

CREATING THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL MUSICAL STYLE – A PROBLEM OF MUSICAL OR NATIONAL IDENTITY?

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SUMMARY. My communication analyses the relationship of interdependency between ideology and music in Romania. My intention is to discover this relationship in the discourses of the composers' and music critics through what they understood by national style. We will see how this discourse has been influenced by the political context and modified in relationship with the shifts of the political regimes. Therefore, I will emphasize the discursive forms of the national specificity in music shaped by the apparently contradictory political ideologies. These range from the nationalist ideology that reached its peak in the interwar period to the communist ideology with its specific forms of nationalism. The temporal setting covers a period of almost one century which will allow us to observe the apparition, development and intersection of political ideologies, especially of the nationalism, and their reflection in understating the national style. The national specific discourse is, after all, one of identity perceived in relation to the otherness. The identity discourse fits into the process of the construction of the national identity, which assumes a definition and delimitation from the otherness. Therefore, we will have the *national – universal* dichotomy, based on the East-West or the Centrum-Periphery relation, and its metamorphoses. Thus, in the pre and the interwar period the emphasis is put on the ethnical element; in the communist period, with the first internationalist phase, the class solidarity replaced the ethnical one and, finally, in the nationalist phase the political strategies appealed to older sensibilities of the autochthonous collective imaginary.

Keywords: ideology, nationalism, identity, musical style, Romanian composers

In recent Romanian historiography the national identity was often taken for granted, a distinct sentiment that Romanians had since the Middle Ages, or even since the Dacians (if we consider the propagandistic overstatements). However, the idea of a national conscience could not have

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appeared before the political administrative construct that was the national state, itself a product of the modern ages. The German model of nation, where the adherence to a nation was given by the ethnical criteria and by a shared descent and culture, had a strong impact in Europe's periphery. That signified that the cultural elites invested music with the power to represent the national identity.

The French model of nation (acknowledged by the historians as the civil model of the nation) is competed in the 19th century by the German model (due to thinkers such as Fichte or Herder) where the belonging to a nation was given by the ethnical criterion, by a common descent and culture, shared by all society's members. Music has had a contribution to this agreed approach of building the national identity, being seen by the cultivated stratum of the society as holding an important symbolic capital with a real potential in the representation of the identity.

For the musicians from Central and Eastern Europe, the most powerful symbol used in the national identity process was represented by the folk music – a great resource that belonged to those societies that hadn't reached modernity – seen as the collective expression of the national identity, rather than that of the social or regional identities. Being subscribed to the cultural nationalism, this movement of moral regeneration searched for gathering different aspects of the nation by returning to its creative principles.² In this way, the nationalism in music began to be seen not just as a stylistic option but as a legacy and a responsibility of the *national spirit*.³ Therefore, between 1870 and 1914, the European musical life offered the image of a Babel tower,⁴ all over the essence of the national music being attached to a local genius, to a tradition and to a historical determination.

The Pre-War Period

The idea to affirm the national school of music was felt by the Romanians as an imperative, the process of creating the Romanian modern music being developed around the conceptual clarification of the national music, a notion that acted both as an ideal to be achieved and as a

² John Hutchinson, "Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration" in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson, Antony D. Smith, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 123.

³ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson, Univ of California Press, 1989, p. 40.

⁴ Didier Francfort, *Le chant des Nations. Musiques et Cultures en Europe, 1870-1914 (The song of the nations. Music and culture in Europe, 1870-1914)*, Hachette Littératures, 2004, p. 11.

standard by which all the musical products of the period were judged. In this period, the conceptual significance of the national music permanently oscillated between folk music and cultivated music that used folk music as a source of inspiration.

The national music had to be like the nation itself, a unitary whole that includes therewith the authentic traditions and cultural innovation in an organic and unique Romanian product. The creations that neglected the folk music or those that treated it in an inadequate way weren't considered to be representative for the national music and its aspirations.

The definition of the national music captured the composers in a tension resulted from the national – universal relation, where universality raised both positive values (the music of the *civilized* nations being a model to follow) and defensive or even anti-European reactions, the national music being excessively protected all the way up to the elimination of the original model. For example, Ion Vidu (1863-1931) said that "foreign music has no meaning for us"⁵; Timotei Popovici (1870-1950) declared that "the German-Wagnerian music is a wrong path because of the massive imitations Romanian composers make"⁶; for Tiberiu Brediceanu (1877-1968) "many of the musical works are unsuccessful and pale imitations"⁷ considering that a march or a waltz is useless if it not contains a Romanian folk music motif; for this reason, Guilelm Șorban (1876-1923) said that "the measure of the absolute music is to be abandoned because, for us, the music is not cleaned yet by all the foreign elements of its nature and the young awakening of our conscience pretends instinctively that all the manifestation of thinking and feeling should have a national character"⁸.

