if you see a blossomed willow, it is no blossomed willow/ But it is our Holy Virgin. Don't stagger if you see a blossomed tree, it is no blossomed tree/ But it is our Holy Lord. Go further, don't stagger if you hear a crowing cock, it is no crowing cock/ But angels shouting." We have to mistrust our ears and eyes.

So her typical attitude comes into sight: going one's way, perceiving, enduring tensions. And this attitude is to be heard in the saxophone concerto.

From the first beginning of the double-basses onwards there are those long pedal notes. They are typical Romanian tones with its origin in the Romanian-Byzantine music where very simple, quiet monodies are accompanied by an unobtrusive pedal tone, ison, audible for the whole duration of those songs. Taken over in her works they are able to give them firmness, orientation, quietness. They are becoming fixed stars, habitations, bridges.

4 In: Gisela Gronemeyer / Klangportrait: Myriam Marbe/Berlin 1991.

They are the guarantors of a difficult and threatened calmness. And some years later, not yet, they are just there, calm and full of beauty.

By this way a music comes into being taking the time it needs to endure tensions: and sometimes it is painful, like the section of the first movement of the concerto where the strings come together for a sinister and tensioned sound which has to be born. But so an enormous power is created. And at the end: there is nothing else but a single tone, a *g*, soft, imperturbable. And we perceive that it succeeded: to resist and to go one's way. Because this is resistance: also if you are crushed or broken, to hold upright and breathe.

## PORTRETE COMPONISTICE

### UlpIU Vlad - a Composer's Portrait (II)

Valentina Sandu-Dediu

The simplification of the writing - wished by the composer in the years that would mark his second period of creation - come up in two versions of communication with the performer: the attraction of the latter into the field of the creative act (as well as into the aleatory formulae exposed in the *Muzica* Review 3/1993) - therefore the generation of a virtually infinite set of interpretive variants for certain sections (moments) of the work - and the explicit appeal to a folk substance (be it the folk quotation or its re-creation). In the first case, one may notice the subtle filiation with the typology of folk creation<sup>1</sup> (exclusively oral as it is), in the sense of the interpreter's liberty to choose his own way out of a "scheme" that is given (in UlpIU Vlad's creation, the "scheme" that condenses multiple possibilities being the chosen aleatory formula itself). In the second case, the attractivity of a musical substance, immediately perceived as integrative of Romanian folk stylemes, cannot be doubted, and thus a direct communication with the interpreter is established (as well as with the listener, of course).

Therefore, here is the second sub-group of this ample period (s. also *Muzica* 3/1993), whose characteristic is the explicit relationship with folklore: *Symphony No.2, From the Hearts* (1984), the wind quintet *From the Languages of Peace* (1986) and the choral cantata *The Joy of Accomplishment. To a Wedding* (1988).

The parameters of *Symphony No.2* somehow place this work at a distance from the other three previous orchestral ones, by means of an even more obvious simplicity of the score<sup>2</sup> (entirely written in the traditional manner, without aleatory formulae), of the threefold architecture (as compared with the onefoldness preferred in the three works), by putting together and merging the specific modal substance (the chromatic whole) and the folk one (diatonic, maybe anhemitonic pentatony, s. the 2<sup>nd</sup> part). At the same time,