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Horia Surianu & Joshua Fineberg

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Romanian Spectral Music or Another Expression Freed¹

Horia Surianu

Translated by Joshua Fineberg

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For many years, contemporary Romanian music has lived in the shadows, far from any distribution, information or normal communication with the West or other continents. Little by little, however, its presence has made itself felt: at first through the composers who established themselves in France, (such as Costin Mioreanu, Mihai Mitrea Celarianu, or Horatiu Radulescu) then through certain Western contemporary music performers. This, combined with the lifting of the 'iron curtain' has allowed several Romanian composers to make known their works beyond their borders.

Effectively, the years of resisting an official music, years of battle that are little known in the West, have turned out to have been an extremely fruitful period for musical creation. Several aesthetic tendencies regarding musical composition thus came into existence.

In this context appeared the first attempts at making spectral music; the practical efforts were doubled by an exchange of ideas and then by some theoretical studies. These studies concerned the work of a group of composers, among whom can be cited: Corneliu Cezar, Octavian Nemescu, Corneliu Dan Georgescu, Lucian Metianu, Costin Cazaban, etc. All of these composers achieved their own independent realizations

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of the musical phenomenon by approaching or identifying with the spectral universe.

The beginnings of spectral thought in these Romanian composers was characterized by realizations concerning the relation between conception and perception. One of the first composers to theorize this essential aspect of spectral music, Corneliu Cezar, put to use several principles tangential to the spectral universe, as early as 1967, by composing a piece for clarinet and tape based on a Polynesian poem 'Taaroa,' and then the piece *AUM* for tape and variable ensemble in 1970 (the title refers to Tibetan music). With the piece *Rota* for tape and variable ensemble (1977), Corneliu Cezar attained another basic principle of the spectral universe: thinking continuously before thinking discretely. This principle also applies to another piece, once again for tape and variable ensemble: *Le Jour sans Fin*, written one year later, in 1978.

While Corneliu Cezar had the merit of opening the debate, another composer, Octavian Nemescu, has turned out to be the most significant standard bearer for thinking in terms of the continuous, and at the same time preserving a global approach to spectral phenomena. Starting in 1965, he composed a piece for cello and tape *Combinaisons en Cercles*, a piece which was then developed for tape and variable ensemble. In this piece there are three superposed sonic layers, representing three essential perceptions of time: the diurnal plane suggested by ephemeral events, the chiaroscuro plane of the subconscious — a stratum of anticipation and transition towards the last layer — and the deepest, which is part of a hidden nature (translated by an extremely complex pedal sonority, suggesting the nocturnal plane of the 'Cosmic Unconscious'). This sonic layer is made up of a rich vibration connoting 'the universal rustling' and turns out to be a vision of the continuous, perceived by a global approach to the sonic phenomenon which controls the whole musical form of the piece.

The compositional strategy of Octavian Nemescu then moved progressively towards other essential precepts of spectral music, notably exponential and non-linear ideas and organization. In this regard we can mention, the works *Concentrique* for variable ensemble (1974), *Musique Imaginaire* (1976), and the class of compositions *Suggestions*, conceived starting in 1968. Part of this class of composition is *Le Chadouf de la Porte*, a piece initially written for violin/viola and then in a version for double bass, synthesizer and percussion instruments. The gradual transformation of a sonic material — the essential idea of this piece, connotes the possible metamorphoses of a meditation on the perpetual becoming of existence. On an oriented axis of evolution (unpredictably oriented, at first) the becoming is fed by the preceding moment — germ from which will spring the events to come.

Even if the discourse, seemingly clothed in immobility, gives the sensation of an empty rotation and an evolution without progress, suggesting the impossibility of escaping a limited condition, its evolution is deeply defined by the searching for a melodic dimension. This dimension is expressed by the double bass which heads towards a sense of equilibrium that will be found through the reconstitution of the theme of J. S. Bach's 'Ricercare' from the *Musical Offering*. Little by little functional construction replaced combinatorial construction — another type of thought which touches the precepts of spectral music — in works like *Naturel – Culturel*, electronic music (1983), *Métabyzantinikon*, for saxophone, violin and tape (1984), *Trison*, electronic music (1987), *Alpha-Omega*, for saxophone, violin, percussion and tape (1988), *Finaleph*, for large orchestra (1990), or *La V-ème Non-Symphonie*, for large orchestra (1991).

