

METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL CHOIR. 100 YEARS SINCE ITS FOUNDATION

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SUMMARY. In 2022, the Choir of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj-Napoca celebrated 100 years of uninterrupted activity in the field of church music. The centenary of the Cluj choir can be considered a particularly important event, both for the Transylvanian musical space and for the tradition of Romanian choral music. Founded in 1922, the Metropolitan Cathedral Choir has had an outstanding musical career, having performed countless religious concerts, cultural and missionary activities, and participated in religious and secular ceremonies. The recognition of the artistic contribution of the Metropolitan Choir is largely due to its prolific activity in the musical field, which has led to increased visibility, both locally and nationally. With a constant activity of 100 years, the Cathedral Choir has had at the conductor's desk, but also among the choristers, outstanding personalities of Romanian music. Among those who have led its musical destiny we remember: Gheorghe Dima, Vasile Petraşcu, Augustin Bena, Sava Golumba, Ioan Brie, Vasile Stanciu. Through the prestige it has acquired over time, the Metropolitan Cathedral Choir has become a benchmark for church choirs in the Diocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, being a benchmark of mastery and virtuosity.

Keywords: diocesan choir, choral music, church choir, conductors, cathedral, centenary

Establishment of the Men's Choir of the Orthodox Diocese of Cluj-Napoca

The idea of re-establishing the Diocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj by the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in 1921, was an inspired administrative move that brought multiple benefits, both in the ecclesiastical,

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musical and cultural fields. Having been invested with the dignity of Bishop of Cluj, Nicolae Ivan (1921-1936), once he took over the diocese, started a series of administrative and cultural projects aimed at a better organization of the Orthodox Church. Among the projects he set in motion were: supporting existing Orthodox parishes and establishing new ones, building a bishop's palace, starting work on building an Episcopal Cathedral and parish churches, setting up a theological institution, founding a printing press and a local magazine.

If in the administrative sector things started to move at a slower pace because of the material situation, in the missionary-pastoral sector, Bishop Nicolae Ivan's actions started to be visible from the first days. In this sense, one of his actions to boost religious life among the Orthodox faithful in Cluj was the establishment of a church choir. Aware of the importance of church singing in the pastoral and cultural mission he had begun in Cluj, Bishop Nicolae had the brilliant intuition to set up a men's choir, whose main mission was to participate in the Holy Mass on Sundays and holidays, to accompany the bishop on his canonical visits and to get involved in the cultural and musical activities of Cluj society².

Taking as a model the musical activity of the church choirs in the historical dioceses of Bucharest, Sibiu and Iași, Bishop Nicolae wanted Cluj to have a representative choir. The idea of founding a church choir came into being on 8 March 1922.

Looking back, we can see that the historical path of the choir has been a winding one, marked by musically prolific periods, periods of transition from one stage to another, from one conductor to another. There have also been organisational problems caused by a lack of qualified choristers and poor remuneration. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the historical events during which the choir has been active have influenced the musical course in a positive or negative way. Beyond all these aspects inherent in the 100-year history of a choir, the Metropolitan Cathedral Choir has managed to maintain its profile and fulfil the mission for which it was founded.

In this presentation of the musical activity of the choir we will start from the documents we found in the Archives of the Diocesan Choir: minutes, files of the conductors, memoirs and reports of the conductors, choir secretaries and diocesan councillors. We will also highlight the performance of the choir and its cultural activities, which we found recorded in the chronicles and articles in the written press of the time.

² Nicolae Vasiu; Ioan Bunea, *Episcopul Nicolae Ivan (1855-1936) Ctitorul reînviatelor eparhii a Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, studii și documente*, [Bishop Nicolae Ivan (1855-1936) Founder of the revived diocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, studies and documents,] 2nd edition edited by Justin Tira, Renaissance Publishing House, 2015, p. 132-162.

By corroborating all this information, we can outline a historical path of the choir, dividing it into four distinct periods, determined by the events that took place in Romanian history. The first period of the choir covers the events that took place from its foundation on March 8, 1922, until 1940, the year of the annexation of Northern Ardeal and Cluj to Horst Hungary. The second period of the choir's history is marked by the Hortic occupation, 1940-1945. The third period is that of the communist era, 1945-1989, and the last stage in the choir's history is the post-December period, 1989-2022.

The beginnings of a missionary church choir (1922-1940)

Bishop Nicolae Ivan's idea of founding an Episcopal choir materialized in 1922 through the direct involvement of several personalities. People of culture, teachers, doctors, lawyers, students, music lovers all contributed to the foundation and development of the choir.

The musical project was entrusted to Vasile Petrașcu, future professor of church music at the Theological Academy of Cluj. A graduate of the Music Conservatory in Cluj, with a wealth of experience in founding and conducting choirs, Petrașcu was given the task of founding a church choir. Petrașcu was helped in this endeavour by the diocesan missionary-cultural department and the referent adviser of the Church Section, Sebastian Stanca, with the assistance of Romanian Orthodox students from the Faculties of Cluj.

