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## HORAȚIU RĂDULESCU AND 'THE QUEST': PIANO CONCERTO OPUS 90

### Romanian Years (1942–1969)

Horațiu Rădulescu was born in Bucharest, the Romanian capital, in 1942. His first musical experiences were his violin lessons with Nina Alexandrescu, a pupil of Georges Enescu. He then attended the Bucharest Academy of Music, where he studied composition with Ștefan Niculescu, Tiberiu Olah and Aurel Ströe. During this time his works often resembled the contemporary music being written in Romania but also pointed towards his later musical aesthetic. Because of the restrictions on Romania during the Soviet years, which were very similar to that of Poland, Rădulescu's knowledge of the advancements of music in Germany and France was rather limited, but thanks to the tuition of Ștefan Niculescu he was able to study the music of Webern quite extensively, along with the Renaissance masters such as Dufay and Tallis. His early compositions include his Piano Sonata No. 1 'Wiege an den Abgründen' and his first string quartet.

### Hyper-Spectral Years (1969–1991)

1969 was a significant year for Rădulescu. He relocated to Paris, where he resided until his later years when he moved to Vevey. 1969 was also the year he wrote his first genuinely unique piece: *Credo* – for nine cellos. This was his first 'spectral' score and predates by a few years other spectral composers like Grisey, Murail or Tenney. *Credo* is based on the first 45 harmonics of the cello's lowest C and this allows him to superimpose new spectra based on higher partials of the original fundamental pitch. The techniques used in '*Credo*' were to become the fundamental basis for everything Rădulescu would subsequently compose.

During the early 1970s Rădulescu visited the Darmstadt summer courses where he attended classes given by Cage, Ligeti, Stockhausen and Xenakis. In 1972 and 1973 he presented his own works in Messiaen's classes at the Paris Conservatoire. Messiaen strongly supported Rădulescu, and stated that he was 'one of the most original young musicians of our time'. Later in 1979, he went on to study in IRCAM.

During subsequent years Rădulescu works were performed in many of the leading European music festivals including Gaudeamus (1971–1972), Royan (1973 and 1975) and Darmstadt (1972). It was also during this time Rădulescu set up the Lucero Players: a group dedicated to performing his own music. He wrote several works which include *Capricorn's Nostalgic Crickets* were written specifically for the musicians in the group.

Stylistically Rădulescu's music was at its most radical and inventive during this period. As he explained in his book *Sound Plasma* (1975), he was trying to write in a style which transcends classical devices like polyphony and heterophony and, instead, which is more like a physical object, an 'orb of sound'. This is a continuation of Ligeti's and Xenakis' experiments in writing purely textural music and could almost be thought of as a 'true' realisation of Schoenberg's *Klangfarbenmelodie*.

Rădulescu acknowledged the influence of Ligeti and Schoenberg but the greatest and probably most direct influence on his work at this time was Giacinto Scelsi (1905–1988). His respect and admiration for Scelsi is encapsulated in *Byzantine Prayer* (for 40 flautists) written in commemoration Scelsi's death. This 'in memoriam' is not the only gesture of respect, as *Byzantine Prayer* itself is playing on the harmonic spectra of a low A, the same A that Scelsi used in his pinnacle work *Quattro Pezzi una nota sola* (1959).

### Later Years (1991–2008)

Rădulescu's music was constantly developing and leading to new unimagined areas. In 1991, he was commissioned to write his second piano sonata (Piano Sonata No. 2 – *being and non-being create each other*), which led to a radical shift in his work. Whereas previously Rădulescu had required to adapt the piano to fit his spectral language, this work was for the equal tempered piano. Rădulescu had not composed anything for the unaltered piano since writing his first piano sonata while still a student in Bucharest.

After this sonata Rădulescu wrote some of his most beautiful works, including *Exil Interieur* (Sonata for Cello and Piano, 1997). He also managed to finally find an idiom that was all-encompassing; the radical forward thinking of his younger years, but also a very strong connection to the musical tradition. One can see in his piano sonatas the use of classical structures is rather obvious. Also his piano concerto *The Quest* (see chapter 4c.) draws on Romanian folk music (*Ancestor's Chants*) and in '*Cinereum*' there is the use of almost medieval-like melisma in the vocal writing combined with his more recognisable and radical musical palette.

Rădulescu died on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008 and in the years since his death there have not been many performances of his work, apart from a few chamber works such as the Fourth String Quartet or *Eterno* for Percussion. It is hard to see any direct impact of Rădulescu's music outside his 'cult' of followers but nevertheless he left an impact on those around him.

