

*The sacred choral concerto in the romanian space, in the creation of  
composers: Gavriil Musicescu, Sabin Drăgoi, Paul Constantinescu and Ion  
Popescu-Runcu*

(traducerea în engleză a rezumatului)

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My thesis of doctorate starts from the premises of setting the origins of the sacred choral concerto musical genre in the universal space and it's pervade in the Romanian cultural environment, after wich the central part of the research it will be destinated for the analysis of the most representative genre creations belonging to the Romanian composers Gavriil Musicescu, Sabin Drăgoi, Paul Constantinescu and Ion Popescu-Runcu. The results of this analytical approach targets the elaboration of an objective, comparative and comprehensive outlook on the styles belabored by this four local creators, in order to configure at the end an overview as realistic as possible about the Romanian choral-concert composing.

As in any research with scientific claims, I sought into **the introductive section** to define the preliminary issues concerning the choosing of this subject, it's topicality and it's relevance into the present context, the research stage in this area and also the details regarding the methodology and the objectives wich we propose.

Particularizing a little each of this parameters, I mention that the choice of this approach theme was determinated both by the pasion of choral music in general and a number of others important factors, such as: carrying out the professional activity in the same musical area, the direct conexion with this kind of repertory from the posture of church choir conductor or the deepening studies conducted in the master cycle. The selection of the authors, certainly one of the elements of originality by the paper, is considering the expanding the analytical horizon over a period of time as large as possible, about a hundred years of choral Romanian music, in order to observe closely the stylistic transitions and the evolutionary path of the genre in the local space.

Then, the topicality of the theme resides a lot in the importance of this sacred choral genre in the Est-European musical culture, and especially in the absence of such an approach in our country. The adoption and increasing development of the plurivocal tradition in the Romanian provinces starting with the second half of the 19th century, but also the more and more easily use of the choral singing in the Orthodox liturgical ceremony led to the taking and development of the sacred concerto genre in the Romanian countries, the one which becoming later one of the most popular choral creations in the local cultural environment. That's why I wanted it this approach to be dedicated to the study of this musical genre, through four of the most important and prolific Romanian composers of sacred choral concertos.

As I already mentioned fugitive, the local research on this topic is completely fragmented and without a comparative treatment, an analyze which could lead to highlighted stylistic directions into the Romanian choral music. Of course, there are isolated approaches on certain genre creations or general studies on a particular composer, but the great gain of the present thesis consists precisely in the detailed radiography of the style of each author of the four on this concerted level, and then in their settlement into a synoptic perspective which can help us decisively to pronounce what are the similarities and differences between them.

The method used throughout the current analytical process is the one systematized by the Indonesian musicologist Jan LaRue in his paper *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (Harmonie Park Press, 2011), model that follows the careful observation of each key parameter from the compositional scaffolding of a musical creation (sonority, harmony, melody, rhythm, formal evolution and text).

The objectives of this research emerge for the most part of those already mentioned, namely the analysis of the compositional style of each composer from the chosen ones, placing them in a synoptic-comparative scheme and shaping an overall perspective on the evolution of the choral-concertante genre in the Romanian area.

Moving now to the actual body of the paper, we mention that **the first chapter** is an expository one and with an obvious historical character, the stakes being the attempt to observe as authentic as possible the paths of the choral-concertante genre in the history of universal music. But, until entering directly into the middle of the research, I decided to introduce also in the opening of the chapter a micro-section with an explanatory role, a terminological one, out of a desire to clarify a priori some key notions in the economics of understanding the whole discourse of the thesis („concerto”, „concertante”, „concert” etc.).

