

The Comic of Molière's *The Pretentious Young Ladies* and the Postmodernism of Vasile Spătărelu's Music

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Molière's theatre inspired the Romanian composer Vasile Spătărelu, who offered to the opera universe the comedy *The Pretentious Young Ladies*. By means of this comedy, the satirical side of the farce is revived, being caricatured the upstartism, phenomenon socio-moral, regardless age. In an effort to coordinate the musical drama, the five actor-singers are the dynamic elements, by the side of female chorus, a small orchestra, and a dancers group. Comical language and situation of action are permanently accompanied by comical effect of musical instruments. The virtuosity of coloristic thinking indicates an ample and subtle using of modern orchestra device, with asymmetries and complementary timbre. The only one Vasile Spătărelu's opera proposes a mixed playing of postmodern music in a stylistically conception which appeals from melodies and motifs picked up from different places and times.

Keywords: comic opera, Molière, postmodernism, *The Pretentious Young Ladies*, Vasile Spătărelu

Molière's theatre inspired the Romanian composer Vasile Spătărelu¹, who offered to the opera universe the comedy *The Pretentious Young Ladies*. Written in 1985, the opera is a musical comedy in a single act, dedicated to his colleague and friend Mihail Cozmei². The absolute premiere was enacted in the same year, on the 11th of July, within the event called *The Musical Holidays of Piatra Neamț* (14th edition). The interpretation belonged to students of the "George Enescu" Conservatory from Iași³, in collaboration with the Romanian Opera from the same city.

The libretto was arranged by Dimitrie Tăbăcaru⁴ and his daughter Anda Tăbăcaru, proposing a specific time and place: Molière's Paris. By means of *The Pretentious Young Ladies*, the satirical side of the farce is revived, the farce being a medieval genre which flourished between the 14th and the 16th century, and in which the attention was drawn towards villains, frivolous ladies, grumpy old men, narrow-minded nobles, hypocrite clergy, and greedy lawyers. The means of expression remind of *commedia dell'arte*, followed by the satires of Molière (a satire genius), from *The Miser* and *The Bourgeois Gentleman* and passing to *The School for Wives* and *Tartuffe*.

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¹ Vasile Spătărelu (1935-2005) was a composer, professor at "George Enescu" National University of Arts from Iași, the creator of the modern school of composition from Iași, dean between 1984-1989 and 1991-1995.

² Mihail Cozmei (1931) is a musicologist and professor at "George Enescu" National University of Arts from Iași, dean between 1965-1976, rector between 1973-1974, 1976-1984, and also music secretary to "Moldova" Philharmonic from Iași.

³ Conservatory is the old name of the current National University of Arts.

⁴ Dimitrie Tăbăcaru (1929-1985) was an opera stage manager and manager (1974-1982) to the Romanian National Opera from Iași, one of the founders of this institution, and also professor at "George Enescu" National University of Arts.

Molière's text is a means of elaborating an exciting and savory music, just as similar to Lully's ballet-comedies. The frisky atmosphere and coquetry appeal to musical intonations signed by famous composers, starting from the baroque music and ending with rock music.

The comedy of situation and of language is always accompanied by the instrumental comedy. The orchestra is part of the interpretation, due to the fact that the members of the orchestra are seated on stage (and not in the pit), and the actors perform in front of the orchestra. The sonant environment serves for the idea of theater and music, the musical representation originating in the *rappresentazione di anima e di corpo* as well as in the *buffo* initiated by Pergolesi. The moments of orchestral accompaniment mimic the Italian *buffa* and the musical *giocoso*. The colourful virtuosity denotes an ample and subtle use of the device of modern orchestra, with asymmetries and complementarities of the inner tone.

Expressive and lyrical, vigorous and picturesque, characterized by a strong irony, or by grotesque allusions, the music written by Vasile Spătărelu charms by its regular and efficient expressiveness, by its savvy but clear writing, by its power to emphasize the comedy of scenical acting, as well as the ridicule of one or the other character. (Cozmei, 2017, p. 436)

All who are involved in the show are characters, including the orchestra and the conductor, who react and even have something to say. They are dressed in specific suits, the orchestra members are actors and musicians, and the conductor is similar to little Mozart, conducting its orchestra.

The scenic acting is the main means of expressing the effort to coordinate the musical dramaturgy and to bring the representation to life. The actor is the dynamic element that makes the action perceptible. It has expression means the word by which the actor states his ideas clearly, conducting the topic and its evolving. But *The Pretentious Young Ladies* is not only words, movement, conflict, and intrigue, but also music. The prose moments appear as a prolonged version of the chanting, and the chanting is an expression of the words. This tendency pretends a certain way of dealing with the dialogue, which has in view the purpose of the word, bearing in mind the fact that the artist pays attention to all surrounding actions.