Therefore, the Romantic Romanian composers understood by national music its delimitation from the Austrian canon (the "Wagnerian", "absolute", "pure" music), a canon that all the national musical schools related to in the process of creating its own specificity. By the national specificity they understood that *way* or *nature* of the people that was impregnated to folk music and that they had to capture and develop in all the existing genres and forms of the western tradition. This specific was obtained at first by quoting and imitating the so called *national arias* – folk tunes selected by

⁵ Ion Vidu, "Literatură și artă națională. Reflecțiuni abstracte de interes actual" (National literature and art. Abstract reflections for the actual interest) in *Drapelul*, Lugoj, 31 ian/1902, p. 3.

⁶ Timotei Popovici, "Principiul național în muzică" (The national principle in music) in *Anuarul Institutului Teologic, Sibiu*, Anul XXIII, 1907, pp. 2-16.

⁷ Tiberiu Brediceanu, "Concertul «Carmen» la Sibiu" (The «Carmen» concert at Sibiu) in *Luceafărul*, Budapesta, an IV, nr. 19, 1 octombrie 1905, p. 372.

⁸ G. Ș. (Șorban), "În jurul Șezătoarei" (Around «Șezătoarea») in *Românul*, Arad, an. IV, nr. 30, vineri 7/20 februarie 1914, pp. 5-6.

the criteria of compatibility with the western harmony type, assimilated at a superficial level (some of these composers hadn't had a strong musical education, rather they were amateurs, arrangers or beginners in music).

Though in the national music's definition there was not enough the folk music call, one of the problems that appeared was that of the superficiality of the folk music's development. Tiberiu Brediceanu said in 1914 that "in our music it is not yet fixed what the veritable Romanian style is, especially I have to mention that there is not a Romanian style that is already formed".⁹ His affirmation appeared in the context of a polemic that debated a composition of Brediceanu.¹⁰ The superficiality in developing folk music that Brediceanu has brought guilt and raised the opinions of many composers and critics of that time over what meant for the Romanians at the beginning of the 20th century the national music. Noticing this phase of the national music raised a question caused by the ambiguity in the precise identification of the national specificity in music, the question being also connected with that of the authenticity of the Romanian folk music.

The concept of authenticity was imposed once with nationalism by distinguishing the authentic from the altered, the contaminated. In this direction, there is no difference between folklores and nationalism in music. The nationalist perception of the folk music resided in the idea of retaining only the unique features, with no equivalent in other folk music. Folk music signified for the composers that entered the 20th century the people music, urban or rural, only later being made the emphasis on the difference between the two in the search for folk music authenticity.

Questioning the specificity in the national music made composers wonder over the folk music origins, many of them being offended that this music could be found in the music of the gypsy fiddlers, as George Enescu (1881-1955) said in 1912 in an interview; he advised the Romanian composers to approach the rhapsody, following the example of Liszt, considering the rhapsody as the best suited genre for expressing the national specificity, saying also that the gipsy fiddlers are keepers of the folk music and express better than some composers the rhapsody.¹¹ Also, Enescu considered that the Romanian folk music particularities resulted from a

⁹ Tiberiu Brediceanu, "În chestiunea «Șezătoarei»" (In the matter of «Șezătoarea») in *Românul*, an IV, Arad, nr. 25, sâmbătă 1/14 februarie 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰ M. Mărgăritescu signed in 1913 a musical chronic in *Flacăra* journal where he considered the musical creation „La șezătoare” of T. Brediceanu as being weak and shallow, „a modest and without claims work of a sympathetic amateur, respectable at more of relishing the bravely boys and the proud girls of Ardeal in the long winter evenings”.