Afterwards, in the second subchapter of this first part, following the research of the specialized literature and the historiographical documents I could see how the roots of the

concertant genre go until the late Renaissance period, when the so-called „Ecclesiastical vocal concerts” appear. This fact attests to an extremely important conclusion and less known to the general public, namely as the sources of the concert as a musical genre are found in Renaissance vocal polyphony, and not in instrumental music, as it might have seemed more natural. Products of the Venetian School of Composition, the „Ecclesiastical concerts” were initially a type of „a cappella” polyphonic work, whose sound texture he proposed an antiphonic language, in a permanent dialogue between at least two groups of voices. Having an eminently religious text, these motet-type poly-choral creations were conceived and intended for interpretation inside places of worship (churches, cathedrals), hence their name of „Ecclesiastical concerts”. More than that, the antiphonic texture was determined by the connection of the writing with the bidding acoustic possibilities of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice (the cradle of this poly-choral style of singing), among the largest propagators of this genus being Andrea și Giovanni Gabrieli (the nephew of the first), two composers-organists who contributed decisive in the development of the style (*concertato*) and its spread in the European area at the end of the Renaissance. A first collection containing such works appears in 1587 in Venice – *Concerti di Andrea, et di Giovanni Gabrieli* – later others followed. Important to mention in the same context is that the next editions will also include the first vocal-instrumental concerts, the instrumental contingent becoming an increasingly constant presence in this type of work, first with an accompanying role, and then as an equal dialogue partner with the choral ensembles.

The third subchapter is dedicated to the aesthetic transitions of the concert throughout the Baroque era. This stage marks first of all the disappearance of the choirs from the structure of the concert score, the improvement of the instruments and the growing popularity they gained undermining to the total disappearance the old vocal-concerting paradigm. Second, it crystallizes in the mid-seventeenth century the first concertante instrumental form, the so-called *concerto grosso*, thanks to composers such as Arcangelo Corelli and Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, the latter also signing the first score of this kind (in 1674). Among the composers who will bring this form to its peak, we mention the famous Antonio Vivaldi, Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Händel, they gradually ruled the architecture in three contrasting tempo movements, by synthesis with other related musical forms such as sonata or preclassical suite. Towards the end of the Baroque period we will witness the increasing emphasis on the concert for the only solo instrument, in parallel with the decadence of the previous form „grosso” (the one with solo instrumental group).

The fourth subchapter deals precisely with the changes brought about by the genre and form of the concert in the classical period, the most important conquest being the consecration of the tripartite-symmetrical structure (the sonata type – ABA, „Allegro” – „Lento/ „Adagio” – „Allegro”), along with the transition to tonal musical language, the discovery of the „pianoforte” or the introduction of improvised cadences. Moreover, Classicism represents the era of grace of the concertante score for a single solo instrument, composers of the first Viennese school (J. Haydn, W. A. Mozart and L. van Beethoven) bringing the most consistent contribution in this regard through impressive creations, like the „Concerto No. 5 for piano and orchestra” – Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Imperial*. We also mention here the fact that the imminent progress of the instrumental technique will lead to the development and shaping of the orchestra in the situation in which we find it even today, this becoming a key element in organizing the concert score, meaning the opposing factor or, as the case may be, the dialogue partner of the soloist.

In the next subchapter (the fifth) I followed the same parameters, but this time in relation to the romantic period. The romantic concert involves numerous expansions and transgressions of classical morphology, the previous clarity and symmetry being replaced by a liberalization of the conception and by the primacy of subjectivity in the compositional act. Confluences with musical genres such as symphony, nocturnal or lied appear, especially as a result of the unprecedented expansion of the orchestral apparatus. The concert form escapes from the classical hermeticism and embraces monopartite or even tetrapartite structures, the principle of monothematism is also stated in the genre works of some authors such as Fr. Liszt, R. Schumann or C. Franck, many of the representatives of this musical current claiming their style from the development in various hypostases of the Beethoven symphonic language (J. Brahms, H. Berlioz, G. Mahler). Which is worth remembering without a doubt referring to the romantic „concert” is that this creation represents an aesthetic culmination of the genre throughout its history, the connection of the musical language with the influences from the area of traditional music and with the versatility of the style attracting to it an immense popularity among symphonic music creators. At the end of the Romantic period, as a result of the ultra-modulatory and poly-tonal musical discourse used by Richard Wagner, and then the transition to atonal music (thanks to the Second Viennese School), the genre of the concert will involve extensive changes, both structural and aesthetic, metamorphoses that will materialize in a totally new facet of the concert in the modern era.