### 'The Quest' Piano Concerto Op. 90 (1996)

*The Quest* is Horațiu Rădulescu's first and only complete concerto. The work was written for Örtwin Stürmer and was premiered by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lothar Zagrosek. The work is a leviathan for any soloist and orchestra, with the four dramatically unique movements and the sheer immensity of the length of the concerto (55 minutes) makes it a powerful beast to tackle. The concerto was written around the same time as the Fourth Piano Sonata and the concerto is almost definitive of Rădulescu's style towards the end of his life. Drawing on folklore, folk music, spectral techniques and the sheer magnitude of the orchestra, *The Quest* takes the listener on a very powerful journey that can only be equalled by works such as Messiaen's *Turangâlima-Symphonie*.

The four movements (*The Gate*, *The Second Sound*, *Ancestor's Chants* and *The Origin*) are written proportionally to fit with the golden section, 21:8:13:5. The concerto functions in similar fashion to Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* where the soloist takes the listener on a journey with the orchestra, instead of showing off their technical prowess.

#### The First Movement – The Gate

The first movement, *The Gate*, is described by Rădulescu as an 'entrance into a magic realm'. The powerful brass declamations, building on a cluster of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> partials played in their natural intonation, create an otherworldly sound before the piano enters with its own response. The additive metre (2+3+4+5/8) almost harks back to Messiaen with its uneven phrasing and focus on additive rhythms. Even though the concerto does not focus on virtuosic playing, it pivots around the pianist who ultimately leads with the orchestra, merely reacting to it. Despite its otherworldly sound, the structure of the first movement is surprisingly simple. In short, the work pivots on two materials (see below).



Fig 1. Material A



Fig 2. Material B

Figure 1 shows the building of the brass opening and Figure 2 show the Romanian folk melody which Rădulescu quoted; this same melody reappears in the third movement. These two elements are combined in a loose sonata form, something that Rădulescu kept returning to within his piano sonatas. This is the basic structure: Exposition – A Section	Bar 1 – 60
Exposition – B Section	Bar 61–96
Development	Bar 97–192
Recapitulation – A Section	Bar 193–216
Recapitulation – B Section	Bar 217–230
Coda	Bar 231–End

The A section, carries the opening motif around the orchestra in an antiphonal fashion, constantly being passed back and forth by the pianist. Significantly, although the orchestra and the soloist share material, the orchestra retains its own identity and sense of growth. With segments like bar 49, where the use of bass drums makes the piano sound much heavier, the flutes highlight the vertical harmony within the piano line and add a halo on top of the newly added weight of the bass drums.

The B section is a prolation canon. The entire section does not vary the pitches of the melody like in section A, but the variation is in the durations of the canon. The soloist plays the canon in the right hand, with the left hand playing an augmentation of the same canon. Because of the limited pitch materials and the constant overlapping of material, the B section almost becomes quite timeless of and the previous brutal and powerful gestures disappear into a continuously resonating texture.

In classical sonata form, the development section is characterised by tonal instability. This ties in with the relationships of the tonic and dominant in the exposition and is then ultimately resolved with the recapitulation. Rădulescu, knew the historical and rhetorical language of writing in sonata form. *The Gate* adheres to a lot of convention within sonata form and then, in turn, goes against it. The exposition, classically speaking, would be foundations of the musical language and the juxtaposition of two tonal centres, most commonly, the tonic and the dominant. As Radulescu did not write tonal music he found a *spectral* way of recreating this, instead of two different tonal centres, the music pivots around certain areas of the harmonic series. Then in the classical sonata, the development would be where the composer adapts motifs to create tonal instability. Radulescu hints at following the tradition but then goes against it. One form of development is variation but he only varies the material instead of developing it. The first key variation is in the switching around of the piano followed by the brass, rather than vice-versa in the exposition. Once again the materials reiterate themselves in a similar fashion to the A section but the key variation throughout the development is the variations in pacing and rhythm. The harmonic material remains unchanged. At bar 134 the piano is completely on its own playing symmetrical patterns in an almost chorale like fashion. The rhythmic cycle is as follows:

$$2+3+4+5 - 5+4+3+2 - 5+4+3+2 - 2+3+4+5 - 5+4+3+2 - 2+3+4+5 - 5+4+3+2.$$

This is then followed by a short recreation of the B section but played on the natural harmonics of the string section. Bar 146 introduces a chorale in the trombone section and tuba. Once again the use of canon is apparent with trombones three and four playing the augmentation



of main material. The tuba interacts with its own melody in contrary motion to the trombones, giving the short excerpt a sensation of spiralling on itself. The development section continues with very short outbursts from each of the three motivic materials but, still, the materials do not vary harmonically; the variation comes from the layering of the motifs and crossing over each other like in bar 184 where Material B and the trombone chorale are layered on top of each other with the piano reiterating ideas from the A section.

With the mosaic nature of the development section, the moment of recapitulation goes almost unnoticed. Its return, in bar 193, is played in an almost timid fashion, rendering it unrecognisable in comparison to its bold and primal opening at the beginning of the work. After that, the reduced A section is almost devoid of brass, giving the sensation of landing somewhere completely new without developing the material. The recapitulation of the B section is more obvious, in comparison, with the same canonic nature with variations in the orchestration.

The coda in bar 231 starts layering material in a similar way to the development. The first key variation is the layering of the mirrored metre seen in bar 134 (see below).

Piano: 2+3+4+5 – 5+4+3+2

Brass: 5+4+3+2 – 2+3+4+5

The ending of the work is akin to the opening, with the bold brass and piano playing, but this time the two are rhythmically pitted against each other, giving the movement one final surge of energy and intensity before the crescendo to its close.

### Second Movement – The Second Sound, The Sacred

The second movement, *The Second Sound, The Sacred* is a much more serene movement in comparison to the first. Despite the powerful opening from the trumpets and high woodwind the movement is extremely meditative and still. The reiterative nature of the movement is heralded by the trumpets and winds, they are paced like this as see below:

Cycle 1	Bar 1–24
Cycle 2	Bar 25–48
Cycle 3	Bar 49–72
Cycle 4	Bar 73–End

The movement is perfectly symmetrical in that all four reiterations of the material are identically paced. This knowledge adds new understanding to Rădulescu's statement that the movement is the 'musical equivalent of a Calder mobile'. Within the four repetitions there are multiple episodes inside themselves which cycle at their own pace (see below):

Cycle 1 'Motif A'	Bar 2–5
Cycle 1 'Motif B'	Bar 6–7
Cycle 1 'Motif C'	Bar 8–9
Cycle 1 'Motif D'	Bar 10–12
Cycle 1 'Motif E'	Bar 13–17
Cycle 1 'Motif D 1'	Bar 18–20
Cycle 1 'Motif E 1'	Bar 21–24

As can be seen within the first reiteration, some of the smaller cycles repeat themselves. This gives the work a very intrinsic micro-macro structure, which implies an almost kaleidoscopic construction. If we take the second cycle we can instantly see the variation (see below):

Cycle 2 'Motif B 1'	Bar 26–28
Cycle 2 'Motif D 2'	Bar 29–31
Cycle 2 'Motif E 2'	Bar 32–36
Cycle 2 'Motif D 3'	Bar 37–39
Cycle 2 'Motif B 2'	Bar 40–41
Cycle 2 'Motif E 3'	Bar 42–44
Cycle 2 'Motif D 4'	Bar 45–47
Cycle 2 'Motif B 3'	Bar 48–49

Looking at the second cycle, the kaleidoscopic nature of the structure is more apparent. Motifs reiterate themselves almost at random, making each repetition sound familiar but also rather alien. The pacing of ideas is similar to Morton Feldman's *String Quartet and Piano* (1985) where the opening gesture remains unchanged and the pacing gives the sensation of constant renewal and mysticism.

This movement is also intriguing due to the fact Rădulescu refers to this kind of device in both his Fourth Piano Sonata (1993) and the cello sonata *Exil intérieur* (1997). With the references to this movement comes two new orchestrations and renditions of the work. In the Fourth Sonata, *the sacred sound* is twenty-four bars in length, so there is only one cycle used in the movement. The opening gesture is identical, only this time the piano's rendition relies heavily on the resonance of the instrument. Also, harmonically speaking, *The Second Sound, The Sacred* in *The Quest* is based on an F# below middle C, while *the sacred sound* in the Fourth Sonata is based on the B a fourth higher. One constant though is visible: the use of self-generative chords. The opening is based on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> partials which in turn produce the fundamental and the 7<sup>th</sup> partial (see Fig. 3). There are numerous examples of these used throughout the movement, which exactly what gives the movement its natural resonance and openness.



Fig. 3

### Third Movement – *Ancestor's Chants*

*Ancestor's Chants* is the most difficult movement to perform but oddly the most 'approachable'. The movement is a collage of Romanian folk tunes collected from Bartók's collection; and spiralling and interacting with each of them in irrational metrical combinations. This is the result of many oral renditions of folk tunes being notated in irrational tuplets such as 7:10, 9:10 and 8:5. This collision of different metres and folk tunes is very reminiscent of many of Ives's, such as the *Universe* Symphony where the five independent groups work solely with one of the five conductors and the whole results in a mesh of all the elements.

