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Abstract

The music of Petar Bergamo has focussed on traditional forms and styles while constantly looking for new ways of expanding their limitations.

Key words: Petar Bergamo, symphony, symphonic poem, motivic development, concerto, madrigal

Nacrtak

Glazba Petra Bergama fokusirana je na tradicionalne forme i stilske okvire, ali istovremeno traži nove načine kako bi se prevladala ograničenja koja oni nameću.

Ključne riječi: Petar Bergamo, simfonija, simfonijska pjesma, motivska razrada, concerto, madrigal

At first appearance the music of Petar Bergamo is superficially traditional, because it relies on classical forms and methods. It has some passing resemblances to the music of such composers as the Russians Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, although it has a distinctive character that is quite different in tone. True, it is bold and thrusting in many respects like these two composers, but it does not convey the same biting sound or harsh irony that is particularly evident in the works of Shostakovich. Bergamo has a gift for creating a special moment, gesture or other characteristic. At every stage in the progress of his music there are features that mark it out as something special. It is one of the hallmarks of his style that he finds interesting and in some ways unique ideas that are capable of serious elaboration and development. At no time was he interested in following the avant-garde techniques that were becoming increasingly common during his early career, but rather to seek innovation within a solid musical and intellectual foundation. The central focus of the present study is the way that the composer was able to infuse traditional forms with new and powerful content, a gift that is not always fully appreciated.

Bergamo's music began to become known in the late 1950s with a Piano Sonata and *Variazioni sul tema interrotto* for piano, both of 1957, and a string quartet from the following year which is known by its Italian title, *Quartetto d'archi*. The piano variations and the string quartet are good starting points for

the study of Bergamo's music.

The ten-bar theme chosen by the composer for the former and described as 'interrotto' is laden with fertile motifs of different characters, variously harmonic, rhythmic and melodic. He selects different aspects in each of his variations. In the first, the opening notes of the theme have a counterpoint of triplet figures derived from a descending but twisting melodic phrase. The second appears to be taken from a tiny phrase in the sixth bar of the theme and presented as an irregular quasi-ostinato broken up by chordal formations originally found in the very opening. The third variation uses a modern version of an 'Alberti bass' with erratic and disruptive rhythmic figures in the right hand which constantly contradict the regular rhythms of the left hand. In the next variation the short twisting melodic figure is transformed into a headlong rush of demisemiquavers on a long crescendo which at the same time rises from the bass to a climax in the highest register before rapidly returning to the lowest register. The next two variations use clever juxtapositions of motifs: in the first a grand procession of chords is interspersed by short emphatic phrases in double octaves, while in the second, bars six and seven of the theme are subtly extended. Variations seven and eight work in a strongly rhythmic manner with more extended development of various motifs, before the final virtuoso section, all in fast semiquavers, until the very end. The typically pianistic rapid alternation between right and left hands is carried out to perfection before the final harmonic and rhythmic passage with double octaves and harsh chords brings this brilliant but terse composition to an end.

Quartetto d'archi is much more restrained and rather less compressed than the piano variations. It shows another side of Bergamo's musical technique: as a starting point it uses traditional forms and structures, notably sonata and ternary forms. Yet over and over again these plans are modified and changed in ways that show the composer's desire for variety and for new ways of creating music. The opening movement is typical of this trend with its combination of contrapuntal and episodic forms. After a brief slow introduction that presents motivic material, a fugal exposition follows. This is strongly rhythmic with numerous syncopations, and starting with a very distinctive falling seventh. The contrasting material is completely different with an arching cello melody (*espressivo e calando*) with intense harmonic complements from the upper strings. A positively brilliant development that is full of motivic activity with every contrapuntal device incorporates the opening material. This leads to a rewritten return of the second section to close the movement. The slow movement again starts contrapuntally, building to an intense climax. Calling the third movement a minuet is deliberately misleading, because Bergamo teasingly varies the motifs and time signatures from the opening constantly to alter the character. It leads without a break into the strong and rhythmi-

cally lively rondo. Again the composer's imagination is very active. Variety is uppermost but it is held in check by a fierce economy of material. Overall the work contains much of the intensity of Bartók with particular emphasis on similar contrapuntal techniques.

Even more important at this stage is a group of four orchestral works that brought Bergamo's name to the attention of audiences in Belgrade where he had been studying. These are the symphonic poem *Navigare necesse est* (1960), the Symphony No.1 (1961), *Musica concertante* (1961-62) and the Symphony No.2 (1962-63). They mark an important turning point in the composer's development in which he modified and transformed his inherited classical forms to his own mode of expression.