The last subchapter of this first large section of the paper contains the evolution of the instrumental “concert” in the time interval opened by 1915, year which conventionally marks

the beginning of the modern period, and going as far as contemporaneity, to the postmodern paradigm. The horizon of the concertante genre in this twentieth century can be drawn in terms of the experimental, since new creations of the genre no longer retain much of the old fundamental features. The classical notation becomes unconventional due to the emergence of random music (via the Polish National School), the musical language also ends up being accompanied by para-instrumental sources such as the synthesizer, computer, etc., and the compositional preferences of the authors are also conjugated with an unprecedented stylistic pluralism. In just a few decades (from the end of the 19th century until the middle of the next century) totally distinct musical trends and currents took place, such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Neoclassicism, Randomism, Minimalism etc. Consequently, the instrumental concert will return, thanks to the neo-baroque orientations of some authors, to the chamber features of the old *concerto grosso* (P. Hindemith), or it will revive the tripartite archetypal form on the background of the recrudescence of the classical archetype.

Within the unsystematic postmodern amalgam, a pseudo-cultural movement that is difficult to define or quantify, especially because of its eclectic, diffuse and totally undogmatic character, it is looking for its aesthetic landmarks also a concerted genre that ends up having no reference to the past, nothing traditional (in the sense of conventional), but only a bizarre form of belonging based on the title of one work or another as a „concert”. Basically, this reality must be connected with the general perception of music in terms of noise rather than sound, the results of this chaotic way of relating to music being extremely evident in the concert spectrum, where creations of this kind have taken on the same non-conformist type of “organization” of the sound material and the same non-intelligible forms of expression.

**In the second chapter** of the thesis I set out to observe the etymological connection between the choral works that today we call „religious concerts” and the medieval „Ecclesiastical vocal concerts”, which we already know as the primary source of the concert genre trying a historical, diachronic approach, to answer with arguments the inherent questions related to the possibility of this descent. Thus, in the first subchapter we started from the dawn of the second Christian millennium, looking in medieval Russian music for worship the levers and primary sources of these choral creations, orthodox choral tradition from which we inherit today both the singing in several voices and the musical genre of the religious concert. The oldest manuscript documents about the style of singing in Russia, after the Christianization in 988, date from the eleventh century and attests to the use of a type of church song, eminently monodic, called „znamenny” („znamyiona” = marks). We know about the type of singing „znamenny” that is using a „Kondakarian” notation derived from the Paleo-Byzantine ones

„Coislin” and „Chartres” and that is based on a double hexachordic scale, in an octoithal system similar to the Byzantine one. Diatonic par excellence, the cult music of the ancient Russians has developed over time distinctly from the Byzantine background from which it originated, receiving consistent influences from the local folk area, which invariably led to a fairly obvious detachment from the original Byzantine source. Going further along the thread of history, somewhere towards the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the next one will appear the first signs of a music on several voices, following the inherent confluence with the cult music of the states on the western border of Russia, but also of the pro-Western policy started by Ivan the Terrible and completed by Tsar Peter the Great. Under these conditions, the Western tradition of singing is recognized and imposed in the early 18th century in the Russian Empire, and in a connected way will appear the first church (clerical) choirs and a pioneering choral repertoire, with sacred songs in 2-3 voices. If at the beginning these works were written in the old notation „znamenny”, the result being a type of hybrid score with a polyphonic music written in a pneumatic system, gradually, the handlebar western semiography will be adopted, for the ease of reading and learning the new tradition of church singing.

A second stage of Russian polyphony is marked by the borrowing of harmonized Ukrainian and Polish sacred songs („kanty”), non-liturgical, written in a Western European Renaissance style, and then the appearance of the so-called „partsny” concerts (from the Latin „partes” – parts, allusion to the type of singing after individual scores), the latter being local creations of the seventeenth century, in Baroque style, but designed in a Western antiphonic manner. It should be noted an extremely important fact in this context, which is clearly stated by the most important voices of Russian musicology, namely, that these "partsny" works form the basis of later sacred choral concerts, existing in use to this day.

