

A visit to the lied creation of composer Mihail Jora

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Abstract: Being attracted to Romanian 20th century music, in this study I am performing a research on the development of composer Mihail Jora’s lied creation. His evolution as a composer was a gradual one, considering approximately half of his works called “songs”. His works based on lyrics by Tudor Arghezi prepare the diversity which we can notice in his vocal miniatures from op. 16 to the lieder with lyrics by Mariana Dumitrescu, which were unique in his time and models for his disciples. This research shows hypostases seen in such works with lyrics by Tudor Arghezi (op. 16), Ion Pillat (op. 20), and Mariana Dumitrescu (op.49). By means of a formal analysis of the lieder *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God’s Cow], *Veverița* [The Squirrel], and *Lupii* [The Wolves], we can draw conclusions about some aspects of the evolution of Jora’s style in the lied genre.

Keywords: Romanian music, Mihail Jora, *lied*.

1. Introduction

In the beginning of the 20th century, new elements of musical language appear and start to also enter Romanian culture, such as the harmony of widened tonality and neo-modalism, the impressionistic use of chromatic scales, the expressionistic auditory violence, together with aspects related to ethos stemming from the traditions of Romanian folk and psalm music. These are found in the creations of emblematic Romanian composers who are very important in musical history, such as George Enescu, Paul Constantinescu, Sigismund Toduță, but also Mihail Jora, one of the great representatives of Romanian composition, the creator of Romanian lied and ballet. Most of this composer’s vocal miniatures are called “songs,” as they are based on an intonation which is traditional or derived from such and on poems in the Romanian language.

I have set out to make musical analysis more colourful by creating a comparative analysis of three of Jora’s lieder, belonging to different creation periods.

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2. The Romanian lied

As we know, a lied is a miniature for voice and piano, created at first by classical composers and being created today, as well.

The syncretism between music and poetry has influenced musical history starting with the classical period and reached its highest point at the beginning of the 20th century.

Romanian composers who have approached the lied genre have definitely use classical and romantic creations as models, from Schubert to Brahms and Wolf. From the composers who have created miniatures for voice and piano in the first half of the 20th century, musical theatre remembers first of all George Enescu (*Trei cântece pe poeme de Jules Lemaintre și Sully Prudhomme pentru bas și pian, op. 4* [Three songs on poems by Jules Lemaintre and Sully Prudhomme for bass and piano op. 4]; *Șapte cântece pe versuri de Clement Marot pentru tenor și pian. op. 15* [Seven songs on poems by Clement Marot for tenor and piano op. 15]; *Trei cântece pe poeme de Fernand Gregh op. 19* [Three songs on poems by Fernand Gregh op. 19]), but also Sabin Drăgoi (13 songs on poems by Șt. O. Iosif, Heinrich Heine, Liviu Coman), Paul Constantinescu (lieder on poems by M. Eminescu, G. Coșbuc, O. Goga), Alfred Alessandrescu (lieder for voice and piano on poems by Elena Văcărescu, Tristan Klingson, Edmond Rostand, Alfred de Musset, Henry de Régnier), Gheorghe Dumitrescu (*Șase lieduri pe versuri de George Bacovia pentru voce și pian* [Six lieder on poems by George Bacovia for voice and piano]), Sigismund Toduță (lieder on poems by Mihai Eminescu, Octavian Goga, Lucian Blaga, Ana Blandiana), but Mihail Jora's lieder, by the force and refinement of their expression, contribute in a decisive way to this genre becoming established in Romanian music.

3. Mihail Jora – small portrait

Mihail Jora was born on 2nd August 1891 in Roman. His mother and his uncle Paul Ciuntu¹, both having studied at the Dresden Conservatory, encouraged him to follow the path of music. An important part in his development was played by his 1909 meeting with George Enescu in Sinaia.