To spread the idea of founding an Orthodox church choir, advertisements were printed in the Cluj press, urging those interested to come to the preselection for the future band. After several appeals in the newspapers of the time, Vasile Petrașcu succeeded in setting up a male choir, made up of students of educational institutions in Cluj, teachers, intellectuals and young people passionate about music.

To create a legal framework for its functioning, on March 8, 1922, the General Assembly of the Choral Meeting "The Men's Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj" was established, a body with a legal status, mandated with the direction, organization and material support of the choir.

During this first solemn meeting, attended by Bishop Nicolae Ivan, members of the Eparchial Consistory, numerous people of culture, the President of the General Assembly, Vasile Petrașcu, reiterated the purpose and objectives of this Meeting. The main purpose was to offer liturgical responses during church ceremonies and at the Holy Mass³. Among the objectives that the

³ Assessment records of the General Assembly of the Choral Meeting "Men's Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", 8 March 1922.

Choral Meeting set itself at that time were: the performance of church choral music; the promotion of religious songs at all festivities of a national character and church ceremonial; the organization of church and lay concerts⁴.

To achieve its objectives, the presence of the new church choir in the musical space of Cluj had to be promoted, so it was decided to initiate a series of collaborations with the two cultural institutions, the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art and the Romanian National Opera in Cluj, to promote it as effectively as possible. Also, to give more value to the choir, it was decided to give to the maestro Gheorghe Dima the title of Honorary President. As a token of appreciation, Maestro Dima assured the members of the Meeting that he will show great interest in this new choir and will do his utmost to develop and promote⁵. In this regard, Gheorghe Dima⁶ has dedicated part of his musical compositions to the liturgical service, pieces that will also be part of the repertoire of the Episcopal choir⁷.

Regarding the composition of the “Men’s Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj”, from this first period, which we could call organizational, we note that, in the beginning, it was formed mainly by male voices, being built a choir for four voices. After several months of intense preparation and learning a liturgical repertoire dedicated to the Holy Mass, the choir succeeded in creating a good impression among the Orthodox faithful.

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of the early musical successes was not constant. From the descriptions of the minutes from 1922-1923 we see that after only a few months, a whole series of organisational problems began to emerge. Among these problems are listed the lack of sheet music, the choristers’ disinterest in choir concerts, absenteeism from rehearsals, lateness and dropouts.

Of course, the wish of Bishop Nicolae Ivan and conductor Vasile Petrașcu was to create a stable choir, dedicated and involved in the musical projects they were going to promote. Despite all the efforts made by the leaders of the Choral Reunion, it was not possible to create a stable formation. Frequent changes among the choristers, caused by the fluctuation of members, who were not stable, led to a slowdown in the choir’s musical development. Also,

⁴ Statutes of the Choral Meeting “Men’s Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj”, Choir Archive.

⁵ Assessment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting “Men’s Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj”, May 31, 1922.

⁶ “In the concert for the Episcopal cathedral, the old master, Mr. O. Dima conducted the Conservatory choir in carols and church songs, some of his most beautiful compositions.” Cf. “Concert for the Cathedral”, in: *Renaissance*, II (January 6, 1924), 1, p. 6.

⁷ For a list of original musical creations, harmonisations and choral works see, Vasile Stanciu *Muzica bisericească corală din Transilvania, [Church Choral Music in Transylvania]*, vol. I, Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, pp. 64-66.

the involvement of the choristers in projects run by the institutions to which they belonged made it impossible for them to participate regularly in rehearsals and musical activities. Among other things, there were also financial problems. Being in its infancy, the Diocese did not have the financial resources to provide adequate remuneration to the choristers. The money obtained from donations was insufficient for the activities of the choir and its efficient organisation, which led to the departure of the choristers.

All these problems led to the need to reorganise the choir over time. As early as 1923, the idea of setting up a mixed choir was raised. To achieve this goal, it was proposed to collaborate with the Normal School for Girls and the ladies of the Orthodox Women's Society of Cluj⁸. The idea was received with much enthusiasm by the members of the Choral Meeting, on the grounds that the organisation of a mixed group would have several advantages. The diocese would have had two choirs, one mixed for Sunday services and feasts and one male for trips to different places in the diocese. Then, the repertoire would have been much more varied, being able to tackle musical pieces with a higher degree of difficulty. Lastly, the mixed choir would have been more numerous, taking advantage of the much greater number of female voices willing to give their contribution to the constitution of a mixed choir.

The idea of transforming the men's choir into a mixed choir materialized in 1927, when on April 17, the Diocesan Choir gave for the first time the responses to the Holy Mass in mixed formation. From this Mass onwards, for several years, two choirs would function, a mixed choir for Sunday liturgies and a men's choir for musical activities outside Cluj⁹.

If these were the historical and social contexts that made it possible for the choir to be founded and for a stable group to take shape, the results of the musical actions were equally influenced by the way in which those at the conductor's desk were involved. It was the conductors who set the repertoire, selected the choir members, were involved in organising the concerts and raised the prestige of the choir through their rich musical activity.

In an eparchy such as Cluj, where, for many centuries, there was no administrative ecclesiastical centre under the patronage of a hierarch, church music has had a particular path. In most cases, the responses to liturgical services in Orthodox parishes, within the diocese, were given by amateur singers, more or less trained. The existence of Orthodox choral groups in the diocese, even at the amateur level, was not an issue. Thus, Bishop Ivan's

⁸ Assessment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting "Men's Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", March 28, 1923.

⁹ Assessment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", May 18, 1927.

desire to find a well-trained choir was well-founded and was because, once established, it would be an indispensable instrument of mission in the diocesan pastorate.

It was the conductors of the Diocesan Choir who made a substantial contribution to its prestige and promotion.

The first conductor of the Diocesan Choir was Vasile Petrașcu¹⁰. He was at the conductor's desk between March 8, 1922, and October 15, 1925. Vasile Petrașcu was also the first President of the newly founded Choral Meeting, a position he held for a year, presiding over the plenary meetings. When it was decided to find a choir, Bishop Nicolae Ivan entrusted Vasile Petrașcu with the task of forming a church choir, which would give the responses to the liturgical services in the Church, considering him to be the right man for this mission¹¹.

The musical results of the choir conducted by Petrașcu began to be visible in the press of the time in the early years. In the newspaper *Renașterea*, the central magazine of the Diocese of Cluj, in a chronicle, the performance of the choir was reported:

“An important attraction of the church in Cluj is the Diocesan Choir, composed of men of heart and devoted sons of the church, who support the choir on Sundays and Feasts, performing with great skill the beautiful liturgical songs composed by Maestro Gheorghe Dima, director of the Conservatory”¹².

During the time Vasile Petrașcu conducted the Diocesan Men's Choir, it was made up of students from Cluj Universities, teachers, civil servants and music lovers. The musical activities in which the choir was involved were diverse, consisting in offering liturgical responses in the churches where Bishop Ivan

¹⁰ Vasile Petrașcu (1889-1973). He was born on March 18, 1889, in Lancrăm commune, Alba County. He attended primary school and the German Gymnasium in Sebeș-Alba, continuing his secondary schooling in Blaj. He then attended the Theological Institute in Sibiu (1908-1911), the Commercial Academy in Budapest (1912-1914), the Conservatory in Bucharest and Cluj. Between 1919 and 1922 he attended the Faculty of Law in Cluj, where he received his doctorate in 1924. During his life he was accountant, music teacher at the Theological Academy in Cluj, assistant at the Law Department (1940-1945). Daniel Mocanu, “Vasile Petrașcu - reperele unui traiect intelectual”, in *Icoană, mărturie creștină, totalitarism*, [“Vasile Petrașcu - Landmarks of an Intellectual Journey” in *Icoan, Christian Testimony, Totalitarianism*] editors: Vasile Stanciu and Cristian Sonea, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Publishing House, 2017, pp. 597-621; Daniel Mocanu, „Vasile Petrașcu. The Transylvanian religious music between stability and continuity”, în: *Studia UBB Musica*, LXV, 1, 2020, p. 147-167; Daniel Mocanu, *Vasile Petrașcu, scrieri, documente, comentarii*, [Vasile Petrașcu, *Writings, Documents, Commentaries*] Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022.

¹¹ Vasile Stanciu, „Episcopul Nicolae Ivan și compozitorul Dr. Vasile Petrașcu, sau roadele unei colaborări de excepție”, [“Bishop Nicolae Ivan and composer Dr. Vasile Petrașcu, or the fruits of an exceptional collaboration”], in: *Renașterea*, (1996), 2, p. 6.

¹² LAUR, “Propășire”, in: *Renașterea*, II (16 March 1924), 11, p. 4.

served and at the celebrations held on various occasions or religious services: funerals, consecrations, memorial services, weddings. Among the most important events in which the Episcopal Choir participated, we mention: the collaboration with the Conservatory Choir and the Opera Choir in the celebration of the master Gheorghe Dima, by performing the piece “Crăiasa ielelor/The Wicked Fairies Queen” and the pieces signed by Dima: “Hora” and “Salvum fac regem Domine”¹³. Involvement with the Orthodox Women’s Society of Cluj in the preparation of cultural evenings in various localities, organization of musical evenings and tea dances. Participation in the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for the future Episcopal Cathedral.

After three years of conducting the Diocesan Men’s Choir, Vasile Petrașcu left behind a well-organized choir with a rich repertoire of church music. Parts of the musical compositions dedicated to the Holy Mass composed by Gheorghe Dima, Ion Vidu, Antonio Sequens, Trifon Lugojanu, Dimitrie Cunțanu were known. Through the cultural actions undertaken during the 3 years since its foundation, under the direction of Vasile Petrașcu, the choir became known in the Cluj area, being more and more often called to different musical events. The presence of the choir with Bishop Ivan at religious services was a good opportunity for the new choir to assert itself. The services sung by the choir took on a different solemnity, contributing substantially to Bishop Ivan’s action of elating religious life.

Through his efforts to establish a stable and professional choir, Vasile Petrașcu can rightly be considered the founder of the Diocesan Men’s Choir.

On February 15, 1925, Vasile Petrașcu will retire from the position of conductor, on the grounds that his teaching duties at the Theological Academy and the activities he had to carry out their prevented him from taking care of the Diocesan Choir. Professor Sava Golumba was unanimously elected in his place.

Sava Golumba¹⁴ was the conductor of the Episcopal Choir from 15 February 1925 to 16 October 1929. The new conductor will be involved in the

¹³ Assesment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting “Men’s Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj”, March 29, 1922.

¹⁴ Sava Golumba (1894-1957) was a music teacher at several high schools in Cluj: “George Barițiu” High School, University Pedagogical Seminary, Academy of Music (1917-1939). Then in Timișoara, at the Teachers’ Normal School, the “Mihai Viteazul” Military High School and the Regional College of Lawyers (1940-1957). As a conductor, he instructed the choir of the “Ioan Popasu” Reading Society of the Theological-Pedagogical Institute (1914-1916) and the choir of the Romanian Singing Society of Caransebeș (1918). In Cluj he conducted the “Gutenberg” Choir of the Printers (1920-1923), the “Șoimii Carpaților” Choir (1928-1938), with which he gave concerts in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and the Choir of the Cercului Academic Bănățean, based in Bucharest (Cluj branch), The “Doina” Choir of the Cluj Branch of ASTREI (1937), the Choir of the Romanian Opera (where it was

creation of a mixed choir and in the diversification of the repertoire for the men's group.

During his time at the helm of the Diocesan Choir, Sava Golumba took part in several important musical events. The choir participated in the funeral of Gheorghe Dima and gave choral concerts in different places in the diocese. Also, thanks to his efforts and those of Professor Vasile Petrașcu, the mixed section of the Episcopal Choir was founded, with the participation of girls from the Normal School and ladies and gentlemen from the intellectual elite of Cluj.

In a report by the President of the Meeting, Sebastian Stanca, from 1928, the choral activity of Professor Sava Golumba was presented:

"In 1927, the mixed section of the choir was founded with great difficulty with the help of ladies and young ladies from the intellectual elite of Cluj. Today, the choir performs in two separate formations: the men's choir (the old one) and the mixed choir.

The choir's repertoire is very rich thanks to the musical culture and the diligence of Mr. Sava Golumba, the current conductor, who has made a real apostolate out of collecting so many jewels of Romanian choral art which, by right, constitute a real fortune for this choir of the Diocese.

The main aims of the choir are: participation and giving liturgical responses on Sundays and holidays at the Orthodox Church in Cluj; participation in any religious ceremony, which concerns the Orthodox Church; preparation of concerts and propaganda for the Romanian musical culture both ecclesiastical and national; participation of the choir in various church consecrations, within the framework of the diocese of Cluj and, finally, undertaking tours and excursions, propagating in all corners of the country the chords of Romanian song.

Today, the choir is made up of 70 choristers (ladies, gentlemen and ladies) and the repertoire of the pieces is very rich and varied. Two men's liturgies, two mixed liturgies, a whole series of other church songs, troparia, etc. are known and sung"¹⁵.

formed under the guidance of Herman Klee), the Youth Choir of the Greek Church, the "Armonia" Choir of the CFR (1919-1921) AND the Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese. In Timișoara he trained and conducted the "Banatul" Choir, the "Lyra" Choir of the CFR and the Metropolitan Choir, and in Lugoj, the "Ion Vidu" Choir (sporadically). Cf. Ionel Popescu and Dumitru Jompan, „Sava Golumba, profesor, interpret, compozitor și îngrijitor de ediții muzicale”, [“Sava Golumba, professor, performer, composer and curator of musical editions”], in: *7 zile, ziarul Gugulanilor, la Caransebeș*, 22. 06. 2017.

¹⁵ Assessment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", February 24, 1928.