With the beginning of the 18th century and the official adoption by the imperial court of plurivocal music, the pole of gravity will be moved around the new capital St. Petersburg, where the recently established school of Western music (the Imperial Chapel) will greatly promote a pro-Italian avant-garde line, Empress Catherine II herself campaigned for the bringing of teacher-composers from the peninsula to apprentice the young Russian generation of musicians in Venetian compositional art. Thus, thanks to the guidance of some big names of the time, such as Baldassare Galuppi or Giuseppe Sarti, choral compositions in Russian will be born, but with an obvious imported aesthetic, works that betray an inadvertence towards the local church ethos and a much more concrete belonging to the polyphonic, poly-choral, Venetian style. Along with the degree of inadequacy to the old style of singing, the intelligibility of the text and the melody of local origin, both defining elements for the religious

creations of the past, are also sacrificed. The most famous local representatives of this composition direction are Maksym Berezovsky, Dmitry Bortniansky, Artemy Vedel, Stepan Davydov or Stepan Degtyarev, authors who will adopt as a choral-concertante form the tripartite structure of the sonata and who will remain tributaries to a music with secular content. It should be noted that at the same time the choral concert will take over the function of the liturgical quinonic, becoming a work more and more present in the cafes of the Russian Orthodox churches.

The Italian period will be followed by a pro-German stage of the Petersburg school, beginning with the investiture of Aleksey Lvov as director of the Imperial Chapel in 1837, moment when the old specialized commission in charge of supervising and guiding the choral-religious compositions will pass to a series of changes, namely: giving up the Venetian style of composition, encouraging the harmonization of old „znamenny” songs from the traditional repertoire, returning to the homophone-chordal (iso-syllabic) texture, restricting the dimensions of sacred concerts, standardizing compositional manners and the sacred repertoire by centralizing and critically readjusting the old regional arrangements in the volume „Common Book of Musical Singing”. This publication will become the leading book of all church choir conductors and the only universally-accepted one in the empire. The musical language used by the authors will be inspired by the aesthetics of German Romanticism, among the most important composers of this stylistic direction being Aleksei Lvov, Mikhail Glinka (considered the founder of Russian classical music), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Mily Balakirev, Aleksandr Arkhagelsky, Gavriil Y. Lomakin, Nikolai Bakhmeteev and others.

A new facet in Russian choral-religious music will be launched by the Moscow Synodal School, both through its teachers and composers, as well as through the voice organ of this educational institution, the Synodal Choir. Starting with the end of the 19th century, the Moscow school will mark a turning point in choral music north of the Dnieper, by returning to local sources of inspiration and capitalizing on old church songs. The central objective will be to capitalize on and propagate the local style (through the connection inherent with the philo-national movement of the "Group of Five"), the craftsmen of the new Moscow school being Stepan Smolensky (first director and composer of the Synodal School), Vasily Orlov (conductor choir) and Alexander Kastalskiy (the most famous composer of the institution). Invariably, these three visionary creators, followed by other famous figures, such as Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Alexander Gretchaninov, Sergei Rachmaninoff or Pavel Cesnokov, will make a decisive contribution to redefining the national specificity in sacred Russian music (and

not only), ensuring at the same time an unprecedented revival of the choral-concertante genre, during this period composing no less than 100 such creations.

At the end of the subchapter in question, I briefly treated the era of the communist-Soviet regime (1917-1991) from the same perspective of Russian choral-religious music, a century in which creativity and free movement of sacred scores enter a stage of secrecy and which, as might be expected, at least in the register of the religious concertant genre, proved to be one far less prolific than the previous one.

The second subchapter of this second section presents the same type of historical-analytical path, but this time from the perspective of Romanian music. For this purpose, we sought first to follow the path of penetration of Western plurivocal music in the Romanian space, and then that of the choral-concertant genre, and we will finally compile a chronological retrospective (according to their authors) of all the genre creations existing in the choral archive in Romania.

