

## Felicia Donceanu – The cycle of lieds

### *Three songs for Til* on lyrics by George Călinescu

ELIZA-PARASCHIVA IRINA SOLOMON

„George Enescu” National University of Art, Iași  
ROMANIA\*

*Poetry is a liturgy, a ceremonial implemented into  
life, without getting confused with it.*

George Călinescu

**Abstract:** Born on Moldavian soil, on January 28, 1931, in Bacău, the composer Felicia Donceanu completed her musical studies at the “Ciprian Porumbescu” Conservatory in Bucharest, under the high supervision of some already established personalities of Romanian music. She composed for various genres, from instrumental theater, children's music, to chamber music, stage music, vocal-symphonic, choral, thus exhibiting, with exquisite skill, her mastery of laying down the notes on the musical scale. With a special love for Romanian poetry and literature and beyond, Felicia Donceanu dipped her writing pen in ink to give voice to her music and through the power of her own words. Authentically feeling this vein of poetic art, she also stood out with texts dedicated to various choral works of Romanian composers. She wrote scripts for various musical-choreographic performances, or radio dedicated, and with her painting talent she gave life to illustrations in children's books. As for the admiration that Felicia Donceanu gives to the distinguished man of culture, George Călinescu, it is drawn in two directions, holding a profound respect for the originality of the personality and the works of this illustrious representative of Romanian culture and literature, who ravished souls and became a source of inspiration, both for the young students of the Faculty of Letters and for people of culture in general. It is not surprising that Felicia Donceanu found in the creation of the poet George Călinescu a never-ending source of inspiration. In 1964, the cycle *Three songs for Til* was born, including the lieds: *The Steps*, *The Leaf* and *The Living Water*. It is based on the love poem structured and rendered in three different forms from a poetic and compositional point of view. Felicia Donceanu thought of the three lieds, in a “suite in pre-classical style: *gavotte* (*The Steps*), *saraband* (*The Leaf*) and *courant* (*The Living Water*)... each of them being doubled by meanings close to popular creation... in the first one, the game..., in the second one, the romance (with depressive, chromatic accents) and in the third one, the *enchantment*” (Constantinescu, 1966, p. 24). The musical interpretation of the poems is not a simple metaphorical game, the musical character of the poems, in general - far from being just an ornament - being part of the act of creation necessary for a fair reception, because it is created in a certain mood and a special tension of tone, and the reader or listener will have to perceive it in the same tension and texture. The quality of the sound, the form and the point of crystallization

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\* solomon.eliza@yahoo.com

of the feeling make up an act of creation and not a borrowing, made by the poet or performer, from life. Poetry is the intimate form of creation, the acquired vocal timbre that identifies itself entirely with the musicality of the content.

**Keywords:** Felicia Donceanu, *lied*, analysis, poetics, performance.

## Portrait

Born on Moldavian soil, on January 28, 1931, in Bacău, the composer Felicia Donceanu completed her musical studies at the “Ciprian Porumbescu” Conservatory in Bucharest, under the high tutelage of already established personalities of Romanian music, such as Mihail Jora, George Breazul, Ioan D. Chirescu, Paul Constantinescu, Nicolae Buicliu, Mircea Basarab etc.

The results of the work did not take long to appear. These materialized in articles and chronicles in the magazines like *Muzica*, *Contemporanul*, *Munca Azi*, but also in conferences, lectures, concert-lessons and radio broadcasts. For years in a row, she was awarded the prizes of the Union of Composers and Musicologists from Romania (1983, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1993, 1996, 1997). At the same time, she was honored with the *Order of Cultural Merit* (Ordinul Meritul Cultural), 1<sup>st</sup> class (1981) and with the “George Enescu” Award of the Romanian Academy (1984).

She composed for various genres, from instrumental theater, children's music, to chamber music, stage music, vocal-symphonic, choral, thus exhibiting, with refined skill, her mastery of laying down the notes on the musical scale. With a special love for Romanian poetry and literature - and not only that -, Felicia Donceanu dipped her pen in ink to give voice to her music and through the power of her own words. Authentically feeling this vein of poetic art, she also stood out with texts dedicated to various choral works of Romanian composers, she wrote scripts for various musical-choreographic performances, or radio dedicated, and with her painting talent she gave life to illustrations in children's books.

