

MODAL - for piano +video

by: Breton Armé :**Pavlos Antoniadis**-piano,
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works by:

Antonio de Cabezón : *Tiento del Tercer Tono(Fugas al Contrario)*
(mid-16th century)

Pascal Dusapin : *Etude no.1 “Origami” (1998)*

Béla Bartók : *Szabadban (Out of doors) (1926)*
-*Sippal, dobbal (With drums and pipes)*
-*Barcarolla*
-*Musettes*
-*Az északa zenejé (The night’s music)*
-*Hajsza (The chase)*

- *-intermission-*

Horatiu Radulescu: *Sonata nr. 4 “like a well .. older than god” (1993)*
-*I Trumpets of the eternal*
-*II The sacred sound*
-*III Music...older than music*
-*IV Abyss*

Maurice Ravel: *Gaspard de la Nuit (1908)*
-*Ondine*
-*Le Gibet*
-*Scarbo*

Olivier Messiaen : *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités (1949)*

The point of focus is the dialectic between the dynamic element of the material’s historical evolution and the a-historical network of references of the Modal element per se: Mythical descent, sacred function and ritual , mysticism, its role as the hard core of folk and classical traditions in the West and the East, the dominant presence of vocal qualities and an anti-dramatic attitude can define quite clearly a unified and

timeless musical “locus”, which can still be active and fertile for western contemporary music.

“**Tiento del Tercer Tono**” (from the Spanish “Tentar”=to try out) is drawn from the collection “Obras de Musica para Tecla, Arpa y Vihuela de Antonio de Cabezón” published posthumously in Madrid in 1578 by the composer’s son. This is the “river piece”: Its wealthy and flexible thematic material (a set of two themes and their inversions, to be gradually abandoned for new material by the end of the piece) is set in seamless flow establishing a pure Phrygian environment (del Tercer Tono)- a kind of uterus for the music to follow. Out of the Tiento’s last chord **Dusapin’s first piano etude** stems in the relationship of a tritone. This is the “desert piece”. The ritualistic quality of melismatic folding and unfolding of lines in horizontal (time) and vertical (range of the instrument) space is highlighted by the composer in the subtitle “origami”-the Japanese art of creating complex shapes by folding paper (his education in visual arts is certainly not irrelevant to this kind of preoccupation with musical form). The relatively limited collection of pitch material (alluding at times to arab maqams, still again with a strong Phrygian flavour) is counterbalanced by highly detailed notation for rhythm, dynamics, articulation, and pedaling. This results in very refined instrumental gestures which never conceal their link to eastern Mediterranean vocal and instrumental traditions. Emotional content is a final point to consider, as Dusapin affirms the lament quality of the music by terming it “Etudes de tristesse” and provides us with an enigmatic ending which blurs the clarity of the initial and slow moving harmonic establishment in an almost sickening gesture. These two works are joined together in an 18 minute long manifestation of timelessness, achieved through radically different means.

Bartók’s 1926 masterpiece “**Szabadban**” (Out of doors) is literally an exit to the vitality of folk music. The composer’s highly distinctive use of the piano resources (similar to that of the Sonata, composed at the same year) and of discordant sonorities is twofold: a kind of transcription of the raw sound quality of eastern european folk (most obviously in pieces 1,2,3 and 4 where folk-like material is used), as well as a very individual contribution to the post-tonal harmonic vocabularies. Both of these aspects can suggest very interesting, yet distinctive, directions to performance practice. The last piece (“The Chase”) is a break-neck ostinato featuring a three against five (or four) cross-rhythm, certainly not exactly a relief from the shadowy world explored before.

