

The Actor in Search of Musical Forms. Case Studies

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Abstract: This article looks at the major differences in the reception of the sounds of a musical fragment, depending on the personal experience of each individual and his profession. The musicians relate to the sound universe guided by the constituent elements of the scores, and the actors look for connections between sounds, gestures, words, characters, and stage situations. They can approach music in other ways than musicians and remember the melodic lines or create accompaniments by making connections with the context in which they find themselves.

In some examples that the article offers, the studied actors demonstrate that sound can become music even in the absence of the vocal or rhythmic qualities of the performers. Other examples refer to the way in which the personality and creativity of artists have a significant role in creating songs or the sound support they need.

Keywords: music-theatre, performing arts, music, musical training

The education, the professional training, the people in the immediate vicinity and the events that have high emotional impacts influence the unique ways in which each of us relates to words, music or to the connections between them. Neurologist Oliver Sacks noted the major differences between the brain of a musician and that of a non-musician, and his study was published in one of his books².

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 2. Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia. Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

An old practice through which certain people associate sounds with their images on the staff offers them the opportunity to think up complex structures, in a musical mathematics that contains many numbers and calculations. They are thus able to observe and admire the “architecture” of the great works and the genius of certain composers in a completely different manner than the profanes of this area.

Non-musicians connect the sounds around them to their own fields of activity and they relate to certain songs through the lens of their own professions. The actor has access to music in a different way than a musician and thus, for them, the same song may seem completely different. From conductor Sergiu Celibidache’s viewpoint³, there is no music, but rather the sound may become music under certain conditions.

Sound is movement because it is a vibration, and that certain sound that becomes music is based on equal and constant vibrations. The musical tone contains the same number of vibrations on a given unit of time. There are several sounds that vibrate together with the base sound, which are called harmonics⁴. Sergiu Celibidache stated that these phenomena occur not only in space, but also in time – an aspect that has been overlooked by musicology – and the temporal structure of the sound is reflected within the human affective universe. In this sense, the musical and the actor are somewhat similar. One good song would please them both, even if one uses musical arguments to motivate their choice, while the other uses theatrical arguments in this respect. Beyond each of their tastes, the “vibration that becomes music” acts upon their affective universe and provokes emotion.

The text of a song influences its reception, depending how people make connections between sounds, gestures, situations, words and their meanings. Since the human brain is a great mystery to researchers and many of its manifestations do not yet have clear explanations, there is no information as to how that happens, precisely. Oliver Sacks was interested in the rare

3. See Sergiu Celibidache, *Über musikalische Phänomenologie. Ein Vortrag und weitere Materialien* (Augsburg: Wissner, 2008).

4. Harmonics – A vibration that accompanies the fundamental vibration of the same type and that has a frequency equal to an integer multiple of the frequency of the fundamental vibration.

neurological cases and the ones connected to music are grouped together in his book *Musicophilia. Tales of Music and the Brain*, in which he describes the way in which several patients formed an almost pathological attachment to music as a result of an accident or a surgical intervention, while others suffered epilepsy episodes, triggered by the melodic lines. In 1937, studies conducted on the cases of eleven patients whose epilepsy episodes were triggered by music established the terminology: “musicogenic epilepsy” and “musicolepsy”. Neurologist Oliver Sacks offers the example of well-known music critic, Nikonov, who was forced to give up on his profession and to avoid all contact with music.

The major difference between musicians and non-musicians is due to the different types of training, so as some things are inconceivable to some, to others they may be commonplace. The brains of non-musicians, in the absence of the exercises practiced by musicians, appeal to the personal experiences and to the training that is specific to their professions. Thus, the actor may relate to “the sound that becomes music” through theatre.

1. The case of Adrian Cucu

Actor Adrian Cucu⁵ approaches songs naturally, prioritizing the stage situations and the meanings of the words. He adapts the songs or, bizarrely, he adapts to them by using gestures through which he memorises the length and height of a sound. Instinctively, the actor uses the melodic lines in favour of the stage situations in which he is involved, transforming music into a sound support system for the words. Through his acting and his playing with the songs and texts, he resolves the musical uncertainties (the ones of which he is aware) and reaches a natural personal musical interpretation.

In his case, as well as in the cases of other actors, I noticed the usefulness of providing certain examples. If we were to use sentences that express almost the same thing and to adapt them to certain melodic lines

5. Adrian Cucu, actor of the National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca.
<http://www.teatrulnationalcluj.ro/en/company>

that similar to those they wish to depict, the interpreters can better identify the thoughts that initially generated the music. The research thus aimed to identify the possibility of reaching a melody, through the text.

