

# DUMITRU CAPOIANU'S BLOOD FLAMES – EQUINOX. SOLSTICE ORATORIO

- *PROTEST AGAINST TIMES WHERE ONLY THE NAME IS MISSING* –

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**Abstract.** *The oratorio Blood Falmes written by the Bucharest born composer Dumitru Capoianu is made up of two parts Equinox and Solstice. The work was written in 1984 and is a protest against the communist regime. The text the oratorio is based on belongs to Eugen Jebeleanu and was taken from the volume Hanibal. The melodic motive which generated the composition can be found in the catholic biblical song Dies irae, which contains the three notes also found in an orthodox song by Anton Pann, Our Father – c, b, c, a. Orchestration, harmony, dynamics, agogics and all the musical elements support the feelings and ideas expressed by the poems. The climax can be found at the end, where the prayer Our Father represents Dumitru Capoianu's musical, social and cultural testament. Even if the oratorio was never performed completely, it is a very brave work, managing to perfectly present feelings of oppression, but also hope, of rebellion and protest against the communist regime.*

**Keywords:** *oratorio, Romanian music, creation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dumitru Capoianu's works, important, dense, inventive and colorful expands over more than 60 years, while he approached an important number of musical genres, but preferring the orchestral genres in their various forms of expression: film music, theatre music, ballet music, symphonies or concerts etc. The vocal-symphonic genre is represented by works such as Cinci cântece din Ardeal (1961), Valses ignobles et pas sentimentales (1986), but the oratorio Flăcări de sânge – Blood Flames, composed in 1984, is an important presence among the Bucharest born composer.

The creation began around 1979 by the composition of Our Father, a choral poem placed in the final part of the composition. The oratorio has two parts: Equinox and Solstice, the latter finished a year before the former, the oratorio being completed only in 1984.

Dumitru Capoianu declared in an extensive interview in the fall of 2010, at his home in Bucharest, that “the work has a very complicated, even bizarre history. It came from my need to express myself without showing off, without having to shout or make a scandal. One day I felt the urge to do what I can do. Around the 80s I felt the need to express my opinion about what was going on in the country. Not by screaming, not by shouting, but by composing music; and composing just as I would have done if I had to scream the music myself.

The equinox is the time when the night is equal with the day. But that moment doesn't exist... night is never equal with the day. And the day equal with the night is never there, if, in an absurd way, we could admit that such a moment existed on the one hand. On the other hand, the solstice represents <<the long day>> when the sun stands still, there is light; ... but that moment doesn't exist either; that moment is always vacillating.”

The literary support of the oratorio can be found in Eugen Jebeleanu's volume Hanibal, about which the composer declared: “I have written music on Eugen Jebeleanu's lyrics all my life. I took one of his latest volumes at that moment, <<shred it to pieces>> and

configured a text from his published poems, out of which to create a work which would be my musical, social and cultural testament.”

This work is an evident anti-communist protest. The lyrics have enough hints to it – for example: They need help to budge – a very brave act of the authors. The composer said referring to that: “Eugen Jebeleanu had the courage and the text doesn’t mention one thing: the name of a person.”

As a paradox, the oratorio, even if it represented a menace to the communist regime, it was performed for the first time – only Solstice – by the Tirgu Mures philharmonic orchestra, conducted by Horea Andreescu in May 1983, the same year it received the prize for the best vocal-symphonic work from the Union of Composers and Musicologists. The first attempt to record it happened a year later, at the initiative of the conductor Iosif Conta, but it was soon stopped because of the text, considered to be “problematic”. That was also the reason for which the choir of the “George Enescu” Philharmonic orchestra, conducted by Mircea Basarab, had to sing the work without words. The oratorio hasn’t been entirely performed to the day.

The orchestra is made up of brass instruments, it has a rich sector of percussion instruments, an organ, choir and reciter, while all is embellished by the presence of three solo instruments: flute/ piccolo flute, violin solo and harmonic guitar/bass guitar, the author declaring that these instruments “suggest more of a mimicked joyfulness. An ugly joyfulness, a grimace, a smirk, to show the discrepancy between what is obvious and what is actually real.”

The score was printed in 1988 by the Musical Publishing House, despite the fact that the censorship of the time tried to stop it from printing. Dumitru Capoianu remembers that moment: “there were people who pretended not to notice these things when this work was printed, even if it was forbidden for it to be played. I have a score which has a No written on it in green, and a signature. But nobody had the courage to say that the work cannot be played because it was what it was, they all said the problem was that it ended with Our Father.”