One of the most recent pieces by Octavian Nemescu clearly shows a constancy of spectral thought, even if other aesthetic orientations, like 'post-modern' thought or the ideas of meta-language, have also found an important position in the compositional process. Additionally, the oneiric side envelops its complete aesthetic conception and continually looks for zones of unreality leading towards the subconscious. This concerns the piece *DanielPentAbsorbOR*, for saxophones (alto, tenor, baritone and contra-bass), three gongs and tape, written for Daniel Kientzy in 1995. The piece has an 'alchemical' nature where bell sounds on the tape mix in a texture composed mainly of sounds from the harmonic series on the fundamental 'C' played by the saxophone soloist. Figure 1 shows one of the moments in the piece marked by the intervention of the contra-bass saxophone.

One can see the poly-rhythmic nature of the texture, which develops towards a diminution of the rhythmic values, and the vectorial orientation towards a rising flight of elements from the harmonic series — as well as the fundamental note which imposes itself in the low register. This type of texture, which hides a latent heterophony through the multiplications and diminutions in the 'infinite' sonic space of a melodic 'model' based on pitches around the 11th harmonic partial (F-sharp), brushes against an aspect of spectral technique while preserving a strong symbolism of choosing the sonic pillars, consisting in the opposition C – F-sharp. In this sense, Octavian Nemescu remains faithful to a transversal concept of composition: meditation *around* a sound and *inside* a sound in relation to a generative semantic of universal symbols, within the framework of certain musical systems which have developed in the course of history. Further is this meditation not also a part of the origins of the spectral universe?

Representing a younger generation, Calin Ioachimescu invokes the spectral universe much more than Octavian Nemescu by concentrating his creative orientations on the acoustic models of spectral music. For

The image displays a musical score for a saxophone (Sax. Contre-basse). The score is written on multiple staves, with the top section containing a dense, complex melodic line. The music is marked with various dynamics, including *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *sff* (sforzando). There are also performance instructions such as *mf* and *f* with hairpins indicating volume changes. The score includes a section marked *34''* and another marked *39''*. The bottom section of the score is labeled "Sax. Contre-basse" and features a different melodic line with dynamics like *f*, *sff*, *mp*, and *mpo*. The score is written in a style that suggests a high level of technical difficulty and expressive range.

Figure 1 Octavian Nemescu, *DanielPentAbsorbOr*

example, one can cite *Oratio II*, for flute, clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, percussion, tape and live electronics, written in 1981. This piece has five sonic centers, each of which generate harmonic spectra on which the musical form is built. The beginning and end are marked by the incantations of a shepherd's flute — creating a possible connotation of natural sonic archetypes which project the work beyond time.

The image displays a complex musical score for 'Celliphonia' by Calin Ioachimescu. The score is organized into several systems of staves. The top system includes staves for 'VIBR.' (vibrato), 'VIBR.' (vibrato), 'VIBR.' (vibrato), 'VIBR.' (vibrato), and 'VIBR.' (vibrato), with dynamic markings such as *sp-alc* and *f*. The middle system features a large staff with a *fz* marking and a *p* marking. The bottom system includes staves for 'VIBR.' (vibrato), 'VIBR.' (vibrato), 'VIBR.' (vibrato), 'VIBR.' (vibrato), and 'VIBR.' (vibrato), with dynamic markings such as *ff pesante fz*, *fz*, *fz*, *fz*, and *fz*. The score is written in a complex, multi-staff format, likely representing a multi-channel or multi-instrument piece. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings, indicating a highly expressive and technically demanding work.

Figure 2 Calin Ioachimescu, *Celliphonia*

The idea of using a model of acoustic synthesis is even clearer in *Celliphonia* (1988), for cello and tape (the tape is made up of sixteen 'voices' of cello). In this piece the spectral material is linked to the idea of form, thanks to the sense of harmonicity in the spectra. A global approach towards musical objects is found in the sense that the qualities of sound and the use of processes create an architecture of sound, where material is not the sound, but the feeling that rises out of its complexity, represented by harmonic resonance. In this way, sonic reality goes far beyond the written notation, even though the writing is very detailed.

Figure 2 shows a fundamental (the note 'A') which generates several spectral configurations of harmonics that evolve in time (notated with some precision in the score for the tape part). The complexity of the sonic reality, however, goes beyond this notation, while, on the other hand, the notation for the cello is extremely detailed and comes much closer to this reality.

Celliphonia — written for the cellist, Anca Vartolomei, with whom the composer collaborated in order to achieve a virtuoso technique and to capture it with the greatest possible precision in the notation — also represents a research into analysis and synthesis, moving towards a new 'consonance' in the triangular relation, composer — interpreter — public, where the laws of acoustics, psychoacoustics and electro-acoustics impose elements of the formal micro and macro-structure. Instrumental technique is not an objective which is focused in on itself; this new technique becomes a generative source for sound, which turns out to be very complex rendering effects from the disguising of timbres all the way to the complete transfiguration of the sonic source.