Choral music appears timidly in the Romanian provinces somewhere at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, thanks to the school founded by Saint Paisie Velicikovski at Neamț Monastery, where the existence of a monastic choir in several voices is attested for the first time. It is known that at that time the monastery housed no less than 800 monks from all over Eastern Europe (Romanians, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians). Other choral formations that will continue in the 19th century this pioneering action will be one by one the “Choral Settlement” (“Stable of the Army”) established under the leadership of the Russian Archimandrite Visarion (in Bucharest), the choir of the „Veniamin Costachi” Seminar led by Al. Petrino and reorganized by Gh. Burada (in Iași) or the Choir from Cluj from the time of Andrei Șaguna, bishop of Carloviț at that time. Simultaneously with the development of lower education and choral formations, the first higher education institutions (Music Conservatories) and the Romanian Philharmonic Societies (1819 – Cluj, 1834 – Bucharest, 1836 – Iași) will appear, as well as the first international scholarships granted to our young musicians.

The official introduction of choral music in the new Romanian state will take place on January 18, 1865, when Prince Al. Ioan Cuza will decree the replacement of „oriental” music (also called „psaltic”) with the systematic vocal one. The first generation of Romanian composers will be a sacrificial one, in the sense that due to the lack of local landmarks, our choral music authors will remain the tributaries of the compositional styles learned in the European study centers (Paris, Vienna, Prague), their music betraying ample shortcomings in terms of adequacy to the liturgical atmosphere of our Orthodox churches. This generation will

consist of personalities such as I. Kartu, Al. Flechtenmacher, Ed. Wachmann, C. Mikuli or I. Vorobchievici. Their works (concertante or liturgical) will not be imposed in time, precisely because of the abstract (secular) sonority of their music, of the sophisticated-polyphonic style and of the unintelligible text, factors that also prevented the adoption of these creations in the usual church repertoire.

The second generation of local composers will also bring a progress in choral-concertante aesthetics, the authors of this late nineteenth century being less concerned with imitating Western models and more focused on the adequacy of musical content to local feeling and ethos. However, this desideratum will face many limitations and a not very high degree of success, given the still unfavorable context and the same general lack of authentic landmarks. Pieces signed by representatives of this generation – G. Ștephănescu, Al. Podoleanu, G. Musicescu, Gh. Dima, E. și Gh. Mandicevschi, D. G. Kiriac or M. Berezovschi – will mark, unfortunately, enough belongs to the different compositional tendencies of the time (Austro-German – Gh. Dima, Viennese – Mandicevschi brothers, French – D. G. Kiriac, Russian – G. Musicescu, M. Berezovschi, Al. Podoleanu), and this despite the propagandistic aspirations to lay the foundations of a Romanian style. However, perhaps the most emblematic conquest of this period, beyond the still quasi-inappropriate sound of church music, will be the imposition of the choral-concertante genre in the Romanian space thanks, first of all, to the compositional and translation activity of Gavriil Musicescu, the founder of the sacred choral concert in our country. By translating the two concerts (Easter and Christmas) after F. Deghtearev and composing several other original creations in style (especially the two works entitled programmatically „Concerto No. 1” and „Concerto No. 2”), G. Musicescu will bring this musical genre also in Romanian choral literature, taking over the tripartite model (sonata type) from the Russian academic creation.

A slightly more considerable leap will be made by the third and fourth generations of Romanian composers, who benefit from the advantage of primary frames already drawn and the possibility of a more realistic screening of subjective preferences in relation to the concrete needs of church choral music. Certain directions had already been anticipated by D. G. Kiriac, who greatly valued the psaltic melody in his sacred creations, but the young composers of the twentieth century may claim even more ardently the need to return choral music to the psaltic melodic background and traditional sources. Thus, the choral-concertante creations will flourish in this twentieth century, despite the tumultuous and transitory political climate, the new composers proving more refinement and inspiration in processing a melodic line of modal

origin. Among the authors who will stand out in this compositional direction will be Gh. Cucu, I. D. Chirescu, S. Drăgoi, I. P. Runcu, N. Lungu, P. Constantinescu and others.