The structural elements this work is based on are succinctly described by the composer: “there are a few elements that helped the composition of this work. First I discovered that the biblical catholic song *Dies irae* contains the three notes also found in an orthodox song by Anton Pann, *Our Father* – c, b, c, a. These notes were a musical starting point. At the same time, the work tends to show less commented, less known, less discussed, less used and less useful facets – hence the text of the oratorio. Therefore we have to notice the visible, worldly component of Eugen Jebeleanu’s text. There is always a line separating, or trying to separate, right from wrong, night from day, variable in its turn.

Playing with the evident, the work begins with the text *Where and Where* (with an accent on the syllable *and*) representing a subdivision marked by a medial line. Ultimately, the text *Beyond and beyond* appears, with a double meaning: *díncolo și díncolo* (elsewhere and elsewhere) or *dincólo și dincólo*. Thus, the work is a duality.”

The duality at the basis of the oratorio has multiple meanings. From a philosophical point of view, we notice two aspects: on the one hand the equilibrium given by the “equality” of the equinox and on the other the preponderance of the positive/negative aspect given by the solstice. From a linguistic point of view, the duality is confirmed by the presence of the syntagms *where and where* as opposed to *elsewhere and elsewhere*. The two expressions present both the balance and the unbalance of space and time. They also suggest an atemporal and spatially undetermined area. From the point of view of matter, we notice the cosmic antithesis between the position of the Earth and that of the sun: on the one hand the equinox represents the moment when the day is equal with the night, while on the other hand the solstice represents the domination of one over the other. From the perspective of human life,

duality can be found in the equality between the domination of good over evil, of freedom over oppression.

Text comes before music during the entire work, the choir and the reciter being the “main actors”, while musical accompaniment, although not without importance, has the role of highlighting and supporting the feelings created by the dramatic development of the lyrics.

## 2. ORATORIO PARTS

The first part of the oratorio has three distinct structures: Death, Satraps and Be free!

Music begins with an e from the flute. This is one of the demarcation lines that support the musical work. Balance is also regained in the choral register. The composition begins with the feminine voices in a register upper than e 1, while the masculine voices' range doesn't go beyond that note, at least in the beginning.

The first segment of the composition, Death, is reserved to the feminine choir, with a subtle static accompaniment of fretting trills of the flute and vibraphone, on the lyrics: Where and where, death shows her teeth/ While other hags grin back. From a musical point of view everything develops from e one upwards, slowly gaining in range and intensity, by clusters, towards a short climax moment.

The musical score for the first segment, 'Death', is presented in a system with five staves. The top staff is for the Flute, featuring a series of trills marked with 'tr' and a dynamic of *sf > p*. The second staff is for the Vibraphone, with the instruction 'lasciar vibrare' and a dynamic of *sf > p*. The bottom three staves are for Soprano voices. The lyrics are: 'A - col - lo și a - co - lo moar - tea își a - ra - tă din - ții A - co - lo și a - co - lo moar - A - co - lo și a'.

The musical discourse loosens up in order to allow the masculine choir to intercede with the text Elsewhere they are killed and elsewhere and elsewhere, on a melodic structure under e one. Thus e the central axis of the entire introductory part, the symmetry axis, the balance, suggesting thus the idea of equinox. This time orchestral accompaniment is much more intense, vertically structured. Intensity is marked three times by forte and the keywords in this fragment are elsewhere and they are killed suggesting moments of maximum acoustic and dramatic intensity.

The musical score for the second segment, 'Elsewhere they are killed and elsewhere and elsewhere', is presented in a system with five staves. The top staff is for the Flute, featuring a series of trills marked with 'tr'. The second staff is for the Vibraphone. The bottom three staves are for Soprano, Alto, and Tenor voices. The lyrics are: 'Din - co - lo sunt u ciji... din co lo... din - co - lo din - co lo'.

The key segment ends with an aleatoric frame writing of where the choir repeats the most important words in the introduction – where and elsewhere – accompanied by the clusters in *ff* of the orchestra. After this climax, a short intervention of the reciter, apparently unexplainable and out of context – thus the colors, at dawn – opens the first orchestral moment, with ascending and descending melodic profiles – anabasis and katabasis – very rhythmic and energetic, with dialogues between the “colored” instruments – flute, bass guitar – and the rest of the orchestra. The fragment brings forth for the first time in the oratorio the main motive made up of the four notes in the beginning of *Dies Irae* with a correspondence in *Our Father* by Anton Pann.