Since our very first collaboration, I noticed that gestures were the ones that help this actor memorise certain difficult texts, or that imprint the desire intention to the song. The threat expressed through a short movement of the head, followed by the emphasis put on each verse ending, turned him into a dangerous character through the line: "Doamna e soția MEA... / N-aș VREA ... să aflu cumVA/ ce căuTA/ la dumneaTA."⁶ In another instance, he had certain difficulties in remembering a text fragment. He, *The Pirate* who grew wooden legs, was telling the story of how one of the became a tree "și erau cuiburi și păsări și leagănă-n el"⁷. The final part of the text posed the greater problems, since the actor could not memorise the succession of the words and the melody, until he began to mark, with logical gestures, each element: the first was the nest, depicted by holding one hand in the shape of a scoop, while the other hand mimed the flight and, in the end, the nest-hand swung back and forth beneath the bird-hand.

His musical distrust found an excellent support in the meanings present in the text and in the stage situations, and the songs were expressed naturally. For the vocal interventions that he found to be too difficult, he asked his colleagues to add certain helpful signals (a bang, a cough or a certain movement). Thus, the actor managed to synchronise his voice, attitude and gestures, painstakingly working on each musical fragment. Such an endeavour would have been difficult in the case of a large-range role, but, on our first collaboration, his character only had a few appearances, and the experiment was carried out successfully.

6. "The lady is my WIFE.../ There would be STRIFE.../ Were I to DISCOVER... / Why she was OVER... / At your PLACE" (If not marked otherwise, all translations in the present paper were made by the author of the present paper. The texts were originally written in Romanian).

7. "and there were nests and birds and swings in it"



Fig. 1: Scene from *Insula*, with A. Cucu in the role of the Pirate, National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, 2011, Photo credits Nicu Cherciu.

The opportunity to study the way in which Adrian Cucu adapted a more consistent material to his very precise way of working on songs arose a few years later, through the character of *Švejk*, from the show *Švejk in Concert*. This time, the voluminous text, containing many difficult fragments, somewhat intimidated him. The experiments by which we reached certain songs together (beginning from the stage situations and the meanings of the words) and the identification of certain useful gestures required prolonged research, and the show premier could not be postponed. We sought solutions that would allow the main character to have less interventions in the songs by using other actors for the plot development. The issue was thus resolved, postponing the research for another 3 years, until Adrian Cucu was cast in the role of *Ubu*, from *Ubu in Concert*.

In *Švejk*, the actor focused on the humour of the situations, avoiding the tragic dimension of the character, present in one of the songs. Our research was limited to the playful tone from Jaroslav Hašek's book, for a

small role. Adrian Cucu, during the show, made many connections between the songs, the meanings of the words and the gestures. The leaps from one sound to the other were accompanied by hand gestures, the actor thus “drawing” entire songs in the air. Using upwards movements for the high notes and downwards for the low, he sang using his entire being in his performance. The end of the show was based on a song⁸ in which the comedy and tragedy take place simultaneously, in a dream about death, and the actor managed to find a way to play it with humour and serenity. He described how a car that was taking him to the front line at high speed and the danger was enormous, but the driver was admiring the beauty of the road and the quality materials from which it had been built. An explosion sent the vehicle flying through the air and it thus managed to reach heaven, which was a copy of the terrestrial military organisation. Several bombings used as accompaniments⁹ determined the actors to make successive motions, which contributed to the creation of certain connections between the text, the song and the stage situation. For the flight resulted from the explosion, all of the actors slightly rose from their chairs, at the same time, with the text “fâl, fâl, zburam printre stele și ne feream de comete”¹⁰, and the verse “am văzut în față un perete”¹¹ was followed by a blow that meant to suggest the first contact with the wall of the military heaven in which the characters had arrived.

By the time of our third collaboration, actor Adrian Cucu had a lot of experience in making the connections between the text, the gestures and the music, since they had been rehearsed during our shows together (which were held periodically by the theatre). Despite the fact that I proposed a larger role (Mr. Ubu, after *Ubu in Chains* and *UbuZdup*, by Alfred Jarry and Gábor Tompa), he did not manifest his previous reservations – on the contrary, he worked as relaxed as an artist who new the rules of the “game”.

8. See Ada Milea, *Vis (repetiție cu Švejk)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q09Sy-BI5ZI), 25.05.2020, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q09Sy-BI5ZI>.

9. Ada Milea, *Vis*.

10. “flap, flap, flying among the stars and avoiding comets”.

11. “in front there was a wall”.

The first song of the new project was a parody of Hamlet's "to be, or not to be", while the characters meditated inside a dumpster: "A puți... A nu puți... A fi, sau a nu fi kaki... A putrezi... a nu mai putrezi..."¹² I noticed that the actor did not refuse the tragic, but preferred it disguised in comedy, and the show offered the ideal context for us to experiment this direction. Once again working with the same team, I was able to continue the musical-theatre research, with respect to the creation of the songs, to communicating with the actors and to developing the orchestrations together with them. Adrian Cucu in the role of Mr. Ubu was extremely inventive, and, this time, he found the connections between the thoughts, intentions and melodies on his own; Andreea Gavrilu's contribution to the choreography of the show benefited everyone. The oriental resonances of the chorus ("Ne lustruieste... Ne lustruieste"¹³) were greatly aided by the dance capable of offering the sound the undulation that is transmissible from movement to song and vice versa.

The research carried out together with Adian Cucu began with a secondary character and by the time of our third collaboration, he had already become used to expressing himself through song with the ease with which he communicated through spoken texts.

2. The case of Ștefan Mura

I resumed the research conducted on the character *Švejk* together with one of the actors from the National Theatre from Târgu-Mureș, Ștefan Mura, whom I invited to perform in a small version of a concert. Having known him from a previous project, I could also imagine him interpreting the tragic dimension of the text without damaging the stage situations. I selected several representative songs from the show *Švejk in Concert* and I presented them in a new form (by changing both the text and the music, depending on the new interpreters and the new context).

12. "To stink... Not to stink... To be, or not to be kaki... To rot... Not to rot...".

13. "Polishing us... Polishing us..."

Several years ago, we had the opportunity of building, together, a certain number of musical versions of certain roles: *Caliban*¹⁴ (in a brutal and energetic song), *Ariel*¹⁵ (delicate and sensitive) etc. from his very first attempt, he expressed himself naturally while using the words and their meanings in the songs. Several discussions made me believe that his connection with the rural world decisively contributed to the relation he developed with music, texts and the stage situations. The somewhat melodic speech of the countryfolk sometimes contains their state of mind and the intentions they wish to transmit. Ștefan Mura, through simple verbal communication with the villagers, practiced the type of connections that I always desire in the creation and interpretation of the songs.

In the rural world, there are places where it is not said that a man cries, but rather that he “sings”. Namely, that he is singing his sorrow or pain through words, while expressing his state of mind together with the cry slipped into a song. The language of the villagers communicates much through few words, due to the fact that they associate the sounds capable of completing the parts that are absent from the text. Sometimes, a shout replaces an accusatory sentence and a “What’s the matter?” can be endearing, curious, aggressive or seductive. This aspect is studied in theatre, but the rural worlds from certain areas naturally connect the words and the aforementioned states of mind with songs. The folk artist expresses a thought through both the melody and the text. His aim is not to create music or literature, but to communicate the truth of a situation that deeply affects him. The authentic rural world musically connects the meanings of the words with the state of mind of the speaker or singer, and actor Ștefan Mura practiced this type of expression for a long time, living under the beneficial influence of certain villagers.

Based on the background information regarding this actor, I approached the role of *Švejk* from a different perspective. I proposed he use the rural speech, so that we could draw nearer to the source of his naturality and, as

14. *Caliban* – a character from William Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*.

15. *Ariel* – a character from William Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*.

such, we continued the research by building a character (emotionally) connected to the universe of our grandparents¹⁶.

I, Ștefan Mura and Bobo Burlăcianu created the accompaniment of each song, involving the characters as well. We sought actions capable of theatrically and musically sustaining the scenes, even if they were connected to musical instruments. The use of bells in a song in which the character was referring to the wonderful moments spent in the hospice (“La balamuc am trăit cele mai frumoase clipe din viața mea. / La balamuc poți să te crezi Iisus, o chiflă sau o acadea”¹⁷) came as a natural addition to the behaviour of a possibly insane person who sang while clinking. In the same way, the villager, proud to having been given an order from the priest, bangs on a drum, emphasising the importance of certain words with bangs¹⁸. We used props, trying to combine theatre with music as effectively as possible, and this helped to clarify some stage situations. The appearance of a phone receiver was surprising, after a long period in which the character had only used instruments, but it was justified by the context and by the text. In a few concerts, I presented fragments from *Švejk*, and the actor played with humour and emotion. The naturalness with which he expressed himself through song determined me to propose that we continue our research with other roles: *Gulitză*¹⁹, from *Chiritza in Concert* and *Sancho*²⁰, from the concert *Quijote*, projects still unfinished. Our experiments aimed to identify certain connections between the musical communication of a text and the accompaniments that can be used, naturally integrating them into the show. Through his contact with the rural world, Ștefan Mura has the experience of dialoguing in a “sung” speech, which contains intentions and word meanings within the melodies of certain lines.

16. See Ada Milea, *rerepetăm Švejk (cu Pateu')*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRc5s7hYSBK), 20.06.2019, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRc5s7hYSBK>.

17. Ada Milea, *rerepetăm Švejk (cu Pateu')*: “In the madhouse, I lived the most wonderful moments of my life. / In the madhouse, you can believe yourself to be Jesus, a bun, or a lollipop”.

18. Ada Milea, *rerepetăm Švejk (cu Pateu')*.

19. See Ada Milea, *Gulitză intro*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HudxBAgRXTw), 04.09.2020, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HudxBAgRXTw>.

20. See Ada Milea, *ziua 1 Q*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm3bW_P6xNo), 01.09.2020, accessed February 03, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm3bW_P6xNo.



Fig. 2: Scene from a concert with fragments from *Švejk*.
National Theatre in Târgu-Mureș.
From left to right Ștefan Mura (*Švejk*) and Bobo Burlăcianu (*Katz*),
photo by Valentina Lazăr.

3. The case of Anca Hanu

During my long collaboration with the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca, I had the opportunity to work with this excellent actress many times. She manages to express herself through music and text easily, and our artistic communication improved from one project to the next. We have undertaken research work both for the shows of the aforementioned theatre, and during the rehearsals for the independent concerts. While offering her creativity as much freedom as possible, I asked her to be my co-author in the case of certain new songs, or to improve the already existing ones, reinventing them together.

At our first artistic meeting, Anca Hanu improvised a carol, using the name of a colleague nearby. The ease with which she immediately adapted to a situation and the creativity she showed determined me to cast her in an important role and to observe the way in which she uses sounds to express the text. I proposed we try a short accompaniment with an accordion, an instrument easily associated with the sailor environment, and she noticed that she could easily use the bass buttons. In order not to unnecessarily complicate matters with instrumentations that could hinder the actress' performance, we used only the accordion bass and transformed the other hand into a fish tail (to justify its passivity).

While working, we could immediately test two voices (in dialogue or in harmony) and modify the melodic line on the spot, in accordance with one another, improvising. The "on the go" ideas were easily to recover with the help of the recordings, and the useful materials were immediately sent to a (secret) working group for the shows.

Another project of the theatre in Cluj²¹ allowed us to resume the research on the sonority of the accordion. We sought Tyrolean resonances, in order to ensure the sound support of the songs requested by director Alexandru Dabija. Beside the sounds and meanings of the words, which we usually noted, we were also compelled to adapt to the "Bavarian" direction of the show, periodically placing yodels²² in the texts. We created an entire chorus of verses made of the sounds used by the interpreters of this musical genre, using them as if they were words: "odl lidl lidl looo! Iodl lidl lidl looo! Iodl lidl lidl, iodl lidl lidl, iodl lidl lidl looo!" The stanzas in German, although their texts were intentionally banal (on the level of a beginner's textbook: "Ich bin Gretchen!"), together with the sound of the accordions and the chorus, created the atmosphere that the show needed. Anca Hanu played the role of a hen, which is why we introduced clucking among the words and we prolonged certain lines with squeaks. Thus, the research led us both to testing the extent to which the universe of a show

21. Alexandru Dabija director, *Mein Kampf* by George Tabori, music by Anca Hanu and Ada Milea, The National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, premiered on October 14, 2014.

22. Yodelling – a form of singing in the Bavarian folklore, in which the voice very rapidly combines the low-pitch (chest) sounds with the high-pitch (head) sounds.

(in this case, a Tyrolese one) and the requirements of the director (in this case, Alexandru Dabija) can offer us new, useful directions in our musical-theatrical experiments. We tried the yodel sonority, converting the sounds of the Austrian folklore into unintelligible words, while the accordion and the other instruments (percussion, in particular) made for an adequate musical basis.

The work on *Švejk in Concert* began with the stages that proved useful in the past experiences. I prepared a show scheme by selecting the possible characters and the relevant scenes from the book, after which I made the musical sketches for each song. Together with Anca Hanu, we invented and reinvented the texts and melodies, after which we filmed their approximate versions²³. For a better use of the lines in the songs, we imitated actors in different roles²⁴, as well as the instruments that were to be used by other colleagues (trumpet, kazoo, percussion etc.)