Navigare necesse est is an imposing work by any standards. While it follows a broad sonata-form plan, it shows few signs of being in any way restricted by it. The opening introduction is both forceful in the immediate sense and important in its structural significance. Some motifs that are to play such an important part in the work appear here. The music of the following *Allegro* is assertive and powerful: the rising motif in the violins and woodwind is characteristically constructed with irregular rhythms, wide intervals and phrasing, with an open-ended feature that allows the symphonic language to develop naturally. The second-subject group is march-like in character, but is subtly transformed unlike, for example, marches in the music of Gustav Mahler, which often have much more the appearance of being quotations of actual marches. There is no hint of the kind of the explicit irony that is found in the march-like sections of Shostakovich's symphonies. The exposition is scaled dramatically with a huge climax just before the beginning of the development which starts as a skeletal fugato of the main motif at a slow tempo. The recapitulation is transformed and abbreviated with a fine climactic ending. The orchestration of this compact and powerful work relies a great deal on the brass sections used homophonically rather than as solo instruments. A large string section is obviously needed for the work to make its full impact.

A slightly reduced scoring is to be found in the First Symphony of 1961. With a duration of just fifteen minutes, it seems more expansive because of its concentrated motivic activity. It is this, rather than its superficially neo-classical nature, that marks it out as a special work. Its four movements suggest a traditional layout, and even the individual movements (a sonata form *Allegro moderato*, a ternary slow movement, a scherzo and trio, and a rondo) would imply the same idea, but this structural framework is only the start. The opening scurrying chromatic figure in the lower register is sinister enough, but in combination with the descending threatening motif on the horns it makes a very memorable beginning. The strong rhythmic foundation of the main part of the first movement is constantly disrupted by Bergamo's characteristic syncopations

and cross-rhythms. The slow movement (*Andante espressivo*) is much less complex, but even here the subtly developed opening woodwind melodies are blended with three-part horn chords and tremolando lower strings that show the eerie effect of the composer's extended tonality. The jaunty scherzo and trio again have a tight motivic control and a firm rhythmic grip. The finale (*Allegro con brio*) is again fairly straightforward in form and rhythmic patterns, but as always Bergamo juggles his themes with skill and variety.

With the Second Symphony the composer moves forward. The transformation of the idea of the symphony is remarkable: rather than relying on traditional forms and techniques, Bergamo has reinvented his approach. The overall structure is the most obvious feature, with the four movements taking the plan of slow-fast-slow-fast, perhaps a recollection of the 18th-century church sonata, the *sonata da chiesa*. To make the point even more strongly, each slow movement is linked without a break to the following faster movement. The work is only fifteen minutes in length (similar to that of the First Symphony), a strong incentive to economy and compression.

The opening *Adagio molto* starts with a note-by-note build up of a sustained chord of no clearly defined tonality, out of which emerges a sinuous and mysterious melody for bass instruments and vibraphone, soon to be accompanied by fast moving ostinato and quasi-ostinato figures. The building up of these textures to a huge climax is quite new and not normally found in a symphony. This forms a strong focal point for launching into the second movement. A suggestion of military music is found in the bass drum and cymbal alternations that are used to propel the music toward the *Allegro ironico*. There is a hint of the opening of the second section of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* (the Dance of the Adolescents), with blocks of strongly rhythmical figurations, sometimes sharply punctuated by loud *tutti* chords. It is much more symphonic in its development than *Le sacre*, throwing the different rhythmic motifs around in a tightly controlled counterpoint of sound. The following *Grave* is heavy, slow and again built up with ostinato-like figures. A vivid section using timpani glissandi, in some ways recalling similar sounds in works by Bartók, has an eerie feel to it, with another huge climax leading *attacca* to a faster finale, *Malinconico, alla marcia*. Ostinato figures in the opening lead to a strong and sinuous but quiet and muted melody on the four horns around which the movement is planned. Here various fanfare-like figures are superimposed in textures similar to ones already encountered.

The fourth work in this group, *Musica concertante*, apparently returns to the variation techniques of *Variazioni sul tema interrotto* for piano. However, it is not as simple as this. *Musica concertante* is a multi-faceted work that can be approached on a number of different levels. It is described as 'symphonic studies,' a title that suggests that the work is composed as an organic whole