## Introduction

“How could I not feel privileged when the lyrics nestle in my soul, linger in my mind, imprint their rhythm on my breath? When I am surrounded by the poetic aura, do I dare too much by saying ... I was chosen by it ... ? Conquering me, poetry gives itself to me, obeys me; at least for the moment, I have to think that only me. Then creating music becomes a necessary action!” Here are the wonderful words with which the composer Felicia Donceanu characterizes her creative spirit and love for poetry in the article named after her in the *Muzica* (Music) magazine, signed by the musicologist Cristina Sârbu (1992, p. 60).

As for the admiration that Felicia Donceanu gives to the distinguished man of culture, George Călinescu, it is drawn in two directions, holding the

profound respect for the originality of the personality and works of this illustrious representative of Romanian culture and literature, which ravished the souls and became a source of inspiration, both for the young students of the Faculty of Letters and for people of culture in general.

It is not surprising that Felicia Donceanu found in the creation of the poet George Călinescu a never-ending source of inspiration. In 1964, the cycle *Three songs for Til* was born, including the lieds: *The Steps*, *The Leaf* and *The living water*, which is based on the love poem structured and rendered in three different forms from a poetic and compositional point of view. Felicia Donceanu organized the three lieds in a “suite in pre-classical style: *gavotte* (*The Steps*), *saraband* (*The Leaf*) and *courant* (*The Living Water*) ...”, each of them being doubled by meanings close to popular creation ... in the first one, the game..., in the second one, the romance (with depressive, chromatic accents), and in the third one, the enchantment” (Constantinescu, 1966, p. 24).

Of course, the proportions of the approach for each individual structure are moderate, the priority being to preserve the unitary thinking of the cycle, both from a formal and a stylistic point of view.

### **The lied *The Steps***

A symbolic element of fulfilled love, of the couple's happiness, *the steps* become - in the poem with the same title – a pretext for the composition of a “small idyllic scene, graceful like Persian miniatures” (Micu, 1979, p. 54).

Whether the lover's walk is *gentle* or *hasty*, it is recognized by the lyrical self, in love, in every circumstance: *when the frightened lizard jumps through the cracks / when the spring sings under the stones, / when the squirrel gnaws its broken peanuts, / when a night moth crashes into the lamp* or, when it appears out of nowhere in the path, the hail, the rain, the lightning - in a word - the universe itself would be against it. The lyrical self would be the only one who would recognize her footsteps. Consumed by the fire of love, he would jump to meet his beloved, he would wipe her face wet from the rain, because he is the only one who can hear and understand her step, the emotion, the joy of seeing her again.

The poem, made up of 9 distichs with strong pastel notes, is loaded with the harmony of the dactylic rhythm merged with the anapestic one, and the musicality created by the paired rhyme has the variable measure of 12-14 syllables.

#### ***The Steps***

by George Călinescu

Through the o-pen gate when you slip tip-toe, (13)

~ \_ ~ \_ ~ \_ ~ \_ ~ \_ ~ \_ ~ \_  
Thief-like if you stepped // I'd still feel your foot-steps, O Til. (12)  
~ \_ ~ ~ ~ \_ ~ \_ ~ \_

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From the thou-sands of tones that fill the u-ni-verse,	(13)
I i-mme-dia-tely re-cog-nize the pre-ci-pi-tate walk.	(12)
So, out of fear, the li-zard jumps through the cracks,	(14)
And hi-d-den un-der the stones from the whi-stle sings the spring,	(14)
Or the chip-munk gnaws bro-ken pea-nuts in its teeth,	(14)
And a night moth cra-shes into the lamp.	(14)
It's an i-ne-ffa-ble rus-ting // a drop in the wet win-dow,	(13)
A gen-tle flight that I a-lone hear.	(13)
If the storm hugged you on the road,	(12)
Un-fur-ling your hair in the air like smoke,	(13)
If the earth howled with hail and rain,	(13)
And the ben-ding trees would hin-der you,	(14)
If it long thun-dered through the huge clouds,	(12)
I would still re-cog-nize you imme-dia-tely by the steps.	(13)
I would come out your way to wipe your wet face,	(12)
For I a-lone can hear your gen-tle walk...	(12)

What is particularly attractive about this poem is the subjective lyricism. The strong confessional mood is spoken in the first person through the repetition of the adverb *alone*, which reinforces the role of uniqueness of the lover, and the verbs *recognize*, *fly*, *hear*, or expressions *I would recognize you*, *I would go out*, *I would wipe*, in the present simple, conditional or infinitive time.

If the present simple shows a certain, real action, giving an objective mood to the expressed feelings, the conditional suggests a hypothetical situation, an imagined lyrical experience *If it long thundered through the huge clouds*, */ I would still recognize you immediately by the steps*, and the infinitive, in the lyrical text, marks an imaginary plane, passing from the real dimension to the ideal one. *I would come out to wipe your wet face*.

The invocation of the beloved one, by direct address, by the familiar short name of *Til*, derived from *Otilia*, becomes a lyrical monologue, a genuine plea for love. In the atmosphere of this invocation, the composer Felicia Donceanu creates through an *Allegro tempo* a diaphanous music, which offers - through the writing lacking density - the possibility of contouring and developing the sounds in all their complexity. From a formal point of view, she views *The Steps* in the manner of the tripartite lied, in the form ABA<sub>v</sub> with a concluding role.

The four measures of the introduction expose the sound material - from the second secondary part (b) of the first period - through a simple rhythmic-melodic combination, with melodious sonority, intensely suggestive in the direction of the approaching steps.



Fig. 1 Felicia Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 1. *The Steps*, mm. 1-6

The entering of the voice keeps the same continuity of *tip-toe* steps. The vocal speech, devoid of complexity, is closely linked to the harmonic pillars that mark the main beats, above which the composer uses with great elegance the values of the quaver and the repetitive crotchet that, through their simplicity, manage to create a unitary whole loaded with suggestion and color.

The attack of the transition notes on the consonant *Th* – *Through the open gate*, it does not have to be a hard one, because the pause necessary for the emission holds in the foreground of the articulation of the consonant *g*, whose means of formation is determined by the interruption of the air flow (in our case through the closeness of the tongue as a result of its pronunciation), which causes the pressure difference between the pulmonary air and the external air to increase, thus preparing the sudden release of air.

Apart from the motivation of the contextual action of the poetic text, the composer inserts the indication *sempre mp* - in the knowledge of phonological notions that she skillfully uses - creating natural and authentic sound effects. Yet another proof of the depth, interest and love with which she treats the poetic language.

The second part of the first period captures an extremely interesting action of the composer.



Fig. 2 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 1. *The Steps*, mm. 13-20

The intention of the composer to highlight the first two lines by repeating them, brings in a musical plan, a different treatment from the previous one. If in the first exposition the soloist had the primacy of building the sound frame – putting the accompaniment in the background suggesting the trail of an echo through the occasional doubling of the vocal score – in the second exposition the accompaniment is enriched with new functions. The role of dubbing is taken over by the vocal melody, while the accompaniment is assigned the first solo score by its transition from the second plan to the main one. The aspect is highlighted by the moments when the musical discourse of the piano starts on an individual level, being later hummed by the voice, but also in the moments of vocal silence, when the piano continues its melodic discourse with the same overflowing mastery from the beginning.

Contrasting from a metrical point of view, the second part (B<sup>-</sup>B<sub>v</sub>) of the lied *The Steps* presents a dynamism of the musical discourse through repeated changes of the binary, the ternary meter and vice versa. It is an interesting and intelligent means of processing the sound material, which preserves the melodic simplicity and, at the same time, capitalizes on the *solo* speech in all the complexity of the creative process.



Fig. 3 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 1. *The Steps*, mm. 20-21 → 33

This musical dynamism, so necessary for the authentic rendering of the poetic text loaded with the rapid and continuous actions of the small creatures - the lizard, the squirrel, the night moth -, forces the interpreter to a marathon of diction, which, although it seems to raise no problems at first glance, it turns out to be one of the most difficult moments of the lied due to the speed of respiratory coordination and that of the correct, deep articulation of the words. If these parameters are not executed correctly, the performer has every chance of producing unintelligible audio speech to the audience. The resumption of the same musical material (B<sub>v</sub>), brings variations at the level of metrical alternation, but also at the poetic level, still maintaining its prosodic continuity brought, this time, in the sphere of nature and its phenomena - the storm, the hail, the rain, the trees, the lightning.



The end of the lied takes place in the same atmosphere from the beginning. The sequential processing of the accompaniment identical to that presented in the second exposition of the first part (*Through the slowly open gate...oh, Til*), but also the melodic variations of the voice, complete the musical discourse in the same intense experience of the recognisability of the loved one's movements... *I would come out your way to wipe your wet face / For I alone hear your gentle walk.*



Fig. 4 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 1. *The Steps*, mm. 47-48→53-57

“George Călinescu's poetry has the nature of the Platonic shadow - concrete, without a real materiality, whose dimension is not the perceptible one, and with an appearance that gives only a hint to the essence beyond.” (Duță, p. 60.)

