

Modern Approaches of the Orpheus Myth in Romanian Music. Tudor Feraru: *The Lyre of Orpheus* and Șerban Marcu: *orfeuridice*¹

Junior lecturer **Tatiana Oltean** Ph.D
(The “Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy, Cluj-Napoca)

Abstract

The present research brings into light two musical scores recently composed – *orfeuridice*², ballet for chorus and chamber ensemble written by Șerban Marcu and *The Lyre of Orpheus*, choreographic poem written by Tudor Feraru. The two composers are young members of the Transylvanian contemporary composition school, both disciples of Cornel Țăranu. The analytical and comparative approach highlights the particularities of musical language, structure and creative view towards the Ancient myth of Orpheus in the two works mentioned above. The research also focuses on the staging of the two works, comparing the choreographic perspectives of Melinda Jakab, who choreographed the two works, the particular use and significance of symbols and message involved both in music and dance.

Key words: *ballet, Orpheus, mythology, musical language, choreographic perspective*

The mythological hero Orpheus is linked to the history of classical music since the Renaissance. Composers have chosen this character as hero in musical works covering most of the genres, among them opera being the most preeminent. The birth of first operas (due to Peri, Caccini and Monteverdi, at the beginning of the 17th Century), Christoph Willibald Gluck and Ranieri de' Calzabigi's reform of the genre (1762, *Orfeo ed Euridice*), the first operetta (Jacques Offenbach, *Orpheus in der Unterwelt*, 1858), the first electronic music opera (Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, *Orpheus '53*, 1953) are peak moments in the history of the genre that are linked to the myth; Even a rock-opera bares his name: *Orpheus and Eurydice* by Alexander Zhurbin (1975), as well as musical films (*The Orphic Trilogy*, 1950, directed by Jean Cocteau and *Orfeo negro*, 1959, directed by Marcel Camus). The myth of Orpheus is widely spread in cantatas (Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Hector Berlioz, Gioacchino Rossini), tone-poems (Franz Liszt) and even lieder (Franz Schubert).

Regarding the history of dance, the Renaissance period hosts the myth in its first documented dance staged production: *The Celebration of Orpheus* (Milano, 1489)³. Great composers⁴ have been inspired by it in their ballet works:

¹ This work was supported by CNCSIS-UEFISCSU, project number PN II-RU 511/2010, as part of the postdoctoral research grant entitled *The avatars of the Orpheus myth in music history* (grant director: Tatiana Oltean).

² The particular use of small caps in the title and subtitles of the work is due to the literary source of Elena Maria Șorban's poems. The composer assumes the exact spelling of the literary source.

³ see also Tilde Urseanu and collab., *ISTORIA BALETULUI (THE HISTORY OF BALLET)* (Bucharest: Muzicală, 1967), p. 38.

Heinrich Schütz (the score was lost), Igor Stravinski, Henk Badings, Hans Werner Henze. Moreover, a revival of the myth has been taking place during the 20th Century, especially in the output of Igor Stravinsky. His ballets *Apollon musagète*, *Persephone* and *Orpheus* bear testimony to his fascination for Ancient Greek mythology.

At the same time, Romanian composers have highly valued the myth of Orpheus. There are few musical works based on the myth in the Romanian musical output, and nevertheless, they are of major impact and interest. One possible explanation could be the fact that Romanian composers are deeply bound to the Romanian folk mythology, centered upon fundamental myths as *Miorita* and *Manole, the Craftsman*. There have been some remarkable masterworks composed on Orpheus myth in the Romanian output: a comic opera by Marcel Mihalovici (*L'intransigent Pluton ou Orphée aux Enfers*, 1928) and an opera by Gheorghe Dumitrescu (*Orpheus*, 1977-'78), a cantata by Cornel Țăranu, based on lyrics by Romanian poet Cezar Baltag (*Orpheus*, for baritone and orchestra, 1984-'85).

As for the ballet Romanian works, the two scores that are subject to analysis in this paper are the first ones based on the myth⁵.

⁴ Here is a chronological list of ballet works based on the Orpheus myth: **B. Grassi**, *Orfeo*, 1631, **H. Schütz**, *Orfeo* (the score is now lost), 1638, **Fr. Deller**, *Orfeo und Eurydike*, 1763, **J-G. Noverre**, *Orfeo und Eurydike*, music by **J. Starzer**, 1763, **L. Henry**, *Orfeo*, 1821, music by **W.R. Gallenberg**, **F. de Bourguignon**, *La mort d'Orphée*, 1928, **H. Badings** – *Orpheus und Eurydike*, 1941, **I. Stravinski**, *Orpheus*, 1947, **P. Henry**, *Orphée*, 1959, **A. v. Miloss**, *Orpheus verliert Eurydike*, 1965, **H.W. Henze**, *Orpheus*, 1976. See Herbert Hunger, *LEXIKON DER GRIECHISCHEN UND ROEMISCHEN MYHOLOGIE: mit Hinweisen auf d. Fortwirken antiker Stoffe u. Motive in d. Bildenden Kunst, Literatur u. Musik d. Abendlandes bis zur Gegenwart*, 8. Erweiterte Auflage (Wien: Verlag Brueder Hollinek, 1988), p. 377.

⁵ Both works have been composed as part of a postdoctoral research grant entitled *Avatars of the Orpheus Myth in the History of Music*, funded by the Romanian National Council of Scientific Research in Universities (CNCSIS; grant director: Tatiana Oltean). The music scores have been published by the MediaMusica Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca and staged at the „Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy Studio Concert Hall on the 23rd of November 2011. The staging in one singular performance is also the reason for the similar instrumentation of the two ballets: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, strings quartet and percussion. The artists involved were students at the „Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy and dancers from the Hungarian Opera House in Cluj-Napoca, as well as members of the *Jubilate* Choir of St. Joseph Greek-Catholic Church conducted by Rodica Trandafir. The choreography of the performance was signed by Jakab Melinda. Tudor Feraru conducted the performance of both works.

The two composers, **Tudor Feraru**⁶ and **Șerban Marcu**⁷, are already well-known to the public ever since the last decade, each manifesting himself differently when it comes to expressing their creativity, although they are both disciples of Cornel Țăranu (preeminent leader of the Romanian school of composition and disciple of Sigismund Toduță): Tudor Feraru seems to show a deep interest in chamber instrumental genres, generally non-programmatic, while Șerban Marcu feels attracted to the vocal genres: choral, vocal and vocal-instrumental, as well as opera.

Tudor Feraru finds himself at his first encounter, as a composer, to the ballet genre, being at the same time the author of a chamber opera – *The Piano Teacher* (2008), based on a short-story by the Romanian novelist and great historian of religions Mircea Eliade. Conversely, Șerban Marcu has written ballet music before: the chamber ballet *Arahneea* (2006), witnessing a profound involvement into Greek mythology across his output (a vocal-instrumental tone-poem entitled *Filemon and Baucis*, 2001, and a chamber symphony, *Acteon*, 2007).

The following analysis will focus on comparative features concerning the two musical works mentioned above and, nonetheless, the two choreographic views: being completely free in their creative approach to the myth, the two composers chose different and highly original paths. For Tudor Feraru, the Lyre embodies Eurydice, Music and Creativeness at the same time. As central character, the Lyre is stolen by satyrs and kept captive in the Underworld, as well as the artist's reason to live and create. On the contrary, in Șerban Marcu's view, the Ancient myth is not fundamentally changed or aborted, but presented

⁶ The young Romanian composer **Tudor Feraru** graduated Composition and Orchestra Conducting at the „Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy in 2001 under the guidance of Cornel Țăranu and Petre Sbârcea. In 2003, he finalized a Masters Degree in Music at the University of Western Ontario, Canada, where he studied Composition under Omar Daniel. During 2004-2008 he has undertaken doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia, under the tutorship of Stephen Chatman. During these years, he taught Theory of Music, Harmony, Composition and Chamber music at the Universities mentioned above. At the same time he directed the Contemporary Music Ensembles at UWO and UBC. Since 2009, he teaches at the « Gheorghe Dima » Music Academy. See the Preface (written by Tatiana Oltean) of the general score *The Lyre of Orpheus* by Tudor Feraru, MediaMusica Publishing House, Cluj, 2011, p. IV.