The presence of actress Sânziana Tarța determined us to use many harmonious voices, since we could immediately try them out and we could develop them together. She adapted to the way in which we musically built a text and she made several highly useful proposals. Hašek's book represented the support in our endeavour, but we tried to imagine roles that would not perturb the events described by the author, while also allowing the two actresses to contribute to the songs.

Initially, the idea was that they were to be two continuously present ghosts, followed by an idea in which they would be two old ladies that greeted the military train in each station; in the end, we thought it would be better if they were two nurses. Their presence allowed us to suggest that the entire action takes place in a hospice, or that war is seen as an action that can only be justified in a psychiatric hospital. We modified the scene in which *Švejk* had an experience in the madhouse²⁵, eliminating everything related to concrete treatments (enemas, electric shocks etc.). The show

23. See Ada Milea, *Alo 1*, www.youtube.com, 24.11.2017, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E79k1aDKfbs>.

24. Ada Milea, *Alo 1*.

25. See Ada Milea, *Švejk – repetiții cu frunza generalului*, www.youtube.com, 14.12.2017, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmJAd4p5z6w>.

began with a song about the Russian military threat, but offered the hope that our countries would unite and save everyone. We relied on the fact that certain similarities between the contemporary world and the one in Hašek's book would intrigue the spectators: "Dragi maghiari și bosnieci!/ Dragi nemți, cehi și austrieci!/ Avem un dușman periculos la răsărit/ Împotriva lui, cu toții ne-am unit!/ Avem același drapel./ Avem voință de oțel./ Popoarele noastre împreună vor lupta/ Într-o zi o să ajungem la Moscova!"²⁶



Fig. 3: Scene from *Svejk in Concert*. From left to right Sânziana Tarța and Anca Hanu, in the roles of nurses. Photo credits Nicu Cherciu.

26. "Dear Hungarians and Bosnians! / Dear Germans, Czechs and Austrians! / We have a dangerous foe to the east / Against him we have united! / We fly the same flag. / Our will is unshakable. / Our peoples shall fight together / To one day reach Moscow!"

For this project²⁷, Anca Hanu used an ukulele, an accordion, a melodica, a synthesiser and a kazoo, some of which creating the accompaniment basis for many of the songs. Together with the other actors, she constructed her role in such a way that the interpretation naturally contained the relation with the instruments, acting and singing at the same time. The accordion thus became an extension of her character, it asked questions or audibly redirected different lines, while the kazoo had very long interventions that imitated the distorted voices from a telephone. In involvement of the larynx in the use of the kazoo allowed the spectators to distinguish the words. The human-instrument dialogues included many moments of improvisation²⁸, and Anca Hanu produced, through the receiver, gentle, hysterical or indifferent voices that dialogued with the other characters.

The theatre research continued with two other projects: *Chiritza in Concert* and *Ubu in Concert*. The collaboration with Anca Hanu was initiated by the discussions on the text and the characters, but it truly began with the sketches of the songs, which we then modified or remade together. She contributed with ideas to their orchestration, imagining the possibilities of integrating the instruments into the show in a natural manner. The actress played the lead role in both of the theatrical productions, and her perspective on the songs proved to have a double involvement: that of a creator and that of a performer.

Our experiences were extended outside the theatre as well, through the concert versions of certain songs; they continued with the essentialisation of certain shows and their completely different instalment. This is the case of the study on *Gulliver*²⁹, after Gellu Naum – the songs were borrowed from a play held by the Gong Theatre in Sibiu³⁰. During the rehearsals, held

27. See Teatrul Național Cluj-Napoca, *Trailer: ŠVEJK IN CONCERT - Teatrul Național Cluj-Napoca*, www.youtube.com, 31.08.2018, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebSdQvL-LI8>.

28. See Ada Milea, *09 Telefoane*, www.youtube.com, 25.11.2017, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anwEtDDUo30>.

29. See Ada Milea, *Gulliver (după Gellu Naum) – aproape tot*, www.youtube.com, 22.11.2020, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHsJTdl5JIw>.