### The lied *The leaf*

“Călinescu adopted - following the example of Paul Valéry - absolute discipline, repressed his temperament and opted for poetry with a classical structure, therefore for an extremely coercive formula. He forced himself to write on given themes, to shackle his sensibility to predetermined rhythms, to experiment with the most uncomfortable versification systems, to practice didacticism and to cultivate gnomism.” (Micu, 1979, p. 69.)

His poem, *The Leaf*, was published in *Gazeta literară* VI (*Literary Gazette*), no. 48 on November 26, 1959, and then included in the volume *Lauda lucrurilor* (*Praise to things*), 1963. Structured in 7 quatrains with cross-rhyme, with a measure of the verses varying between 6-7 syllables and an anapestic rhythm, the tableau reproduces the thrill of the beginning of autumn, with the leaves that always hit the window and turn into a pile under the tree, with the sadness, with the melancholy of the end of time, of the season, so authentically rendered by the title loaded with symbolism.

*The Leaf*

by George Călinescu

From the leaves that kept to-day	(6)
~ _ ~ ~ ~ _	
Bum-ping in the win-dow,	(7)
_ ~ ~ _ ~ _ ~	
Fall-ing in the pi-le un-der tree,	(6)
~ _ ~ _ ~ _	
I put one in your book,	(7)
~ _ ~ _ ~ ~ _	
Turn-ing red-ish,	(7)
Like a lord-ly tis-sue,	(6)
With threads of fi-re-y coal	(7)
That still spar-kle.	(6)
It's soft like sa-tin,	(7)
And like a dumb mouth	(7)
That cross-ing the cheek	(7)
On your eye lids it kiss-es.	(7)
Like in a shell	(6)
Your hear the roar-ing sea,	(7)
In my sheet of fi-re	(6)
The leaves fall with a rus-tle.	(7)
Hear the soft rus-tle,	(7)
Their gen-tle sigh,	(6)
When through the gar-den	(7)
Are pushed out by a leg.	(6)
Or when the wind drives them a-way	(7)
On roads and in ci-ties,	(7)
Sing-ing across the Earth	(7)
Im-mense pre-ludes.	(7)
O // Til // I put in your book	(7)
A leaf of at-las,	(6)
By which from afar	(7)
I ca-ress your cheek.	(6)

Poetry springs from emotion in front of nature, of life. In general, Călinescu's lyric is structured in its entirety "in concentric circles that descend into the depths: the eternal cosmos, the ephemeral man, the harmonizing eros, the glorifying art" (Duță, p. 58).

It is a continuous praise of things, nature, plants and animals, which is born from the conception of the uniqueness of matter, of universal harmony, of



cosmic becoming, in which man becomes an ideal synthesis despite his ephemerality.

The music of the falling leaf is conceived by the composer in the form of descriptive soundscapes, structured in 6 sections. It achieves a dominant expressive power through color and rhythm. The whole score revolves around the idea of faithfully rendering the moment described, with all its implications and symbolic references.

Section I, preceded by the three introductory measures of the piano, brings to light a first picture of late autumn, which blows into the window the few leaves that have not yet reached the pile of trees. The desire to stop time in place determines the man to gather between the pages of a book one of the special leaves, which is raised to the rank of *royal tissue*.



Fig. 5 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 2. *The Leaf*, mm. 1-6

The slightly lively tempo requires increased attention to the rhythmic precision of execution, being one of the primary elements of the expressive outline of the action. One can easily see the correlation between the falling leaf and the descending musical march, but also the high percentage of use of the dotted rhythm that reproduces the manner - in steps and slightly swaying - of the leaf falling. The close connection with the exceptional values of triolets prints an extra motricity and dynamism of the moment.

The same importance of the rhythmic motive also marks the accompanying plan. The voice and the piano intertwine, depending on the case, by the simultaneous or progressive support of the musical discourse, to create a whole of the same idea.

The way the lyrical self relates to the leaf, the detailing of the sensation offered by its caress, soft as satin, gives consistency to the poetic message, and the likening of the last gesture of touching the leaf to the idea of a kiss that it offers once it reaches the eyelids, highlights in the second section the romantic side of the lyrical self.



Fig. 6 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 2. *The Leaf*, mm. 16-17→19-20

This state of contemplation is also encouraged by the indication *poco rallentando* which allows the music to unfold in a more settled manner, conducive to the stated situation of contemplation and dreaming. Also, the entire musical discourse is approached in a simpler, more airy manner, due to the reduction of the accompanying density, the exclusion of dotted rhythm formulas, in favor of those belonging to the divided rhythm, but also the use of a language loaded with linguistic meaning. The word, the unfolding tonality reproduce the interiorization, the intimacy, being emphasized by the softness of the vowels through which the sound frame is outlined.