⁷ Born in 1977 in Brașov (Romania), **Șerban Marcu** graduated the „Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca in 2001. During 1999-2000 he was participant at the Composition Courses in Český Krumlov (Czech Republic) under Marek Kopelent, Osvaldas Balakauskas, Vinko Globokar, Petr Kotik. He completed his doctoral studies in 2006 under the tutorship of Cornel Țăranu, with a thesis named *Some features of contemporary musical writing in vocal-instrumental works*. His output consists in songs, choral works, tone-poems, a miniopera, a chamber ballet and a chamber symphony. Șerban Marcu teaches Harmony at the “Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca. See Tatiana Oltean: Preface to *orfeuridice*, general score, MediaMusica Publishing House, Cluj, 2011, pp. IV-V.

in successive episodes that are „cut” and interpolated with *a cappella* choral interludes.

The ethos of the Ancient Greek Tragedy choir is not the only feature of this kind that the composer employs: significant in this regard are also the sonorities of Ancient Greek instruments as the lyre or the *kithara* (in the score it is the harp who embodies them) and *aulos* (the flute and the clarinet, which are at the same time personifications of the main characters –Eurydice and Orpheus, respectively), as well as modal constructions in horizontal, vertical and oblique postures based on perfect intervals as fourth and fifth, taking as a model the presumed structure of the Ancient *phorminx* tuning (*e-a-h-e*).

Concerning the architectural structure of the two works, one can identify features that both composers use and some particularities that are bound to the unfolding of the myth in each work. The bold subtitles of several episodes in the following table show the common parts of the myth that appear in both musical works:

<i>The Lyre of Orpheus</i> – Tudor Feraru	<i>orfeuridice</i> – Șerban Marcu
1. <i>Sunrise over the Olympian Forest</i>	1. <i>preludio</i> (choral)
	2. <i>i am orpheus, i am euridyce...</i> (choral)
2. <i>Orpheus and his Lyre</i>	3. <i>orpheus and eurydice</i>
3. <i>The stealing of the Lyre</i>	
4. <i>Orpheus’ Descent to the Underworld</i>	4. <i>if you were to come in hell...</i> (choral)
5. <i>Before the throne of Hades (dance of Hypnos and Thanatos)</i>	5. <i>orpheus in the Underworld</i>
6. <i>The Charming of Persephone (Orpheus’ Plea)</i>	
7. <i>Return and Punishment (the vanishing of the Lyre)</i>	6. <i>i do not know whether i belong to you</i> (choral)
8. <i>The silent wandering</i>	7. <i>orpheus’ death</i>

After having observed the unfolding of the episodes of both works, it may be concluded that in the first one, *The Lyre of Orpheus* by Tudor Feraru, there is a rather epic view of the story in which, excepting the first and the last episode, there is a „purple line” holding the action focused on the Underworld part of the myth (episodes 4 to7). In *orfeuridice* by Șerban Marcu, there is a more lyrical and poetic approach to the myth and, although one can undersee the focal points of the unfolding of the story, in episodes 3, 5 and 7, they are always interrupted by *a cappella* static moments of the choir. In spite of these particularities, the essential moments of the myth are to be found in both works: they are the love duet between the two lovers, the descent to the Underworld, Eurydice’s death and the wandering/death of Orpheus.

As a personification of Music itself, the Lyre of Orpheus in Tudor Feraru’s work is suggested by the sonorities of the harp, whereas Orpheus has

his own timbrality suggestion: the clarinet. In this way, the composer gives life to a love story through musical suggestion in the second episode of his ballet, using *stretto* imitation between the two instruments, as well as mirrored superpositions:

Ex. No. 1, Tudor Feraru, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, Episode 2: *Orpheus and his Lyre*, bars 37-42 (cl., hp.)

