

## LIGETI'S ROMANIAN CONCERTO: FROM WAX CYLINDERS TO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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**SUMMARY.** Beneath the *Romanian Concerto*'s colourful orchestral surface, evoking the folk-inspired music of both Bartók and Enescu, lies Ligeti's early activity as a researcher (1949-1950) at the Folklore Institute in Bucharest. Placing cutouts from the printed score side by side with the manuscripts of his transcriptions kept at the Paul Sacher Foundation, one may discover this piece's origins, and the process by which Ligeti, the "archaeologist" brought the rich stock of Romanian folk music from the wax cylinders to the symphony orchestra. *Romanian Concerto* not only shows the impact our folk music had on the young Ligeti but also the way in which his collaboration with Romanian ethnomusicologists such as Mircea Chiriac influenced the composition of his first major orchestral piece.

**Keywords:** Ligeti, *Concert românesc*, Folklore Institute, Bucharest, Mircea Chiriac

Simon Gallot formulated the following categories in terms of Ligeti's use of folk music: "borrowed, invented and synthetic"<sup>2</sup>, and an attempt at placing his *Romanian Concerto* in one of these will clearly point towards the first: there is an overt and undeniable connection with such a source of inspiration. Although it was composed at a time when the Second International Congress of Composers and Music Critics in Prague<sup>3</sup> had already established clear new aesthetic guidelines for artists from the Eastern European Bloc, Ligeti's *Romanian Concerto* should not be assessed as a gesture of compliance with the regime's new aesthetic framework in any way whatsoever. The piece comes rather as a response to Ligeti's admiration for Bartók's manner of dealing with folk music in composition, and also as a consequence of Ligeti's contact with Romanian music in 1949-1950, during his stay in Bucharest, researching in the archives of the Folklore Institute. Representing so much more than just a composition exercise, Ligeti's

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<sup>2</sup> Gallot, Simon, *György Ligeti et la musique populaire*, Symétrie, Lyon, 2010, pp. 53-64.

<sup>3</sup> The Congress was held in 1948, clearly outlining the new aesthetic criteria of the socialist realism: the new music was meant to be produced either to convey an ideological content, or to grow directly from the folk music of each country, being very accessible and easy to process.

*Romanian Concerto* seems to be in accord with works of other artists of the Eastern Bloc in terms of its dependence on folk music: *Quattro Danze transilvane*/1944;1949 by the Hungarian Veress Sándor (teacher of Ligeti in Budapest, the composer was also awarded the Kossuth Prize in 1949), in Poland, Lutoslawski's *Silesian Tryptich*/1951, *Slovak Suite*/1957 by Schneider-Trnavský, in Czechoslovakia, or in Romania the *Suite Prin Munții Apuseni (Through the Apuseni Mountains)*/1952 by Marțian Negrea, *Trei dansuri românești (Three Romanian Dances)*/1950 by Theodor Rogalski, Toduță's *Concerto for string orchestra No. 1*/1951, and Silvestri's *Three pieces for strings*, all in fact compositions of good musical quality.

In order to avoid an inconvenient social task in Budapest - the composition of a cantata in honour of Stalin or Rákosi<sup>4</sup> - Ligeti arrived in the neighbouring capital city of Bucharest only to find a striking yet somehow unsurprisingly similar situation. In 1949, Matei Socor, a faithful follower of communist propaganda, had been appointed the new head of the Society of Romanian Composers, directly after such musicians as Enescu and Jora had been removed from their positions of president and vice president respectively. Socor was rigorously imposing the strictures determined by the new ideology then engulfing Eastern Europe<sup>5</sup>, and started to re-organize the Society according to their new political criteria for artists. An official list arranged the categories of musicians by their political "usefulness": "very actives", "actives", "worth activating", "inactives/unknowns", "suspicious" and "to be removed"<sup>6</sup>. In order to understand something of how these definitions were arrived at, it may be mentioned that within the "suspicious" category fell such names as Mihail Jora, Marțian Negrea, Theodor Rogalski, Constantin Silvestri, and among those "to be removed" were many notable names, some of them already based abroad, including Constantin Brăiloiu, Marcel Mihalovici, Paul Constantinescu, and Dinu Lipatti.

A couple of months before Ligeti's arrival in Bucharest (October 21-22, 1949), the Society re-invented itself on a "new, healthy" basis, which preached Marxist-Leninist ideology while criticizing and rejecting the modern orientations of Western "decadent" music<sup>7</sup>. Schoenberg's *Erwartung* was considered to convey mere pessimism, while Messiaen was rejected for composing music which concerned itself with the end of time. Yet, Ligeti found an ideal refuge from all this in the music recorded on wax cylinders, as well as in his contact with some notable Romanian musicians.

<sup>4</sup> See Marina Lobanova's interview with Ligeti in: Lobanova, Marina *György Ligeti: Style, Ideas, Poetics*, Verlag Ernst Kuhn, Berlin, 2002, p. 393.

<sup>5</sup> Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, *Universul Muzicii Românești. Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor din România – 1920-1995/ The Univers of Romanian Music. The Society of the Composers and Musicologists of Romania – 1920-1995*, Editura Muzicală a U.C.M.R., București, 1995, p. 176.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, pp. 186-188.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p. 193.

