THE MODAL HARMONIC CONCEPT
IN TUDOR JARDA’S CHORAL WORKS

Professor Ph.D. CONSTANTIN RÎPĂ
"Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy, Cluj-Napoca

Constantin Rîpă (b.1938) studied musicology, composition and choral conducting at „Gheorghe Dima” Music Conservatory with Dorin Pop, Traian Mârza, Tudor Jarda, Sigismund Toduţă. He published 11 books of music theory, 67 musical studies in specialized magazines and composed over 200 works for all types of classical music (vocal-symphonic, symphony, chamber music, choral music and lied). Is the founding member of Antifonia Choir. Along with his rich didactical activity he stood out as the President of National Commission for Music from Ministry of Education, Director of the Distance Learning Department part of the “Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy, Director of the MediaMusica Publishing House etc. Beside of the international awards won with Antifonia Choir he was granted with nationals prizes: in 1994 – Officer Rank Merit for Education, in 2008 - Cavalier Rank Merit for Culture and in 2013 the City’s Senior Merit.

ABSTRACT
The study reveals the total originality of the harmonic conception developed in the process of music creation by composer Tudor Jarda, relying on the authentic folk song from Transylvania. The principles of this harmony developed using two vertical elements: “the ison” (single, double, multiple) and the verticality of the melodic interval. Among these intervals the second and the fourth were preferred. The imitative and non-imitative polyphony and and many "melodic notes" add thereto.

Keywords: folk song, harmony, modal

As a graduate of the Music Conservatory of Cluj-Napoca (which during World War II took refuge in Timișoara, while he was still a student), Tudor Jarda, in spite of being able to play several instruments, was strongly influenced by two great composers who were also his teachers, Marțian Negrea and Sabin Drăgoi. From the former he thoroughly learned tonal-functional harmony, while the latter opened his eyes to folk music and made him aware of the necessity of a new verticality for the processing and harmonization of folk music.

From Sabin Drăgoi, Tudor Jarda learned the theory of folkloric modes (incomplete though it was at the time) and focused, from the very beginning, on finding new chord relationships to comply as closely as possible with the modal-melodic content.

It is well known that the previous phase of modal harmony had consisted in the (partial) circumvention of the tonal-functional harmony in the harmonization of the folk melody. This phase had been initiated by Gavriil Musicescu and Dumitru Georgescu-Kiriac and it consisted solely in avoiding the frequency of the dominant chord and in a preference for
the use of secondary scale degrees, which, through their mostly minor character, weakened
tonal functions.

The Cluj school of composition, represented by the tradition initiated by Gheorghe
Dima and Augustin Bena, had however remained completely anchored in tonal-functional
harmony. Martian Negrea himself persisted, in the 1940s, in using the same harmony.25
Nevertheless, some of the young men of the time, of the likes of Tudor Jarda, Sigismund
Tuduță, Max Eisikovits, were convinced that the verticality of the Romanian folk song could
not be satisfied by means of a harmony that is foreign to its spirit. This was even more so as in
the meantime this folk song was no longer the one stylized by the urban environment, as in
George Enescu’s *Rhapsodies or in the works of* Gheorghe Dima, Iacob Mureșianu, Ciprian
Porumbescu, Augustin Bena, or of composers from other regions like Ion Vidu, Gheorghe
Cucu, Eusebie Mandicevchi etc., but was instead the peasants’ song, whose value was
discovered by folklorists like Béla Bartók, Sabin Drăgoi, Constantin Brăiloiu etc.

This is how Tudor Jarda, coming into direct contact with the folklore of the peasants
from the Ilva region, sensed a powerful need to dress it in a harmonic palette that was as close
as possible to its specific essence.

Jarda’s first folk arrangements for choir were written in the modal tradition of his
predecessors (G. Musicescu, D. G. Kiriac, S. Drăgoi), using secondary scale degrees and,
preferably, chords pertaining to natural minor keys (including minor dominants), performed in
free succession and avoiding as much as possible the dominant-tonic relationship typical of
the tonal-functional harmony. An illustrative example thereof is the piece *Du-te, dor, pe valea seacă.*
The melody of the first verse outlines the sphere of the *F* Ionian mode, but T. Jarda
harmonized it initially with *A* Phrygian chords, then shifted to *F* Ionian, thus obtaining two
modal zones whose chords enrich the harmonic-modal colour:

**Example 1: Du-te, dor, pe valea seacă, bars 1-2**

[N.B.: if in *F* Ionian mode, the chords of this first melodic line would be numbered as III –
**VI**₄ – III – *II*⁰ – V – I, while in *A* Phrygian mode the chords would be numbered as I – IV⁶ –
I – **VII**₆ – III – VI].