The journey of Orpheus from the happiest love story ever told up to his wandering in search of his lost inspiration and final death is musically expressed through the transgression from clarinet to cello and finally to bassoon.

Șerban Marcu's *orfeuridice* is based on two literary sources: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Books X and XI) and four poems by Elena Maria Șorban⁸. Moreover, the title and subtitles of his work are suggested by this last source. His genre option – ballet for choir and instrumental ensemble – reminds of the syncretic Ancient Greek Tragedy, as well as the spectacular French Baroque musical-theatrical performances, where voice, instruments, verse and movement were equally contributing to the artistic phenomenon. In his musical-dramaturgical approach, the composer prefers a much more poetic and static atmosphere, except the episode of Orpheus' slaughter by the hands of the maenads – a frantic dance based on a lydic scale, in rush tempo, featuring the

⁸ **Elena Maria Șorban** (n. 1960) is a musicologist, university professor at the Theoretical Faculty of the „Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca, where she teaches History of music and Gregorian paleography. Her main subject of interest is the Western liturgic music of medieval Transylvania, with published research in Germany and Poland. Since high-school period, she has a constant activity of writing poems, which were never published ever since. See Tatiana Oltean, Preface to *orfeuridice* by Șerban Marcu, general score, MediaMusica Publishing House, Cluj, 2011, p. V.

piccolo flute solo. The highlight of the grotesque element in this moment of the action, using the acute, rasping and in some extent wild sonority of the piccolo flute – an instrument from the family of flutes that embody Eurydice, draws an abrupt antithesis between Eurydice and the maenads, creating a sharp contradiction between the kindness of the first and the insane cruelty of the latter:

Ex. No. 2, Șerban Marcu, *orfeuridice, orpheus' death*, bars 308-309

Both works are structured according to a fine-tuned inner dramaturgy, based on musical principles like gradation and contrast, that guide the musical flow according to the epic unfolding of the myth. În Tudor Feraru's view, this particular use of gradation is rather in accordance to the meter growth and ungrowth of the meter and scale complexity, the latter being a succession of evergrowing harmonic fields that are at the root of the scales involved in the musical language of each episode. Naturally, after the fifth episode, the most

chromatic of all, follows the reversed succession of the same harmonic fields in the next four episodes, as it can be easily seen in the next table:

The image shows a piano score with two staves (treble and bass clef) illustrating eight distinct harmonic fields. Above the staves, the fields are numbered 1 through 8 and labeled: 1. tritone 1, 2. tetratonic 1, 3. pentatonic 1, 4. hexacord 1, 5. hexacord 2, 6. pentatonic 2, 7. tetratonic 2, 8. tritone 2. Each field is represented by a specific chord structure on the piano keyboard.

Ex. No. 3, Tudor Feraru, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, the gradation of harmonic fields of each episode

This kind of structure leads to a balanced architecture of the whole, having as symmetry axis the fifth episode (*Before the throne of Hades*), the main climax point of the work. It is a macabre dance filled with grotesque elements, energetic and spasmodic, and having the most chromatic musical structure:

The image displays a full orchestral score for the fifth episode of 'The Lyre of Orpheus'. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Percussion (Perc.), Harp (Hrp.), Violin 1 (Vl. 1), Violin 2 (Vl. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vcl.). The music is marked with 'cresc.' (crescendo) in several places, indicating a gradual increase in volume. The score covers bars 97 to 101.

Ex. No. 4, Tudor Feraru, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, Ep. 5: Before the throne of Hades, bars 97-101

As observed above, Șerban Marcu's *orfeuridice* is configured as an alternation of static choral episodes and lyric, poetic danced episodes. In other

words, vocal and instrumental sound are never superposed – this is the main contrast that stands at the roots of the work’s inner dramaturgy. There are two separate, distinct worlds – that of voice, of chanted word, and that of pure instrumental sound, of musical metalanguage.

