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ROMANIAN COMPOSERS' SPIRITUAL CREATIVITY IN THE 20TH CENTURY – MUSICAL HAGIOGRAPHY OF THE ORDEAL OF A SOCIETY

Abstract: The spiritual music creativity of Romanian composers in the 20th century underwent numerous phases, between their zenith and despair, due to societal events specific for all of eastern Europe in the past century. Despite the fact that this creativity, in essence, expresses the tradition of the East, and does not seek to minimize its Byzantine roots, many composers, especially in the second half of the 20th century, left aside the elements of these aesthetics and directed their creative focus towards new creative tendencies. This work reviews the works based on spiritual topics by 20th century Romanian composers, from the first decades, including the years of Communist government, till the days when they set out on a postmodern creative course, and it presents the names of the majority of composers who dedicated their works to the worship of the Almighty, analyzing thoroughly the information found at the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania in Bucharest.

Keywords: spiritual repertoire, vocal music, instrumental music, stages pieces of a spiritual character

Byzantine music and the music of Byzantine tradition represent an integral and very important part of the Romanian cultural space. It was preserved and

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it circulated from generation to generation thanks to the few who were literate, monks, teachers and preachers that carried out their activities near monastic settlements. Around these dwellings, during many years, real schools were founded there, where spiritual (ecclesiastic) music was created. It's impossible not to mention, for example, the existence of the famous *School in the monastery Neamt* (*Școala de la Neamț*) in the 15th century, or of the *School in the Putna monastery* (*Școala muzicală de la Putna*) in the 15th – 16th centuries.¹ The schools from Brasov or Bucharest were also well-known, and all of them preserved both the tradition of the music itself and the old neumatic music notation.

When we talk about the Romanian cultural space and its historical aspect, we should not omit one very important fact. The Romanian people lived its destiny between three big *musical pylons*, and they were: folk music, religious music and the music that originated in Occidental culture. Although these three pylons had separate developmental paths, they influenced each other, many times with intersecting paths and this fact helped them to survive all the challenges that arose on their way.

Contrary to folk music that always circulated orally, Byzantine music and music of the Byzantine tradition² have numerous written traces in libraries and archives. However, there were situations when religious music circulated orally, especially ecclesiastic cantillation that existed in various parts of the Romanian countryside.

The manuscripts of Byzantine music include ecclesiastic chants for Orthodox rites written in a so-called *old system*, and also the written ones in the *new or Christian system*, that was practiced from 1814 till nowadays. The majority of the manuscripts found on actual Romanian territory have an autochthonous origin and they were written in monasteries by more or less known authors. Others were brought from Constantinople or from Mount Athos or from other Christian eastern spiritual centers in many ways and in, at least, interesting circumstances.³

In Romania, nowadays, there are approximately 250 manuscripts of old music made before 1814. As we have already said, the majority of them were written on Romanian territories and these realizations were usually grouped in anthologies whose titles were given, depending on the place where they were kept.

¹ Titus Moisescu, *Muzicabizantină în spațiul cultural românesc* (Byzantine music in the Romanian cultural space), București, Editura Muzicala a Uniunii Compozitori lorși muzicologilor din România, 1996, 8.

² The term “music of Byzantine tradition” was used by the musicologist Titus Moisescu in his works, and by this term implies the religious music created in the Byzantine manner after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453.

³ Titus Moisescu, *Ibid.*

(For example *Antologhionul de la Putna*). The famous manuscripts from Putna, 10 of 11 manuscripts are anthologies that include chants for Vespers, Matins or Liturgies. In the main, the manuscripts from Putna contain 478 chants, 374 in Greek and 104 in the Slavonic language (the old Church Slavonic language).⁴ In musical ecclesiastic manuscripts, the Romanian language would be used later, especially thanks to Filothei, the son of Aga Jipa, a psalt from the Metropoly of Ugro-Wallachia and his work *Psaltichia rumanasca* written in 1713.⁵