This orchestral moment opens a new chapter in the evolution of the oratorio, where the choir and the reciter are in permanent dialogue, with accents on the keywords of this segment – elsewhere and for now. The idea of equilibrium is given by the reciter, who is at the core of the dramatic development, presenting the text fluently, on the horizontal. Temporal instability and the duality of equinox can also be found within the text – for now, my soul, for now – as well as in the metric structure of 3 fourths, but with the melodic structure of 5 eights:

The melodic discourse becomes rarefied, only the celesta playing chromatic passages in opposite directions, marked by short interventions of the tympanum and guitar, to a single sound made by the organ in order to allow the reciter to present two stanzas obviously remonstrative. The moment is purposefully left without orchestral accompaniment so as the literary intentions are clearly understood and unaltered: I fly, now, through hearts of shot brethren / Through empty pockets but filled with hope / Through shouts of people: “why won’t you help us” / and through blind tunnels of stray tears. The feeling of helplessness, emptiness and hopelessness induced by these lyrics is highlighted by the orchestral interlude that follows, where, on the cluster support of the organ, the trumpet, then the flute and the horn play melodic lines generated by the main motive with descending profiles, rhythmically poignant, but with no finality, like the segment presented by the reciter.

The choir intercedes again, with a new metaphor, important for those times from the social point of view – wind blows. This segment of the oratorio is composed with the help of

the rhythmical cluster in dialogue with rhythmic signals to the winds and percussion instruments.

With the indication Tempo I (Andantino) the first part of the oratorio is reprised, the writing from the beginning is also reprised, as well as the keyword elsewhere, this time in two variants: with the accent on the first syllable – díncolo – and with the accent on the second syllable – dincólo.

Tempo I (Andantino)

Soprano  
Din - co - lo și din - co - lo

Alto  
Din - co - lo și din - cō - lo

The musical discourse amplifies, ending the first part of the oratorio. The indication *attacca* marks the beginning of the second part, *Satrap*s, starts with two new stanzas presented by the reciter, supported by the cluster of the organ. The text becomes more and more remonstrative, with clear “targets” for those times: For many years I wanted all be well / Not for us, but for every / And others have wanted their days to flow gently / Only to them, on gilded wheels. With the change of tempo in *Allegro barbaro* – which was chosen randomly – the orchestral discourse becomes extremely rhythmic, balanced and caustic, interrupted by the choir scanning more or less familiar *satrap*s’ names: Tiribaze, Tissaferne, Farnabase... These names, unimportant after all, are highlighted by vocality, syllabifying helping the grim discourse. The dialogue between the choir and the orchestra is in a permanent crescendo because of the dynamic waves, the diversity of scans and the amplification of the writing.

An interesting acoustic effect happens with the names ending in *s* – *Mazaisos* or *Memnos* of *Rhodos* – the consonant being prolonged by whistling, in contrast with the decisive discourse of the orchestra, suggesting conspiratorial silence.

Soprano  
Ma - za - i - sos (s)  
*comme fischio, solo con il soffio*

Alto  
Ma - za - i - sos (s)

Tenor  
Ma - za - i - sos (s)

Bass  
Ma - za - i - sos (s)

The rush of the orchestra is suddenly interrupted by the intervention of the soloist concluding the long sequence of the choir – killing, they wanted swallowed, time – and the choir highlights – They perished in one night or in one day, showing the fact that we all expect the same finality.

The final intervention of the reciter – from where – is “prolonged” by the choral voices each reciting the same word, from the soprano towards the bass in a fan technique. The same way, the last uttered words – from elsewhere – are taken over and repeated by the choir, becoming central points in this segment of the oratorio. Therefore, up to this moment of the composition we have four adverbs similar in shape which become keywords in the literary discourse: there, elsewhere, from there, from elsewhere.

The third part – *Be free!* – begins with a vast introduction by the organ where we can find the thematic elements mentioned before such as the concealed motive *dies irae*-our father, which is also to be found in the end of the oratorio. The melodic lines in opposite

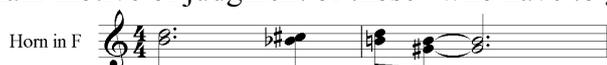
directions, the rhythmic, the cluster and the contrast between registers are but a few of the techniques used for this solo. The organ is not randomly chosen for this moment: the dynamic contrasts, the writing in opposite directions or the equilibrium given by the possibility of infinitely prolonging the sound suggest once more the message of the equinox of equality and balance.

The discourse in *fff* of the organ diminishes leaving room for the reciter to present very profound lyrics, with a clear socio-political message, with obvious ideas of hope, need for freedom, as well as with the declare intention of humans for sacrifice for peace: I'd go through the gates of hell / Sparkling eyes / If I could hope that mankind / will ever drop flowers not bombs..