¹¹ Ion Borgovan, "La Gheorghe Enescu" (At Gheorghe Enescu) in *Luceafărul*, Sibiu, 16 mai 1912, p. 287.

mixture of Arabian, Slavic and Hungarian music, "its foreign influences being too obvious to be negated".¹² Unable to separate precisely between the Romanian from the un-Romanian, Enescu touched a problem of ethnomusicology specialty that at that time couldn't offer clear answers.¹³ The confusion that gravitated over the folk music specificity – that could have put in danger the national identity in music – was caused by the numerous polemics that resorted to emotional arguments. As composer Gheorghe Dima (1847-1925) said, "In music as in language, we find many Oriental, Slavic or Hungarian elements but these influences couldn't change its national character".¹⁴ In these confusing situations that pushed a threatening over the ethnical originality, the regional nationalism of some Transylvanian composers raised affirmations such as those of Timotei Popovici that noticed the more obvious national element in the works of the composers from Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina, whilst in the scores of the composers from the other areas is more weak and compromised by the urban folk music and by the romances.¹⁵

By folk music composers understood both urban and rural music, until they began to differentiate them in the quest for authenticity. That divided the composers in the ones that acknowledged the diversity of oriental, Russian or Hungarian elements in the Romanian folk music (predominantly the composers from Bucharest, of French orientation), and the ones that did not accept this influences (particularly the composers from Transylvania, of German orientation). The confusion over the specificity of the folk music was caused by the polemics that resumed to emotional arguments; the Romanian *spirit* couldn't be defined in technical details.

The Interwar Period

The problem of the national specificity in music was going to be extended, appearing in 1920 as an investigation initiated by the *Muzica* journal from Bucharest, joining the opinions of many Romanian composers; it invited to clarify the problem of the Romanian music and its development as an art using the folk music. The initiative was determined by the new

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Once with the Romanian folk music collections of Béla Bartók, the ethnomusicology makes a step forward to professionalization.

¹⁴ Codru T. (Octavian Tăslăuanu), „Muzica românească. De vorba cu d-l Gh. Dima” (The Romanian music. Speaking with Mr. Gh. Dima) in *Luceafărul*, nr. 6, 1913, p. 203.

¹⁵ Timotei Popovici, „Principiul național în muzică” (The national principle in music) in *Anuarul Institutului Teologic, Sibiu, Anul XXIII, 1907*, pp. 2-16.

political configuration that Romania gained in 1918, a moment that also stimulated composers to establish the *Romanian Society of Composers*. The inquiry from *Muzica* journal revealed a diversity of opinions from the ones that suggested useful solutions to those that limited the possibilities of using folk music. For example, Alfred Alessandrescu (1893-1959) affirmed that it is illusory to adapt the folk music for the supreme ideal, namely the symphonic music because the thematic development of the rhythm and harmony could not be sustained by a folk melody. Neither I. Nonna Otescu (1888-1940) was convinced by the use of folk music in all the western genres and forms: "The Romanian fragments do not present enough malleability being more repeated than developed"; George Enescu recommended the rhapsody to be approached due to its free form; Mihail Jora (1891-1971) added the symphonic poem or the ballet with mythological thematic to the list of musical genres that could support the development of the folk music; much firm in responses were Constantin Brăiloiu (1893-1958) that contradicted the existence of superior and inferior genres suitable for folk music development, and Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968) or Dimitrie Cuclin (1885-1978), that were faithful in capitalizing folk music by approaching all the "big" forms. On the other hand, Emanuel Cerbu warned over the danger of standardizing through exclusive use of folk music.¹⁶ The increased interest of the musicians towards folk music was showed also by collecting and systematising it, two folk music archives being established in the late 20s, in Bucharest (the Phonogramic Archive of the ministry in 1927 and the Folk Music Archive of the *Romanian Society of Composers* in 1928, that later merged).

In 1931, Romanian musicologist George Breazu (1887-1961) identified two dominant conceptions in Romanian musical thinking: "the one of a Romanian characteristic (that affirms the Romanian character under the influence of cultural, ethnical and social Romanian environment), and the abstract universalist (that is detached from universal aspirations, is independent by the will or the aspirations of a specific medium or by the imperatives of a breed)".¹⁷ Delimitating the two directions by the ethnical criteria and making value judgments, Breazu emphasized that "the universality of an art work could be attained exactly through the national way, a product of a Romanian psychic ambiance conditioned firstly by a Romanian public".¹⁸ In an all the more stressed climate of the 30s, the theory of attaining universality through the affirmation of the national, emphasized the ethnical argument, aimed to outline the psychological profile of the nation.

¹⁶ "Muzica românească" (The Romanian music) in *Muzica*, an II, nr. 3, ianuarie 1920, pp. 97-118.