The characters act as the spectators who watch them, having comic conflicts, whose resolving bears joyousness and vivaciousness. By means of exaggerating the comic aspects, the psychological realms, the misplaced affects, and the character mismatch. Within the dramatic action, choreographies are present, because the dance brings to light the expressiveness of the body in its most stylistic form. The energies propel the dancers, making them the starting point of the dynamic imaginative process. The choreographies are diverse from stylistic dances, such as the gracious, gallant minuet and the rock and roll.

The scenic representation includes the use of choirs (the musical moment of *The Roman History*), as equal voices choir. The female choir becomes a character in its own right, along with the choirs personified by the soloists. It encompasses individual soubrettes, and its character is "at times similar to a tree trunk, built from the whole, and at other times similar to the branches which emerge from the trunk and expand to infinity" (Arbore, 1992, pp. 215-216).

Vasile Spătărelu—Master of the Sung Word

The musician affirmed himself in the field of creativity, bringing to life symphonic pieces and vocal-symphonic pieces, theatrical music, chamber instrumental and vocal-instrumental music, entertainment music, and choral music; the value of his music was confirmed not only by the audience, but also by the Composers and Musicologists Union of Romania and by the Romanian Academy.

Within the last decades, Iași became an important musical centre, and among the persons to whom we owe such evolution, we can find Vasile Spătărelu. Composer, professor, organiser, or animator of the musical industry, he created the Musical School of Iași, along with musicians, some of them being his own students. The composers reunited here, although each of them has a unique profile, all have a common aura, different from that of their fellow colleagues from Cluj or Bucharest. The impulse of their orientation appears to be drawn from Vasile Spătărelu himself. Originating from Oltenia, Romania, adapted to the Moldavian environment, Spătărelu did not want—just the same as Stravinski did not—to write a musical piece for himself, but always for the others. (Niculescu, 1998, p. 22)

Vasile Spătărelu was keen on sound design, signing the musical background for *The Twelfth Night* by W. Shakespeare, *Iași in Carnival* by V. Alecsandri, *The Cherry-Tree Garden* by A. P. Cehov, *Ozana's Empire*, pantomime inspired by Ion Creanga, *Perugian Wedding* by Al. Kiritescu, and many more. *Suita Brevis* is also inspired by a musical background, in baroque style. *The Pretentious Young Ladies* musical comedy, after the homonym play of Molière, is the most important piece of Spătărelu meant for stage performance, a combination of post-modern music, in a stylistic concept that appeals to melodies and motives from different places and times.

The dominant aspect of his creative vision, envisaged throughout his evolution as a composer, is the fusion of the construction with his musical poeticness. For him, the act of creation is not an affective spontaneous and easy process, but a result of an elaboration which coordinates the affective impulse with his vivid imagination. In fact, not even his craftsmanship or rigorousness explain his creation, but only his poetic universe, of such poeticness and diversity. He looks relentlessly for a unique, but eloquent language. (Boțocan & Pascu, 1997, pp. 374-375)

Vasile Spătărelu developed an advanced language, which did not impede him to stay connected to the traditional musical spirit, with atonal gliding. Paying attention to lucid structures, he discretely dosed his lyricism. Man of great culture, figure marked of Iași's culture, Vasile Spătărelu loved poetry and used to express himself in lyrics and verses, with the closest persons. He is therefore keen on a vivid association between the sound and the word within the vocal space, the choral space, and the stage space. His ability to enrich small forms with the maximum density of musical expression was practiced with within lieds, choral miniatures, and furthermore in his unique work for the stage.

Loved by his students, who seem to have embraced not only his ability to compose, but also his music craftsmanship, *Made*⁵ is first and foremost, a composer. A composer of lyrical substance, by means of his emotions, aspirations, and attitudes. A lyricism censored by sentimental attitudes, especially serious. Cursed to be a composer, with held by the knowledge of the composer, he sometimes meditates, inspired by Enescu's longing and anxiety (aspect proven by *The 5 Pieces for Piano*) and when he feels to have found the best musical transposing of the thought, lots and lots of sounds connect his soul to the sky, to the flowers (blue or not), to the stream of waters, and to our souls, of listeners. (Cozmei, 1998, p. 25)

The aemuli of professor Vasile Spătărelu were always provoked by the discovery of the new, being conscious that the qualitative music is always to be created from the intertwining of tradition and modernism. Not only was the composition class influenced by the creative personality of the master, but also other musicians, who were taught by the professor himself.

“*Made* is friendly and welcoming, and these are among the virtues all the more rare in our embittered world. He has the talent and knowledge of the art creator, and also the finesse of the teacher” (Bentoiu, 1998, p. 27).

⁵ *Made* was the nickname of the composer Vasile Spătărelu.

The Themes Approached

The purpose of the satire is a social, intellectual, and artistic movement, whose origins date from the beginning of the 17th century. In the nobles' rooms, the pretentious and complicated means of expression was to be found among the Parisian aristocratic young people, being a manifesto against the rudimentary behaviour of the Orleans "noblemen". This attitude was vehemently condemned by Jean de la Bruyere (1645-1696) and by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, also known as Molière (1622-1673)⁶.

Starting from the year 1625, the spiritual Parisians reunited in the salon of Marquise Catherine de Rambouillet. The newly-created current elaborated a new code of conduct and thought with its main purpose to refine the taste and morals and turn them into medieval courtesy principles. The pretentious ones wanted to reform the matrimonial customs of the era, which passed from mercantilism and brutal seduction. One started from the subtlety and delicacy of expression and continued with the elegance of clothing and only pure feelings.

If the virtuousness of the conversation and the self possession of poetic expression were of high interest in that society, it is no wonder that the audience of the Petit Bourbon⁷ applauded the first representation of Molière's play—*The Pretentious Young Ladies*.

In his piece, Molière shows the contrast between the blunt but honest self-expression of the old man Gorgibus, of the chambermaid Marotte, and the pretentious expression of the two provincial young ladies, Madelon and Cathos. Secondly, Molière proposes a farce in which the tandem Mascarille—Jodelet parodies all that is artificial. It is caricatured by parvenitism, a dangerous moral and social phenomenon that continues to exist, regardless of the era, attacking especially a society in which ideological and educational mutations take place.

The Subject of the Opera

The action takes place in Paris, where the bourgeois Gorgibus (bass) wants his daughter and his niece, Madelon (soprano) and Cathos (mezzo-soprano), respectively, to marry two respected young men, La Grange and Du Croisy (prose counterparts). To their surprise, the two young ladies, obsessed with precious fashion, refuse the young men. To seek revenge, La Grange and Du Croisy team up for a farce, along with Marotte, their chambermaid (soprano). Thus, Mascarille (baritone) and Jodelet (tenore), the two butlers, are two important wisemen, fearless warriors, creators of sonnets, madrigals, and poems. Madelon and Cathos are fascinated by the personality of disguised men. And whilst the moment of maximum seduction, La Grange and Du Croisy debunk the two men, and all their marriage wishes are destroyed. Old man Gorgibus believes that this farce will stop his daughter's and niece's taste for pretentiousness, but they profoundly offended by goings are deciding to search other counts, marquises, dukes, and princes, pursuing their beauty rituals and bringing the others on the verge of going crazy.

⁶ The pseudonyme Molière comes from a small village from South West France, Molières—situated in Dordogne Department, Aquitaine region. Retrieved from <http://www.map-france.com/Molieres-24480/07/26/2015>.

⁷ Petit Bourbon: Hotel Petit Bourbon is an old Parisian inn, built in the 14th century, situated in front of the Louvre Palace, today *Place du Louvre*. The building encompassed a very large room, the most spacious of Paris, that was home to the entertainment of the Court. Here took place *The Comical Ballet of the Queen* (1581) and *General States* (1614). This was also a theater salon—Molière's plays were enacted by *Scaramouche*, an Italian band of Tiberio Fiorilli. It was demolished in the 17th century. Retrieved July 26, 2015 from <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petit-Bourbon>.

Analytical Performing Itinerary

The score encompasses musical numbers which alternate with the prose, or accompany it, switching in an inspired manner to structures which are specific for the musical theater: prelude, recitative, arioso, duet, ensemble, choir. This is the synoptic structure of the show (see Figure 1)⁸:

Scene	No.	Music-theater	Scenes	Characters
I.	1.	Orchestral prelude and pantomime		
	2.	Prose		La Grange, Du Croisy
II.		Prose		Gorgibus, La Grange, Cu Croisy
III.	1.	Prose		Marotte, Gorgibus
	2.	Aria		Gorgibus
IV.	1.	Orchestral interlude and pantomime	<i>Wigs arrangement</i>	
	2.	Prose		Madelon, Cathos, Gorgibus
	3.	Duet		Madelon–Cathos
	4.	Orchestral interlude and pantomime		
V.		Duet		Madelon–Cathos
VI.		Prose		Marotte, Madelon, Cathos
VII.	1.	Orchestral interlude and dance	<i>Mascaril shows up</i>	
	2.	Prose		Madelon, Cathos, Mascarille
VIII.	3.	Duet-dance		Madelon–Cathos
		Choir	<i>Roman history</i>	Subrettes, Mascarille
IX.		Prose-music alternatively		Madelon, Cathos, Mascarille
X.		Prose		Marotte, Madelon, Cathos, Mascarille
XI.	1.	Intermezzo	<i>Jodelet shows up</i>	
	2.	Arieta		Jodelet
	3.	Prose		Madelon, Cathos, Jodelet, Mascarille
XII.		Dance—slow menuet (Themes from Scene VII.1) →rock and roll		
XIII.	1.	Prose + music	The return of the marquis and count	Du Croisy, La Grange, Jodelet, Mascarille, Madelon, Cathos
	2.	Prose + music ensemble	<i>Butlers debunked</i>	
	3.	Intermezzo and pantomime; Replay the music from part XIII.1	<i>Butlers undressed</i>	
XIV.		Ensemble		Madelon, Cathos, Jodelet, Mascarille, Gorgibus, subrettes choir
XV.		Prose		Madelon, Cathos
XVI.		Orchestral number with Pantomime	<i>Wigs arrangement, reprise from Scene IV.1</i>	

Figure 1. The synoptic structure of the show *The Pretentious Young Ladies* by Vasile Spătărelu.

⁸ Based on the manuscript, I edited the vocal score at publishing house of “George Enescu” National University of Arts (ISMN 979-0-9009883-2-4). Watching the succession of the prose and music, on the rational route of the dramatic progress, I renumbered the scenes and the subscenes.

Musical Language of Postmodern Opera

The Pretentious Young Ladies is a postmodern opera structured on the tonality concept, as well as on concept of mode. From one end to another, no key signature is marked, but there are a lot of alterations (even double ones), which lead us through a complex musical universe. The tonality is subtly represented, reminding of the slow menuet fragment which starts from the bright G major. Many moments are modally designed, with intonations which encompass diminished or augmented intervals (seconds, fourths, fifths, and octaves); ongoing some pitches of scales become mobile. Due to the sequency technique, the scales initially listed appear in different configurations, being subjected to transposition.

The jazz influence is visible, in harmonical part⁹, by means of ingenuous chord progressions, which avoid the resolving according to classic rules and also in the rhythmical part, which have different configurations (through the presence of irregular subdivisions, syncopation, off-beating, and dotted notes). The rhythmic coordinate is inseparably bounded to the used language. Just as any other comedy opera, the dynamism is one of the aspects which superimposes by itself.

The measure signature is sometimes unsophisticated (4/8, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4), and most of the time it proposes mixed meters of the type 2/8, 3/8, 3 + 1/8, 7/8, requiring the attention of the conductor, in order to find the particular note value and the corresponding figure for each bar. The tempo serves to carry out the action and the logic of uttering the text by the vocal performers. The tempo changes are either unexpected, by suddenly changing of the movement, or gradually, through *accelerando* or *ritardando*. Being a musical work which cannot evolve within a large timing, which is the main characteristic of the comic opera, the tempos develop within short timeframings. This aspect requires certain qualities on the conductor's side, who must prepare the upcoming agogic switches. To this, we add the requirement to closely follow-up the prose moment, in order to utter the music on time, so that the tension of the theatrical flow does not crop.

Dynamics can be qualified as diverse, involving between the maximum levels *piano fortissimo*, with sudden or gradual transits. The accents are very often used, both in vocal and instrumental plan.

The composer thought the vocal scores with pronounced acting valencies and the heroes must be actors and singers at once. This is the reason why Vasile Spătăreanu did not write musical page to ask for vocal bravura. The transition from *sprechstimme* to *parlato* and expressive singing must be done with a great deal of naturalness, using different ways of uttering sounds (white, non-vibrating, or falsetto sounds), and not just those known by the *belcanto*'s technique.

In approximately 60 minutes of music, the performers are accompanied by a modern orchestra, not very large. To the string quintet composed by 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 + 1 is added by a single player at each wind section (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, and tuba) and an impressive arsenal of percussion: snare drum, big drum, castanets, triangle, xylophone, gong, crash cymbals, and rock band drums.