---

25 We must point out that although George Enescu was, at that time, extremely advanced in a modal harmonic
thinking, just like his contemporaries Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók, he was ignored by the composition school
from Cluj (and from the whole country), being regarded as a relatively foreign and abstract element in
relationship to the Romanian music of the inter-war period.
The melodic process in the second verse leads to a cadence on the 6th degree (D). This is a cadential cliché of the Romanian folklore and its harmonization implies the appearance of a dominant with C# for the first degree D, as it was done in the Renaissance. However, the diatonic nature of the Romanian folklore is not familiar with the tonal-functional gravitation and this is how the subtonic cadence is born, i.e. with the chord of the natural 7th degree (C). Sometimes the cadence is "strengthened" by way of a new chord, i.e. that of the 6th degree, which becomes a subtonic for the 7th degree.

Example 2: Mă dusei la târg la moţi, bars 11-12

At this point the composer adds a cadential succession in Dorian and Aeolian modes, namely the chord of the 4th degree (which contains the Phrygian melodic relationship) with a stop on the 1st degree, but with an ascending altered third.
Example 3: Cucule, cucuț bălan, bar 14-17

In his course book entitled *Armonia modală*[^26], T. Jarda justifies this cadence as follows: "any cadence of a minor mode can gain more stability if we replace the final chord with its major counterpart. In Western literature the phenomenon is known as the «Picardy third» [1, p. 52], which is the predilection, in Renaissance music, for the use of a major chord in cadence endings on minor chords" [4, p. 195].

Several pieces from his first volume entitled *Coruri* [3] were written by means of this harmonization technique. The characteristics of this period are:

– preserves the tradition of the four triad forms (major, minor, diminished, augmented)
– preserves the idea of functional relationships (tonic, subdominant, dominant)
– to a considerable degree, the chord relationships preferred for the modal character also occur in some sequences of the tonal-functional harmony; for example the subtonic chord VII – I in the natural minor key; the minor subdominant (with a lowered 6th degree) IV – I in major key; the harmonization of the upper tetrachord of the natural minor scale in descending form (as Phrygian tetrachord) etc.

In other words, Tudor Jarda was strongly influenced by the tonal-functional harmony, which he strived to adapt to the modal spirit of the folk song.

The second stage begins with the cycle of *Coruri pe versuri populare* [3], which contains mainly arrangements of carol tunes.

1. The evolution is represented by the extension of the concept of triad, first with added sounds, then with sounds from the upper harmonics, and finally with harmonic conglomerates (of 6-12 sounds), obtained through interjections of chords; for example, the interjection of chords $F – A – C$ and $G – B – D$, which he arranged in different voices, in

[^26]: Modal Harmony (translator’s note).
different distributions. Thus the overlapping seconds occur, in which the interval of a second, as well as that of a seventh, becomes a component of the chords.

2. The moment of the total exit from the third chord structure is generated by adopting a vertical arrangement produced by overlapping fourths and/or fifths. The most synthesizing piece, which is also the most brilliant of this cycle, is La casa di peste drum. It combines all the harmonization procedures listed above:

– added notes:

**Example 4: La casa di peste drum, bars 1-4**

![Example 4: La casa di peste drum, bars 1-4](image)

– overlapping fourths and fifths:

**Example 5: La casa di peste drum, bars 34-36**

![Example 5: La casa di peste drum, bars 34-36](image)

– multiple notes
Example 6: *La casa di peste drum*, bars 46-48

Another procedure of harmonic enrichment is the **pedal:**
– the multiple (amplified) pedal

Example 7: *Soare strălucea*, bars 31-34

Example 8: *Și se-ntâlni cu n d-ajunu*, bars 43-48
– shifted pedal

**Example 9:** *Mă luai, luai*, bars 19-21

The third stage, during which he reached the height of his career, was marked by his last cycle, *Coruri pe versuri de Blaga* [2].