¹⁷ George Breazu, "Conceptiile dominante în muzică" (The dominant conceptions in music) in *Gândirea*, nr. 1, 1931.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Once with Béla Bartók's visit to Bucharest (1934), the modernity seduced a great part of the Romanian composers influenced by his conceptions over the modernist potential of the peasant music. Therefore, the national tendency to make art based on folk music is not interrupted, but integrated in a Central and Eastern European movement where Stravinsky, Bartók or Janáček proved vigorously that folk music became the prime material of an authentic modern art.¹⁹

Therefore, we find in the pre-war and the interwar period the problem of specificity shaped between the two points of tension: affirming the ethnical element by calling the folk music (it opens also the problem of folk music authenticity by classifying it in urban and rural; in contaminated and uncontaminated) and developing the folk music in the western tradition forms and genres (first by quoting the folk tunes and later by transforming it through the gradual appropriation of the creational process techniques, up to exiting of the western canons).

The discursive nuances projected over the relation between national (ethnical) and universal (international/cosmopolite) are determined strictly by the influence of the nationalist ideology that can have more or less tolerated forms in finding the equilibrium between the two ends. Because of its peripheral placing towards the western musical tradition, the musical thinking of the Romanian composers in that period is generated by ethnical motivations, some of them refusing to acknowledge the reciprocal influence of different ethnical music or rejecting total the abstract western music (serial or dodecaphonic music).

The Communist Period

Once with the establishment of the communist regime, the problem of the musical style falls under the ideological domination of socialist realism, at first passing through an anti-national phase, so called internationalist, and then, after 1971, moving to a decidedly national phase (which was never named as such, because the term was prohibited). Romania's metamorphosis from a capitalist periphery to a socialist satellite changed the framework of all the intellectual activities, the official ideology manifesting itself in the cultural-artistic field more conspicuously than in the other countries of the communist bloc. The intellectuals, defined as ruling the "legitimate space", work all with symbolical meanings that form subjectivities;

¹⁹ Clemansa Liliana Firca, *Modernitate și avangardă în muzica ante- și interbelică a secolelor XX. 1900-1940 (Modernity and avangarde in pre and interwar music of the 20th century)*, phd thesis, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 164.

their talents are used for power and any other ruling or period where a way of controlling through symbolical-ideological is crucial.²⁰ By the new cultural system imposed by Moscow, through a quote of Stalin that said that the writers are the engineers of the human soul, arts and literature become instruments of the state policy and the autonomy and formalism in arts are deemed heretic conceptions.

Under the leadership of Matei Socor, from 1949 to 1954, *The Union of the Romanian Composers and Musicologists* imposed the ideological paths for the Romanian music at that time, aggressively promoting the so called progressive music, music for the people, accessible, diatonic, and with a strong folkloric mark.²¹ Its purpose was to serve the *new man*, to persuade the peasants to accept collectivization or to illustrate the need of industrialization. An important number of musical works signed by composers with a well-known interest in folklore were accused of formalism and some of these composers, such as Mihail Jora (1891-1971), were marginalized.

Aesthetically, the '50s witnessed the existence of a very thin line between the content of the socialist realism and the folk inspired nationalism.²² Therefore, some composers managed to escape from the request of doctrinal purity by continuing a folkloristic path. Examples include Dumitru Capoianu (1929-2012) or Marțian Negrea (1893-1973) whose intentions were not to express the socialist propaganda in their works, but were nonetheless tolerated by the regime because of the large addressability of their music.

The composers and musicologists' discussions in the '60 presented the issue of the Romanian musical style more intensely by the end of the decade, a time when a short period of political ease emerged, and, as a result, marked the shift in interest, for some composers, from neoclassical folk music inspired to serial music and avant-garde. In 1966, the *Muzica* journal presented again a discussion on the synthesis between national and universal in the Romanian music. This time, some opinions are pleading for the emancipation from the specificity *obsession* (Pascal Bentoiu) or for the detachment from the ethnographic and exclusivist nationalism (Gheorghe Dumitrescu); and composers such as Zeno Vancea or Ștefan Niculescu are asserting that a national character should not be conditioned by the use of a

²⁰ Katherine Verdery, *Compromis și rezistență. Cultura română sub Ceaușescu* (Compromise and resistance. The Romanian culture under Ceaușescu), Humanitas, București, 1994, p. 64.

²¹ Valentina Sandu Dedi, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000* (The Romanian music between 1944-2000), Ed. Muzicală, București, 2002.