The value of Byzantine music became evident thanks to all the medieval manuscripts preserved on Romanian cultural territory. Those manuscripts represented a huge source of inspiration for future creators. The composers of the 20th century were also familiar with this musical treasure. Actually, in this period, the core investigation of Byzantine music really begins in a modern way and a return to Byzantine music, although there were some attempts before, in the 19th century.⁶

Romanian musical creativity from the 20th century, inspired by religious music, represents a natural sequel of the previous composers' works, those composers who founded Romanian musical culture. One of the predecessors whose influence on composers from the 20th century was notable was the composer **Gavriil Musicescu** (1847–1903). He brought full affirmation to homophone choral chant, which, probably, was a consequence of his folklore studies and psaltic music. Musicescu had always been in favor of keeping the specific model of the ecclesiastic chants. He was an excellent connoisseur of the works of the Russian artists, which can be confirmed by analyzing his works, and we especially mention the *Prohodul* for the 1st voice.⁷

Musicescu was not the only composer to have a clear impact on 20th century composers. Another big *inspirational pylon* to religious music composers was **Eusebiu Mandicevski** (1857–1929). He composed Liturgies in the Old Renaissance style, with Renaissance motets, imitations, modal harmony and tonal inflexions. In the chant *Evloghimenos* from the *Liturgies nr. 12*, Mandicevski creates a fusion between eastern antiphonies, psalm music and divided choirs that are specific for the Renaissance.⁸ Among the composers that also made their

⁴ Eugen Cinci, *Opusurimuzicaleromânești* (Romanian musical opuses), Vrșac, Književna opština, 2006, 11.

⁵ Moisescu, Titus, *op. cit.*, 8.

⁶ Eugen Cinci, "Muzica religioasă românească între glorie și declin (Romanian religious music between ascent and disaster)", *Dealul Vârșetului*, year IV, no. 7, 4.

⁷ Vasile Herman, *Forma și stil în noua creație muzicală românească* (The form and style of new Romanian creation), București, Editura Muzicală, 1977, 30.

⁸ Herman, Vasile, *Ibid.*, 49.

contribution to the structure of the creative direction of the last century were: Alexandru Podoleanu, Gheorghe Ionescu, Ioan Bunescu. They had an important role in forming the national school of ecclesiastic music, both, monadic and harmonic. The same path would be pursued by Gheorghe Cucu, Ioan D. Chirescu, Nicolae Lungu, Ioana Ghika – Comănești, Sabin V. Drăgoi and many others. Among the generations that followed, we can mention Paul Constantinescu, Marțian Negrea, Doru Popovici, Viorel Munteanu, Ștefan Niculescu, Tudor Jar-da, Liviu Comes, Gheorghe Firca, etc.

It is evident that every period leaves a visible trace regarding the creative style and, in general, the artistic language that is being used. From this point of view, it seems, that the 20th century surpassed all the proceeding moments. In just hundred years, religious music underwent tremendous changes. At the beginning of the century, composers did not dare to write any work that was not intended for performance during church services. In the second half of the century the situation was completely different. New compositions came into being whose very titles indicated that they were of sacral music.

In the first half of the 20th century, the composers' attention was drawn to vocal *a cappella*⁹ music. They used to write choral opuses which, thanks to their form, structure and adaptations, could easily be included in any religious service, be it Orthodox or Catholic services. Because of the previously mentioned motifs, the music of this period can truly be called *ecclesiastic music*. Contrary to this kind of church music, the creation of the second half of the century addressed its attention to the artistic scene.

As we can understand, the Romanian music of the last century, inspired by the religious repertoire, followed the natural course of other creative genres. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the musical genre we are discussing, in the 20th century experienced many *dark moments* – of course, we are referring to the period after the World War II, to be more exact, the period after the fifties. The regime installed in Romania, the new ideas and visions about art, about its role and society in general, heralded difficult times for religious Romanian music. In order to publish works of an evidently sacral nature, composers had to modify their titles and sometimes even the content.¹⁰ Consequently, nowadays, difficulties arise when tracking down works with religious elements in the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania. The titles given to some works, in order to pass the censorship, were misleading in that they revealed

⁹ Eugen Cinci, *op. cit.*, 33.