After graduating from the Conservatory and the Faculty of Law in Iași, Jora studied with Max Reger in Leipzig between 1912 and 1914 and with Florent

¹ Paul Ciuntu – Composer, pianist, conductor, teacher, very appreciated at the time, especially in Germany. For Mihail Jora, he was “uncle Ciuntu” from whom he received his first musical guidance as a child. He was born in the city of Roman, in 1866. Education: Leipziger Konservatorium (1886-1891), with Salomon Jadassohn, then in Lemberg, with Carol Miculi (piano). Conductor of the Rostock Opera, director of the Rostock Music School, director (1903) and piano teacher (1910-1918) at the Bucharest Conservatory. Works: *Simfonia în la minor* [Symphony in A Minor]; *Trio, pentru vioară, violoncel și pian* [Trio for violin, cello, and piano]; *Lieder for voice and piano on poems by German poets*; *Lay choruses on poems by Romanian and German poets*. Viorel Cosma, *Compozitori și Muzicologi români* [Romanian Composers and Musicologists], Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, București, 1965.

Schmitt in Paris after the war (1919-1920). In 1920, he became a founding member and vice-president of the Romanian Composers' Society. In 1926, he made his debut as conductor in the Bucharest Philharmonic. In 1928, he became director of musical broadcasts in Radio Bucharest and he laid the foundation of the institution's symphonic orchestra. In 1929, he became a professor of the harmony chair within the Bucharest Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, of which he would be rector between 1941 and 1947.

Despite all his hard work in various musical fields and the renown he had gained, Mihail Jora's life was shaken by the change of Romania's regime. After King Michael 1st's abdication in 1947 and the composer's proposition to have a silent moment for the end of monarchy, he was fired from the chair and from all the positions he had in society².

After five years of material and moral hardship, Jora reprises his rightful place in the community and in 1962 becomes consulting professor of the Bucharest Conservatory. During the same year, he receives the title "Professor Emeritus" and seven years later, in the great hall of the Academy, he is awarded the "Gottfried von Herder" award of the Vienna University. Jora's great personality enjoyed the appreciation of both Romanian and foreign colleagues. Before he was received in the Romanian Academy, he became a member of the Max Reger Institute of Bonn (1948) and, much later (1962), of the "Gesellschaft der Freunde Archieve E.V." of Vienna.³

He died on 10th May 1971, in Bucharest.



Fig. 1⁵ Mihail Jora (portrait)

Mihail Jora's creation was appreciated by both his contemporaries and the following generations. Paul Constantinescu, one of his contemporaries, said: "If Jora had only written *Cântec din fluier* [Recorder song], he still would be a great composer."⁴

4. Jora's lied

Jora's miniatures show a deep understanding of the peculiarities of our spoken

² George Sbârcea (1969). *Mihail Jora*, Editura Muzicală, București, pp.187-200.

³ Florinela Popa (2009). *Mihail Jora, un modern european* [Mihail Jora, A Modern European Man], Editura Muzicală, București, pp.14-17.

⁵ <https://www.muzicieni-in-arhive.ro/mihail-jora-ro.php>, accessed on 10.11.2024.

⁴ Ștefan Niculescu (1995). *Creația de cântece a lui Mihail Jora* [Mihail Jora's Song Creation], in *Mihail Jora, Studii și documente* [Mihail Jora, Studies and Documents], Volume I, Editura Muzicală, București, p. 64.

language and of the Romanian melody of folk origin. As the first commentators of Jora's lieder mention, these works could not, however, have appeared without an evolved Romanian poetry (writers such as O. Goga, T. Arghezi, I. Pillat, or L. Blaga); therefore, a first peculiarity of his creation is sensitivity and an openness towards modern poems, towards the problems of Romanian poetry.