30. Alexandru Dabija director, *Cel mai mare Guliver*, by Gellu Naum, music by Ada Milea, Gong Theatre, Sibiu, premiered on October 02, 2016.

in an apartment³¹ in which we constructed the concert version, we considered that all of the song were sketches upon which we could intervene with no reservations. Together, we studied the way in which a giant could be (audibly) suggested, and the attempt to influence the songs in this sense determined us to use the effect of the image on the song. In a previous study that focused on the same huge character, we added an effect that exaggeratedly deepened the voice, singing very close to the microphone, accompanied by a speech dilation. Thus, the word “Matei” [Matthew] was spoken slowly, in very low-pitch notes. Because this song was performed in front of an audience made of children, the powerful, low-pitched utterance of the word caused a slight collective commotion. The young spectators became frightened upon imagining the giant, although there was no image of him. When we discussed this story, we decided to use a projection, in order to establish the extent to which the sound and the image can contribute to the live musical illusion of the giant.

The exploration of the universe of a contemporary Chiritza, for the show *Chiritza in Concert*, challenged Anca Hanu to seek her character before rehearsals even began. This time, we created a visible profile on a social network page³², where the participants could follow the respective updates. We wished to create the profile of a contemporary celebrity, starting from the author’s information and from the inspiration provided by the current society. We thus built the caricature of a character whom money, deception and fraud propelled to the top, regardless of her level of stupidity and superficiality. Our aim regarded the fleeting figures and their undying habits, even if the audience imagined that they recognised anyone in particular in the characters: “Televiziunili mă vânează mereu/ Reporterii stau ciorchine-n juru’ meu/ Nu pot să fac greșeli di vocabular/ că imediat îs ruptă-n bucăți di vreun ziar”³³.

31. See Ada Milea, *RepeGulli 2*, www.youtube.com, 25.08.2017, accessed February 03, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugNxUufhol4>.

32. *Chiritza Bârzoii*, <https://www.facebook.com/Chiritza-B%C3%A2rzoii-758296127887995/>.

33. “The televisions hunt me daily / Reporters all around me / One slip of the tongue / And I’m immediately ripped to shreds in the papers”.



Fig. 4: Scene from *Chiritza in Concert*, with the two charlatans. From left to right Cosmin Stănilă, Anca Hanu (Chiritza) and Radu Dogaru. Photo by Nicu Cherciu.

The character of Chiritza also had an essentialised version, outside the theatre, for the concerts held in unconventional spaces. Our research followed the way in which the songs can be received by the spectators who are unfamiliar with Alecsandri's text. During the apartment rehearsals, together with Bobo Burlăcianu, we reconstructed several musical pieces, presenting the dramatic situation of a husband forced to become perfect³⁴, the quarrel over the marriage of certain girls³⁵, a story about Thai people on a trip to Vienna³⁶, the conquest of Chiritza by a toreador who was, in fact,

34. See Ada Milea, *Prefect (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcxx1orAw3A), 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcxx1orAw3A>.

35. See Ada Milea, *Ni șiertăm (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onNMFjqo-RQ), 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onNMFjqo-RQ>.

36. See Ada Milea, *Chiritza la Viena (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43mp7JQgoGA), 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43mp7JQgoGA>.

not a toreador³⁷, the bimbos dreaming of the ideal men³⁸ and their emotions upon meeting them³⁹.

4. Difficulties, obstacles and solutions when working with the actor

The relation between the actor and the song depends both on the interpreter's musical qualities (rhythmic sense, voice etc.), and on their ability to use other qualities. Sometimes, the person aware of their musical talent focuses on the melodic line excessively, without offering the voice an adequate emotional support. Although they perform the sounds accurately, they tend to ignore an essential dimension in theatre: the connection between the text and its meanings.

Actress Dana Dogaru showed a justified distrust in a mysterious character who had to perform a musical moment in a Japanese restaurant in Russia⁴⁰. She told me even proved to me that she could not perform songs. Indeed, she could render neither the high pitches of certain musical notes, nor any rhythms, but music is not limited to such aspects. A melodic line devoid of context involves memorising a string of sounds, but humans can create connections between the sounds and the words or the stage situations. In the case of the aforementioned actress, I avoided the presence of an instrument, since it would have emphasised the difference between a melody considered to be correct and the one that she emitted. For this reason, I suggested that she accompanied herself by an imaginary Japanese orchestra. I offered her a musical sketch, marking the passages that she had to sing instead of the instruments, after which I recorded an approximate version. Together, we tried out several possibilities, imitating string

37. See Ada Milea, *Toreador (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, www.youtube.com, 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfoekkJaEgI>.

38. See Ada Milea, *Fetili (repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, www.youtube.com, 28.06.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0TLJf0-TDg>.

39. See Ada Milea, *Noaptea pi lac (din repetiție la MiniChiritza)*, www.youtube.com, 22.12.2020, accessed February 04, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF3tkmjagiE>.

