

# **TUDOR JARDA AND HIS FOLKLORE-INSPIRED CHORUSES: AFFINITIES, CONTEXT, STYLISTIC POSITIONING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Of composer Tudor Jarda's entire oeuvre, his Romanian folk music-inspired choruses most clearly reflect his aesthetic orientation. Preoccupied with transplanting this folkloric element into his choral pieces without altering its expressive features through compositional artifice, Jarda is positioned, from a stylistic point of view, on an axis that begins with Gavriil Musicescu, Gheorghe Dima, Augustin Bena, D. G. Kiriac, Paul Constantinescu etc., and has clear points of convergence with Sabin Drăgoi's and Sigismund Toduță's art, respectively. In Europe, his creative efforts share similarities with Janáček's Moravian song arrangements or with Kodály's arrangements of Hungarian folk melodies, demonstrating, however, strong affinities, from a visual point of view, with the handling of line and colour in naïve painting.

**Keywords:** Jarda, chorus, folklore, arrangements, Drăgoi, Toduță

## **1. Introduction. Choral music in Tudor Jarda's oeuvre**

A review of Tudor Jarda's rich compositional work will arrange statistically the genres covered by the author in an unequivocal order: choruses, opera, lieder, symphonic music, instrumental chamber music and *solo concerti*. In the 50 years that he dedicated to composition, Jarda enriched the legacy of Romanian choral music with over 200 pieces, extremely diverse from the point of view of their expressivity and presenting a variety of writing techniques. His affinity for this music compartment is obvious and has an explanation that is as natural as it is convincing, especially when expressed in plain language, without any convoluted phrasing on the part of the author: ".../ it is impossible for a Romanian composer not to be attracted to vocal music, especially to choral music. Just look at all our great predecessors – Kiriac, Cucu, Musicescu, Dima, Vidu, Drăgoi, Bena, Hubic – they were all great composers of choral music. We sang in the school choir ever since we were little children. /.../

At the Conservatoire, choral music was at the forefront, and with maestros of the likes of Augustin Bena and Lucian Surlașiu it was impossible not to be attracted to this musical genre. Later, I also sang in a church choir of the Greco-Catholic Church in Timișoara" [6, p. 138].

Approaching this genre primarily through practice, Tudor Jarda completed the larger part of his choruses in the 1960s and 1970s – which, quantitatively, were the most productive decades in his entire compositional career.

## **2. The folk music element as main source of inspiration**

Although his musical catalogue includes religious music (*The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*) as well as music that draws on the most valuable poetic stock of Romanian literature (*Choruses based on the poetry of Lucian Blaga*), his main source of inspiration remains Romanian folklore. However, the author did not regard the Romanian folklore as an object for the assertion of his creative personality, but rather, as his colleague Liviu Comes stated, as a fragile gem that needs to be skilfully placed within a refined and tasteful setting in order to sparkle and shine. With regard to the old and controversial issue of using the folkloric stock as a source of inspiration, Tudor Jarda made a few comments that may be considered as a reflection of his own aesthetics: "This transfiguration of folklore into musical composition may spark many debates, symposiums, etc. Here I would like to quote Comes, who once said: «however much we process folklore, we only mar it. For we cannot make it any better, or more beautiful, or more expressive than it already is.» Comes seems to have been right. Personally, although it sounds better, I do not much like the term ‘transfiguration’. To ‘transfigure’ means to change, to alter, and if we alter folklore, the outcome is no longer folklore. I think I prefer the term ‘to stylize’ instead. Here is what the Dictionary says: «to stylize – to process a motif of choreography or folk music, preserving, at the same time, its essential characters.» /.../ From the musicians’ thinking there seem to have emerged three stages in the folk-inspired music, three phases that were identified by Bartók, if I remember well: the phase of quotation; the phase of composing in folk style; and the phase of creating an atmosphere specific to the folk song, evoking a specific ethos. I would take a reverse approach: from the atmosphere, to succeeding to write melodies in folk style and then to quotation – the last one being, in my opinion, the most beautiful phase" [6, p. 141].