From the reviews of the Cluj editorials and the reports of the Choral Meeting, one can observe the conducting activity of Professor Sava Golumba. While he conducted the Diocesan Choir, Sava Golumba distinguished himself by his professionalism and mastery in preparing the choir for concerts and musical performances. During his time, both the number of choristers and the quality of interpretation increased, and the repertoire was enriched with new musical works.

In 1929, due to ecclesiastical reasons, Sava Golumba was forced to retire from the leadership of the Diocesan Choir. Until a new conductor was chosen, Professor Patriciu Curea was appointed as provisional conductor¹⁶.

Patriciu Curea (September 3, 1929 - February 1, 1930) was for a short period the conductor, conducting rehearsals and participating in various church and cultural events.

After several discussions, the Choral Meeting Committee will propose Mr. Augustin Bena as conductor of the Diocesan Choir.

Augustin Bena (1 February 1930 - 30 August 1940), Rector of the Conservatory in Cluj, is given the post of conductor and, from 1930, the Diocesan Choir enters a new phase.

Once he became conductor of the Diocesan Choir, Augustin Bena imposed new rules: rehearsals were to be held twice a week in the Conservatory Hall, the attendance book would be a tool for motivating and remunerating the choristers and new scores were to be purchased. In this new formula, the prestige of the Diocesan Choir increased greatly thanks to the outstanding personality of the rector Augustin Bena. In 1930, the choir numbered 97 members: 27 sopranos, 17 violists, 31 tenors and 22 basses. After the first rehearsals and participation in various events, Augustin Bena presented a report about the choir to the General Assembly, in which he mentioned the problem of fluctuating choristers, which was slowing down the musical development. He also discussed the organisation of concerts with a simple repertoire so as not to tire and demoralise the choir. Augustin Bena also mentioned the need to purchase new scores and better material support to motivate the choristers to stay in the choir¹⁷. Taking note of what Maestro Bena said, the Choral Meeting did its best to fulfil the new requirements brought up to ensure a better musical performance and to shape a stable choral group.

¹⁶ Assessment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", October 16, 1929.

¹⁷ Assessment records of the Committee of the Choral Meeting "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", November 21, 1930.

Benefiting from his position as Rector of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, Augustin Bena increased the number of choristers, using the students of the institution. He also appealed to the intellectual elite of Cluj to support the choir. Following the appeal, many personalities responded positively, getting involved in the activities of the Diocesan Choir. Thus, thanks to the prestige enjoyed by Augustin Bena, the number of choristers increased from 97 to 120 members: 35 sopranos, 27 violists, 28 tenors and 30 basses, creating a well-rounded choral group with multiple interpretative possibilities.

During Augustin Bena's time at the choir's helm, a few musical achievements were recorded that did not go unnoticed by the press of the time. Among the most important musical actions we mention: the consecration of the Episcopal Cathedral. On this unique occasion in the history of the diocese, the Choir of the Orthodox Diocese, together with the Choir of the Normal School for Girls and the Choir of the National Opera, conducted by Augustin Bena, gave the responses to the Holy Mass¹⁸. It is worth mentioning that the 300 choir members sang the Mass in A major composed by Gheorghe Dima¹⁹ and an *Our Father* composed by Augustin Bena for 12 voices²⁰. During 1936, the Diocesan Choir gave several concerts in collaboration with the Choir of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and the Choir of the Normal School for Girls. In 1938, in collaboration with the Choir of the Academy of Music and Drama, the Episcopal Choir gave a memorable concert at the Romanian Athenaeum. At that time, "the 120 choristers conducted by Professor Augustin Bena, rector of the Academy of Music, delighted the Bucharest audience"²¹.

Analysing the activity of Professor Augustin Bena, as conductor of the "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj", we can conclude that he managed to organize a mixed choir, according to all academic requirements, raising the level of artistic performance to a high degree of professionalism. The activity of the choir was vitalized by the extraordinary concerts it gave in Cluj and in different cities of the country. At the same time, he has introduced in the choir's repertoire a complex repertoire for Sunday Masses and feasts, including 3 liturgies, *the 2nd Mass* for mixed choir by Bena; the *Mass in A major*

¹⁸ „Trei zile memorabile 4, 5 și 6 noiembrie 1933” [“Three memorable days 4, 5 and 6 November 1933”], in *Renașterea*, XI (19 November 1933), 45-46, pp. 1-16.

¹⁹ Chronicle: „Noul cor al Catedralei Ortodoxe a fost alcătuit din 120 de persoane” [“The Orthodox Cathedral's new choir was made up of 120 people”], in the Choir Archive.

²⁰ Susana Coma Bosica, *Augustin Bena. Contribuții documentare. Omul și opera în documente și evocări* [Augustin Bena. Documentary contributions. Man and work in documents and evocations], Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj, 2000, p. 29.

²¹ Chronicle, „O realizare extraordinară a Corului Episcopiei”, [“An extraordinary achievement of the Diocesan Choir”], in: Choir Archive.

by Gheorghe Dima and the *3rd Mass* in E major by Eusebiu Mandicevschi. Bena also increased the repertoire, adding a new musical dimension to the choir's activity, namely creations from the universal religious repertoire and from the sphere of Romanian folkloric works. Through his sustained activity, his professionalism and the dedication with which he conducted the Diocese choir for 10 years, Augustin Bena can rightly be counted among the founding fathers of this prestigious choir.

The first stage in the historical development of the "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj" was a difficult one, due to the hardships it went through until it became a stable formation, but it was also the most prolific stage in many ways. First, the conductors who took turns at the choir's desk were true professionals, musicians of vocation, raising by their presence the prestige of this choir. Secondly, the choir had a record number of choristers, 120 members at one time, which will never be equalled. Another detail related to the active members of the choir was that the people who were part of it came largely from among musicians, but also from among the intelligentsia of Cluj. This detail illustrates the degree of professionalism that the choir had reached and the prestige it had acquired in the Cluj music scene. Then we must remember the remarkable concerts that he gave during this first period. All this made the choir's reputation known in the Romanian musical space, being among the most representative mixed choirs of that time. At the same time, the musical and cultural effervescence of this first period made possible the involvement of the choir in cultural actions organized by various associations and institutions. The large number of concerts, musical evenings, tea dances, charitable events, cultural activities in the villages of the diocese, will never be equalled. Looking at all the musical activity we can say that this first period can rightly be considered the golden period of the Diocesan Choir.

The choir of the diocese in the Horticulturalist period (1940-1945)

The activity of the Diocesan Choir will function very well, with many musical achievements, until 1940 when, following the Vienna Dictate, in the conditions of the cession of part of northern Ardeal to Hortist Hungary, the choir considerably restricted its ecclesiastical activities. Also, during that difficult period, the choral society "Choir of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Cluj" was dissolved, losing its legal status and the possibility of subsidization. Forced by political circumstances, many members of the choir withdrew from the ensemble, crossing the Feleac hill, so that the fate of the choir became problematic, being in the unpleasant situation of disbanding. Despite the historical context and the material and social hardships, the choir did not disband, but continued to function, but in a much smaller formation. While the

choir numbered 120 members between 1930 and 1940, during the dictatorship it operated with only 30 members. From 1940 to 1945, the Diocesan Choir consisted of a few choristers from the old group, but also new members, teachers, civil servants, workers and students.

In these special circumstances, in order not to deprive the Episcopal Cathedral of the presence of the choir, the Eparchial Councillor Laurențiu Curea was appointed to take care of its destiny.

Laurențiu Curea²² (30 August 1940 - 24 May 1946) was the right man who was closely involved in supporting the Diocesan Choir. Using the old members who had remained in Cluj and bringing in new choristers, he set up a choir, much smaller in size, which he conducted at services in the Episcopal Cathedral. During this difficult period, musical activity was limited, with the Episcopal Choir giving only a few concerts in the Episcopal Cathedral when the Eparchial Assemblies and on the eve of the winter and Easter holidays.

In a chronicle of the time, at the death of the Eparchial Councillor Laurențiu Curea, his and the choir's activity was evoked:

“Left alone in this part of the Midnight Ardeal, he set to work and succeeded only in a few weeks to revive the choir of the diocese, which had been dismantled by the departure of the brothers across Feleac. He brought the fame of Romanian music far and wide. The liturgies conducted by him, the Christmas carol concerts, the concerts in the “Albina” hall as well as the funeral responses, are all evidence of the sincere and unanimous appreciation enjoyed by the choir and its conductor”²³.

Laurențiu Curea, in addition to his position as conductor, was also a composer, composing a Mass for mixed choir, in the style of Dimitrie Cunțanu, which he sang constantly during the six years he was conductor of the Choir of the Diocese of Cluj.

The choir's activity during the Horticultural period was limited to the Orthodox Cathedral. From the old cultural tours, festive concerts in different cities, activities with social impact, only the memory of a period of musical

²² Laurențiu Curea (1881-1946). He was born in 1881, in Dol, jud. Sălaj. He attended primary school in Zimbor, high school in Zalău and Beiuș, and the Theological Institute in Sibiu. After graduating he was ordained deacon and priest. In the course of his life, he was a priest in Deva, archpriest of Deva, diocesan secretary and referent counsellor in the Diocese of Cluj. Among his accomplishments are: the establishment of an Orthodox Church in Prague; the re-establishment of the Choir of the Diocese of Cluj. Cf. Alexandru Moraru, *La răscruce de vremi o viață de om: Nicolae Colan Episcopul Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, după documente, corespondență, însemnări, relatări, impresii*, [At the crossroads of times a man's life: Nicolae Colan Bishop of Vad, Feleacului and Cluj, after documents, correspondence, notes, accounts, impressions], Editura Arhiepiscopiei Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, Cluj-Napoca, 1989, p. 97.