In the third subchapter of the middle part, we aimed to draw a parallel between the religious choral concert and the liturgical choral chironic, notions that are somewhat confused both at the theoretical level and in the current practice. The most important distinction of the two works is the destination, which in the case of the concert is an extra-liturgical artistic show or, in any case, a para-liturgical musical moment. Then, we notice next to the concert an increased complexity of the musical content, the choral chironic being a slightly simpler work, with a text well indicated by the service books and in a slow rhythm, corresponding to the papacy style of the connected Byzantine genre. The sacred concerto is a broader creation with an increased degree of difficulty, most often having solo treatments (or even instrumental accompaniment) and proposing an eminently religious text, but not as restrictive as in the case of the quinonic (either a quote from Psalms, either another type of quote or an original composition).

**The third chapter** of the thesis is focused on the musical analysis of the most important sacred choral concerts signed by the four Romanian composers. For G. Musicescu I chose the works, Concerto No. 1 – „The words of the prophet David from Psalms 23, 150 and 142”, Concerto No. 2 – „Renew, New Jerusalem”, „Release Now”, „At the River of Babylon” and the prayer „Under Your Mercy”; for S. Drăgoi The quinonic concert „Lord, my lips”, the liturgical fragments „Let our mouths be filled” and „Holy is the Lord”, respectively the processing „These are the words of the Lord” (after his original for voice, cello and piano); in front of P. Constantinescu „The prayer of the heart”, the liturgical quinonic concert „Psalm XXXIX” and „God have mercy” from the *Psalter-style Liturgy* for mixed choir, as well as the fragment „Today He was hanged on Wood” (excerpt from the Byzantine Oratorio Passion and Resurrection) and in the case of I. P. Runcu the choral concerts „Vespers”, „Christ is risen”, „May God rise”, „God of my salvation” and „Look from heaven”. Next to each composer I also attached a micro-section with a biographical character, along with which I also presented a brief list of their compositional work.

**In the fourth chapter** I tried to parallel the conclusions of the previous chapter, trying a comparative approach that would highlight even more suggestively the similarities and differences between the four creators of choral music.

If we were to sketch a summary sentence next to each composer, we could say next to Gavriil Musicescu that he is one of the first Romanian composers who successfully approached the sacred concertante genre and on whom is attributed the success of its introduction in the

Romanian space. He traces the main frames of this musical genre, stating the tripartite form of choral concert (the sonata), but without detaching himself too much from the model of the Russian teachers at the Imperial Chapel where he was formed.

Then, Sabin Drăgoi is a somewhat more versatile, more nuanced author, in which the romantic language of the German chain is combined with the Romanian folk modalism, the result being an expressive, sensitive, ample musical text of great depth and aesthetic value.

Paul Constantinescu is not so much an explicit creator of sacred concerts, but a composer who in his choral-religious works programmatically follows the centrality of the monodic modal discourse, eminently of Byzantine inspiration, a true stylist of psaltic melody in masterful polyphonic processing that undeniably personalizes his creative inspiration.

Ion Popescu-Runcu represents in our opinion a synthesis author, whose compositional work is influenced both by the Slavic environment in which he worked for about 25 years, and by the Romanian academic conservatism that expressly demanded the recovery of psaltic melodies in liturgical-choral creations and the abandonment of the western intricate (imported) style. In the very vast choral-concertante literature left to posterity by I. Runcu we discover a very sinuous melody, lively and with deep bright accents, parallelisms of voices specific to the Russian way of writing and a predilection for the solo type of sacred concert, all these features the image of a composer both traditionalist and innovative (especially in terms of used timbre registers - very extensive).

At the end of the thesis I structured a section of **conclusions**, in which the most important directions and results obtained by this research can be radiographically notified, and then a consistent number of **annexes** (documents, scores and various musical examples) will be attached. and the **bibliography** related to any scientific approach. In the hope of conducting a study as thorough and authentic as possible, I hope that the current thesis can be used in the future by other researchers to discover and explore new horizons in the field of choral-religious music.

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