Also, in the first studies of Jora's lieder, the author, Ștefan Niculescu, mentions the first sources of their conception:

“From the French ‘chanson,’ Mihail Jora has taken some harmonic chromatic procedures and means of accompaniment meant to give nuance to the musical image. [...] Musorgski's vocal art was the one that strengthened his decision to rely on national texts and stylise the national music creation. [...] Mihail Jora's song is the Romanian equivalent of Fauré's art song, of Schubert's and Schumann's lieder, of Musorgski's chamber vocal creation.”⁵

The composer's vocal miniatures are based on poems describing Romanian landscapes, our history, national cultural customs – they tell a musical tale of Romanian realities.

The recitatives in Mihail Jora's lieder are based on the principle according to which every syllable corresponds to a note. The music of his miniatures comprises chromatic procedures, *glissando*, and spoken declamations.

Harmony plays an essential part in his songs, as the composer uses various combinations (counterpoint, polyphony, harmony) to create auditory images.

Starting with his first lieder, Mihail Jora has respected to stress points resulting from reciting the poem and therefore his vocal miniatures also contain *recto tono* recitatives, which are often found in ballads.

4.1. *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow] –formal analysis

The lied *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow]⁶ is the third miniature in the cycle *Cântece pentru voce și pian pe versuri de Tudor Arghezi* [Songs for voice and piano on poems by Tudor Arghezi] op. 16 rom 1936, which contains four vocal miniatures (*Ghicitoare* [Riddle], *Buna Vestire* [The Annunciation], *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow], *Cântec din fluier* [Recorder Song]).

⁵ Ștefan Niculescu (1995). *Creația de cântece a lui Mihail Jora* [Mihail Jora's Song Creation], in *Mihail Jora, Studii și documente* [Mihail Jora, Studies and Documents], Volume I, Editura Muzicală, București, p. 64.

⁶ The lyrics in Romanian are: „De prin vârful pomilor/ A venit o boabă-n zbor/ De cafea,/ Năclăită în perdea./ Dumnezeu când i-a făcut/ Ființa din sclipit și lut./ Cu o pensulă de zdreanță/ A vopsit-o cu faianță/ Și i-a pus ca din greșeală/ Două coji cu căptușeală/ În spinare,/ Ca să zboare,/ Și aproape în zadar/ Patru puncte, ca de zar./ Se gândea atunci că nu-i/ Greu să fie vaca lui./ Ca un nod de broderie/ Neagră și cărămizie/ Care mișcă și se zbate,/ S-a-necat pe jumătate/ În nemarginire-albastră/ Din fereastră./ Și fiindcă răsar în ață/ Stelele de dimineață./ Crede că din zare-adâncă/ Luna vine și-o mănâncă./ Și se-așează liniștită/ Ca să fie înghițită.” (https://www.tudorarghezi.eu/opere/poezii/vaca_lui_dumnezeu.html, accessed on 10.11.2024).

It can be found online in only one version, sung by soprano Mirela Zafiri. The singer conveys the kind of energy desired by the composer and portrayed in the song by means of certain tempo changes and by nuances.

This lied consists of two ample stanzas. In the first stanza, a horizontal polymeter appears. "Mirror" chords are found, derived from the harmonization of Romanian carols.

Stanza I is based on the Mixolydian mode on the G note, but at the end of it the seventh becomes major, and the mode changes to Ionian (measures 1-17, measure 18 is a transition). **Stanza II** is composed in a Lydian mode on C, comprising measures 19-30, the last measure being the conclusion.

Fig. 2⁷ *Vaca Lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow]

The **rhythm** is simple, mostly in eighths and fourths. An imitation between the vocal part and the accompaniment appears in certain melodic fragments.

There are no changes in tempo as in other lieder written by Mihail Jora. The song uses plagal harmonic relationships frequently. Within the two stanzas, we notice fourth chords in the accompaniment. The piano develops its melody on long notes, fourths and seconds, but, at certain moments, very well chosen by the composer, the ornamentation formed by sixteenths (E-D-C-B) then a fourth (A) appears, providing a splash of colour to the accompaniment.