²³ “Prot. Stavrofor Laurentiu Curea”, in *Renașterea* XXIV (2 June 1946), 22-23, p. 1.

glory of the choir remains. However, reorganised and reduced in number, the choir responded with great professionalism to the liturgical services in which it was involved. During those difficult years, the conductor, Laurențiu Curea, was credited with bringing together a group of dedicated church people into a choir and building, from the beginning, a new choral group to carry forward the purpose for which the Diocesan Choir was founded.

The choir of the diocese during the communist period (1945-1989)

Since 1946, in a particular political climate marked by the rise of the communist regime, the Diocese Choir entered a new process of reorganization, seeking solutions for hiring new members and setting up a new committee to take care of the choir. The first thing those concerned with the future of the choir did was to change the name from the Diocesan Choir to the Cathedral Choir. The cultural sector of the Diocese of Cluj was directly involved in the consolidation and reorganization of the choir.

In this sense, one of the solutions found to revive and strengthen the choir was the collaboration with the musical institutions of Cluj. Thus, through a close collaboration with the Music Academy “Gheorghe Dima” and the Romanian National Opera of Cluj-Napoca, the foundations were laid for a choir made up of professionals, which will give the responses at the Holy Mass in the Episcopal Cathedral. The select composition of this group, in addition to its musical advantages, has also had several disadvantages. The busy schedule of the members of the Cathedral Choir, who also had to attend rehearsals of the musical institutions to which they belonged, meant that the choir was often numerically restricted, which meant that the repertoire for Sunday services was simpler and the musical performance weaker. The musical development of the Cathedral Choir depended to a large extent on the availability and kindness of its members.

Without a legal status and a permanent committee to take care of the material and organisational aspects, the choir was left without subsidies and dependent on the modest budget it received from the diocese. In such a situation, without a substantial budgetary fund from which to pay the choristers and being at the financial disposal of the Diocese, the members of the choir could not be paid or even remunerated properly. This financial inconvenience led to a continual turnover of choristers. The choir operated largely through pro bono participation by choristers. In fact, the remuneration of choristers has always been a sensitive issue for the Cathedral Choir, a fact that persists to this day. Under these constraints, the Cathedral Choir has struggled to find musical stability. However, overcoming all the material and social inconveniences,

after many years of work, thanks to the goodwill of people passionate about music, a professional Cathedral choir was set up to give the responses at Mass on Sundays and feasts.

As for the conductors, since this period, after the death of Councillor Laurențiu Curea, the Provisional Assembly of the Committee for the reorganization of the Diocesan Choir voted unanimously that the post of conductor be filled by Deacon Ioan Brie, professor of church music at the Theological Seminary in Cluj²⁴.

Ioan Brie was the longest-serving conductor (27 November 1946 - 31 December 2006), he conducted the Cathedral Choir of Cluj for six decades. During all these years, starting from a small group of choristers, Ioan Brie managed to organize a new choral group, thanks to the kindness of choristers from the National Opera and the Conservatory of Cluj²⁵.

In a 1958 report, John Brie presented the situation of the Cathedral Choir to the Diocese, describing the composition of the choir, its purpose, repertoire and the difficulties it faced.

"The choir is composed of 33 people: 10 sopranos, 8 violists, 7 tenors, 8 basses. Recruitment to the Cathedral Choir is on a competitive basis, with lyric voices being valued as the only voices suitable for singing in the Church. The choir members also have a specialist singing degree. All members of the choir are employed by other institutions. The work of the choir has three aspects: 1. Effective participation in divine services; 3. Performing religious concerts or participating in festive occasions. Normally, the Cathedral Choir performs an annual carol concert on the first Sunday before Nativity.

As for the repertoire, we appreciate with priority Romanian compositions and, in particular, those works and compositions inspired by traditional church music. Among foreign composers and church music of other peoples, we consider that of the neighbouring Orthodox peoples, as being the closest in style and form to our church music, such as Russian and Serbian church music.

The choir alternately knows and sings in full or almost in full the compositions for the Holy Mass of St. John Chrysostom after the following authors: G. Muzicescu, N. Lungu, D.G. Kiriac, A. Sequens, Gh. Cucu.

Apart from these composers, the choir's repertoire includes isolated pieces from the Holy Mass, religious chants and hymns by G. Comănești, Gh. Dima, A. Bena, S. Drăgoi, I. Brie, E. Mandicevsci, Curea Laurențiu, etc.

As a style, in the interpretation of church hymns in isolation or as a liturgical ensemble, we promote the one appropriate to the purpose of singing

²⁴ Assessment records No. 5, 27 November 1946.