A first remark is that in this cycle the composer abandoned the folk quotation and created his own tunes (of folk inspiration).

On the other hand, Blaga’s poems provided composer Tudor Jarda with poetic images of great variety and lyrical content, which required the use of advanced techniques to match the poet’s expressionism.

Therefore, harmonic verticality took a step forward, **detaching itself from the third chords** as well as from the idea of sequence based on a functional principle.

Here are the sounds of the first three overlaps and their succession in the climax of the first phrase of the piece *Pan*:

**Example 10:** *Pan*, bars 4-5
[N.B.: the first chord contains the $A - B$ overlap, the second $A - C - D$, the third $D - E - F - G - Bb$]

Another example is the chord suggesting blind Pan’s fine hearing, an overlap of seconds ($A - Bb$, with inverted harmonic sequence $Bb - C, D - A$).

**Example 11: Pan, bars 48-49**

The indifference (the freedom) of chord sequences may be the result of an in *stretto* polyphony which expresses the sprightly clatter of a gambolling lamb.
Example 12: *Pan*, bars 42-45

These vertical agglomerations often tend towards the phenomenon named *cluster*, often filling a mode segment or an entire mode, as in this example, which completes the scale of the *G* Mixolydian mode.

Example 13: *În marea trecere*, bars 56-59
In many cases and especially in polyphonic segments, **bi- and polymodal structures** can be identified.

**Example 14: La casa di peste drum, bars 29-33**

It should be noted that already in the second stage, particularly in cadences, Jarda **eliminated the third**, leaving only the fifth and the octave, thus eliminating the functional redundancy of the third.

**Example 15: Pan, bars 76-79**

After having reviewed the harmonization procedures employed by composer Tudor Jarda we must mention that a primordial aspect related to harmony was the so-called "voice
leading”. Thus, the necessity for chord consonance never prevailed when it would have imposed a difficult melodic leap or an unsingable melodic contour. As an unwritten rule (which harmony teacher Tudor Jarda used to tell to his students), chords must never impose the melodic contours of the voices, but instead, the melodic line of each voice must prevail in terms of singability. In these circumstances, dissonances that may occur in the harmonic verticality do not count. Thus, it is obvious that Tudor Jarda possessed the science of choral singing and that he composed with his mind on the choristers who had to learn and sing the piece while also being artistically satisfied by the beauty of their own singing, irrespective of the part assigned to them.

The harmonic thinking in Tudor Jarda’s choral works evinces a system that the composer created himself and to which he was consistently faithful. Like many composers of the 20th century such as Sigismud Toduță, Alexandru Pașcanu and Anatol Vieru, or of world music such as Béla Bartók and Olivier Messiaen, who all created their own tonal system, Tudor Jarda circumscribed his own system to the micro spiritual universe of the Romanian folklore.

Tudor Jarda’s choral music has a vivid quality and was created in a direct relationship with the performers. This is why his works have been performed by almost all the choirs in Romania.

The spirit of Tudor Jarda’s music is refreshing, optimistic and often humorous. Choristers sing with pleasure because the effort of learning and singing is immediately rewarded by the musical result which is always pleasing.

Thus, Tudor Jarda won the "competition” with almost all the peers of his generation who, given the countless choral groups supported by the communist regime (most of which were of a high and very high professional standard), ventured into writing extremely difficult pieces in terms of intonation and rhythm, which hardly any choir would be able to perform nowadays, and probably in future, too. All we were left with is the professionalism of the philharmonic and opera choirs, which, however, only rarely perform a capella pieces.

As regards the mastery of his writing, Tudor Jarda’s choral music is an open book, conveying a clear and inspiring vision.

Apart from his musical works, Jarda also wrote a course book on Modal Harmony. This course book, which can be considered a treatise on contemporary harmony, is read and especially studied thoroughly by very few people. We believe that if the young people were

27 His work with the choirs and musical groups from Leșul Ilvei in the 1950s is well known.
familiar with this harmonic technique, they would be able to find the path to that exceptionally expressive simplicity that many composers look for in various, often ineffective complex structures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY