

Albert Sarda - Elements of musical language

Mariana FRĂȚILĂ¹

Abstract: *Albert Sarda (Sardà) belongs to the generation of Spanish composers who in the 70s and 80s came up with their own directions, obviously continuing to expand their interests up to the present day: spectral music, insisting upon an original sound, ways of integrating aleatoricism, be it more or less controlled, minimalism, instrumental theater, electronic and electroacoustic music.*

Key-words: *serialism; aleatoricism; elements of serial and graphic origin; unconventional writing*

1. Introduction

Infinitely less is known about the music subsequent to Manuel de Falla than about flamenco and zarzuela, the studies on twentieth-century Spanish music being written only by Spanish musicians in their mother tongue - a situation comparable to that of Romanian musical culture. Based on this consideration, this time I have chosen a Spanish composer.

The generation of Spanish composers born in the 40s and 50s was strongly influenced by the Darmstadt School. These composers are still looking for their own stylistic approaches. The elaboration of Spanish and extra-European folklore, heterophonic writing, electronic, spectral techniques, graphism, experimentation with the sound capabilities of the instruments: clusters, prepared piano - all these trends are found in their creations. From Albert Sarda's creation we will analyze two more important works: *String Quartet* and *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*.

The String Quartet dates from 1975, being the first significant work in which the composer rigorously uses a group of string instruments, reunited in the traditional form. This work bears the expressionist imprint of his master Josep Soler, and also the influences of the Darmstadt School, Ligeti, Stockhausen, Kagel and Xenakis.

The composition mode that governs this work is fundamentally serial. This serialism is used with a certain freedom of expression, in which melodic lines and counterpoint relations prevail, all this to the detriment of any excessively programmatic technique. Three main ideas are used in the melodic-intervallic development of the quartet: *the dodecaphonic series, the melodic cells derived from the dodecaphonic series, the use of an aleatoric and microinterval system.*

The composer uses in this work the dodecaphonic series, with abundantly repeated intervals. *Basic series (O)*



¹ Faculty of Arts, "Ovidius" University of Constanța, marianafratila93@gmail.com

Ex. 1

Inversion (I)

Recurrence of basic series (R)

Recurrence of inversion (RI)

Ex. 2

Throughout the work, the series will be varied, mostly using all possible combination techniques.

Ex. 3

The series is combined between instruments and, from time to time, it seems to be incomplete, e.g., the case of the viola entrance:

Ex. 4

Albert Sarda, influenced by Schonberg's idea, uses in the quartet very similar rhythms from "*Pierrot*", even if he does not keep the idea of melodic recurrence. Thus, in the beginning the inverse series (I) is exhibited - ex. 5, for it to end in its original formula (O) - ex. 6:

Ex. 5 Measures 116 – 117

Ex. 6 Measures 125 – 126

The author states that: "*I have never followed the series to the letter, when a sound seemed more appropriate to me, maybe the sonority felt better to me or, simply if I wanted to, I immediately changed it*"².

Even if throughout the work the series is not followed to the letter, some fragments/pieces are exceptions to the rule; in some fragments there are elements which appear sporadically, thus being derived from it. These elements are fragments of the same series, normally grouped as a concatenation of 2 sounds:

Ex. 7

The interval mentioned above is omnipresent and almost obsessive. Thus, fragments of the series appear, randomly distributed, according to the melodic needs, which conveys a greater unity (ex. 8):

²Agustin Charles Soler. Albert Sardà, 60 aniversario: una estética de pathos serial [Albert Sardà, 60th anniversary: an aesthetic of serial pathos]. www.agustincharles.com/analisis.html



Measure 11 – cello



Measures 9 and 10 – violin I



Measure 63 – violin I

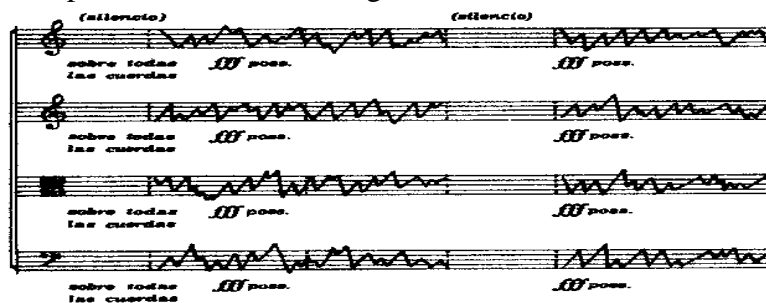


Measure 77 – violin I

Ex. 8

Even if the aleatoric techniques are used to a lesser extent, they are of great significance, especially if we take into account the amplification process which the subsequent works would undergo. This can be classified as follows: *the use of micro intervals, the tuning of graphic sets, the use of untampered execution in the incapacitated parts of the instrument.*