40. Felix Alexa director, *În rolul victimei*, by Vladimir and Oleg Presniakov, The Metropolis Theatre, Bucharest, premiered on September 30, 2007.

instruments or small percussions, as similar to the European perception on the Japanese sonorities as possible. The actress sang the lines using sounds that could seem Japanese, after which she imitated an imaginary orchestra. At our next collaboration, we preferred to use an accompaniment made of the noises the shoes made on the floor. Once again, the actress' talent successfully replaced her musical ear and thus the songs of the show⁴¹ were interpreted without any problems.

Another interesting case was the role of *Leonce*, from the *Leonce and Lena*⁴² play, for which I proposed an actor that had rhythm problems⁴³. Although I did have other more comfortable options (from a musical viewpoint), my recommendation was based on the interpreter's past (he was a student of the Faculty of Theology) and his ability to better understand the character's existential turmoil. The cast of a different actor could have been much more useful rhythmically, but it would have taken us away from Büchner's character. In the case of *Leonce*, the effects of the rhythmic issues were diminished by the interventions of the character of *Valerio*, played by an extremely musical actor⁴⁴. He gave him useful signals and saved him vocally, when needed, with ease and elegance. The spectators confused the actor's wandering in the world of sounds with that of the character that was disoriented by the society in which he lived, and his reliance on *Valerio* was received as a sign of admiration for the one with a better knowledge of humanity's madness. As friends and colleagues, they naturally communicated through words, sounds and glances (some, the aforementioned signals). More than *Leonce*'s musical precision, what interested me was that the philosophical games from Büchner's text be clear, which can happen when the actor focuses more on the ideas than on the melodies.

41. Felix Alexa director, *Meșteșugul vieții*, by Hanoch Levin, The Bulandra Theatre, Bucharest, premiered on October 15, 2011.

42. Mihai Măniuțiu director, *Leonce și Lena*, by Georg Büchner, The Queen Marie Theatre, Oradea, premiered on November 23, 2013.

43. E.N. – actor of the Queen Mary Theatre of Oradea.

44. Richard Balint – actor of the Queen Mary Theatre of Oradea.

During the rehearsals with less musical actors, I noted the way in which the stage situations, the text and the experience can help them interpret melodic lines. Even through some of them showed a justified distrust in their own ability to sing, they did true to express themselves musically and, through theatre, to reach “the sound that becomes music”.

5. The instrumentalist actor and his theatrical accompaniments

In an attempt to identify the sounds that are capable of aiding the musical expression of the texts, I found an excellent ally in the actor who can play an instrument and who can use it as he would a character (or as an extension of his character). Florin Călbăjos is able to make a double bass play different roles, by making it “mumble”, “speak” or “scream” in his own “voice”. Through small suggestive gestures, accompanied by sounds, he creates images in addition to the text he sings. He made an accompaniment in which two bangs placed periodically, upon certain words, offered them new meanings. Namely, they could suggest the empty head of a woman, while also playing percussion (“**Banii**, în **ca-pul** unei femei, sunt ca... **os-ul** pentru căței, sunt ca.. **Dar-win** pentru atei, sunt ca... **berea** pentru prietenii mei”⁴⁵).

The character played by the actor had a double bass and was only concerned with money. We undertook a study together, trying to use everything at hand (sounds, gestures, words) in order to get him to refer to money in as many ways as possible. The rhythm dissonances⁴⁶ of his instrument showed how money “squandered”, while a hand gesture that controlled the sounds proved how they “disappeared”⁴⁷. A small foot tambourine rattling represented “all his money”⁴⁸ and the snapping of his

45. “Money, in a woman’s **head**, is like... the **bone** for the dog... it is like... **Darwin** for the atheists, it is like... **beer** for my friends”. See Ada Milea, *Banii în capul unei femei*, www.youtube.com, 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paZK_sczFQ4.

46. See Ada Milea, *Banii mă înnebunesc*.

47. See Ada Milea, *Banii mă înnebunesc*.

48. See Ada Milea, *ăștia mi-s toți banii*, www.youtube.com, 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFgnYtKLaeo>.

fingers suggested his shortcomings⁴⁹, or the large number of plays written in a year⁵⁰ (the gesture also emphasized their quality, but especially the idea of payment).