The caricature tone is rendered through different effects: *glissando* to the trombone and tuba, quickly *tremolo* nearly to the bridge, *sforzando piano* to the brasses with mutes, *molto sforzato secco* to the tambourine. The affectedness of the two women appears in the orchestration even from the introduction, where the strings execute *tremolo sul ponticello*, which outlines a glacial atmosphere. From musical numbers designed for the ensemble (prelude, slow menuet, and rock 'n' roll), to recitative moments, the orchestra's participation is bright, requiring different manners of integration in the whole dramaturgy.

⁹ Very often, Vasile Spătăreanu improvised at the piano with great originality and masterfulness.

The Integration Within the Romanian Genre

About 20 years ago, the composer Pascal Bentoiu¹⁰ himself wrote a libretto, being attracted to the same solid fundamental patrimony of Molière's comedies. The opera called *L'amour Medecin, op. 15* (1964)¹¹ is a modern piece, in spirit, form, and language, and its main theme is all about entertainment, tending towards bettering morals. Therefore, the world of Molière's characters brought Bentoiu and Spătărelu closely, the second common aspect being the choice of musical citations, a technique by means of which they are aligned with poly-stylism. Both satires remind us of *A Hard Day's Night* by Paul Constantinescu¹², with another coordinates of style.

A replica for *The Pretentious Young Ladies* is to be found in the *Medieval Farces* of Christian Misievici¹³. In a playful atmosphere, full of movement and surprises, the ethos of the medieval comedy bonds with the affectiveness of the comic opera, whilst the musical discourse is adorned with elements from the jazz music. While the heroes are wired, the music reminds us of Bach, Beethoven, Puccini, Berlioz, and the quotations and creation *à la...* subscribes to postmodernism.

The characters dress up sounding "costumes", just like universal and local masks from a musical carnival, just about the same as in *The Lost Letter*¹⁴ signed by Dan Dediu. In a humorous and attentive comment there are different styles and genres, from tango to habanera, waltz, and romance, and passing to hora and sarba, in sonorities of fanfare.

Conclusions

The Pretentious Young Ladies musical comedy, after the homonymous play of Molière is the most important piece of Spătărelu meant for stage performance, a combination of postmodern music, in a stylistic concept that appeals to melodies and motives from different places and times. In an effort to coordinate the musical comedy and to give life stage to the performance, the five actor-singers are the dynamic elements, besides a small orchestra, a female choir, and a dancers group. Impersonating on Madelon, Cathos, Gorgibus, Mascarille, and Jodelet, the vocality of the singers must encompass a justified balance of speaking-singing, due to the fact that the melodic line unfolds in recitativic manner, with many repeated sounds and conjunct melodic motion, intermingled by skips. For the palette to be complete on the principle of musical declamation specific to postmodernism, the voice is treated in *sprechgesang* manner. The comedy of language is present into the device of modern orchestra and all the performers are characters.

Joyful and dynamic, *The Pretentious Young Ladies* show is a challenge for any musician and a source of delight for any concert-goer. The experience of this musical manifestation brings about the extraordinary fascination of the opera, with its syncretism and complexity. Through *The Pretentious Young Ladies*, Vasile

¹⁰ Pascal Bentoiu (1927-2016) was a composer with a refined and modern language, focused on the expressivity of music, having tangencies with neo-romantism.

¹¹ Premiere: December 23, 1966, at the Opera and Ballet Theatre in Bucharest.

¹² Premiere: October 26, 1935, at the Romanian Opera in Bucharest. Paul Constantinescu (1909-1963) was a Romanian composer of Jewish origin, which has shown a constant preoccupation with folklore and Byzantine melos.

¹³ Disciple of Vasile Spătărelu's, Cristian Misievici (1943) is a composer, professor of harmony, orchestration and composition to "Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy of Cluj-Napoca. The premiere of his only opera took place on the 28th of June 1986, in Piatra Neamț, at the Musical Holidays event, 15th edition.

¹⁴ The premiere took place on December 16, 2012, at the Romanian National Opera of Bucharest. Dan Dediu (1967) is a pianist, composer and professor to "Ciprian Porumbescu" National University of Music from Bucharest, head of the composition department, rector between 2008-2012. Retrieved from http://www.observatorcultural.ro/MUZICA.-O-scrisoare-pierdută-de-Dan-Dediu-in-premiera-la-ONB*articleID_28043-articles_details.html.

Spătărelu showed off his dramaturgical qualities and his composer virtues, developing a musical action which is full of logic, temperament, and originality.

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