The use of untampered sounds is a legacy from the Darmstadt music. The effects Sarda would use here are the following: the attack on various strings behind the wrest pin, hitting the strings with the palm of the hand, hitting the case.

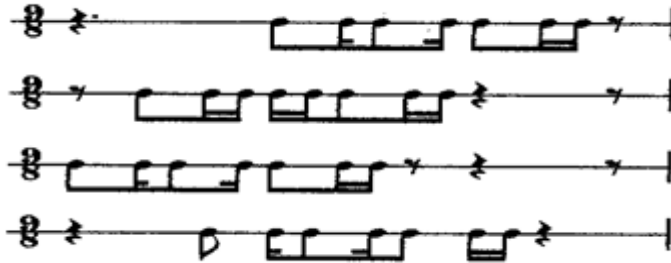


Ex. 9

We can discuss a little the rhythmic development in the quartet even if some rhythms appear to be used continuously while others appear sporadically. Sarda often uses rhythmic condensation as a means of increasing density and as an argument for culmination in certain fragments.

It can be said that there are various rhythms used systematically and which from their first appearance turn into "*leitmotif*" rhythmic elements. This rhythm which appears first on the viola and then on the violin would be the starting point for the rhythmic demotion from measures 116 up to 126. Another aspect to be noted is the use of the canonical-rhythmic

imitation from measure 114, which is used as a prelude of the fragment in the following recurrence:



Ex. 10

This method of canonical-rhythmic imitation would be used in the epilogue of the work in the form of fugato imitation in which the only difference is the use of a group of different sizes for each entrance.

"The formal distribution of the quartet responds to a re-expository ABA form, although the interconnectedness of the elements that compose it is much more complex"³.

In reality, the formal aspect of the ABA quartet consists of a series of concatenated sections, which are in a culminating form of development and which compete with each other without any form of reiteration being established, even if the reiteration of the series is continuous. Thus, the work follows the expressionist principle that Schönberg would reveal: "to repeat yes, but never exactly, to copy exactly is the work of a copyist"⁴. Basically, the formal ABA aspect is reduced to the re-expository idea of the series maintained in the final ABA part.

The Concerto for Cello written in 1985 is one of the most significant works in the author's catalog. It initiates a new stage in his creative process. New ideas appear here which, even if they do exist in previous works, are used with greater rigor. Among these, one should note the use of aleatoric techniques of various types along with melodic development techniques with a clear expressionist character.

The concerto is exactly at the midpoint of the so-called need to renew the author's musical language. For this reason, we will analyze separately the two registers; even if they are independent, in the end they were integrated into the work: *elements derived from the atonal-dodecaphonic discourse, elements of aleatoric articulation and unconventional writing*.

In the concerto, the need to detach from the serial concept is obvious, a fact highlighted by the limited use of the series ... "one of the main problems of contemporary music: the dilemma of its structural construction. This dilemma is the one every composer has to face. Serial technique, as well as free style are used"⁵.

The use of various series is, however, completely arbitrary. What is more, there would be no continuous use of one or more series, which would appear in certain sections of the work as a necessity to return to the previous ideas in the sense of repeating certain intervals so as to reach a certain melodic continuity. In this context, two main series with a varied development technique are used:

³Agustin Charles Soler. Albert Sardà, 60 aniversario: una estètica de pathos serial [Albert Sardà, 60th anniversary: an aesthetic of serial pathos]. www.agustincharles.com/analisiis.html

⁴Munteanu, Viorel, *Roman Vlad - Modernitate și tradiție [Roman Vlad - Modernity and tradition]*, Muzicală Publishing House of UCMR, Bucharest, 2001

⁵Agustin Charles Soler. Albert Sardà, 60 aniversario: una estètica de pathos serial [Albert Sardà, 60th anniversary: an aesthetic of serial pathos]. www.agustincharles.com/analisiis.html

Series A exhibited by the cello



Ex. 11

Series B exhibited by the orchestra



Ex. 12

The series of the cello A' varied by adding sounds – would also be exhibited by the rest of the orchestra.