The structure of this movement is much harder to pin down due to the almost spontaneous nature of the folk melodies, but what is noticeable in the structure is the reference to the golden section. This is noticeable where the biggest shifts in momentum occur, the first occurring one minute in. The next big change occurs in the second, third, fifth and eighth minutes. The fifth minute is when momentum almost dissipates and the eighth is one of the most active moments in whole work. After this the energy of the work dies down, it still explores the folk tunes, but without the same intent before building to the largest climax of the work, where the whole orchestra introduce their own folk tunes creating a huge almost muddy texture before the brass unite in one folk tune to give the piece a really energetic end.

Even though this is not the first time Rădulescu referenced the music of his native Romania, this is one of the biggest references to it due to its sheer size. The later piano sonatas all make reference to either an element of folk art or a folk tune '*Doina* – (3<sup>rd</sup> Movement 3<sup>rd</sup> piano sonata)' or '*Immanence* – (1<sup>st</sup> Movement 2<sup>nd</sup> piano sonata)' but it is only really ever to a single element of it, while this movement of the concerto almost attempts to put it all into a coherent piece.

### The Fourth Movement – *The Origin*

The final movement, *The Origin*, is as powerful and primal as the opening of the first. This time the brevity of the movement means the energy does not get interrupted by moments of serene calm, but instead the work hammers its way to the end in an almost ritualistic fashion. Like in the second movement, *The Origin* cycles small bar long gestures over and over again in this technically marvellous ritual. The constant change in metre gives the work an odd pulsating sensation which upon each repetition, makes it more intense and dramatic. To add to the complexity of the work each cycle is constantly expanding, almost like the ritual coming closer to fulfilling its purpose. So unlike the stasis of the second movement, this movement constantly tries to build energy on each repetition.

### The movement consists of five basic materials:

- A – Percussion heavy
- B – Piano solo, sometimes accompanied by percussion
- C – Woodwind
- D – Brass, accompanied by percussion
- E – String

### This is how they circulate throughout the movement:

A	Bar 1
B	Bar 2–3
C	Bar 4
A1	Bar 5
B1	Bar 6
A2	Bar 7
B2	Bar 8–9
D	Bar 10
B3	Bar 11–12
E	Bar 13
A3	Bar 14
B4	Bar 15–17
A4	Bar 18
B5	Bar 19–21
C2	Bar 22
B6	Bar 23
C3	Bar 24
B7	Bar 25
A5	Bar 26
B8	Bar 27–29
D1	Bar 30
B9	Bar 31–32
A6	Bar 33
C4	Bar 34
B10	Bar 35–37
D2	Bar 38
B11	Bar 39
E1	Bar 40
C5	Bar 41
B12	Bar 42
A7	Bar 43
B13	Bar 44
C6	Bar 45
A8	Bar 46
E2	Bar 47
B14	Bar 48–51
C7	Bar 52
D3	Bar 53
B15	Bar 54–55
C8	Bar 56
B16	Bar 57–58
A9	Bar 59–60
E3	Bar 61

<b>B17</b>	Bar 62
<b>C9</b>	Bar 63
<b>B18</b>	Bar 64-65
<b>E4</b>	Bar 66
<b>A10</b>	Bar 67
<b>B19</b>	Bar 68-69
<b>D4</b>	Bar 70
<b>C10/E5</b>	Bar 71
<b>B20</b>	Bar 72
<b>C11</b>	Bar 73
<b>B21</b>	Bar 74-76
<b>D5</b>	Bar 77
<b>B22</b>	Bar 78-79
<b>C12</b>	Bar 80
<b>B23</b>	Bar 81-82
<b>D6</b>	Bar 83
<b>B24</b>	Bar 84
<b>C13</b>	Bar 85-86
<b>B25</b>	Bar 87-89
<b>E6</b>	Bar 90
<b>A11</b>	Bar 91
<b>D7</b>	Bar 92
<b>B26</b>	Bar 93
<b>E7</b>	Bar 94
<b>A12</b>	Bar 95
<b>B27</b>	Bar 96-97
<b>C14</b>	Bar 98
<b>B28</b>	Bar 99
<b>E8</b>	Bar 100
<b>C15</b>	Bar 101
<b>A13</b>	Bar 102
<b>D8</b>	Bar 103
<b>B29</b>	Bar 104
<b>C15/E9</b>	Bar 105
<b>A14/D8</b>	Bar 106
<b>A15/B30/C16/D9/E10</b>	Bar 107-End

As can be seen from the table, the piano's solo material is definitely the central figure in the movement. While the brass and strings do very little apart from being the key signifiers for every ten bars. Even though harmonically C and E are almost identical, they are seen and used as separate motifs simply because the basic colours are the definitions of each motif used in the movement. What is also very obvious is the brevity of each motif, very rarely do the ideas expand over more than one bar and only once does the piano play consecutively for three bars on one motif (see B27 on graph). What this does is almost negate any develop as the motives are not expanded into melodic lines. The small ideas just circulate making the movement feel more ritualistic because of the 'simplistic' and non-developmental nature of the movement.