The *Concerto pour saxophone et orchestre* (1994), dedicated to saxophonist Daniel Kientzy, is structured around five fundamental tones which develop their sonic spectra while determining the general form of the piece — articulated into five sections which become progressively, more and more, contrasting. Heterophonic writing predominates the discourse, hiding the melodic motives of ethnic origin, etched into the pedal sounds which evoke archaic resonances.

Another piece inspired by instrumental research, involving the multi-phonic sounds of Daniel Kientzy, *Les Éclats de l'Abîme* (1995), for contrabass saxophone and tape, shows a spectral conception in its organization of sonic material. This time, the spectra are multiplied within a homogeneous structure. The idea of structural rupture shows itself to be a directing principle in the progression of the musical discourse; creating, in this way, three large articulations (individualized and contrasting) on the formal level. By listening to this piece, one gets the impression that the exhaustion of the constituent elements of a structure generates and conditions the rupture. New instrumental techniques play a critical role in

the choice of sonic material, as they also did in the other pieces mentioned (the tape part is also made up of recorded saxophone sounds). The special playing techniques also hearken to the spectral universe.

Among the composers living outside of the Romanian borders, Horatiu Radulescu represents a special case, mixing together originality, fantasy, invention, intuition and a taste for novelty. He is one of those who established a basis for certain spectral techniques for composition, starting in 1969. Notably, with his piece *Credo* for nine cellos; where a single spectrum, defined by its first forty-five components, is generated by a multitude (around 4000) of spectral processes.

Another piece, *Infinite to be cannot be infinite/Infinite anti-be could be infinite* (1976–1987), for nine string quartets, also reveals a new spectral technique. Additionally, it shows an interdependence between the frequency of a sound and its use in time. The composer proposes the placement of eight quartets around the public, playing 128 different spectral components beyond the 36th harmonic and corresponding to the 128 strings of the eight quartets tuned accordingly. The ninth quartet is placed in the center and modulates twenty-seven spectra. The superposed micro-musics with their own durations mix in a sonic-spatial and global-temporal texture by articulating the form of the piece.

The new spectral techniques applied by Radulescu are mostly defined around the 'sound icon' — a concert grand piano turned vertically and played by bowing the strings, or with other specified modes of playing; its tuning is appropriately adjusted, so as to obtain the generative fundamentals of sonic spectra. At the level of organization of the musical material, the composer uses this spectral 'scordatura' starting with, for example, a scale of unequal intervals corresponding to Fourier's harmonic series. On the temporal, energetic plane, he introduces the notion of 'spectrum pulse' — a variable distribution of spectral energy that creates different layers of time, perceived simultaneously, within which the sonic processes develop into micro and macro-forms, while still maintaining a global vision based on the spectral synthesis of a sonic source (sometimes represented by virtual fundamentals).

His catalog of works is very large: it has approximately 80 pieces. Among them are *Taaroa* and *Lamento di Gesu* for orchestra, *Iubiri* for ensemble, and *Doruind* for chorus. In 1980, with *Capricorn's nostalgic crickets II* for seven flutes, Radulescu created an evolving progression of the musical discourse by imagining an 'infinite melody' trapped inside a circle built of inharmonic frequencies. The 96 sounds which form the basic material are etched onto the schema of a 'canon,' without a starting nor an ending point. By their complexity, the 96 sounds generate 96 micro-musics of very varied textures. This complexity is created by four types of sounds which are defined in the context of micro-spectrality,

thanks to the different types of attack modes used (Flutterzunge combined with sung unison pitch or tremolos on the same pitch, but with different fingerings) and thanks to stable and unstable multiphonic sounds (which the composer calls 'spectral thermometers'). The irregular placement of each event (sound) within a period of eleven seconds, leaves an important margin of action to chance, which will effect the evolution of the discourse within its globality; however, it controls the 'life' of the micro-spectra within a flexible unit of time.

Almost the same techniques can be found in another piece, this time for solo flute, *Dizzy Divinity I (Envouté Dieu, Je)*, written in 1985. The score can be adapted to several types of flute (C-flute, alto, bass, baroque or shakuhachi). The basic technique revolves around an irregular 'tremolo,' slow or fast, on the same note, which discretely changes the exact pitch of the sound (because of the changing fundamentals that accompany each fingering) and gives the note a very slight pulsation (with the connotation of the shimmering of stars). Dynamics play an important part in underlining the contours of a harmonic spectrum on F, whose 6th to 23rd harmonics are felt. The horizontal perception reveals an unstable lament, suggestive of a neo-Byzantine style where micro-intervallic structures dominates.