Fig. 3⁸ *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow]

⁷ Mihail Jora (1956). *Cântece pentru voce și pian pe versuri de Tudor Arghezi* [Songs for voice and piano on poems by Tudor Arghezi], Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, p. 12.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p.13.

4.2. *Veverița* [The Squirrel] – formal analysis

Veverița [The Squirrel]⁹ is the second miniature in the cycle *Patru cântece pe versuri de Ion Pillat* [Four songs on poems by Ion Pillat], op. 20, from 1941, and it is a lied written in the spirit of Romanian folklore.

It is sung frequently (Laura Tătulescu; Silvia Micu; Andreea Panu), and the differences between various interpretations are not great.

Tempo changes are few in the case of this lied. The rhythm formulae and the measure changes suggest the squirrel's running from one tree to another.

The song is structured as follows: there is a short four-bar introduction (chromatic mode 1 on Eb); **stanza I** is built on a chromatic mode with the fundamental on F#; **stanza II** is built on a Phrygian mode on G, with a Phrygian cadence.

The **accompaniment** is built like this: stanza I is built on a chromatic mode on D, the middle part, in which the main role is assigned, is based on a bi-chromatic mode on Bb, and stanza II focuses on a chromatic mode on G, with the augmented second between Eb and F#.

VEVERIȚA
Das Eichhorn (Ion Pillat) The Squirrel

op. 20 No. 2

Scolto e scherzoso.

Lyrics (Romanian):
 Le - ve - ri - ță, ca - n - ai / Casă, cur - te și alai, / Legă - nân - du - te î - mi stai /
 Sus, pe ra - mură, ca - n - rai, / C - o alu - nă - n ghe - are mi - ci, / De ni - mic nu - ți pa - să, ni - ci /
 De pa - ftale și mă - rge - le, / Scum - pe - n ochii dra - gei me - le, / Ni - ci ru - ble - le de - ar - gin - ti /
 Pen - tru ca - ri se bat și mi - nt, / Lin - gu - șin - du - se avan, / To - ți boie - rii din di - van, /
 Stai pe ra - mu - ra de tei / Și te ui - ți de sus la ei, / Stai pe cre - an - gă de ste - jar /
 Și de ni - me - ni n - ai ha - bar.

Fig. 4 *Veverița* [The Squirrel] (Introduction)

⁹ The lyrics in Romanian are: „Veveriță, care n-ai/ Casă, curte și alai,/ Legănându-te îmi stai/ Sus, pe ramură, ca-n rai./ C-o alună-n gheare mici/ De nimic nu-ți pasă, nici/ De paftale și mărgеле,/ Scumpe-n ochii dragei mele,/ Nici rublele de-argint/ Pentru cari se bat și mint/ Lingușindu-se avan,/ Toți boierii din divan./ Stai pe ramura de tei/ Și te uiți de sus la ei,/ Stai pe creangă de stejar/ Și de nimeni n-ai habar.” (<https://www.versuri.ro/versuri/ion-pillat-veverita/>, accessed on 10.11.2024).

Modal instability is noticeable throughout the song, through melisma and short appoggiatura, which highlight the “popular-moralizing” character of the lyrics. The accompaniment is divided into two levels, a melodic-diatonic one and a chordal-chromatic one¹⁰.

Fig. 5 *Veverița* [The Squirrel] (Ending)

4.3. *Lupii* [The Wolves] – formal analysis

Mihail Jora approached Mariana Dumitrescu’s work when his creativity has already reached its maturity and, together with the writer, he went through subtle, but spectacular processes of stylistic essentialisation.

His acute desire to be free from symmetrical rhythms specific to European classical music can be regarded as an adaptation to Mariana Dumitrescu’s poetic rhythm.

The lied *Lupii* [The Wolves]¹¹ by Mihail Jora, op. 49 nr.3, from 1963, is sung frequently (Cristina Radu; Laura Tătuțescu; Emanuela Sălăjan) and interpretations resemble each other greatly, which means that the singers understand what the composer wanted to convey.

The song opens with two introductory measures, conceived in a Mixolydian mode on D in the low register in an ascending plane and a pentatonic scale built on the 3-1 model (minor third-minor second succession), creating a bimodal structure from the beginning. These two sound planes culminate in the second measure, in an augmented chord, and introduce us to a morbid atmosphere reminiscent of expressionist creations.

¹⁰ Florinela Popa (2009). *Mihail Jora, un modern european* [Mihail Jora, A Modern European Man], Editura Muzicală, București, pp. 58-59.

¹¹ The lyrics in Romanian are: „Ființe ciudate-n cămăși de cenușă/ cu ochii sticloși, veninoși,/ Fără milă-n artere-nghețate:/ lupii.../ Triburi însângerate/ vânând fericirea altora/ cu boturi căscate.../ Ca pe vrejuri de crin sfărâmă crani și oase.../ Dorm în ierburi de sânge/ ca-n pat de mătase:/ lupii.../ Trecerea lor iscă uragane de spaimă/ ei regi ai pădurii,/ vichingi cu gheare de aramă.../ Dar pe lupi nimeni nu-i întreabă/ de cine le e teamă.../ Lupii.../ lupii.../ lupii...” (Mariana Dumitrescu, poezia *Lupii*).

Fig. 6¹² *Lupii* [The Wolves] (Introduction)

The rhythm is determined by the line of the poem; vertically, it is worth noting the richness of the polyrhythmic formulas that appear in the context of a non-melisma *rubato* and emphasize the pre-existence of a *giusto-syllabic* divisional system.

In this lied, the minor third interval is an element playing the part of a “signal” or “symbol,” which can be seen as the leitmotif of the vocal miniature. It plays an important role in both the melodic and the harmonic structures and is part of the basic mode.

In measures 7, 8, 9, we see progressive augmentations of the intervals that lead to an important denouement: the word *lupii* (“the wolves”), which is present in several moments of the song, in different hypostases, based on the descending minor third interval.

Fig. 7¹³ *Lupii* [The Wolves], ms. 6-9

¹² Mihail Jora (2017). *Căntece pe versuri de Mariana Dumitrescu* [Songs on Poems by Mariana Dumitrescu], Volume II, Editura Grafoart, București, p. 62.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

The **coda** has a flowing melodic configuration and the tonal ambiguity is further accentuated at the end by means of the use of non-tempered intonations, micro-tones ($\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone).

The **accompaniment** focuses on seventh, ninth, eleventh and diminished octave chords (used in tense moments).

Tranquillo *mf*

Dar pe lupi ni-meni nu-i în- trea-bă de
A-ber nicht ei-ner fragt die Wöl-fe ob
But no one will ask the wolves e-ver of

ci-ne le e tea-mă... Lu-pii... lu-pii... lu-pii...
ste von Angst be-fal-len... Wöl-fe... Wöl-fe... Wöl-fe...
whom they stand in ter-ror... The wolves... the wolves... the wolves...

* ♯ = 1/4 tone più alto
 ♭ = 1/4 tone più basso

Fig. 8¹⁴ *Lupii* [The Wolves] (ending)

A procedure extracted from the works of G. Enescu and O. Messiaen can be noted here, namely microtones, which encompass an expressiveness different from that of Romanian folk songs. The quarter tone highlights the word “lupii” (“the wolves”), sounding like howls. The harmony is abstract, with both tonal and modal structures present. We notice polychords, free chordal structures, mixtures, chords with added notes, indicating a certain “spirit of the times”¹⁵.

4.4. Comparative analysis

In these three vocal miniatures, the composer follows the climax of the text, achieving a melodic climax at the tensest moment, as they are placed in acute areas of sound force.

The feelings found in the poetic texts are also highlighted in the melodic line. *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God’s Cow] is characterized by a playful and energetic style, due to its rhythm and interpretative style, *Veverița* [The Squirrel] is an expressive and lively portrayal, and the song *Lupii* [The Wolves] has a theme of sadness and gloom, implied by the “symbol” interval.