Another actor, Romulus Chiciuc, used a violin in several projects in which we aimed for the same relation between the instrument, the music, the text and the stage situations. In the concert *Quijote*, the actor played *The Puppeteer*, whose puppets were the violin's bow and body⁵¹: the bow was the male-puppet (Marcello Bello) who sang low-pitched notes on the lower cords, and the thinner cords were reserved for *Isabelle's* quavers, in a type of instrumental commedia dell'arte. I collaborated with this actor in other concerts as well, in which the violin was used as a dulcimer (by hitting the cords with a pencil⁵²) to illustrate insects flying through a garden⁵³, or to help the actor write threatening letters to Santa Claus, using a pencil with an eraser⁵⁴.

The research on the instruments that efficiently use the text, the characters and the stage situations continued by involving an extremely creative percussionist, Alex Neagu⁵⁵, in the theatrical-musical experiments. Together, we transformed many of the already existing songs, offering them new versions. Thus, several songs about fires, firemen and stories shrouded in mystery, initially created for a performance in Iași⁵⁶, were readdressed, with the involvement of certain percussion instruments. From

49. See Ada Milea, *artiștii nu se îmbogățesc*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLaHcI-6EMI), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLaHcI-6EMI>.

50. See Ada Milea, *16 piese într-un an*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acwMP6HCB38), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acwMP6HCB38>.

51. See Ada Milea, *păpușar cu vioară*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF9HYjvf93M), 09.05.2018, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF9HYjvf93M>.

52. See Ada Milea, *Aoleu*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_zUPfghs0s), 24.01.2014, accessed June 01, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_zUPfghs0s.

53. See Ada Milea, *Ruginesc albinele*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IK_PQIGZo8), 25.01.2014, accessed June 01, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IK_PQIGZo8.

54. See Ada Milea, *Scrisoare de amenințare pentru Moș Crăciun*, [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKuRZOqDGLA), 21.09.2014, accessed June 01, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKuRZOqDGLA>.

55. Alex Neagu – drummer, percussionist, member of the bands The Bread Pits and Fără Zahăr.

56. Felix Alexa director, *Biedermann și incendiarii*, by Max Frisch, The National Theatre, Iași, premiered on October 24, 2009.

the desire to discover as many connections as possible with the events in the text, we also introduced a lamp which could have different uses: as a light bulb turned on at night by a person haunted by insomnia (the percussionist had lines, while turning the lamp on into his own eyes⁵⁷), as a sun rising in plain sight (the lamp was turned on, immediately followed by the line “Soarele a răsărit”⁵⁸), or as a reflector of the night guards (the lamp was turned on, followed by moments of fear⁵⁹). The musician also used other unique percussion elements: several tuned tubes⁶⁰ (whose smell was investigated when discussing flammable substances⁶¹), a hairdryer (to suggest indifference towards certain situations in the text⁶²), a floor tom⁶³ into which air was blown through a hose and thus changed the sound of the drum⁶⁴ etc. These instruments were used in many other songs. In one such song, the floor tom audibly suggested the belly of an immense fish⁶⁵, while another created the illusion of the sway of a pirate ship⁶⁶. The sounds always aimed to support (together with their images) the ideas in a text, and the musician also vocally took part in the song. He was a character and a percussionist, using the percussions naturally.

57. See Ada Milea, *Cine (repetiție'n sufragerie)*, www.youtube.com, 24.11.2020, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7OPpnBylfi>.

58. The sun has risen”. See Ada Milea, *Soarele - repetiție'n sufragerie*, www.youtube.com, 24.11.2020, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLThmjAmfQ>.

59. See Ada Milea, *Dormitzi*, www.youtube.com, 06.06.2019, accessed February 06, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx_Xj6LdoMI.

60. See Ada Milea, *Biciclete*, www.youtube.com, 06.06.2019, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksSs98fw5IQ>.

61. See Ada Milea, *Benzina*, www.youtube.com, 06.06.2019, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msDXN55-zY4>.

62. See Ada Milea, *Zdup zdup zdup - repetiție'n sufragerie*, www.youtube.com, 24.11.2020, accessed February 06, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCW1AM4ytEY>.

63. Floor tom – an element of the drum set.

64. See Ada Milea, *Benzina*.

65. See Ada Milea, *Peștele suprem - repetiție'n sufragerie*, www.youtube.com, 26.11.2020, accessed February 07, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pn4DPWDQC28>.

66. See Ada Milea, *Piratzii*, www.youtube.com, 06.06.2019, accessed February 07, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVJuSVprZSI>.

The research on the way in which the actors identify the melodies through the texts and the stage situations continued by seeking the types of audible interventions that would help them in their endeavour. Then, I studied the ability of the instrumentalists to transform their instruments into characters and to use their theatrical qualities in a musical context.

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