Tudor Jarda chose his folk sources and then his writing techniques based on the possibilities of the ensembles for which he wrote. Thus, part of the choruses set to folk poetry were dedicated to the choir of Leșu, an ensemble engaged in amateur music, whereas the choruses set to poems by Lucian Blaga were written for *Cappella Transylvanica*, a prestigious ensemble

then conducted by maestro Dorin Pop. Aware of the potential of the choirs to which the music was dedicated, the author differentiated the degree of difficulty and the musical writing: "Seldom have I written without a dedicatee in mind; I usually write for a particular ensemble. That is why my works – as whoever studies them can notice – are quite different in terms of degree of difficulty, language and mode of address" [6, p. 139].

Although Jarda's style displays a special type of originality, his music shows certain inflexions that can be traced back to the Romanian folk music tradition. The composer's oeuvre is situated on an axis that links and extends the achievements of Gavriil Musicescu, D. G. Kiriac, Paul Constantinescu, but especially (according to the composer himself) those of Sabin Drăgoi and Sigismund Toduță, personalities who exercised a strong influence on his musical conception. "I went to Blaj<sup>28</sup> and learned what piece we were supposed to sing: *Psalm 101* by Toduță. It was a work that impressed me profoundly. It employed an entirely different language from the one I had been accustomed to. /.../ The way in which this work was conceived impressed me deeply: it was structured in a modal language and based on our Transylvanian choir music. /.../ No one seemed to notice that Toduță and I had a lot of language affinities. I was aware of this, but I am not sure if Toduță was, too. Another important moment for me was Drăgoi's musical work. I was studying at the Conservatoire when maestro Surlașiu brought us a chorus by Drăgoi, perhaps one of the easiest ones: *Lae Chioru', sus la crâșmă-n Dealul Mare, de trei zile-i cu soboru'* (suggested English translation of title: *Blind Nicholas has been drinking for three days up at the barrelhouse in Dealu Mare*). I was already familiar with *Năpasta* (suggested English translation of title: *The Bane*), *Kir Ianulea*, *Divertisment rustic* (suggested English translation of title: *Rustic Divertimento*), though only as a spectator. On that occasion, as I was singing the notes of that simple choral piece (which, however, used a completely different harmonic language than that of the pieces I knew), I was impressed to such a degree, that this influenced my subsequent compositions" [6, p. 136].

If Toduță's music influenced Tudor Jarda's modal thinking, Drăgoi's music, on the other hand, instilled in him a taste for the natural, for the genuine, for an elegance sprung from simplicity. These features were promptly pointed out and appreciated by the critics. Doru Popovici [4, p. 192] noted the fact that "his artistic temperament leans towards a harmonic vision with simple, diatonic progressions, and very clearly outlined tonal functions", while Dan Buciu [1, p. 37], in a eulogistic tone, emphasized: "Upon close inspection of the maestro's score, the keen musicologist will discover a genuine guide to modal writing. /.../ The analyst

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<sup>28</sup> In 1939, on the occasion of the festivities that took place in Blaj (*author's note*).

will be amazed to discover how this wizard of the modal world handles the entire arsenal of specifically modal chords with an ability utterly devoid of artifice: open fifth chords, harmonies based on fourths or fifths, compact *clusters* or near clusters (tone-missing), sound canvases constructed in a variety of manners and, what is amazing, these harmonic progressions evolve with a disarming naturalness, reuniting in a homogeneous whole, characterized by an impeccable logic".