Two years later in 1987, Radulescu used an enlarged harmonic spectrum in the piece *Frenetico il longing di amare* for bass voice, octo-bass flute (or contra-bass flute) and 'sound icon.' From the 6th to the 53rd harmonics on the fundamental E, the material is articulated on the schema of a figurative chorale. The sonorities of the 'sound icon,' tuned to non-equidistant intervals, based on a spectral-type scordatura, transport the listener towards the aesthetic of Hindu 'ragas,' towards a sort of meta-physical meditation reminiscent of a 'tampura.' This atmosphere created by the 'sound icon,' by mixing with the sounds of the flute and the bass voice in a universe whose pitches are micro-spectral and whose micro-rhythmic irregular pulsation is the unstable and ephemeral 'life' of the micro-spectra, creates the image of an intimate ritual. Sometimes this ritual is explosive and, at other times, it is contained, as it so well translates the title 'The Nostalgic, Frenetic, Desire to Love,' in its poetic sense.

Thanks to the flutist Pierre-Yves Artaud and his research into the potentials of the instrument, the flute has played a crucial role in the works of Horatiu Radulescu. In 1988, after the death of the composer Giacinto Scelsi, Radulescu wrote another piece for flutes: this time for a large ensemble of 40 flutists divided into concentric groups and disseminated through the audience in the following manner: one octo-bass flute, one double-bass and one bass flute, 3 alto flutes, 5 bass flutes, 8, 13 and 5 C-flutes and 3 alto flutes. This creates the divisions 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 5, 3

and corresponds to a disposition based on the 'Fibonacci' series. The spectral universe of this piece is defined around a theoretical spectrum built on the note 'A' and enriched by other spectra built on 'E,' 'G-sharp,' 'G,' 'B,' 'D-sharp' and 'F-sharp.' The dialogue between groups, or their encounters within the global sonority, unveil the specific world of the composer, based on the 'life' of the micro-spectra etched into the micro-rhythms and existing in an 'eternal continuity.'

Another composer living outside of Romania, and who is also among those who selected Paris as the musical center in which to work, is Costin Cazaban. He also is part of the spectral universe, but without being so fully inside as Radulescu. His work also operates on other aesthetic, stylistic and technical terrains; notably, minimal and post-modern orientations. Nonetheless, spectral elements can be found in certain of his works, such as *Zig zag* for cello and double bass transformed into a version for two double basses in 1981, after the composer met the Italian bass player Fernando Grillo. This piece investigates the limits between sound and noise by offering a progressive trajectory from noise to sound within a sonic 'X-ray' that contains the complex harmonic resonance of the instrument. This work flirts with the spectral universe without, however, making it an end in and of itself.

With *Naturalia* for seven keyboards, Costin Cazaban suggests the origins of the tempered system by spreading out the series of harmonic sounds on the keyboards. An artificial world thus finds its origins through a corrected transplantation. Even though this piece is stylistically minimalist, on a symbolic level it suggests the spectral universe and makes references to this universe in the choice of its sonic material.

The piece *Flûtes à vide* for solo flute (using the whole family of flutes, from the octo-bass to the piccolo) and seven tracks of flute pre-recorded on tape, presents a sonic material obtained with the help of the partials of a virtual low 'B' that become, in their turn, new fundamentals. Upon this material a series of 48 terms is generated, which develop the sonic spectra and play a crucial role in the harmonic organization of the piece.

Another piece for flute(s), *Deus ex Machina*, this time in combination with 12 strings, accents the harmonic language, which determines, within a certain measure, the overall form of the work, since the piece is articulated like a giant cadence on the fundamentals 'E' (sections 1-3) and 'A' (sections 4 and 5). Group theory controls the organization of the material, with the help of harmonic functions based on the two fundamentals mentioned above. The spectral aspect can be defined even in relation to the articulation of certain formal sections. For example, the progressive fall from the 31st to the 1st term of the series built on A, or the progressive ascent from the 1st to the 34th term of the series built on the same fundamental.

Au-delà de Vienne, for string quartet is in a similar vein. At the end of the work, in the fifth and final section, the fundamental 'C' is established and polarizes the other pivot sounds of the piece; each pivot corresponds to one of the previous sections and can be considered as a derivation of the basic sound (G, D, A, E — which also represents the other open strings of the quartet). The spectral material is defined on the basis of a selection of 18 harmonics of each fundamental used and is derived from the upper series. This structure of 18 harmonics remains constant and is simply transposed each time the fundamental changes.

Of course the list of Romanian composers whose work touches upon the spectral universe does not stop here; composers such as Corneliu Dan Georgescu, or Lucian Metianu, or even the author of this article, are preoccupied with certain aspects of this phenomenon, which has turned out to be very complex and has opened up future perspectives — still waiting to be discovered.