As Ligeti's manuscripts at the Paul Sacher Foundation show, the borrowed melodic ideas in his orchestral piece turn out largely to be quotations of several Romanian folk songs he transcribed during his time spent at the Foklore Institute in Bucharest in 1949-1950, with the aid of a research grant from Budapest. The piece represents the most powerful argument in examining Ligeti's later Romanian spiritual roots, as an organic part of his complex artistic DNA, especially in this, his 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

The *Romanian Concerto* could be understood today not only as one of the most convincing testimonies of his connection with our folk music but also as an origin of the more subtle manner in which this heritage permeates his future work.

The Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel is the custodian of the composer's manuscripts and as such is the only institution able to offer solid evidence in support of this musicological hypothesis. The documents kept there on the Rhine (in fact, a key location for the study of 20th-century music) consist of a rich collection of sketches, scores, notes, and correspondence. Their thorough chronological study affords a panoramic and yet detailed overview of Ligeti's enduring relationship with Romanian music (along with the Hungarian which is even more evident), from the early years of his youth spent in this country all the way to the end of his creative activity. A close inspection of the Basle documents clearly points to a temporal and stylistic phasing, for which Cluj and Bucharest become backdrops in a sepia-tinged evocation of a bygone era.

Ligeti's early acquaintance with Romanian spiritual heritage is evident from as early as his adolescence, during his education in Transylvania's multicultural ambience. In the course of the seven years he spent studying in a Romanian school in Cluj, the young Ligeti, a Jew of Hungarian origin, makes his first attempts at musical composition and among the first fruits one can find some arrangements of Romanian songs. Among the manuscripts of the Basle Ligeti Collection one may discover a *Hora* for piano and a *Christmas Song*, mentioned with its corresponding Hungarian title *Karácsonyi dal*. Both pieces are part of a cycle the young Ligeti entitled *Kis zangoradarabok* (*Small Piano Pieces*), dating from 1938-1941, and consisting of six miniatures: *Korszerűtlen Praeludium*, *Karcásonyi dal*, *Szonatina*, *Hora*<sup>8</sup>; *Grotesque*, and *Elmélyülés*. Two of the pieces (*Karcásonyi dal*, *Szonatina*, *Hora*) demand to be seen as representative of Ligeti's early connection with our music, and especially as part of an assimilation process of a Romanian musical idiom which surrounded him, and which was just as important to him as Hungarian music.

<sup>8</sup> *Hora* also appears as an independent piece in this incipient period in Ligeti's musical formation, dedicated to Hary Eisikovits, a classmate, brother to the better-known Max Eisikovits, who would years later become a professor and rector of the Cluj Conservatoire, teacher of György Kurtág in Timișoara, during the time when Cluj Conservatory was in refuge to Timișoara, while the North part of Transylvania was ceded to Hungary after the Vienna Dictate, in 1940.

The title of the second piece of the cycle, *Karcásonyi dal*, is in fact a piano arrangement in variation form, 120 bars in length. While its theme is a genuine “trademark” carol from the Romanian Christmas folk repertoire, *O, ce veste minunată* (“Oh, what wonderful news!”). Unfortunately, despite its complexity, the piece has survived only in manuscript form:

**Ex. 1**



**Ligeti - Kis zongoradarabok: Karácsonyi dal**

© Ligeti Collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basle. Reproduced by permission

The Romanian Sabin Drăgoi was not the only composer to rework this famous song in his piece *Divertisment rustic*<sup>9</sup> (first movement – *Colinda*). György Kurtág<sup>10</sup>, also did so, as if it were a vague, faded memory, in his piano cycle *Játékok*:

<sup>9</sup> Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968) was an acknowledged composer and folk music researcher, being appointed as the Director of the Folklore Institute in Bucharest from 1950 to 1964. For his piece *Divertisment rustic* he was awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> George Enescu Prize in composition, in 1928. The five movements rely on some species of the Romanian folk music which Ligeti will also employ at the beginning of his career as a composer and also during the last two decades of his life. Drăgoi's movements of the piece *Divertisment rustic* are the following: 1. Colinda/Carol; 2. Doina; 3. Bocet/Lament; 3. Dans/Dance; Cântec de nuntă/Wedding song.

<sup>10</sup> The composer recoured again, in 2008, to a Romanian colinda (collected by Bartók from Păucinești village, Hunedoara county), completing the piece *Colinda-Balada*, op.46. It was premiered in April 2009 by the Transylvania Philharmonic Choir at the Cluj Modern Festival. See also Țiplea Temeș, Bianca, *De la Cluj Modern la Palais Garnier. Itinerarul Colindei-Baladă op. 46 de György Kurtág / From Cluj Modern to Palais Garnier. The Itinerary of György Kurtág's Colinda Balada op. 46*, in “Actualitatea Muzicală”, nr. 1/2011, Bucharest, p. 17.

## Ex. 2

## Hommage à Farkas Ferenc (2)

toszlányok egy kolinda emléképből  
 Erinnerungsbrocken aus einer Kolindenmelodie  
 Scraps of a colinda melody—faintly recollected

Vivace, dolce

ppp una corda  
 That all fine

ppp

meno p

ppp

meno p

ppp

meno p

ppppp

(in tempo)

ppppp

György Kurtág - *Játékok III*

A period that greatly contributes in both depth and substance to Ligeti's connection with Romanian music is represented by the six-month scholarship in Bucharest. This is clearly evidenced by certain documents among the manuscripts at the Paul Sacher Foundation. A few notebooks bought in Romania, bearing on the printed cover the title *CAET DE MUZICĂ* (MUSIC NOTEBOOK), displaying the publishing brand name "Flamura Roșie Sibiu", contain Ligeti's sketches from the time he spent in Bucharest (*Skizzenheft 34*, after a recent renumbering at the Paul Sacher Foundation, previously *Skizzenheft 36*) and also part of the collections he produced in the village of Inucu, Cluj county (here Ligeti was part of a team, transcribing the music of the Hungarian population of this area, together with noteworthy Hungarian researchers in Transylvania such as Jagamas János, Szeghő Julia, Szenik Ilona, etc: *Skizzenheft 35-37*, after the recent renumbering in Basle).

Sketchbook no. 34 contains 27 transcriptions in manuscript, the best-represented being the Banat and Oltenia regions. Ligeti carefully notes the source for his transcriptions, allowing us to observe today his familiarity with important Romanian folk music collections, assembled by Sabin Drăgoi, George Breazul, and Alexandru Berdescu (of the 9 notebooks of *Romanian Melodies* series):

1. Horă de mână (disc 1419 – II) Gorj
2. Joc (vioară) Câmpulung (disc 648 a I) – Măriuța
3. Puiculeasa (disc 648 b II)
4. Ciobănașul (disc 648 c II)
5. Sârba (Gorj Runc) (disc 305a)

6. Sârbă (disc 306)
7. Sârbă (disc 326)
8. Sârbă (disc 469b)
9. Sârbă (disc 472b)
10. Doină (disc 374) Teleorman Viișoara
11. Doină (strofică) Câmpulung Sadova (disc 640a)
12. Cântec (F.40.a) Slatina
13. Colind a) Sab. Drăgoi<sup>11</sup> Belinț 17
14. Colind b) variantă: 18
15. Colind c) Sab. Drăgoi Belinț 32
16. Colind Sab. Drăgoi Belinț 35
17. Cântec Sab. Drăgoi Belinț 13
18. Bucium (utânzat) disc 1330 c Gorj: Găvănești
19. Balada Miorița cântec 30 (textul din Alecsandri) Sab. Drăgoi Belinț
20. Argeș (Bartók)
21. Banat (Bartók)
22. Bihor (Bartók Gy.)
23. Gyors (Vâlcea) (Oltenia) + bucium
24. Nagyan gyors Vâlcea (Oltenia) bucium
25. Berdescu Al.: Melodii române 1862. Caetul 6 no. 3 (Aug. Ciobanu)
26. Troduțele (Vâlcele)
27. Breazu: Colinde 5

The months spent by Ligeti in the two Romanian cities were recollected by György Kurtág<sup>12</sup>, who recognised them as an extremely productive period in Ligeti's study of our folk music:

“De 1949 à 1950, il fit un voyage d'études en Roumanie. Il travailla aux Institut de Folklore de Bucarest et Cluj, ou il écouta et nota un grand nombre d'enregistrements”.

Ligeti himself ascribed great importance to his research period in Romania, mentioning the Folklore Institute in his biography, even during the 1970s, when his fame was securely established well beyond the Iron Curtain, once based in Vienna, when his musical tastes were stylistically completely opposed to those of the period strongly echoing Bartók's influence. The first paragraphs describe in detail aspects of his early life, in a text submitted for publication in Riemann's lexicon<sup>13</sup>, text in which Ligeti makes reference to the time of his study in Bucharest:

**1945-1949:** *Kompositionstudien an der Musikhochschule in Budapest bei Sándor Veress und Ferenc Farkas, zeitweilig auch bei Pál Járdányi. Kompositionen beeinflusst von Bartók, Stravinsky, und von ungarischer sowie rumänischer Volksmusik.*

<sup>11</sup> Ligeti refers to Sabin Drăgoi's *Monografie muzicală a comunei Belinț / Musical Monograph of Belinț Village*, published in Craiova, in 1942.

<sup>12</sup> Kurtág, György, *Entretiens, textes, dessins (trois entretiens avec Bálint András Varga. Deux hommages à György Ligeti. Autres textes)*, Contrechamps Éditions, Genève, 2009, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Adam Horst, dated January 1973, Berlin, kept by the Paul Sacher Foundation, the Ligeti Collection, microfilm 266.1 - 00013.

**1949-1950:** Ein halbes Jahr lang als Stipendiat in Rumänien: Studium der rumänischen Volksmusik und Sammlung ungarischer Volkslieder in Siebenbürgen.

Ligeti's stay in the Romanian capital was not confined to the purely technical activity of transcription and research. The young composer's creative imagination was stimulated by what he had heard on wax cylinders<sup>14</sup>, and his first arrangements of certain melodies he had heard at the Folklore Institute are actually contemporaneous with the transcriptions. A suite of ten simple pieces that remain in manuscript form, entitled *Román népdalok és táncok*<sup>15</sup> (i.e., *Romanian Folk Songs and Dances*), show Ligeti's attempt to imitate the traditional manner of accompaniment for Romanian folk songs:

### Ex. 3

[illegible]

## Ligeti - *Román népdalok és táncok: Doina*

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<sup>14</sup> It was only in 1951 that a more modern method was adopted for archiving the music collected on cylinders.



9) Sărbă  
Gyors.

8

Maestros!

1. Ai hai in  
2. Ai hai in  
3. Ai hai in  
4. Ai hai in  
5. Ai hai in  
6. Ai hai in

1. Bună vremea bun e casu la la lai la la la  
2. Bună vremea pe gârlă la la lai la la la  
3. S'au arde o mândreală la la lai la la la  
4. Nu știu de ce în iarbă la la lai la la la  
5. Că-și nege la oiaș furi la la lai la la la  
6. Băile lui mă caros! la la lai la la la

1. Bună vremea bun e casu la la lai la la la  
2. Bună vremea pe gârlă la la lai la la la  
3. S'au arde o mândreală la la lai la la la  
4. Nu știu de ce în iarbă la la lai la la la  
5. Că-și nege la oiaș furi la la lai la la la  
6. Băile lui mă caros! la la lai la la la

1. Bună vremea bun e casu la la lai la la la  
2. Bună vremea pe gârlă la la lai la la la  
3. S'au arde o mândreală la la lai la la la  
4. Nu știu de ce în iarbă la la lai la la la  
5. Că-și nege la oiaș furi la la lai la la la  
6. Băile lui mă caros! la la lai la la la

Ligeti - Román népdalok és táncok: Sărbă

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<sup>15</sup> The suite inspired by the Romanian songs transcribed in Bucharest consists of the following titles, some of which combine the Romanian titles with agogic terms in Hungarian or even with the Hungarian translation of the Romanian original, in brackets: 1. Lassan (i.e., Slow); 2. Cântecul miresii (i.e., Bridal Song); 3. Măriuța – Tánc; 4. Doina; 5. Sărbă; 6. Párnás tánc; 7. Cântec de nuntă (i.e., Wedding Song) (Lakodalmás); 8. Zicala găinii (i.e., The Saying of the Hen) (Tyúk-mondóka); 9. Sărbă; 10. Gyors (Bătut) (basszus *col legno* üres húrokon).



Looking back at his activity at the Foklore Institute, Ligeti spoke highly about his collaboration with Mircea Chiriac during an interview given in Romanian to the composer Nicolae Brînduș, in Aix en Provence, France, in 1979, from which we reproduce a fragment<sup>16</sup>:

G.L.: As far as my interest in Romanian music goes, I was mainly preoccupied with folk music, for the study of which I was offered the scholarship I was telling you about. I spent a few weeks at the Folklore Institute in Bucharest, a period which had a big significance for the deepening of my knowledge about Romanian folk music, which I actually knew pretty well, having lived for so many years in Transylvania. I listened to a significant number of phonograph cylinders and a series of discs, and had the opportunity to collaborate with Mircea Chiriac, Gheorghe Ciobanu, Tiberiu Alexandru, and Ilarion Cocișiu, personalities from whom I had a lot to learn and benefit during the study that I conducted. I then went to Covăsînt in Arad county, together with Mircea Chiriac, in order to collect folk music over a few days' period... perhaps a week. I had never had the practice of noting polyphonic music. I could only note/transcribe what I had previously studied in Bucharest and then in Cluj, that is, one part unaccompanied melodies. I had mainly dealt with transcribing *colinde* (carols), which, as you know, have a very complex rhythmic structure: the melodic line is simple but the rhythm is very intricate! – which I would listen to from the wax cylinders, using headphones. I thus learnt to note down rhythmic proportions which were extremely....

N.B .... fine

G.L. .... yes! Fine, a fact which helped me greatly in my future compositions. The days spent in Covăsînt have been a special experience to me. I admired Mircea Chiriac as an expert not only in transcribing folk melodies, but also in noting the harmony, and in noting even the positions on the string instruments! I was observing how Mircea Chiriac was noting music live, instantly and at an extraordinary speed, with a confidence and skill which I lacked.... I was so interested in the music I came across on this occasion that later, while in Cluj, I wrote an article about the polyphony of the songs I heard and about generalized aspects of this polyphony in the Romanian folk music I had studied. I first wrote this material in Romanian (which is further proof that I mastered the language much better back then!) and later on I rewrote it in Hungarian. /.../ Throughout my entire stay in Romania, my contact with Mircea Chiriac was of great value to me<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Brînduș, Nicolae, *Interviu cu György Ligeti (Interview with György Ligeti)*, in "Muzica", No. 1/January, 1980, Bucharest, p. 40. I express hereby my gratitude to composer Nicolae Brînduș, who kindly provided me with the recording of this interview.

<sup>17</sup> Romanian, original:

G.L.: În ceea ce privește interesul meu pentru muzica românească, m-a preocupat îndeosebi folclorul, pentru al cărui studiu mi s-a oferit bursa de care vă vorbeam. Am petrecut câteva săptămâni la Institutul de Folclor din București, timp ce a avut o mare însemnătate în aprofundarea cunoștințelor mele despre muzica populară românească, muzică pe care o cunoșteam deja destul de bine trăind atâția ani în Transilvania. Am ascultat un mare număr de cilindri de fonograf, o serie de discuri și am avut posibilitatea de a colabora cu Mircea Chiriac, Gheorghe Ciobanu, Tiberiu Alexandru și Ilarion Cocișiu, personalități de la care am

Only four years older than Ligeti, but already employed as an acknowledged researcher at the Institute (after having studied composition with Mihail Jora), Mircea Chiriac had an important role in helping Ligeti integrate with the Institute, navigating his way through the wax cylinders and generously sharing with him his experience in transcribing folk music.

The transcriptions made together with Mircea Chiriac mark the source of the theoretical conclusions formulated by Ligeti in the studies that were later to be published in Budapest<sup>18</sup>. Their importance was highlighted again by György Kurtág<sup>19</sup>, who also drew attention to the Ligeti's preference for the texts of the most learned Romanian ethnomusicologist, Constantin Brăiloiu, as well as Bartók or Simha Arom:

“On a beaucoup écrit sur le profit qu'il a tiré de la recherche folklorique (des textes de Brăiloiu, Kubic, Simha Arom et naturellement encore et toujours de Bartók). Toutefois, il apparaît en contrepartie que l'on ait oublié (et qu'il ait pu oublier lui aussi) que le jeune Ligeti (1950-1953) avait découvert, à la rédaction d'un article essentiel, les règles du fonctionnement et de l'harmonisation des orchestres de musique populaire roumains”.

Another aspect of Ligeti's stay in Bucharest directs our attention towards his compositional activity; in 1950 and 1951, the author arranged part of the melodies he noted and kept in the transcription notebook, presently held by the

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avut multe de învățat și profitat în studiul întreprins. Am plecat apoi la Covăsint în județul Arad împreună cu Mircea Chiriac pentru o culegere de folclor de câteva zile... poate o săptămână. Eu nu avusesem niciodată înainte practica de a nota muzică polifonă. Nu puteam nota decât ceea ce studiasem mai înainte la București (și apoi la Cluj) și anume melodii pe o singură voce. Mă ocupasem mai ales de transcrierea colindelor – despre care Dv. știți că au o structură ritmică foarte complexă: melodia este simplă dar ritmul este foarte complicat! – pe care le ascultam la cască de pe cilindrii de ceară. Am învățat astfel să notez raporturi ritmice extrem de....

N.B.: ...fine...

G.L.: ... da! Fine, lucru care m-a ajutat foarte mult și în compozițiile mele de mai târziu. Zilele de la Covăsint au fost pentru mine o experiență deosebită. L-am admirat pe Mircea Chiriac ca pe un expert nu numai în notarea melodiilor populare dar și a armoniei, ba, mai mult, până și a pozițiilor de pe instrumentele de coarde! Asistam cum Mircea Chiriac nota muzica pe viu, imediat și într-o viteză extraordinară cu o siguranță și îndemânare pe care eu nu o aveam... Am fost atât de interesat de muzica pe care o cunoșteam cu acest prilej încât ulterior, la Cluj fiind, am scris un studiu privind polifonia în cântecele audiate și aspecte generalizate ale acesteia în folclorul românesc studiat. Acest material l-am redactat mai întâi în limba română (încă o dovadă că posedam limba mult mai bine pe atunci!) și apoi l-am rescris în limba maghiară. /.../ În tot răstimpul acestei șederi în România contactul cu Mircea Chiriac mi-a fost de mare preț. /.../

<sup>18</sup> Ligeti, György, *Egy aradmegyei román együttes*, in: “Kodály Elmékkönyv. Zenetudományi Tanulmányok I”, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1953 and Ligeti, György: *Népzenekeutató Romániában (Research on Romanian Folk Music)*, in “Új Zenei Szemle”, I/3, August 1950, Budapest, pp.18-22. See also Ioan T. Florea, *Folclor muzical din Județul Arad: 500 melodii de joc (Folk music from the Arad county: 500 dance melodies)*, Centrul de îndrumare a creației populare și a mișcării artistice de masă a județului Arad, 1974, where Ligeti's article is cited.

<sup>19</sup> Kurtág, György, *Entretiens, textes, dessins (trois entretiens avec Bálint András Varga. Deux hommages à György Ligeti. Autres textes)*, Contrechamps Editions, Genève, 2009, p. 168.

Paul Sacher Foundation. Sketchbook no. 34, which most likely only represented part of the folk songs transcribed during his stay in Bucharest, becomes an essential element in the decoding of Ligeti's most important Romanian-inspired work from this period, and his first significant orchestra piece: the *Romanian Concerto* (*Concert românesc* – original title). It is preceded, in terms of its melodic content, by a more simple version, the piece *Baladă și joc* (i.e., *Ballad and Dance*), a diptych derived from two folk melodies noted down in 1949-1950 and tried out by the author in several instrumental forms (as a duo for violin and piano, then as a work for school orchestra).

The transcriptions, the first folk melody arrangements, and the composition of the piece *Baladă și joc* (i.e., *Ballad and Dance*) are all preliminary stages of a process that paved the way for the composition of the *Romanian Concerto*. The latter is a much extended and more elaborate version of the piece *Baladă și joc* (i.e., *Ballad and Dance*), in which Ligeti uses a combination of folk songs transcribed in Bucharest, defining this work structurally as a hybrid between Suite and Rhapsody.

The four movements alternate stylistically between the sonority of Enescu's *Rhapsody No. 1* (in its melodic figurations) and, in certain parts, Bartók's manner of dealing with the orchestra (one will find echoes of the *Romanian Dances*, the *Concerto for Orchestra*, and even similarities with the *Viola Concerto*, especially in the opening of the third movement). Beyond the compositional technique of a 27-year-old composer seeking his artistic identity, the direct references to the melodies comprised in Sketchbook no. 34, kept in Basle, are striking even though Ligeti's statement on the CD booklet emphasized "reworkings of some imagined folk music"<sup>20</sup>.

Placing the cut-outs from the score side by side with those from the transcription manuscripts speaks volumes. The first movement conveys the melody of the *Miorița Ballad*, collected by Sabin Drăgoi in Belinț village<sup>21</sup>. One of the most representative ballads in both Romanian folk literature and folk music, "Miorița" circulates also as a *Colinda* (Carol). Ligeti's orchestration centres on the idea of unison (at the beginning of the piece) emphasizing its archaic resonance and the melodic and rhythmic typology of an old *Colinda*.

<sup>20</sup> CD "The Ligeti Project" II, TeldecClassics 8573-88261-2, Germany, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> A fact recently indicated also by musicologist Constantin Stan Tufan, author who brilliantly complements the information with the names of other Romanian composers who found in this folk melody originating from the Banat region a source of inspiration for their pieces (Sabin Drăgoi – *Miorița* for mixed choir, Paul Constantinescu – *Miorița* for mixed choir), in Sabin V. Drăgoi: *Monografia muzicală a comunei Belinț. 30 de melodii cu texte culese, notate și explicate* (i.e., *Musical Monograph of Belinț Village. 30 Choir Pieces Arranged After Folk Songs Noted, Collected and Selected from Belinț Village*), anastatic edition edited by Constantin-Tufan Stan, with a musicological study by Constantin Catrina and a linguistic study by Simion Dănilă, Eurostampa Publishing House, Timișoara, 2012. See the introduction signed by Tufan-Stan, Constantin, *Monografia muzicală a comunei Belinț. Geneza și destinul unei capodopere* (i.e., *The Musical Monograph of Belinț Commune. The genesis and fate of a masterpiece*, pp. XIV; XVIII-XXII).

Ex. 5

*Balada în sol fa. son. drab. sorini. corale so.*

Handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Balada în sol fa. son. drab. sorini. corale so." The score is written on three staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (F major/D minor) and a time signature of 3/8. The second and third staves are in bass clef. The lyrics are written below the staves: "Peu prier de plu... Per qu'on de ra - ci... Sa - ra - ra...". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Skizzeheft 34

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Ex. 6

**I**

Andantino ♩ = 106

Printed musical score for a piece titled "Andantino" by György Ligeti, from "Skizzeheft 34". The tempo is marked "Andantino" with a quarter note equal to 106 beats per minute. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Flauto (Flute), Oboe, Clarinetto (Sik) (Clarinet), Fagotto (Bassoon), Corno (Fa) (Horn), Tromba (Do) (Trumpet), Percussione (Percussion), Violino I (Violin I), Violino II (Violin II), Viola, Violoncello (Cello), and Contrabbasso (Double Bass). The score is divided into two systems, each with a tempo marking of "Andantino ♩ = 106". The first system includes parts for Flauto, Oboe, Clarinetto (Sik), Fagotto, Corno (Fa), Tromba (Do), Percussione, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabbasso. The second system includes parts for Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabbasso. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

# LIGETI'S ROMANIAN CONCERTO: FROM WAX CYLINDERS TO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

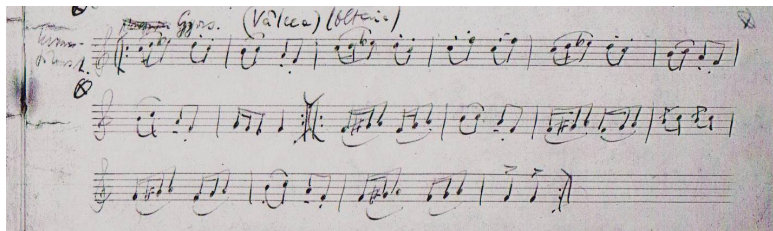
The image displays a musical score for Ligeti's Romanian Concerto, 1st Movement. The score is organized into two systems of staves. The first system includes parts for Clarinet in C (Si), Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The second system includes parts for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in C (Si), Bassoon, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including 3/8, 4/8, and 2/8 time signatures, and dynamic markings such as 'p' and 'con sord.'.

## Ligeti – Romanian Concerto, 1<sup>st</sup> Movement

It is not only the overall timbre, emphasizing the warm ‘vocal’ sound of the strings, that is reminiscent of the original in Drăgoi’s collection, but also the modal harmonization and the agogic indications, preserved by Ligeti almost identically.

In the second movement, a fast piece (“gyors”/fast, as Ligeti notes in Hungarian on the manuscript) from the Vâlcea region in the province of Oltenia, is selected for arrangement. The transcription was by the composer himself from the wax cylinders, and reveals a striking implication, deploying all his theoretical knowledge, for at the beginning of the first staff he identifies a chromatic modal scale, marking this detail in Hungarian (“kromatikus”).

Ex. 7



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Ex. 8

14

92 **D** a tempo Solo

Picc. (2)

Cl (Sib) 1

Fg. 1

Tamburo piccolo solo

Perc. *pp*

VI. I *p* *pizz.*

VI. II *p* *pizz.*

Va. *p* *pizz.*

100

Picc. (2)

Fl. 1

Ob. 1 2 *pp*

Cl (Sib) 1 2

Fg. 1 2 *pp*

Tr. (Do) 1 2

Perc.

