THE SYMBOLISM OF THE MOUNTAIN IN THE EUROPEAN AND ROMANIAN SYMPHONIC CREATION

CASE STUDY: RICHARD STRAUSS - ALPINE SYMPHONY AND CSÍKY BOLDIZSÁR - THE MOUNTAIN TONE POEM

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ABSTRACT

Background: This analytical approach aims to accentuate the interconnections between two universes which are apparently in contradiction: ideal and pragmatic, or symbol and sound.

The mountain – viewed as a place of creative inspiration – represents a leitmotif of creation in most of the artistic fields. Thus, literature, visual arts and music give this symbol a historical anchor in the artistic movements of all eras.

Methods: In order to exemplify a possible way of interference between the two philosophical areas, we have chosen as a “contact unit” the symbol of the mountain, observing the intuition with which it was represented in Alpen Symphony by Richard Strauss and the tone poem The Mountain by Csíky Boldizsár.

In the compositional context of the twentieth century, Richard Strauss made a remarkable creation with a strong philosophical idea as a model of descriptive Programmatism.

In his work, the composer suggests the ascension of a traveler in a mountain climb that encounters, in his journey, places either protected by nature or dangerous. The whole journey is dominated by majestic symbols of life, nature, and, and resembles an initiatic journey through which the hero is challenged to push himself to the limits and evolve. Equally, this is an allegory of life.

On the summit, The Glacier, or The Storm are just some symphonic scenes with complex symbolic connotations that will be analyzed in this research through the connection with the componistic technique of the creator.
In a mysterious universe, the tone poem The Mountain by Csíky Boldizsár depicts the monumental landscape of the Transylvanian lands, the symbols of greatness, boundlessness and eternity. The intention of the composer is to raise a monument dedicated to the invincible human will, a force that drives explorers of unknown seas and lands, researchers of all mysteries, poets, psychologists, artists, to the eternal unknown.

In music, the composer uses an abstract language, anchored in modernity, using a whole arsenal of complex mixtures of chords, bartokian modes, non-imitative polyphony, mobile clusters, elements that serve the expression.

Results, Conclusions: Finally, this research aims to demonstrate, as a synthesis, how the tonal and modal languages manage to illustrate the connotations extracted from the symbol of the mountain.

Keywords: Mountain, symbol, Richard Strauss, Alpine Symphony, bartokian mods

INTRODUCTION

This analytical approach aims to accentuate the interconnection between two universes which are apparently in contradiction: ideal and pragmatic, or symbol and sound.

In order to exemplify a possible way of interference between the two philosophical areas, we have chosen the symbol of the mountain as a “contact element”, observing the intuition with which it was represented in Alpen Symphony by Richard Strauss and the tone poem The Mountain by Csíky Boldizsár.

The mountain – viewed as a place of creative inspiration – represents a leitmotif of creation in most of the artistic fields. Thus, literature [1], visual arts [2] and music give this symbol a historical anchor in the artistic movements of all eras.

Starting with this symbol, composers of European musical culture (from France, Germany, Russia etc.) made works with strong aesthetic resonance and high artistic expression.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, German music was under Wagnerian influence, but at the same time the post-romantic direction will be imposed in this context and it will be represented by Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Anton Bruckner, Hans Pfitzner, Alexander von Zemlinski, Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Thus, we can remark the reaction to the supersaturation of musical language from the late romanticism by returning to classical genres and forms.

METHODS: PART I: Richard Strauss - An Alpine Symphony

Richard Strauss was an emblematic personality of German musical culture at the beginning of the 20th century, who merged his conducting and composer careers. His creation is monumental, imagistic and philosophical, in perfect harmony with a complex compositional technique.

The symphonic poem is an important approach of Richard Strauss, because of his predilection for the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose literary creations turn into
essential symphonic works - Also sprach Zarathustra, A Life of Hero, Don Juan, Till Eulenspiegel, Don Quixote.

Richard Strauss achieves a dramaturgic implementation of an initiating journey, on the Alpine mountain peaks, from sunrise to the fall of the night. Moreover, Richard Strauss creates a real fresco / sonic reality of the Alps.

Night (Nacht) is the moment when we are introduced to an unknown and unforeseeable universe that symbolise darkness. „Psychologically this is the symbol of unconsciousness“ [3] . Compositionally, this is achieved with a minimum of thematic material, but with complex development techniques.

Even from the beginning, the generative melodic cell is transposed to a descending fifth by imitative polyphony, which will determine the accumulation of a cluster pedal. This structure consists of the superposing of the chords of tonic and supertonic of the tonality b flat minor.

Ex. 1 R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, Nacht, bar 1-8

The moment of the sunrise begins with an imposing theme in A major, which has a similar profile with T1a, as the result of the descending line and long notes which constitute it.

Ex. 2 R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, Sunrise, [7-8]

Its monumental character makes the connection to the symbolism of light, „a sign of liberation, unleashing, regeneration, knowledge, life and happiness“ [4]. The sun itself confirms the antagonistic position of this symphony debut: in contrast to the instability of the night, the sun is the source of light, the symbol of divinity and the center of the human universe. These details provide an additional argument for the fact that the road is under the influence of two contradictory energies that guide the steps towards a knowledge path.

The second theme of this part - T2b - is „characterized by a ternary rhythmic configuration" [5] (the triplet formula). Initially the melody is in A major, but chromatic modulation will lead to the Db major (the relative of the incipient key - B flat minor)
Ex. 3 R. Strauss, Simfonia Alpilor op. 64, Răsăritul soarelui, T2b (R [9])

Ex. R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, Sunrise, T2b (R [9])

In the transition to the third moment - which marks the actual beginning of the work (Night and Sunrise summing up a large introductory moment), we can recognize a progression of chromatic chords (dominating structures) in the aerophone section of orchestra (wood and brass). The orchestral dramaturgy makes the transition to the next moment.

In the third part (The Ascent), the main theme is a monody exposed in the lower register by the cello and the double bass and has an energetic character (“sehr lebhaft und energisch” - full of life and energetic) due to the intervallic construction (6m ↑ -3m ↑ -6m ↓ -7m ↑), the accents of each beat in the measure, and the rhythmic formulas used (amphimacer cell). These structures configure, in a semantic point of view, steps of the ascension road – a route loaded with symbolic connotations. Thus, „the journey is a way to progress, a place of encounter, knowledge, but also of initiation in the deep mysteries of life that produces transformation, transcendence, discovery and change” [6].

We observe the gradual accumulation of the theme by stretto polyphony and also the accumulation of the whole orchestra at the climax of the thematic exposition (bar 54-58)

Ex. 4 R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, The Ascent, bar 54-58

The conquest of the mountain peak represents the richest moment from a semantic viewpoint, the mountain being an axial symbol that embodies a „mystical center of spirituality” [7].

This moment has a sonority that can be compared to the unmistakable beginning of the symphonic poem “Also sprach Zarathustra” [8], or the spectacular moment “At the Gates of Kiev” in “Pictures at an Exhibition” by Modest Mussorgsky, orchestrated by Hector Berlioz. The onset of this moment is dominated by grandeur, alike a panoramic, global perspective on the Alpine landscape. For this reason all theme is played in or-
chestral tutti and and the brass section is playing a majestic motive based on ascending perfect fourths.

Ex. 5 R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, On the summit, [76], bar 534-544

An introspective moment is revealed by the emergence of a new thematic profile, which symbolizes a moment of contemplation and demonstrates the human fear in the face of imposing nature. The simplicity of the new theme played by oboe gives a unique rhetorical suggestion in the Straussian score.

The configuration of the theme reveals a progression of a unique cellular-motive structure, with an ascensio-descensio profile, which symbolizes a spiral in semiotics. The ancestral symbol found in this structure embodies the semantic key of the entire symphony based on the description of an evolutionary path that aims at aspiration to infinity.

Ex. 6 R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, On the summit, bar 545-551
This moment is followed by a climax that reaches the limits of paroxysm, the oversized variation of the mountain theme being exposed in orchestral tutti (T5v) and the theme of the sun (T2) exposed in C major, suggesting grandeur and completeness of natural perfection.

The storm reveals the last events of the mountain trip, this moment being dominated by an unmistakable orchestration.

This natural phenomenon represents a divine force. “The thunder (the symbol of the divine voice), the lightning (message written in the sky, the heavenly fire), the wind (a symbol of movement and speed)” [9] are the elements that complement this moment through the terrifying effects it causes and the symbolic load they hold. Moreover, in mythology, “the viper symbolized a confrontation between two opposing forces - a cosmic sabbath” [10].

Ex. 7 R. Strauss, Alpine Symphony op. 64, Storm and Thunder, Descending, R [120], bar 922-925

Thus, the strings - by the rhythmic figure they impose together with the wind machines - represent the force of the wind, the flutes represent lightning due to the interruptions they cause in the course of events, the percussion section is the thunder, and the brass section is the traveler who remembers every moment of the journey.

At the same time, this part of the symphony configures the image of the descent of the traveler, leading to a path already known but completely changed by this natural phenomenon. Therefore, the moment of descent will cause the re-emergence
of sound-symbol structures present in the score. First of all, the main theme is T3 - the theme of the ascent - is present in its inverted variation, which will induce the suggestion of decreasing, and in the second plane the ostinato pedal consisting of an isorhythmic figure with a predominantly descending chromatic profile that will be maintained throughout this painting.

All orchestral dramaturgy is based on the constant presence of the church organ that provides harmonic support and participates in the homogenization of the discourse. The harmonic progression starts from B flat minor, following C major, F minor, F# major, C minor and B flat minor. Moreover, the tension attributed to this moment is maintained with mixed harmonic structures, with overlapping functions, in particular I + II, I + III or I + V, at different times, which may constitute a polytonal suggestion.

PART II: Csíky Boldizsár - The Mountain
In this research I will approach the tone-poem “The Mountain” to demonstrate how the symbol of the mountain is infused in modern musical creation. Csíky Boldizsár is a Romanian composer who represents musical avant-garde, renowned nationally and internationally for innovative techniques of composition and profound philosophical ideas.

While listening this work, the unmistakable impression we feel is that the musical message is modeled particularly by autobiographical and philosophical tones.

The composition portrays the monumental landscape of the Transylvanian lands, the symbols of greatness, boundlessness and eternity, the imperturbable force and cosmic nature’s temporality with its irresistible attraction, excavating from the depths of our archaic anguish.

The work is composed of four parts and the connection is created between motivic developments of the work, the metamorphosis of the three basic musical structures provides a powerful unity to the whole poem.

The first part represents the emergence of the rocky peaks, titled “Massive in mist” where the human being contemplates. The compositional technique alternates between traditional methods with modern musical structures based on three generating cells.

The first structure (x) is a chord constructed on the F root, which contains a pre-cluster with a density of 7. This structure has an aggressive character because of the rhythmic configuration of this structure (syncope chains accompanied by a strong accent) demonstrating the contradictory feelings of conquering the mountain.
The second structure (y) is a chromatic scale configuration that has an accentuated modal character, due to the integration of the inverted chromatic formula turned over within the context of a dominant seventh chord. Moreover, this structure is performed by strings, with different sound centers (cello-G, double bass-B, viola-E) leads to the accumulation of the twelve tones.

Ex. 9, Csíky Boldizsár, *The Mountain*, P. I, bar 1-5

In the first part, this structure is an intermittent pedal point, the interruptions having the role of providing surprising contrasting moments. Remarkable is the juxtaposition of the generating motifs in order to cumulate the twelve tone chromatic scale, arranged in succession or simultaneity (bar 25). Also, the image of this continuous instability is created by the polyphony of attacks in the brass section (bar 17).

We can also remark the influence of the Bartokian style in the construction of the discourse, integrating segments and structures from the axial system, through which the composer creates a descriptive and suggestive acoustic climate according to the semantic background of this work. An example of this is the moment of accumulation of the acoustic material in a vertical structure in an orchestral tutti, only one exception being the structure of the axial system 1:2 in the fifth transposition - a cluster structure based on a pedal point in the extreme regions of the chord. (bars: 11-16)

The second part (“The Abyssal Call”) reflects the world of the deep which embodies
the states of existence in the chaos. The abyss appears in cosmogonic myths as the
point of origin and point of the end.

The reflection of this semantic context is accomplished using the same acoustic ma-
terial, expounded through preponderantly polyphonic syntax. This aspect is observed
even from the beginning of this part, the \( \gamma \)-cell and the \( \alpha \)-motif being exposed by
imitative polyphony, outlining a sonorous image of the aggressiveness and imminent
danger.

This image of danger is also created with the various instances of the \( \alpha \)-motif in poly-
phonic vocal hypostasis (2M and 4P intervals) varied rhythmically (by off-beat or rhyth-
mic augmentation/diminution) or by timbral variations, in simultaneity (bars 51-55).

Ex. 10, Csíky Boldizsár, The Mountain, P. II, bars 51-55
Moreover, the tension is reflected with some harmonic suspensions or the sudden change of continuity that intervenes in the three main moments of this musical painting. An example is the mixt harmonic structure based on C# which includes three distinct vertical configurations on B (6/5 #) C#7 and F 7b/9#/11 (bars.55-56, 96). This structure produces a strong acoustic impact by accumulating a vast sound spectrum (density of 10) and by intervening at the time of sound accumulation. Another moment with semantic impact is the configuration of an ostinato pedal point made up from a-motif variation resulting in a polyrhythmic, polymetric effect, a reflection of primordial chaos, disorder and anxiety.

The third part (“Obsession of the altitudes”) gives us, in the form of a summation, the musical image of everything the author attempted to formulate earlier about the conquest of the mountain peak. The central symbol is the height and implicitly the obsession that keeps the desire to overcome the forces of nature.

Musically, this uninterrupted aspiration is reflected first through the rhythmic-harmonic ostinato pedal point maintained throughout this moment. It is made up of a vertical structure based on Cb and a pre-cluster (Gb-G-Ab) configuration that, together with the incisive and aggressive rhythmic-metric performance, will render the semantic context.

Ex. 11, Csíky Boldizsár, The Mountain, P. III, bars 101-106

The golden section of this creation is marked by a moment of sudden orchestral rarification, and by the introduction of an unexpectedly expressive instrument for the symphony orchestra, the acoustic guitar, that echoes a harmonic structure equivalent to the first segment of the alpha chord agreement of the barthokian system, which will accentuate the grotesque character of this part.

The last part (“Nostalgia of Heights”) is a reverberation of the last experiences, a conclusion. The height conquered in the initiatory journey on the mountain peaks is a symbol of ascension and spiritualization. The height is more than a symbol; it is a purpose of perfection.
This image is concretized through a diatonic, aerated sonority, the dramatic moments being converted into peace and equilibrium.

First of all, the construction of the theme is based on the alpha motif (in various instances) supported by a static pedal point. This pedal is given to the violin section. (Ex. 13)

The equilibrium and stability is accomplished by strings in the first section of this part, which will give a warm and homogeneous sound. The intervention of the horns as a signal adds majesty and nobility to this moment, which can be compared to certain Wagnerian moments (Parsifal, bar. 177-181)

Ex. 12, Csíky Boldizsár, The Mountain, P. IV, bars 164-170

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The end of this creation embodies the romantic dictum “ed aspera ad astra” - “from darkness to light” - in a remarkable rhetorical gesture: simplicity and balance can be ways of knowledge and spiritualization. At the musical level, the composer calls for the support of a diatonic harmony - D min9/11 configuration in orchestral tutti, on which the thematic segment, like a nostalgic wave, unfolds - in an upward trajectory which embodies a calm end.

**CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this research is to highlight the importance of symbolism, philosophy and linguistic elements in connection with musical structures.

The symbol of mountain makes the acquaintance of this two contradictory artistic worlds and discovers the complex philosophical ideas hide.

The complex of connotations extracted from the symbol of mountain as we can see in the Alpine Symphony includes natural phenomena such as storm, lightning or thunder; natural spaces sunrise, sunset etc.

Also in the tone-poem The Mountain we can discover human feelings like obsession, nostalgia or abyssal fear.

All this symbols correspond with specific musical structures in special themes or motifs and also with instrumental timbre in a perfect correspondence with the semantical connotations.
Remarkable is the ample space of expression of this symbol which can be materialized in post-romantic style – the culmination of the tonal music – and also in an avant-garde style with a modern language and abstract technique.

Concluding, the mountain is a mysterious space, which, by its multitude of points of perception, provokes the imagination of artists and becomes a symbol of creativity and contemplation.

REFERENCES


[2] Paul Cezanne (Sainte Vicorine Mountain, Landscape with rocks), Ferdinand Holder (Mont Blanc), Marsden Harbley (Mount Katahdin in Autumn), Paul Klee (Niesen Mountain) Gheorghe Tătărăscu (Dămbovicioara Cave), Ibidem, pp. 149-150.


[9] Ivan Evseev, op. cit., p. 223

[10] Ibidem, p. 634