with motivic connections either of melody or other features. At face value one can appreciate that the work is compact, with a strong economic relationship of musical materials. The composer's description makes this clear: "the architectural plan of *Musica concertante* consists of twelve symphonic etudes, twelve surfaces taken over (in the sense of construction material) from famous works of the history of music, which were created from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century." Yet here we are presented with a new level, "famous works ... from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century." What are these works and why has Bergamo chosen to refer to or quote from these compositions? The answer to this lies in the Latin quotation which heads the score: "Memento homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem revertis", freely translated as "Remember, O Man, that you are dust, and that you will return to dust." Before making any pronouncements about the works concerned one must appreciate Bergamo's view about the development of serious art-music in the middle of the 20th century. He felt that somehow, partly or completely because of the wars and other difficulties (financial, social and nationalistic) encountered especially in Europe, art, and music in particular, was entering a phase of incomprehension. Rather than joining with this disassociation with music's audience, Bergamo wanted to remind his listeners of the positive features of music that he held dear. It was particularly the music from the previous century that he would describe as 'impressionistic.' This led him to present some of this music in his new piece, which is emphatically not pastiche nor can the work be described in any way as a 'suite'; it forms part of Bergamo's 'lingua franca'. An investigation of the separate sections of the work in the order of appearance will give some indication of the music to which he alludes or from which he quotes.

The opening is based on clusters of notes, played very quietly, in the manner of the then avant-garde Polish 'school of composers.' The idea is that the composer being suggested is Witold Lutosławski, although it would not be difficult to imagine that Krzysztof Penderecki was also in the composer's mind. Against these clusters are short sustained woodwind phrases, but also in the bass is a short melodic phrase (usually consisting of six notes) that engages our attention. It is no surprise that this forms something of a motto for the work. Serial permutations of an eight-note group are found in the next study. The possible feeling of any kind of abstruse music is dispelled by the brilliant but delicate orchestration, mostly for xylophone, celesta, piano and harp. The next group of four studies pay generous tribute to four major composers of the first half of the 20th century. The slow movement of Bartók's *Music for strings percussion and celesta* with its beautifully sinuous melody, relating to this work's 'motto' and its fleeting reference to the final movement of the same work (bars 150-180) hint at the impressionistic quality of the Hungarian composer's music. Following this, Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* is suggested in a short but

vigorous dance, while the impressionistic features of Ravel's music, especially the ballet *Daphnis et Chloe*, with its fast and evocative wave-shapes in parallel thirds 'described' by the upper woodwind and later by the strings, shows Bergamo's admiration for and sympathy with the French master's techniques. It is not important to make any exact identification of all the works to which Bergamo makes tribute. Suffice it to say that Prokofiev is alluded to in study number seven, and Lutosławski in the eighth, with Stravinsky in the background of number eleven. The note-clusters in the last study return us to the atmosphere of the opening, perhaps the impressionistic music of the then recent Polish music. To sum up, one can sense that the composer here is giving us his manifesto for new music, not of the avant-garde for which he showed little sympathy, but to the enduring qualities of much music that had been composed in the previous 100 years.

Traditionally a Classical concerto lasts up to thirty minutes, while many Romantic piano and violin concertos run to about forty-five minutes, or even more. The aim of most concertos is to display the technical ability of the soloist over a wide range of contrasting music. However, if one reduces the length of the concerto dramatically, removes the orchestra, and completely avoids any hint of virtuosity, one can ask what is left of the concerto. To compress a concerto's features into ten minutes is surprising, but to restrict its instrumentation to a single instrument is totally amazing. This, however, is the challenge that Bergamo gave himself in his *Concerto abbreviato* for clarinet of 1966 and it is exactly what he did. This concerto is a multi-tempo single-movement work which uses many newer clarinet playing techniques, but which avoids avant-garde features such as multiple sounds as catalogued by Bruno Bartolozzi.¹ One of the most distinctive features of the concerto is its sparse textures. The clarinet is called upon to play widely separated single notes or short phrases which are similarly detached from each other. Bergamo has a skilled way of building up tensions by rhythmic repetition and introducing changes, e.g. extra notes to phrases, changes of rhythm, to move into a new section. He is in no way restricted by the conventions of 'bridge-passages' or transitions. Yet when the player needs to increase the speed the composer has no hesitation in increasing the demands on the player. While the rapid tonguing 'scherzo' like section appears, the player is required to play as fast as in any concerto, and difficult arpeggio-like flourishes are also negotiated by the clarinetist. The form of the piece is novel, with clearly defined tempos in the first half of the work, but later there is a considerable fluidity of tempo as the player develops the various motifs. Its nature has proved very attractive to clarinetists, making it a suitable recital or even competition piece, because it

¹ Bruno Bartolozzi: *New Sounds for Woodwinds* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967; 2nd edition, 1982)

fully taxes the abilities and concentration of the player.²

More recent works have moved even further away from reinterpretations of traditional forms, of which two can be taken as representative of new trends. The *Canzone antiche* of 1982 consist of three short triptychs for wind trio of oboe, clarinet and bassoon, each with three parts in contrasting tempos. Their luminous neo-Baroque sound is immediately engaging, with the leading melodies and the accompanying figures very clearly distinguished. In the contrapuntal sections which abound in imitations between the players, Bergamo's skill in finding the most appropriate register for clarity is everywhere apparent. It is a brilliant exercise in reinventing the Baroque in a way that does not suggest pastiche or a slavish copying of stylistic techniques.

The second reinterpretation is Bergamo's contemporary version of the madrigal. His *Spiriti eccellenti* of 1993-96 consist of a group of seven separate madrigals for women's voices and a small group of instruments: oboe, 2 trumpets and various percussion instruments (bells, raganella (cog rattle), tambourine, vibraphone and guiro). It draws on a number of compositional techniques and styles in a satisfying amalgam. The work reinforces the impression one has of Bergamo's strength in maintaining a reinterpretation of traditional ideas. The madrigals are set to words by Marina Čapalija. The chosen tempi vary: the first three are slow, the fourth suddenly fast, with a return in the sixth and seventh madrigals to the character of the opening. There is thus a symmetrical arch-shape to the overall plan.

The first of the pieces ('Ničesa višje nima'/'Nothing more is left') builds out from a sustained D from the oboe and a 'rocking' phrase which appears in instrumental imitations and each of the vocal parts. The atmosphere is surprisingly both relaxed and tense. The second ('Užala je užgat lumin'/'She set off to light the candle') again uses the sustained oboe D and the rocking phrase from the first piece. The choir uses closely spaced homophonic chords, then builds up the chords one part at a time. The combination of detached chords with a syllabic setting and sustained chords on the same notes produces an unearthly effect in line with the intense words. The ritualistic alternation of F sharp and E to accompany the chorus in the next madrigal ('Evo ovod san stala'/'Here I have stood') with its Medieval-sounding parallel fourths has a marked intensity, clearly identified by the composer in marking for the chorus: *piano, narrativo ma legato, con dolore e sospiro*. The more usual parallel thirds follow in the next section which brings in a sweetness that was savoured by some composers in the Medieval period, notably in England. The fourth and central piece ('Tukli su mora jemali žen'/'They beat the seas and had women')

² See also the article: M. Živković: 'Petar Bergamo: Concerto abbreviato,' *Pro musica* (1967), no.27, p.7

bursts in with vigour, bringing the surprise entry of the two trumpets with cog rattle in a scherzo-like interpretation of the words. The fifth madrigal ('Unesu te na vela vrata'/'You are brought in through a big door'), employing all the instruments, is rhythmically much more free, with brief unmetred sections for instruments alternating with the voices. A section towards the end combines singing with fast whispering in a magically atmospheric manner. The last two pieces mirror the first two. The sixth ('Iznijali brodi na žalu'/'The ships have rotted on the strand') returns to the parallel homophonic singing of the second piece, while the final madrigal ('Nima ničesa, nima'/'There is nothing left, nothing any more') is similar to the first in its elaboration of the sustained D from the oboe and the rocking phrases.

This short survey of some of Petar Bergamo's works gives some indication of the strengths of his music and its character. It works mostly within traditional techniques, but always seeks to extend those boundaries. It also shows the composer's determination not to be drawn into areas of musical composition which he did not feel reflected the best of the music of the recent past. He was able to take traditional forms and formal devices, but turn them to his own purpose, or modify them in ways that were artistically meaningful. On the one hand, none of the music discussed here could be considered to be reactionary, relying on outmoded or obsolete techniques, nor, on the other hand, does it venture into 'vogueish' and 'fashionable' modernisms of no real artistic worth. That is the sign of a true artist.

SAŽETAK

Forma i sadržaj u glazbi Petra Bergama

Glazba Petra Bergama je naizgled tradicionalna, jer se oslanja na klasične oblike i postupke, ali plijeni značajkama koje je čine posebnom. Skladatelj traži inovacije unutar čvrstih glazbenih i intelektualnih temelja. Njegova rana djela za klavir i komorni opusi postavili su osnove za tradicionalne oblike i ekstenzivni motivički razvoj, dok grupa orkestralnih djela iz 1960-tih godina svjedoči o izbrušenim, dotjeranim skladateljskim tehnikama. U dvjema simfonijama, u kojima naizgled slijedi tradicionalne oblike, Bergamo njihove okvirne nacрте ispunjava i prožima impresivnim nadahnućem, kao što to čini i u simfonijskoj poemi *Navigare necesse est. Musica concertante* se zasniva prvenstveno na ideji varijacijskih tehnika, a očituje i odavanje "priznanja" raznim i različitim skladateljima. *Concerto abbreviato* za solo klarinet predstavljao je blistav razvojni korak; *concerto* je tu sveden na temeljnu ideju. A u *rekreiranju* madrigala u zbornom ciklusu *Spiriti eccellenti* skladatelj koristi brojne tehnike i stilske načine kako bi se postigao željeni amalgam.