¹⁴ Mihail Jora, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁵ Florinela Popa (2009). *Mihail Jora, un model european* [Mihail Jora, A Modern European Man], Editura Muzicală, p. 87.

The *melody* is focused on predominantly modal lines, reaching the point where, during the period of creation of the lieder on poems by Mariana Dumitrescu, Jora’s songs were built with free rhythm and tonal ambiguity.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God’s Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) Stanza I – Mixolydian on G b) Stanza II – Lydian on C c) One note = one syllable	a) Stanza I – chromatic on D – 2+ between Bb and C# b) Stanza II – chromatic on G – 2+ between Eb and F# c) One note = one syllable	a) Tonal ambiguity b) Non-tempered intonations c) Microtones ($\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone) d) One note = one syllable

Table 1 Melody

The **harmony** in these three lieder focuses on modalism in the first stages of Jora’s creation, while, in his maturity period, the composer broke free from this system.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God’s Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) Diatonic modes b) Plagal harmonic chains	a) Chromatic modes b) Modal chains	a) Tone and mode ambiguity b) Harmonic chains with seventh, ninth, eleventh, and diminished octave

Table 2 Harmony

The **rhythm** and **meter** are adapted for the poetic text.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God’s Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) At certain moments – sixteenths (E-D-C-B) and a fourth (A) b) The meter varies, as it is adapted to the poetic text c) No tempo changes d) Polymeter in the first stanza	a) Playful, suggestion the squirrel’s run b) The meter is the same throughout the whole lied (2/4) c) Few tempo changes	a) Determined by the poem lines b) A richness of polyrhythmic formulae c) Non-melisma rubato d) Pre-existence of a <i>giusto-syllabic</i> divisional system e) The meter varies, as it is adapted to the poetic text f) Frequent tempo changes

Table 3 Rhythm and meter

In the first two lieder, the rhythm is simple, focused on octave durations, while, in the song on a poem by Mariana Dumitrescu, polyrhythmic formulae, rubato segments and giusto-syllabic divisions are found. In the lied *Veverița* [The Squirrel], the meter is unchanged throughout the entire miniature, but in the other two songs it changes frequently.

The **accompaniment** in Mihail Jora's lieder becomes diversified as the genre evolves in the composer's work.

<i>Vaca lui Dumnezeu</i> [God's Cow]	<i>Veverița</i> [The Squirrel]	<i>Lupii</i> [The Wolves]
a) Mirror chords b) Horizontal polymeter c) Four planes d) Imitation of the vocal melody e) At certain moments – sixteenths (E-D-C-B) and a fourth (A)	a) Complementary b) Introduction by accompaniment – chromatic mode 1 on Eb c) The middle part is attributed to accompaniment – bi chromatic mode on B	a) Seventh, ninth, eleventh chords b) Diminished octave chords c) Bi-modalism d) The accompaniment consists only of chords e) Introduction and transitions made by the accompaniment

Table 4 Accompaniment

These vocal miniatures come from different creation periods of the composer, and we can notice an evolution with regards to the melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, and accompaniment. Mihail Jora introduces very diverse and non-conformist techniques in the vocal miniatures.

5. Conclusions

Mihail Jora was the creator of the lied genre in Romania, creating a remarkable number of works in this genre. The lieder *Vaca lui Dumnezeu* [God's Cow], *Veverița* [The Squirrel], and *Lupii* [The Wolves] come from three different creation periods. Thus, lied op. 16 was composed during the beginning period and has a temperate sound, the song op. 20 has an energetic and playful side, while the miniature op. 49 is expressionistic and gloomy. Jora uses poems by appreciated poets and discovers the music hidden within them.

Florinela Popa claims that "Mihail Jora's creation identifies not only with the 'beginning' of the Romanian lied, but also with a lot of its evolution in Romanian music"¹⁶.

¹⁶ Florinela Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

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