As in the second movement, Rădulescu references this movement in a separate work *The Origin* (1998) for two bass drums. This solo percussion rendition pulsates on small rhythmical patterns which build and die away until it gathers momentum for its final climax at the end of the work. Unlike in the concerto, *The Origin* (bass drum version BDV) looks more like a ritual being carried out by the performer. The focus needed to perform the complex rhythms and produce the correct colours on a bass drum gives the work a profound intensity one can only get from witnessing a ritual of a similar nature. This reference to the movement in many ways sounds more successful as a work. The final movement of the concerto works as a powerful end to the work, but does not have the same independent strength of the other three movements. *The Origin* in the concerto context almost functions as an extremely powerful coda to the whole work ending it in such a magnificent fashion which is probably why the movement on its own is not as successful as *The Origin* (BDV) which breaths its own life through the ritual. That sensation is almost missing in the final movement but instead sounds like a powerful conclusion to a fantastic narrative.

The hour long concerto is a monumental work both for Rădulescu but also for the piano repertoire. Its originality and power could easily make it one of the pinnacle works of the past century and can rub shoulders with great landmark works like *The Rite of Spring* or *Turangâtila-Symphonie*. Because of the references to old and new musical aesthetics the concerto will forever be a timeless work. The sheer megalithic stature of the work should almost guarantee it a place in the repertoire due just to the sheer spectacle of it.

While in relation to other concerti *The Quest* is not quite as ground breaking as other works in the past 100 years, it is still a powerfully original work which only a handful of previous concerti can equal. In retrospect, looking at the whole of Rădulescu's oeuvre, probably the greatest shame for anyone loving his work is that he only attempted two concerti. The second remains uncompleted but it does seize the imagination; what would his other concerti have sounded like? Would he have stopped there or would he tackle a symphony? As speculations they are very exciting as any keen follower of Rădulescu's work will know. Whatever form he wrote for, he was almost 100% original every time. What will always be Rădulescu's greatest and longest lasting legacy is his originality and invention. Very few composers can ever claim to have had such an impact on any form or tradition, let alone almost impacting every form and tradition they tackled. Horațiu Rădulescu is arguably the most inventive composer of the twentieth century. The shame comes in the fact that, due to the complexity it takes to perform his works, he could quite easily become a forgotten gem who will never quite be equalled by any future composer after his powerful legacy.

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**Horațiu Rădulescu and 'The Quest':  
Piano Concerto Opus 90**

Horațiu Rădulescu (1942–2008) was one of the leading figures of the Spectral movement. His works drew inspiration from the ideas of the harmonic series, like many Spectralists, but his approach to writing for the piano led him into an intriguing path. His only complete concerto 'The Quest' – Piano Concerto Op. 90 (1996), originally written for Ortwin Stürmer, is a result of

his experiments and exploration of the well-tempered piano. The paper will look at his treatment of the piano, the concerto form, and its links to the harmonic series.

**Keywords:** Horațiu Rădulescu, Piano concerto, Harmonic series, Well-tempered piano, Spectral music, Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**Горациу Радулеску и «Поиск»:  
Концерт для фортепиано с оркестром оп. 90**

Горациу Радулеску (1942–2008) предстаёт одной из ведущих фигур направления спектралистов. В творчестве он черпал вдохновение из обертонового ряда подобно многим спектралистам, однако его подход к сочинению для фортепиано обеспечил творческое своеобразие. Единственный завершённый концерт композитора – «Поиск», Концерт для фортепиано с оркестром оп. 90 (1996), первоначально написанный для пианиста Ортовина Штюмера, – явился результатом эксперимен-

та и исследования хорошо темперированного фортепиано. Данная статья рассматривает способы использования композитором фортепиано, связь концертной формы с обертоновым рядом.

**Ключевые слова:** Горациу Радулеску, фортепианный концерт, обертоновый ряд, хорошо темперированное фортепиано, спектральная музыка, музыка XX века

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