Regarding the vocal – particularly choral – episodes, one can obviously see the symmetrical construction of chords, based on the same type of intervals – especially perfect fourths and fifths, in various chordal combinations:

25 ♩ = 60

S. Eu, Eu-ri - di - ce, eu, Eu-ri - di - ce,

A. Eu, Eu-ri - di - ce, eu, Eu-ri - di - ce,

T. Eu sunt Or- feu, Eu sunt Or- feu,

B. Eu sunt Or- feu, Eu sunt Or- feu,

Ex. No. 5, Șerban Marcu, *orfeuridice*, ep. 2, *i am orpheus, i am euridice...*, bars 1-5

As in Tudor Feraru’s work, the chromatic parameter is subject to contrast and structuring element in *orfeuridice*. Diatonic and chromatic language are valued symbolically. But, conversely to the former’s work, the chromaticism is not used as formal effect of gradation, having as main effect symmetry, but used as symbol of the Underworld, especially in the Underworld episode (there is also recognisable the use of the low range of the clarinet, large melodic intervals, tracing a sharp contrast to the high range of strings, that unfold in „chromatic clusters” that lead directly to the maenad’s dance:

166

Fl.

Cl. *pp*

Perc.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc. *poco cresc.*

Ex. No. 6, Șerban Marcu, *orfeuridice*, ep. 5, *orpheus in the underworld*, bars 167-169

Another element of contrast in Șerban Marcu's work is the constant balance between *giusto* and *rubato* that can be traced along the whole work. One final remark upon the particularity of musical language in *orfeuridice*: the use of monody and *unisono* in the choral parts, which divides progressively developing in dense – sometimes chromatic – chords, which depict a specific use of gradation.

As it concerns the two choreographic approaches of the ballets, it is worth observing that they are inscribed in the experimental area by the provocation assigned to choreographer Jakab Melinda itself: the one to produce two distinct choreographic views based on the same myth, starting from the expressive suggestion of each score. The two choreographies were put together in parallel, and the result is displayed both on the level of the stylistic and ideational identity of each ballet, as well as on the level of a homogeneity of the expressive solutions, on a *unity in diversity*-type of principle for the overall show.

The decision to present them within the framework of the same show led choreographer Jakab Melinda to putting the two works in balance – a perfect equilibrium between the particularity of the gestural expression, shaped on the sonorous expression of each distinct work, on one hand, and the unity of movement, message and construction of the artistic image in its complete whole, on the other hand. To put it differently, having at her disposal the students of the choreography class of the Cluj's Academy of Music and collaborators from the Hungarian Opera of the same city, Jakab Melinda created a unified show and integrated the two works within a homogeneous artistic act.

The two ideas functioning as a starting point in the revaluation of the myth are further presented.

The Lyre of Orpheus choreographic poem by Tudor Feraru exploits the musical expression directly according to the visual expression. The metaphor of the lyre as a symbol for Eurydice and eventually, of inspiration itself that provides meaning to the creator's existence, contains in itself the virtuality of the gestural expression necessary for the visually contextualised imagining of the myth: Eurydice IS the lyre.

On the other hand, the quasi-cyclical structure of Șerban Marcu's ballet is to be located also in its choreographic stance: according to Melinda Jakab's vision and starting from the title of the ballet – *orfeuridice*, Orpheus and Eurydice are represented as the statue of an embraced couple, enlivened by the Sculptor through the help of the lyre. Orpheus is heartbroken for the irreversible loss of Eurydice and dies, torn apart by the bacchante, but She returns from eternity in order to reunite with Orpheus, forever, in the realm of myth. The two lovers, driven by the sounds of the lyre kept in the Sculptor's hands, return to the initial image of the statue of the embraced couple.

The choir fulfills an important stage role within the choreographic vision of Șerban Marcu's ballet: in the picture of Eurydice's death, where she, according to the myth, is bitten to death by a snake, the chorists gradually

surround her, through wavelike motions of their arms – a gestural symbol for the snake. The moment of the fatal attack against the heroine is gesturally illustrated simultaneously with the musical gesture through the movement of each chorist's right arm oriented upwards, describing an incisive and "sharp" gesture of biting, stretched and united fingers, oriented downwards.