Whether he draws on authorized collections (compiled by T. Mârza, V. Medan, I. Szenik, Fl. Prajea, etc.) or he "stylizes" folk melodies from the repertoire of certain popular singers of folk songs (Maria Precup, Maria Peter, Maria Marcu, Dumitru Sopen, Gheorghe Turda), composer Tudor Jarda had one aim only: not to distort the purity of Romanian folklore through the use of scholarly procedures. The Transylvanian folk music from the regions of Cluj, Bihor, Năsăud and Sibiu resulted in the compilation of three reference volumes (along with a *Bihor Suite*): *Coruri pe versuri populare* (suggested English translation of title: *Choruses Based on Folk Verse*), Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1964), *Zece coruri* (suggested English translation of title: *Ten Choruses*), Gh. Dima Conservatoire, Cluj, 1971, *Pe-un picior de munte* (suggested English translation of title: *On a Mountain Foot*), (The Cluj County Center for the Coordination of Folk Creation and Artistic Mass Movement, 1973).

Out of this entire picturesque palette, *Mă luai, luai* (suggested English translation of title: *I Am on My Way*) from the volume of the *Ten Choruses*, remains a compositional model, about which composer Dan Buciu wrote: "anyone reading for the first time such a harmonic beginning would find it difficult to imagine the high degree of polyphony in the middle section, which would bring elements of invertible contrapuntal writing, strict and free imitations in the four parts, removed from the strictly harmonic texture to which it was 'confined' in the beginning, where the melodic line of the soprano was followed by harmonic canvases subtly transformed in a continuous evolution" [1, p. 37].

**Example 1:** Tudor Jarda – *Mă luai, luai*, bars 1-4 (harmonic writing)

Lento

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Mă lu-ai, lu - ai — mă lu-ai, lu - ai

Mă lu-ai, lu - a - iu Joi de di - mi-nea - ță Sus pe la fă - na - ță

Mă lu-ai, lu - a - iu Joi de di - mi-nea - ță Sus pe la fă - na - ță

**Example 2:** Tudor Jarda – *Mă luai, luai*, bars 19-25 (polyphonic writing)

S.

A.

T.

B.

*mf*

De jos o lu - ai, de jos o lu - ai De colb o su -

*mf*

De jos o lu - ai, de jos o lu - ai, De colb o su - flai

De jos o lu - ai Și-n sân o

De jos o lu - ai Și-n sân o

*f*

flai Și-n sân o bă - gai Floa - rea

*f*

În sân o bă - gai, Floa - rea bu - ci - na - ră,

*f*

bă - gai Floa - rea bu - ci - na - ră, Floa - rea bu -

bă - - - gai

S. bu - ci - na - ră Mun - ții tre - mu - ra - ră

A. Floa - rea bu - ci - na - ră, Mun - ții tre - mu - ra - ră

T. - ci - na - ră, Mun - ții tre - mu - ra - ră

B. Floa - rea bu - ci - na - ră Mun - ții tre - mu - ra - ră

In the second volume of his book *Opera românească* (suggested English translation of title: *The Romanian Opera*) [2, p. 222], Octavian Lazăr Cosma formulates an objective opinion on the music of the composer from Cluj: "The folk song of peasant stock is used with skill, denoting a deep understanding on Tudor Jarda's part. He will generate multiple and diverse nuances or contrasts in the description and presentation of country folks. Thus, the composer manages to paint genuine pictures of country life".

### 3. Stylistic positioning

Tudor Jarda's personality stands out among the representatives of the Cluj school of composition primarily by consistently relating to the authentic layer of the Romanian folklore. But what distinguishes him even more is his attitude towards this source of inspiration, reflected in his constant preoccupation with preserving its expressive aura. No other compartment of his oeuvre proves this tendency more clearly than his choruses. His art consists in the craftsmanship with which he transposes the elements of an essentially linear folk music into polyphonic writing. It is commendable that the musician never fell into the trap of sterile contrapuntal exercise, nor ever gave in to the temptation of proving by all means that the Romanian folk song can easily withstand grandiose polyphonic treatments. Naturalness and simplicity govern his entire choir music, and his fellow musicians did not hesitate to praise his worthiness in the press. The laudatory words that composer Dan Buciu [1, p. 37] used in the "Muzica" Journal to describe Tudor Jarda's entire oeuvre remain a confirmation and an important bibliographical landmark for all those who show an interest in