Ex. 13

In this latest series the sound 6 - B flat is occasionally replaced by B natural. The series appear clearly only at the beginning of the work, then disappear progressively. Each series uses a distinct instrumental means which will be progressively unified.

Series A' exhibited by the cello



Series B exhibited by the orchestra

Musical score for Ex. 14, featuring parts for Cl 1,2, Cl bass, Fg 1,2, Cng, Corn 1,2, Corn 3,4, and Timp. The score includes measure numbers 11, 12, 10, 7, 8, 9, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, and 2.

Ex. 14

Except for the beginning, where the mentioned series appear clearly until measure 31 they will not be repeated (ex, 15). They will do it on the cello with the A' series, although some fragments of it will be repeated just as it happened in the string quartet.

English horn/ cor anglais measure 8

English horn/ cor anglais measure 8

Bass clarinet measures 8-9

Bass clarinet measures 8-9

Violin I, measures 6-7

Violin I, measures 6-7

Ex. 15

The same series of cello A' (ex. 16) would be used later in measure 37. In this measure, as well as in the following ones, the series will appear with the same rhythm in canonical imitation (ex. 17), a technique already used in the string quartet.

The series would never meet completely, being fragmented:

Cello solo

Measures 1-8, with dynamics 'sord' and 'dolce'.

Cello solo

Ex. 16

Ex. 17

This type of canonical development would be used again in the final coda.

What we notice in the concerto is the use of *aleatoric* elements. If in the string quartet they appeared only limited, here their number is considerably increased. It should also be noted that aleatoric elements of different origins appear in the work (which did not happen in the previous works of the composer where the use of a single means was chosen); in this case the elements used could be classified as follows: *aleatoric elements of serial origin*, *aleatoric elements of graphic origin*.

This division is a clear example of the weight of the dodecaphonic tradition in Sarda, which confirms the Schönbergian maxim "*I can't help but say it every time: my works are dodecaphonic compositions, not dodecaphonic compositions*"⁶.

The use of serial elements would be done in two distinct ways: the "*formants*" with *definite tempo (groups of notes included in a square)*, *melodic directionality with rhythmic freedom* (there is a clear difference in the sense that the notes should not be repeated in any case).

The elements of graphic origin are here different from those used in the string quartet and respond more clearly to the idea of synthesizing the objective pursued by the author. Sarda uses a progressive *accelerando* and *ritardando* mode.

The concerto consists of three sections depending on the appearance of aleatoric means. The first section makes greater use of the dodecaphonic series, the second one uses only the amplified series; in it the cadence is also realized.

The third section only serves as the concluding coda. The aleatoric elements are, therefore, a distorted and contrasting element compared to the fixed sections which also involve an amplification of the formal discourse through a conventional interconnectedness which ensures a better conduct of the musical discourse. This division has in addition a golden section relation to the work in general⁷.

Throughout the analysis of the two works it can be seen that the apparent difference between them is not so great and is due rather to the writing techniques than to the strictly musical content.

The truth is that the differences appear in the use of certain compositional means which, according to the author, are used mainly to improve the traditional system and not in the use of different systems: the first work is the product of learning, and the second is the fruit/result of a widely developed experience.

⁶ Vlad Roman, *Storia della dodecafonia [History of dodecaphony]*, Ed. Suvini - Zerboni, Milano, 1958; translated by Irina Passa and Viorel Munteanu; edition supervised and enlarged, study, notes and comments by Viorel Munteanu. Bucharest. Ed. Național. p186

⁷ Agustin Charles Soler. *Albert Sardà, 60 aniversario: una estética de pathos serial [Albert Sardà, 60th anniversary: an aesthetic of serial pathos]*. www.agustincharles.com/analisis.html

2. Conclusions

By analyzing the two works created by Albert Sarda, a lesser-known Spanish composer, we have tackled certain techniques and sound parameters specific to avant-garde composition, namely the serial technique, the timbre symbolism, the new notations in the random inserts and a new structure of the musical form.

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