The same idea is presented by the choir – Smile. Be free. Be the wind – in a homophonous discourse, interrupted by a new dramatic interlude of the organ. The discourse accelerates, becomes more intense from the dynamic and rhythmic point of view and at the indication *Lentamente* the only C major chord in the entire work, in *ppp*, on the first syllable of the word *vântul* (the wind). The temporal aspect is reiterated by the repetition of the word *deocamdată* (for now) overlapped on a descending melody suggesting the decline and decadence of the entire criticized system. The first part of the oratorio ends by *rallentando e perdersi poco a poco*, with a long chord, in the high register of the choir, over which the flute plays the descending passages using less and less sounds, up to just one.

The most important characteristics to be found in this first part of the oratorio are a-temporality, duality and equilibrium. The virulent protest is transformed in hope and the waiting – suggested by *deocamdată* (for now) – is transfigured in a problem of time. The entire development of the text centers around a few keywords: there, elsewhere, from there, from elsewhere, for now.

The second part of the oratorio – Solstice – begins more roughly than the first part, with impressive sonorities, the motive *Dies Irae*-Our Father being presented entirely this time. The feeling created by dissonances, extreme nuances and clusters is perfectly shaped on the idea suggested by the main motive of judgment of those “who have to get rid of their skin”.



The typical contrast of this part can also be found in the following moment, when the solo violin plays a melody with folk ethos to be found also at the opposite pole of the composition. This contrast, this false joy, this burlesque grin represent the lie and false welfare suggested by the political system of those times.

A long intervention of the solo flute follows, with an expressive melody of wide respiration but also dynamic, interrupted by the brass choral preparing the first appearance of the reciter with the same critical lyrics: There is still time until / But I tell you the truth / There are still many / that must leave their skins..

The choir takes over the text, balancing between two notes – d and c# – in a homophonous way. The musical discourse becomes dynamic reaching rhythmic and melodic exclamation supported by the lyrics filled with rage and revolt: Heavens shatter / And can't hold them / Where they are / And from where they shall tear themselves..

The climax of the text comes right after this “scream” of the entire melodic arsenal, at the reciter, who is accompanied by a dissonant chord, in *ppp*, by the organ. He is left alone to utter the lyrics: They need help to budge / because their tiaras /are broken teeth / under frozen light.

We have to notice here Eugen Jebeleanu and Dumitru Capoianu's courage to propose for printing, in 1988, such a clear protest.

The melody of the flute is reprised in various forms, played by the piccolo flute. The moment of false joy played by the solo violin is also reprise in order to increase the dramatic

feeling by simple sounds underlined by texts reaching paroxysm, all culminating with the scream in *fff*, with undetermined sounds, of the choir: Let it be over!

Musical score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: sfâr - șeas - - - că - se! The dynamics are *fff* and *pp 2*.

The reciter's comment alternates, as follows, with highly dissonant chords in the brass section, while later the choir takes over the text's flowing through constant rises and decreases, in great leaps *accelerando*, reaching the central exclamation of this fragment, on the word *fumegă* (smokes), repeated three fold, using a harmonic writing made up of seven overlaying thirds.

The reciter enters again, accompanied by the pipe organ and flute and "marked" by intensely dissonant chords of the winds. The central moment of this fragment resides in the line intentionally left without accompaniment, a line suggesting the need for freedom: *Și mă fă lumină!* (And turn me into light!). The protest doesn't stop here but is obviously declaimed by the reciter: *Nu-mi da decât o rază: / Pe aceea ce retezând grumazul tiraniei / Izvor de raze face să țâșnească* (Give me but one ray/The one that springs more rays/When slitting tyrants' throats).

Thus is prepared the final section of the oratorio, a prayer, the Our Father already outlined all throughout the work. Everything develops in *Adagio sereno*, like a requiem addressed at all those abused by the political system of the moment. For the first time the harmonic structure of the choir is "clear", made up of consonant chords. The prayer's text is not the traditional version but a stylized form, perfectly adhering to the dramatic intentions of the oratorio: *Tatăl nostru, carele ești în ceruri / Coboară, dacă ești, pe pământ / Și oprește viforul morții / Și fă din căști pălării / Și mângâie fețele morților / Păstrându-i în viață pe vii / Și stai printre noi de ni-ești tată. / Din sângele scurs făcând vin / Și fă din oricare armată / Alaiuri civile. / Amin!* (Our Father, who art in Heaven/descend if you are, on earth/and stop death's blow/ And make hats of helmets/ And caress the faces of the dead/ Keep alive the living/ And stay among us if our Father you truly art / Turn shed blood into wine/ Turn all armies / in festive processions).

Musical score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: Ta - tăl nos-tru ca-re-le ești în ce-ruri... co - boa-ră, da-că ești pe pă-mânt. The dynamics are *pp*, *mf*, and *ff*.