the study of the composer's music: "The Cluj composer is, undoubtedly, one of the great maestros that choral composition gave to Romanian music history and, what is both remarkable and significant, the recognition of the undisputed worth of his oeuvre came very quickly. It may be said that each of Tudor Jarda's works was embraced by singers and audience as soon as it came out. Such a combination of value and popularity is, we must admit, very hard to imagine, for it arouses in us fellow musicians noble (albeit friendly) envy! What secret does Tudor Jarda hold, what unfathomed alchemies does he manoeuvre in order to give birth to works of such worth which are, moreover, immediately loved by conductors, choir singers and audience alike? /.../ Everything that the Cluj composer accomplished bears this seal of naturalness, into which he melted together his scholarly musical art (displayed in the most innocent and... natural way imaginable) and the typically Romanian modal sensibility. It is as if his works have never suffered the 'throes of birth', or as if they were born at the beginning of time, like the earth's soul from which they extract their unmistakable sap and aromas. The keen researcher will always have asked the rhetorical question: what is the secret of these true gems, of these small choral masterpieces? If this secret truly exists, it must be sought in the covert alliance that Tudor Jarda struck between the high European musical technique (which he mastered to the point of perfection) and this unmistakable spirit, hidden for centuries in the depth of the secret nooks of the Carpathians, where it has survived for millennia. His credit lies in the fact that he found the ideal catalyst for the wonderful chemical reactions that emerged from the hand of the unparalleled musical alchemist that he was!"

Compared, in terms of choral accomplishment, with his two contemporaries from Cluj – Sigismund Toduță and Max Eisikovits (whose musical works are characterized by the Baroque contrapuntal thinking of fugue and choral type, respectively), Tudor Jarda may be considered a classic in terms of his compositional techniques, and at the same time a Romantic who was close to the ideals of the national school composers, if we take into consideration the author's preoccupation with folklore and modal harmonic colours. Toduță's choruses are undoubtedly dominated by the polyphonic thinking of Baroque and Renaissance origin, which sometimes oppresses and shackles the elasticity of the Romanian folk melody, but at the same time aims at obtaining certain sophisticated, heavily expressive harmonies. Likewise, in Eisikovits' choruses one may distinguish the marks of an essentially imitative polyphonic thinking which sometimes betrays the fact that the music was conceived with the aid of the piano. Meanwhile, Tudor Jarda's choruses, without ignoring the established contrapuntal procedures, are free from any abuses related to the speculative imitative techniques. In his music

it is the horizontal-melodic factor that dictates, while the harmonic-polyphonic treatment only represents a process by which the melody is integrated into an adequate context, which should not alter the essentially modal character of folk music. Paradoxically, the compositional outcome is not monotonous, simplistic music. Here one encounters genuine moments of polyphonic writing, which occur as elements of contrast, emphasizing the climaxes through canonical imitations or *strettos*. However, it is the free, brief imitations, the ison (pedal note), the chordal writing, a broad palette of procedures in tune with the folk music's means of "accompaniment" that prevail.

#### 4. Conclusive ideas

It is certain that Tudor Jarda is not an innovator or avant-gardist as far language or writing techniques are concerned. His creative effort may be placed on a par with Janáček's Moravian songs and Kodaly's Hungarian songs arrangements. With the simplest of means (comparable perhaps with the handling of line and colour in naïve painting), the author achieves each time highly efficient, clear, and pure sound effects. It is through this that he distinguishes himself in the field of composition on a national level, pursuing his own path in the choral use of Romanian folk music. His simplicity does not stem from a limitation of the resources of expression and technique, but rather from a very clearly formulated aesthetic option, that is, from an assumed aesthetic *credo*.

(English version by Bianca Țiplea Temeș)

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