The choir is similarly used as an enlivened background. Around the chorists, placed on the entire surface of the stage, a moment of confrontation between Orpheus and The Sculptor takes place. The use of the human body as enlivened decor, in movement, is employed as a function of a gestural alliance for the show. In *The Lyre of Orpheus*, the same device is used through the dancers, in the episode where, after losing Eurydice, Orpheus desperately searches for her among shadows, evenly unveiling the head of each dancer.

The death of Eurydice is symbolized in the *orfeuridice* ballet by the gesture of The Sculptor who places a white veil on Eurydice's head (the overall outfit of the two protagonists is in white – a symbol of their love's purity). The final death of the nymph is similarly represented by the sudden pull of this veil off her head. However, in Tudor Feraru's ballet, the seeming death of Eurydice takes the shape of her being kidnapped by the satyrs. Here, the choreographer made use of a ballerina's body position resembling the instrument. The long hair of the Lyre represents its strings. In the love duet between Orpheus and The Lyre – a moment of maximum poetic weight of choreography – Orpheus "plays" his Lyre, in stylized movements of caressing the strings. The final death of The Lyre, which precedes the end of the ballet, is an episode of great dramatic intensity, since Orpheus is looking for her among the shadows, but is unable to find her. The choreographic execution is exceptionally made: the two lovers are always visible on the stage, looking for each other, but their "journeys" are thus conceived such as their gazes never meet.

By contrast to the choreographic approach in Șerban Marcu's ballet, where Orpheus is brought back to life – at least to a life in the realm of myth – by Eurydice, after he was torn apart by the bacchantes, in the visual conversion of Tudor Feraru's ballet, Orpheus is torn apart by the bacchantes in incisive and synchronic gestures in the direction of Orpheus (meaning, the bacchantes torn apart Orpheus without literally touching him). Orpheus breaks down with each "attack", encountering greater difficulty in rising up again. The end of the ballet exhibits the bacchantes in an act of "sucking", through regressive gestures, the vital breath from the hero's chest.

While in Tudor Feraru's *The Lyre of Orpheus* one can identify a choreographic vision closer to the epic concreteness of the myth, full of symbols and gestural expressiveness, in Șerban Marcu's *orfeuridice*, the choreographic concept tends more to abstracting, stylizing and lyrical poetry.

Bibliography

Acsan, Ion. ORFEU ȘI EURIDICE ÎN LITERATURA UNIVERSALĂ (ORPHEUS AND EURIDICE IN UNIVERSAL LITERATURE). Bucharest: Albatros, 1981.

Hunger, Herbert. LEXIKON DER GRIECHISCHEN UND RÖMISCHEN MYHOLOGIE: mit Hinweisen auf d. Fortwirken antiker Stoffe u. Motive in d. Bildenden Kunst, Literatur u. Musik d. Abendlandes bis zur Gegenwart, 8. Erweiterte Auflage. Wien: Verlag Brueder Hollinek, 1988.

Kapp, Reinhard. CHRONOLOGISCHES VERZEICHNIS (in progress) der auf Orpheus (und/oder Eurydike) bezogenen oder zu beziehenden Opern, Kantaten, Instrumentalmusiken, literarischen Texte, Theaterstücke, Filme und historiographischen Arbeiten

(<http://www.musikgeschichte.at/kapp-orpheus.pdf> , updated 22.06.2011)

Urseanu, Tilde, Ianegic, Ion, Ionescu, Liviu. ISTORIA BALETULUI (THE HISTORY OF BALLET). Bucharest: Muzicală, 1967.

Music scores

Tudor Feraru, *Lira lui Orfeu (The Lyre of Orpheus)*, choreographic poem. Cluj-Napoca: MediaMusica, 2011.

Șerban Marcu, *orfeuridice*, ballet for choir and chamber ensemble, lyrics by Elena Maria Șorban. Cluj-Napoca: MediaMusica, 2011.