²⁵ "Church", in *Renașterea*, XXVI (1 February 1948), 5-6, p. 4.

in the church, as a means and not as an end. This appreciation is in accordance with the directives of the holy canons in this regard and is necessarily imposed by the sincerity, piety, modesty and silence that characterize the performance of our ritualistic rites even when they are of a festive nature”²⁶.

During his 60 years, Father Ioan Brie has established a church choir performance, with which he performed on Sundays and holidays a rich and generous palette of the Romanian church choir repertoire: Al. Podoleanu, Gheorghe Cucu, Gheorghe Ștefănescu, Ioana Ghika Comănești, Gheorghe Dima, Augustin Bena, Gavriil Musicescu, Nicolae Lungu, Gheorghe Șoima, Constantin Drăgușin, but also from the works of foreign composers F. Dehtearov, D. Bortneaschi or G. Sarti. Referring to Ioan Brie’s conducting activity, Professor Vasile Stanciu states the following: “working in a historical period in which the Orthodox Church was deprived of its rights and humiliated, the Choir of the Cathedral of Cluj, under the direction of Father Ioan Brie, was like a bastion of Orthodox and Romanian resistance through culture and music. The Cathedral of Cluj became a spiritual and cultural laboratory from which the faithful took refuge, escaping from a world hostile to the Church into an oasis of reunion and tranquillity”²⁷.

Post-December period (1989-2022)

Benefiting from the freedom brought by the 1989 revolution, the Cathedral Choir, conducted by Ioan Brie, was reorganized again. New members were recruited, more musical actions were carried out in the public space, and the choir, through its new musical performances, became a reference for the musical space of Cluj.

In December 2006, after the death of Professor Ioan Brie, the direction of the Cathedral Choir in Cluj was entrusted to Father Professor Vasile Stanciu, professor at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca.

The presence of Professor Stanciu at the conductor’s desk brought a new breath to the choir. Gradually new members began to join the choir from the “Transilvania” State Philharmonic, the National Opera of Cluj-Napoca, students from the “Gheorghe Dima” Academy of Music and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. At the same time, the choir’s repertoire has been diversified, introducing new musical pieces in liturgical celebrations on Sundays and holidays.

²⁶ Choir Archive: activity report of the Cathedral Choir, August 1, 1957 - August 15, 1958.

²⁷ Vasile Stanciu, „Corul Catedralei Mitropolitane din Cluj-Napoca”, [“The Choir of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj-Napoca”], in *Tabor* (2011), 9, p. 57-66.

When he took over the post of conductor of the Cathedral Choir, Professor Vasile Stanciu set himself a series of objectives, which will shape the musical activities he will undertake. Among the objectives stated by the new conductor we mention: to consolidate and affirm a continuity in the activity of the most prestigious Cathedral choir in Transylvania; to articulate an impressive tradition in contemporary times, by perfecting the art of interpretation, which will satisfy the most refined tastes in a citadel of music; to create an atmosphere of prayer, by including in the general repertoire the most valuable church choral creations from Romanian and universal literature; recruiting new young members who are passionate and eager to do mission in the Church and through music; printing on CDs the songs of the Holy Mass, carols and traditional hymns; exchanges of experience with other Cathedral Choirs of the Romanian Patriarchate; missionary trips and tours²⁸.

Of all these desires stated by conductor Vasile Stanciu, when he took over the direction of the choir, many of them have been fulfilled with great professionalism. The composition of the choir was changed, adding many young voices, a series of CDs with the Holy Mass and Church Songs were printed, many thematic concerts were held on different occasions and missionary tours were carried out. On 27 October 2010, the Choir of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj participated in the 3rd edition of the National Competition of Ecclesiastical Music, organized by the Romanian Patriarchate in the Patriarchal Palace, together with the Cathedral Choirs of all the Metropolises, and won the 2nd prize, and the conductor received the diploma for the best conductor.

During its 100 years of uninterrupted activity, the Cathedral Choir has had periods of rich musical activity, but also periods of difficult activity, when its activity was limited to performing liturgical responses in the Episcopal Cathedral. The musical performances, the repertoire, the interpretative quality, the conductors, the active members, the prestige and the cultural visibility, all these are realities that the Cathedral Choir has experienced during its one hundred years of uninterrupted activity.

With a rich musical experience, the Choir of the Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj-Napoca can be considered a prestigious choral group, which has managed throughout its existence to be a benchmark for other choirs in the diocese. In difficult periods of history, it has been a landmark of national identity and perpetuation of religious and moral values. Through its artistic performances and the professionalism, it shows during performances, as well as through the cultivation of a Romanian church music repertoire, it rightly contributes to the promotion of national values and the affirmation of choral music in the Orthodox tradition.

Translated from Romanian by Marcela Stan

²⁸ Vasile Stanciu, „Corul Catedralei...”, p. 67.

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