From an interpretive point of view, it is essential to perceive the *legato* as a means of creation, not just as a tool of compositional technique. Phrases must be thought of in the length of two lines, and that inner *legato* of the moment, permanently preserved and driven energetically in a neat way and without brutal accents.

The appearance of the generative motif for the lied at the end of the phrase (mm. 20-21), refers to a type of *leitmotif* of falling leaves, which brings the idea of ephemerality back to the fore.

Section III reveals the restlessness, the inner commotion established once with the thought that another sheet of fire - which refers to the pages of life that turn simultaneously with the passing of the years - is towards finality, finality signaled by the rustling of falling leaves. It is, in fact, an internal struggle of the self, of its non-acceptance and non-reconciliation with the time that passes so quickly, the tabs of life.



Fig. 7 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 2. *The Leaf*, mm. 21-23 → 26-27

This inner commotion, mostly expressed in the piano segment, increases in the sound substrate tensional harmonies, descriptive of the whole set of intense experiences. The dynamics of the moment is what gives consistency to the musical drama, even if this state of agitation, also indicated by the composer (*Poco agitato*) can create the impression - at first glance - of the need to sing *forte* the whole section. The dynamic fluctuations between *piano* – *crescendo* – *forte* and vice versa must be carefully thought out and played faithfully. In order to create a musical tension, we must start from the vocal minimum, thus ensuring the increase in intensity, the coloring of the musical speech, but also the close, expressive rendering of the emotions experienced.

The 4<sup>th</sup> section returns to the original state of contemplation.

Fig. 8 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 2. *The Leaf*, mm. 27-28 → 30-32

It is extremely interesting to observe how the composer manages within the length of one measure - with anacrusis in our case - to reproduce the smooth rustling through multiple ways of constructing the musical language. The chromatic march is not chosen at random, but is intended to describe the sonority of the rustling, specially thought out from semitone to semitone, thus transmitting the sensation of the *smooth fall* of the leaf. It brings to sonority the dynamic musical plan, but also that of the word, of correct emphasis through diction. The dynamics of the term *rustling* emphasize the first part of the syllable - *rust*-, through the previous *piano* construction of the word *hear*, in contrast to the marking given by the *forte* emission of the first syllable *rust*-, followed by the emission of the melodic line in *decrescendo*, maintained until the end of the word.

As for the pronunciation, the construction *hear the soft rustle*, the fricative consonant -s-, brings the sonority related to the action, making the exaggerated pronunciation of the consonant s, an ideal means of coloring and sound reproduction of the word.

The resumption of the *leitmotif* in the simultaneity of the two plans - vocal and instrumental - on the verse *Their gentle sigh* sheds light on the theme

of cyclicity rendered through the process of falling leaves which is repeated again and again through another and another leaf, but also through that of temporality, which creates new beginnings, new experiences, of seasons, of life, of passing into non-existence.

Section V represents a variation of Section III, maintaining the same spirit of excitement, of inner tension: *Or when the wind drives them away / On the roads and in the cities,/ Singing across the Earth/ Immense preludes.*

The VI section encompasses the variation of the first two early parts of the lied, closing the circle with the same tableau of the leaf preserved between the tabs, in the memory of Til. This is how the ending moment of *The Leaf* lied takes shape.



Fig. 9 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 2. *The Leaf*, mm. 39-42 → 44-47

*The Leaf* remains an intellectualized, slightly Eminescu like romance. It is a disturbing variation on the theme of *fortuna labilis*, in which the poet tries, through a superior-philosophical understanding, a consoling peace. A symbol of ephemerality, the leaf pressed between the pages of a book remains the only evidence of unforgiving time, it is the messenger of a nostalgic love about to set, a testimony of passing, be it ephemeral.

### The lied *The Living Water*

“Călinescu’s lyricism thus twists itself painfully, darkened by philosophical ‘melancholy’, in a hidden reason of existence, towards an unknown but continuous meaning, nurturing the desire to conquer new creations and erect monuments, to leave testimonies of the passage.” (Duță, p. 60)

The poem *Otilia’s Hair* is a portrait made with Asian pictorial means, to which is added a mini-portrait, a caricature. The poem was obtained by cutting out the second half of the third line and the entire last line of each stanza and juxtaposing them. The result was a “kind of *libretto* - the author states - that is sung on oriental music (*Your hair Otilia / Dark like vanilla*)”.