Radulescu’s sonata nr. 4 “like a well...older than god” draws its title from Lao Tzu’s “Tao Te Tzing”. The composer’s (a pioneer in spectral music) preoccupation with sound per se qualities is evident both in the material and its (non) development: the harmonic series (the second movement is a kind of transcription for the piano of a series on a B fundamental, with partials notated with their numbers on the score) , 12-tone harmonic formations based on 2 or 3 intervals stretched along the keyboard and Rumanian folk tunes are juxtaposed as concrete building blocks. While traces of development can still be found in the “coda” of the first movement and in the fourth movement (recycling of previous material), it seems that the term “sonata” mostly refers to its etymological root (sonare). A kind of mystic perception of sound is further

enhanced by the rather Xenakian approach to dynamics and articulation (striving for a universal-like projection of the sound), the abundant use of right pedal reminding us of Murail's definition of the piano as a "chamber of resonances", as well as particular gestures such as: a folk tune played in up to 4 different tempi on the same register (mvt1), harmonic stelae growing dramatically up (mvt 1), two Rumanian Christmas carols played simultaneously in a huge cresc ("as an enormous gong approaching and invading you" is the composer's subtitle for 3rd mvt)-to name just a few.

The importance of a literary source -3 poems by Aloysius Bertrand- for the shaping of Ravel's "**Gaspard**" is emphasized with their inclusion in the very first edition of the work. "**Ondine**" is a water-nymph trying to seduce a mortal man, but failing and bombastically disappearing. Her murmuring song echoes in a minimal - like way through the crystalline first movement, although the climax-however short and elusive- is very representative of Ravel's confession to pianist Vlado Perlemuter: "I wanted to compose a caricature of Romanticism, but perhaps I let myself get carried away!". "**Le gibet**" (the gibbet) is a macabre mix of the beauty of nature with human brutality, expressed in the closing image of a hanged man glowing red in the setting sun. Colourful polychords and expressive melodies are always crossed by an ominous B flat bell-like octave, and Ravel's beg for a monotonous, unvaried tempo seems more than justified. Finally, "**Scarbo**", far from the virtuosity icon it is usually considered to be, is a real tribute to the poetics of disappearance : scary silences between elusive gestures, fragmented melodies and thematic glimpses, continuous crescendi and diminuendi and sliding harmonies, reflect the experience of nightmarish creatures in one's bedroom.

Messiaen's "**Mode de valeurs at d'intensités**" is usually cited as the first work to apply serial procedures in parameters other than pitch- namely duration, articulation and dynamics- and to directly influence the rise of total serialism in Europe (due to its premiere in Darmstadt Summer Courses in 1949).Although this can definitely be seen as a kind of dystopic end of the modal spectrum outlined during the concert, as a mode where modality is abstracted, it still bears some qualities of embodiment to the musical "locus" represented by the Modal: The "natural" (in the sense of their arrangement close to the harmonic series model) spacing of pitch and duration on the keyboard range, the anti-dramatic quality of the piece in its homogeneity of gesture, even some formulaic, neume-like schemes in Messiaen's modes themselves make the link to modality sensible behind the dense serial net.

The idea of a **video projection** was originally perceived not with the intention of creating a sound and image amalgam, but instead as a kind of hyper-text for the musical works. Adorno's ideas on what he terms convergence of the arts-most notably applied to the parallelism between second Viennese School and Expressionist painting and Kandinsky- have been very influential to this enterprise. The relationship to the musical works is twofold: either the image is constructed along the lines of abstract musical parameters such as form, rhythm, texture , dynamics, range, types of movement etc; and/or it is triggered by the pretexts of the musical works , which it wishes to re-interpret in meaningful ways. Technically, the video was produced by a Hi 8 (analog) camera with no further digital process other the final editing : A

deliberate limitation to foster creativity and unique solutions, as well as an expression of dysphoria to the almost enforced adaptation to accelerating technological possibilities, through the resort to a neutral and outdated means of recording. Its combination with drawings and paintings (Francis Bacon's "Painting" of 1946 and the "Study after Velazquez; portrait of Pope Innocent X" of 1953 are used for the video image in *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*), next to the psychogeographic representation of a city (Athens) - as a reversal and abstraction from the Bartók rural settings - and acting-based bits (*Ondine*, *Scarbo*) provides a variety in image construction reflecting the multiple manifestations of the Modal.

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