²² Joel Crotty, "A Preliminary Investigation of Music, Socialist Realism, and the Romanian Experience, 1948–1959: (Re)reading, (Re)listening, and (Re)writing Music History for a Different Audience" in *Journal of Musicological Research*, Routledge, 2007, 26:2-3, 151-176.

folk-inspired musical language.²³ For Liviu Glodeanu, the value of certain music is not given by its simple adherence to a nation, this aspect not being responsible for its quality, although it always accompanies it.²⁴

Some of the composers sought to ideologically motivate the appropriation of the contemporary means of musical expression, as a natural phenomenon, historically determined, as being a criterion of style and not of value. Statements such as this one were due to the partial freedom of expression acquired at the end of the 1960s, and, therefore, the composers could afford to argue for the avoidance of isolationism, but also of imitation. Zeno Vancea stated that: "the provincial isolation, the unilateral cultivation of a limited ethnographic style was equally harmful for the true progress, as well as the faithful imitation of the foreign models".²⁵

But, in defining the national specificity we can discover the same appeal to the emotional criterion, the recurrence of G. Breazul statement, that the universal could be attained only through the national, demonstrating continuity with the interwar ideas. In this direction, Liviu Glodeanu stated that "is hard to define in exact terms the national specificity of a culture, this aspect consisting in its elements from an emotional-attitudinal domain." He explained that the balance between national and universal was expressed by the acceptance of the mutual influences between the cultures, but also by delimiting these influences from cosmopolitanism: "the interdependence process between national and universal should not be confused with cosmopolitanism, the expression of a distrust in the nation's creative forces who prefers the products of a foreign culture, even though mediocre and inferior to the national creations".²⁶

The refusal of formalism was made in accordance with the idea that "the music should maintain the character of a human message, of a language of the sentiments, of the human sufferings and pleasures, and to have a certain social resonance." Zeno Vancea stated that "some aestheticians affirm that in the age of technical civilization, the art should reflect the increasingly accentuated process of life's mechanization. But, it is clear that exactly in such a situation, music is all the more necessary to produce a certain catharsis."²⁷

²³ Zeno Vancea and Ștefan Niculescu, "Raportul între național și universal în lumina dezvoltării istorice a muzicii" (The connection between national and universal in the light of music's historical development) in *Muzica*, nr. 3, 1966, p. 2.

²⁴ Liviu Glodeanu, "Apartenența compozitorului la cultura națională" (The appartenance of composer to a national culture) in *Muzica*, nr. 3, 1966, pp. 8-9.

²⁵ Zeno Vancea and Ștefan Niculescu, *op.cit.*

²⁶ Liviu Glodeanu, *op.cit.*

²⁷ Zeno Vancea, "Legătura dintre tradiție și inovație văzută în lumina dezvoltării creației muzicale românești" (The relation between tradition and innovation seen in the light of the Romanian musical development) in *Național și universal în muzică* (National and universal in music), 10-12 mai 1967, Conservatorul de muzică „Ciprian Porumbescu”, București, p. 25.

The turn of the communist regime towards nationalism started in 1971, the also called "cultural revolution", and signified the emphasis of the importance of the past values in order to compensate the wounded pride and the failures of a desolated and poor present. Because of the isolationism caused by the Ceaușescu regime, the ethnical criteria is once again restored in defining the national specificity, the folkloric element is accentuated, and a growing interest emerges for the archaic rituals of the popular traditions.

Looking across years, the understanding of the Romanian national music is revelling itself as a process of affirmation and definition of the national identity that was permanently stressed by the tension of resolving the syntheses of the national together with the universal. The nationalist perspective is resulting from the tones that composers used to define and redefine Romanian music and its specificity, in many cases the nationalist discourse being the final arbiter On the national character of a given work or style.

The music was well aware used in cultural politics of the Romanians, as much in the pre-war period (aimed to awaken the national conscience), and all the more in the interwar period (for consolidating the new Romanian state), as the more oppressive in the communist era (due to the nationalism of Ceaușescu). In defining the national specificity in music prevailed the ethnical criteria, excepting the internationalist faze of the communism when it was substituted with the class criteria.

From the perspective of revealing the interdependence between music and ideology, it is clear that the precisely appearance of the debates over music in certain years, as the one in 1920 and the other in 1966-67, could be explained by emphasizing the social and political context that generated their apparition. For 1920, the composers mobilized themselves in defining the national music, motivated by the new political reality after 1918 that resized the cultural politics and shaped the evolutional lines of the cultural unity. The composer's debate coincided with the polemics in literature between the modernists and the autochthonous.

Due to a moment of relaxation that the communist regime had in the end of the 60s, we could observe the existence of diverse perspectives traced then (1966-67); where opinions that considered the possibility of national music without resorting to folk music could not being seen in the 80s, when the ethnical nationalism of Ceausescu's regime peaked.

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