The metaphor *Living water* acquires multiple valences in Călinescu's poem: aphrodisiac liquor, invigorating strength (fr. *l'eau de vie*) or apotropaic role of the living water that resurrects the dead. In fact, it is a love poem, a unique, hidden, ritualistic way of expression through which it can deceive its inner tantic abyss: *Often in my house I shut myself up, / And weep like King David / For his son Avesalon / Hanging from the hair in the tree, / Thinking of Otilia, / With hair like vanilla.*

### ***The Living Water***

by George Călinescu

I of-ten lock my-self in my house,	(8)
~ _ ~ _ ~ _ ~ _	
And weep like King Da-vid	(8)
~ _ ~ _ ~ _ ~ _	
On his son A-ve-sa-lon	(8)
~ _ ~ _ ~ _ ~ _	
By the locks hang-ing in the tree,	(8)
~ _ ~ ~ ~ _ ~ _	
Think-ing of O-til-ia,	(8)
With hair like va-nil-la.	(8)
To cast her in-to gold of O-phir,	(8)
Plac-ing her on a por-phy-ry plinth,	(8)
Un-der an or-nate ceil-ing	(8)
Of Le-ba-non ce-dar wood?	(8)
Mount Zi-on is des-o-late!	(8)
Where is your tem-ple // So-lo-mon ?	(8)
Give me, oh, King, liv-ing wa-ter	(7)
Who rais-es the dead,	(7)
Be-cause I want to keep her clean,	(7)
For-e-ver un-harmed,	(9)
With the glo-ry of sing-ing	(7)
And the fresh-ness of the sea,	(7)
Spark-ling like a ru-by,	(8)
Fair as the li-ly,	(9)
Cool as a lake,	(7)
And the li-lac flow-er,	(7)
With de-wy cheeks,	(8)
Like ap-ples when it rains.	(7)
May the sweet breath re-main,	(9)
Like a le-mon peel,	(9)
And the em-balmed bo-dy,	(7)
Like a dri-ed grape.	(8)
Smooth foot in san-dal	(9)
To have the al-mond flesh.	(9)
And leave a wave be-hind	(7)
Of myrrh and san-dal-wood.	(6)
I want her to live for-e-ver,	(7)
Like the stars and the moon.	(7)

From the perspective of the poetic construction, *The Living Water* is an astrological poem with the rhyme pair *ophir / porphyry, clean/ sea*, etc., in the composition of which is included a variable measure of lines of 6-9 syllables, but also an interweaving of binary rhythms (trochaic), ternary (dactylic) and quaternary (peonic). Also the attention is drawn to the vocation of playing in pastiches, paraphrasing, even improvisations and – as in all Călinescu's poems – forays into mythology, as well as two elements highlighted in Călinescu's portraiture: hair and eyes.

Felicia Donceanu attributes to this poem a sonority appropriate to that of enchantment in the folklore, rendered most of the time through simple melodies, subject to the rhythm borrowed from that of speech.

The first part of the lied is opened by the two introductory measures of the piano which insert through an isorhythmic figure - repetitive and from the intonation point of view -, a kind of foreboding tension, above which the composer describes the pain felt by a poor lonely soul, whose intensity she compares to the biblical moment of the terrifying event experienced by King David upon learning of his son's death, Avesalon.



Fig. 10 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 1-3 → 6-7

This type of intonation, built on the basis of the sounds found in the composition of the D-A fifth interval, processed by repeating them with small variational insertions of meter or time, makes the melody seem always different, always new and full of interest, although the procedures of literary intervention are minimal. It is worth noting the mastery of rendering the textual load, as well as the way of imagining and presenting it soundly, with the word as the determining factor, with all its meaning and expressive power of emotional dominance. The way in which the words lead the rhythm through their natural accents, sends to the atmosphere of initiation, of a ritualistic evocation.

The permanent doubling of the voice in the right-hand accompaniment plane sustains and strengthens the vocal construction, giving it more sonorous charge, coloristic load and significance, while the continuous repetition of the



same group of three linked eighths in the left-hand plane maintains the tensed state of the speech.

The two moments attributed to Otilia change - for the moment - the sound frame and *parlando* modality of the initial unfolding.



Fig. 11 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 8-12

*Otilia*, for whom *in the secret dream he feels his soul bent*, is the generic name attributed to the ideal lover, an unmarried Virgin, *forever betrothed*. Otilia is a “Madonna Laura” to whom Petrarch dedicated so many sublime hymns. The love for Otilia becomes a love afflicted by too much purity. It is the ideal image of the beloved, a cult-angelic and paradisiacal image.

The poetic metaphor paints an angelic portrait of her *Vanilla-haired*. / *Sparkling like a ruby*, / *Fair as the lily*, / *With dewy cheeks*, / *And the embalmed body*, / *Smooth foot in sandal* / *To have the almond flesh*. / *And leave a wave behind* / *Of myrrh and sandalwood*; resorting to new pictorial means, through associations of ermine belonging to the vegetable kingdom (lily, lilac, apples, lemon, grapes, almonds), mineral (ruby, myrrh, sandalwood) or from nature (lac, sea).

The written form that the composer Felicia Donceanu approaches in order to describe Otilia's sound is that of the simple melody, loaded with musicality and discrete harmonic accents, the harmonic support of which is obtained through the second plan of the seventh chords. In order to preserve the sonority of the created atmosphere, the voice needs to be carried out with great ease above the notes, in a velvety and warm emission, which evokes the beauty of Otilia, but also the passionate desire of the lyrical self.

The next section of the lied returns to the initial mode of evocation, taking over some of the construction elements of the language of the first section, obvious especially in the rhythmic writing. The desire of the self to erect an altar to the loved person, *To cast her in gold of Ophir*, *Placing her on a porphyry plinth*, / *Under an ornate ceiling*, / *Of Lebanon cedar wood*? is played against the background of unfolding piano chords in fan shaped forms,

which interweave the harp-like timbre with the repetitive and persistent rhythm of evocation. The entire section ends with King Solomon's summoning moment!



Fig. 12 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 17-19

The biblical references that the poet skillfully inserts outline step by step the type of evocation presented in the poem, namely the religious one. The prayer to divinity through biblical characters denotes the complexity of poetic thinking, the vocation of playing in pastiches, paraphrasing, even improvisations, forays into mythology. At the same time, the desolation that existed at a certain time on Mount Zion is brought into context, when the First Temple - built by King Solomon, son of David - was destroyed during the reign of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II. As punishment, The Temple Mountain was desolated and used as a garbage dump.

The musical approach of the moment *Desolate is the Mount Zion* brings sonorities from the sphere of Byzantine singing, through the chromatics of the group of five sounds thought in a melismatic way, but also, the freedom of temporal dynamism of the phrase, given by the presence of indications of acceleration, respectively deceleration of the musical material, according to one's own feeling.

The next section presents, in the form of an incantation, the prayer to the king for the life-giving *Living Water* to keep the loved one forever unharmed. At the same time, the permanent march is highlighted within the musical discourse through the parallel fifths in the low register (fig. 13).

The repetition of the invocation formula highlights its incantatory character, while the accompaniment comments on the vocal discourse in the harmonic substratum. The way in which the composer Felicia Donceanu manages to capitalize on words is remarkable. Thinking about every single detail, from the accents; meanings and colors, she built an extremely complex

and intelligent musical material in an overall concept of simplicity. It is an added value given to one's own composition technique.

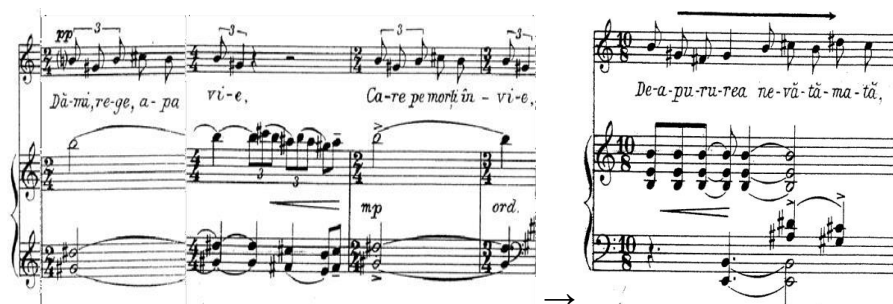


Fig. 13 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 23-25 → 27

Due to the multiple changes, transitions from one state to another, different addresses, it is important for the soloist to perceive the correct dynamic leadership and the plan of differentiation of the musical phrases. The fact that the score calls for the beginning of the phrase in *pianissimo* (*Give me, oh, King living water*) denotes the mystical character of the statement, which must remain – hereafter – one unknown to the crowd. The emission must be similar to the whispering of a secret, and regarding the optimal way of coloring the phrase, in the absence of the possibilities of dynamic contouring, an interpretive coloristic conception, realized through the prism of the vowels, is necessary. The acceleration indication of the passage *Because I want to keep her clean, / Forever unharmed*, but also that of gradual growth, reveal the ardor with which everything is done in Otilia's name.

The lied concentrates in two measures, both the construction and the imposing, hymn-like tonality of the musical material.



Fig. 14 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 28-29

The dynamic contrasts - the key elements of this passage - are what gives the final shape to the song. The simple rhythm, largely taken over by the accompaniment, emphasizes the intention to glorify the moment, and the

intonation restricted at intervals, on the stretch of 3m, easy to memorize, also supports this idea.

It is followed, in antithesis, from the point of view of the musical character, by a new melody full of momentum and brightness, describing Otilia.



Fig. 15 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 30-31 → 39-40

If before the descriptive moments included a maximum of two musical phrases, this time, their composition is expanding, from 2 to 6 phrases, being developed, augmented through repetition and rhythmic processing. It is one of the few moments of the lied where the voice has primacy, allowing it to unfold and be freed from the rhythmic subordination. The idea of contrast is also used, but this time, it is inserted at the level of the dynamic construction and not at the rhythmic-melodic level.

Re-entering the rhythm of the incantation *Her soft breath to remain* resumes the attributes that the lyrical self-wishes to be immortal.



Fig. 16 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living Water*, mm. 40 → 46-48

After a new attempt to subdue the divinity (*Give me, oh, King, living water...*) in the same atmosphere of incantation, this time rendered at the interval of a third, a last prayer that has a slightly imperative tone, echoes with

pathos; is the desire to acquire eternity: *I want her to live forever / Like the stars and the moon!*

The tableau is also outlined by a darker tonality that intercrops in the harmony pulsating, complementary rhythmic planes. They are the basis of the harmonic debate of the musical-vocal discourse.

The resumption of the introduction and, implicitly, the first section, outlines a conclusion based on the same principles presented in the incipit score of the lied, such as those related in particular to rhythm and to capitalizing on the expressive power of the word. Small variations are brought at the melodic level, through the sequential processing of the vocal score, but also harmonically. They are determined by following the route from the exuberant sonority to the one oppressed by sorrow, fatigue and hopelessness. A last trace of hope emerges in the thought towards Otilia, a thought that emphasizes the secondary plane of the melody, above which the accompaniment weaves at the quaver the main melodic line of the musical plane.

Fig. 17 F. Donceanu, *Three songs for Til*, 3. *The Living water*, mm. 61-63→68-70

The end of the lied respects the rule of cyclicity, of creation from a certain point and of finding finality at the same initial point. Bringing the part from the beginning of the poem back to the foreground capitalizes on this creed. It is easy to draw a parallel with the biblical phrase *From dust you were born, to dust you will return*.

## Conclusions

Art is undoubtedly a product of free creation, and the paroxysmal impulses of inspiration can sometimes bring surprising turns and constructions. Any of the ramifications of art must be framed in certain canons of wisdom, of good taste. Faced with a mixing of information whose target is to be original, the interpreter must have the necessary “weapons” to maintain his/her verticality in the face of the imposed technical-interpretive challenges. It is



necessary to juggle different types of emission, but it is essential to succeed in these artifices of the emission without altering the natural one, healthy for the vocal organ.

The informational, musical baggage of the artist, as well as the one acquired in the sphere of general culture, play an indispensable role in discerning the authentic, correct and authentic informational mass so necessary nowadays in the creation of the creative personality of the lyrical performer. At the same time, skill in approaching a contemporary musical repertoire, in our case the *lied*, is very important. The generative nucleus of the lied - Poetry - is based on sensitive intuition, on the play of emotional states, on imagination, on sensibility, on the impulses of reflection, using primarily verbal expression.

The verse means harmony, musicality. The music-poetry relationship is conditioned by deep psychological processes through the common element of rhythm and harmony. Poetry is music; through its intimate structure - it is an art of language, through word and metaphor - knowledge, through image and through the system of symbols that encompasses reality - it is the result of the description of the world and human inner life.

Musical interpretation of poems is not a simple metaphorical game. The musical character of the poems, in general, far from being just an ornament, is constitutive of the act of creation necessary for a fair reception, because it is created in a certain mood and special tension of tone, and the reader or listener will have to perceive it in the same tension and texture. The quality of the sound, the form and the point of crystallization of the feeling make up an act of creation, and not a borrowing, made by the poet or the performer, from life. Poetry is the intimate form of creation, the acquired vocal timbre that identifies itself entirely with the musicality of the content.

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