VI. I

VI. II

Va.

Vc.

Cb. *pizz.*

Ligeti – Romanian Concerto, 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement



The lively *tempo* and dance-like character are emphasized by Ligeti in the orchestral version by the use of a percussion instrument (*tamburo piccolo*), deployed to accompany the melodic flow, and used discreetly but effectively by punctuating the down beats.

The evocation of Romanian alpenhorn signals generates the melodic and harmonic substance of the third movement, one with a pastoral tinge in which the alpenhorn is mimicked by the four horns of the ensemble. Used as a substitute for the folk instrument in a symphony orchestra, the horns make a sound that comes closest to the sonority produced by this emblematic Carpathian instrument.

In Ligeti's manuscript transcriptions kept in Basle there is one example of vocal imitations of the bucium signals, from Găvănești (Gorj county), / Disc 1330c, called "hăuliț", but no transcription of a such instrument playing is noted. The composer had surely listened to far more examples during his research stay, because the wax cylinders in Bucharest also included music played on this instrument. Yet the melodic line used in the third movement is difficult to attribute to a clear region. Bartók himself transcribed an impressive number of Romanian bucium signals<sup>22</sup> but the recordings on wax cylinders in Bucharest were rather rich regarding this category of folk Romanian instrumental music. Whether transcribed or "reconstituted" by Ligeti, the resulting scale of the accumulated sounds allow us to attribute it to a certain region, as so systematically shown in Tiberiu Alexandru's book<sup>23</sup> where he classifies the scales according to the harmonics pointing toward geographic areas of Romania. It turns out that Ligeti's signals in the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement of his piece evoke the region of the Apuseni mountains, in Transylvania<sup>24</sup>. Bartók<sup>25</sup> himself refers to the rhythm used in playing this instrument, observing that in this region the dominant aspect is the *giusto* category while the *parlando-rubato* type is mostly used in the Mountains of Maramureș. Corneliu Dan Georgescu<sup>26</sup>, speaking about the various functions of the bucium playing (signalling, pastoral, magical or even funeral rituals) and providing a significant amount of musical transcriptions, leaves no doubt that Ligeti evokes in his *Romanian Concerto* the pastoral signals. The specific succession of sounds proceeding from the natural harmonics shows that his melody belongs to the 5<sup>th</sup> category Corneliu Dan Georgescu<sup>27</sup> described (typical for the Apuseni

<sup>22</sup> Bartók, Béla, *Romanian Folk Music. Vol. I*, The Hague, 1967.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandru, Tiberiu, *Instrumentele muzicale ale poporului român (Musical Instruments of the Romanian people)*, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1956, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Such scale employs mainly the harmonics (3) 4, 5, 6, (7), and 8.

<sup>25</sup> Bartók, Béla, *Romanian Folk Music. Vol. I*, The Hague, 1967, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Georgescu, Corneliu Dan, *Repertoriul pastoral. Semnale de Bucium. Tipologie muzicală și corpus de melodii (Pastoral Repertoire. Bucium Signals. Musical typology and melodies collection)*, Ed. Muzicală, București, 1987, pp. 16 – 28.

<sup>27</sup> Georgescu, Corneliu Dan, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

region). The combination of features from Apuseni and Maramureș allow us conclude that Ligeti was pursuing his own sonic vision of the bucium signals, mixing together elements of what he might have heard on the wax cylinders, in 1949-1950 or in the open air, as a child.

In this Bucium / like movement of the *Romanian Concerto* the orchestra is constantly treated as a harmonic mirror of the alpenhorn signals, as an echo-chamber of sounds projected at a distance, as if in an open geographical space.

**Ex. 9**

**Ligeti – Romanian Concerto, 3<sup>rd</sup> Movement**

The Finale, which is the movement that comes closest to Bartók's style and overall sonority, picks as a first melodic landmark, a song from the Banat region, which reminds a lot the folk music of Bihar:

**Ex. 10**

**Skizzeheft 34**

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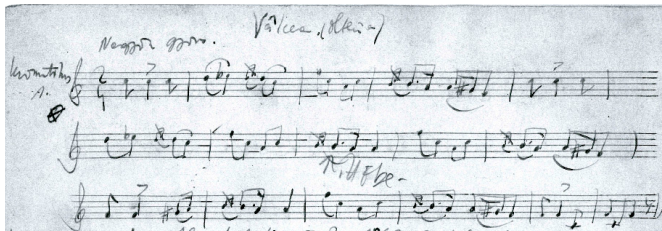
## Ex. 11

Ligeti – *Romanian Concerto*, 4<sup>th</sup> Movement

Alongside the song from Banat, the 4<sup>th</sup> movement, structured as a rhapsody melding different folk melodic ideas, benefits from yet another thematic element with a pronounced dance-like character: a very rapid melody (“nagys gyors”/very fast, in Hungarian, as Ligeti notes in his manuscript) from Vâlcea, moulded on the structure of a chromatic modal scale and punctuated rhythmically by syncopations in the melodic line and by cross-rhythms in the accompaniment:

BIANCA ȚIPLEA TEMEȘ

### Ex. 12



## Skizzeheft 34

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### Ex. 13

Ligeti – *Romanian Concerto*, 4<sup>th</sup> Movement

The identical, complete quotation of the melodies transcribed by Ligeti in Bucharest is not the only compositional formula applied by the composer; the *Romanian Concerto* contains numerous fragments in which he manipulates cells extracted from the folk songs used; developing extensive transitive articulations based on these cut-outs, with augmentations or other developments, and in this manner rendering entirely flexible the structural frame of the final movement. Moreover, one discovers fragments in which Ligeti uses short cutouts from certain melodies transcribed in Bucharest (but which never appear in their complete form in the *Romanian Concerto*), such as the extracted exclamation from the *Sârba* dance from the Suite *Román népdalok es táncok*, defined by intervals of a perfect fourth and fifth:

### Ex. 14

[illegible]

## Ligeti - *Román népdalok és táncok: Sârbă*

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This melodic profile lends significance to the Finale of the piece, especially in the last enunciation, in which the long note is accompanied by a dissonance of a minor second, and which also might have raised the eyebrows of the Eastern Bloc censors. Luckily, the reaction was not so radical as in the case of Lutoslawski back in 1949, on the occasion of the premiere of his Symphony No. 1, when the Polish Vice-Minister of Culture (Włodzimierz Sokorski) left soon after the beginning of the concert, suggesting that the composer should be thrown under the wheels of a street car. Shostakovich's struggles with the state are also well-known.

559

C. (Sax)

2

Tr. (Dr)

1

1. sola con sord.

*p* in rilievo

VI. I

(1 solo) 3

VI. II

(1 solo)

Va.

(11 solo)

Vc.

(11 solo)

565

Pic. (Fl)

(2)

solo

*ff* sempre

Cl. (Sax)

2

3

Tr. (Dr)

1

1.

*pp*

perendosi

VI. I

(1 solo)

*sempre pp*

VI. II

(1 solo)

Va.

(1 solo)

Vc.

(1 solo)

2 soli pizz.

*pp*

## Ligeti – *Romanian Concerto*, 4<sup>th</sup> Movement

Composed directly after Ligeti's stay in Bucharest where he worked closely with Mircea Chiriac in transcribing and arranging, the *Romanian Concerto* displays certain similarities in its use of authentic folk music with one of Mircea Chiriac's own pieces composed in 1951 – *Rhapsody No.1*. Initially written exclusively for folk instruments, Chiriac rewrote the piece for symphony orchestra, preserving the cimbalom as part of the forces. He draws inspiration from a few folk melodies from Muntenia, Ialomița, Mușcel, Vlașca and from Dobrogea (geamparale), surely melodies transcribed also from the wax cylinders of Bucharest.



New confirmations of the impact that Romanian music had on Ligeti also occur in the composer's final creative stage. In 1993, he granted Lerke von Saalfeld an extensive interview of about one hour, in which he reminisced about many autobiographical echoes. Moreover, as with Bartók, he admitted that Romanian folklore was much richer than Hungarian folklore (due also to the larger size of the territory), even if the impact of the latter on Ligeti's oeuvre is, no doubt, fundamental and constant throughout his life, inspiring the composer to write many masterpieces.

“/.../ Dadurch, daß ich zufälligerweise in Siebenbürgen geboren bin – und das gehörte zu Rumänien, und ich ging sieben Jahre lang in die rumänische Schule – konnte ich Rumänisch und so galt mein Interesse der rumänischen Folklore. Durch die Gegebenheit daß ich die Sprache fast perfekt gesprochen habe, war mein Zugang dazu sehr leicht. Die rumänische Volksmusik ist sehr viel reicher als die ungarische.”<sup>28</sup>

Ligeti's statement came at a time when a reconfiguration of his stylistic concerns was in full swing, and when he expanded the sources of his inspiration, staking everything on a unique *ars combinatoria* of totally non-homogeneous elements.

One notes the fact that he started to relate to our sonic spirituality, writing ethnic music in the first place (i.e. the years he spent in Cluj, Budapest, and Bucharest), inspired directly from the Romanian and also the Hungarian folk melos, and as such following in the footsteps of the man he greatly admired, Béla Bartók.

Using the melody of a Colinda, pastoral bucium signals and the sparkling rhythms of Romanian folk dances as ingredients, all in colourful orchestral garb, Ligeti pays matchless musical homage to our folk-cultural heritage. Moreover, as Simon Gallot pointed out, Ligeti's ethnomusicological journey to Bucharest had significant consequences for his later works<sup>29</sup>, in terms of both their musical substance and compositional techniques. These remain to be discussed in future, with the *Romanian Concerto* as a point of reference.

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<sup>28</sup> *Über folklore, Gy. Ligeti im Gespräch mit Lerke von Saalfeld*, in “Neue Zeitschrift für Musik”; Januar 1993 (CD that comes with the magazine): “Because I happen to have been born in Transylvania, which belongs to Romania, and because I attended a Romanian school for seven years, I came to master this language, hence my interest in Romanian folklore. Under the circumstances, because my Romanian was almost flawless, it was very easy for me to access Romanian folklore. Romanian music is much richer than Hungarian music.”

<sup>29</sup> Gallot, Simon, *György Ligeti et la musique populaire*, Symétrie, Lyon, 2010, p. 79.

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