¹⁰ Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *Muzica românească între 1945–2000* (Romanian music between 1945–2002), București, Editura Muzicală, 2002.

little evidence of any kind of religious content, and sometimes it was impossible to discover their real character.

The post-monarchical period was not the only time when composers, in order to create freely, had to fulfill some political criteria. Therefore, in the forties of the previous century, while Romania was still governed by a monarchy, some *selections* with a political background were made. At the end of 1944, so-called *cleaning commissions* were set up whose purpose was to eliminate political opponents from public life, mainly former legionnaires. The composer Dimitrie Cuclin was sentenced to do forced labor because of his legionary sympathies and Harry Brauner was arrested, along with his wife, on the pretext that he belonged to Patrascanu's politically inappropriate group, and that he was a dissident.¹¹

But, in spite of all the difficulties, religious music managed to come to life again. In the second half of the previous century, among Romanian composers there appeared names, such as Valentin Gheorghiu, Tudor Ciortea, Liviu Glodeanu, Richard Waldemar, Sigismund Toduță, Franz Xaver Dressler, Hanz Weisz, Șerban Nechifor, etc.¹² They have given a new vision to religious musical creation and we can notice that the chants no longer have ecclesiastic features and that they have become closer to scenic performance.

After the events in December 1989, when the political regime was overthrown, new works with an evidently religious aspect appeared on the Romanian music scene. We could say that in recent years, it has gone to the other extreme, and we can speak of a super saturation of musical pieces with sacral elements.

The 20th century Romanian compositions whose source of inspiration came from the religious repertoire can be classified on the basis of two important criteria, such as:

- Music criteria and
- Religious criteria

According to the music criteria, we can classify the works into:

- Vocal,
- Vocal-instrumental and
- Instrumental.

When we talk about religious criteria, the works can be classified as follows:

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Franz Metz, "Muzica bisericesca si cea sacra după 1945 în România (Ecclesiastic and religious music in Romania after 1945)," *Muzica*, 2002, no. 2, 120.

- Real religious works
- Works significantly influenced by religious topics
- Works with a lesser influence of religious topics

The first category comprises works that can be used in any religious service, without being adapted, considering that their content and form correspond to church needs. These, generally, are Orthodox liturgies, Catholic masses, and parts of them that can be performed as independent works. They are mostly written for choirs (*Răspunsuri Liturgice, Trisaghion, Heruvicul, Pre Tine, Tatăl Nostru, Priceasna, etc.*). The same category includes musical pieces that are part of the Vespers and the Matins of the Orthodox rites, or even their complete services (Matins hymns or *stihira* and *sedelne* – chants that can be performed while the listeners sit down), the pieces that are included in the service of the Sacred Mysteries or the entire services, and also the special services found in the *Molitfenic* (Funeral rites for newborns, Prayer when entering in church, Prayer for school-children, etc.).

The second category consists of pieces that, given their content, approach and form cannot be part of a religious service. They mostly have a title that could correspond to religious works, but not their content. We enumerate here vocal-instrumental, instrumental or simply vocal works that in terms of their content cannot be included in a religious service, especially in Orthodox churches.

The works from the third category are those works that do not penetrate so deeply into the religious sphere, but only use certain elements, quotes from the religious repertoire. They are intended for the stage and not for religious practice. The lyrics of some of them are based on the composers' creation, not on spiritual texts, or on the creation of some famous Romanian poets. The works in recent years mostly belong to this category, and they represent a new way of approaching the religious repertoire. (For example, the choir liturgy and rhythm section).¹³

It is almost impossible to describe on just a few pages, the musical creation that marked the entire 20th century in the Romanian space. The registers of the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania have hundreds of them, irrespective of whether their titles are obviously religious or the religious elements should be sought between the title and the content. In this work, we present the creation of only a few composers who were working on instrumental religious music, which, by its structure and form, could not represent a part of religious services but were intended for artistic performance. Some of them

¹³ Cinci Eugen, *op. cit.*, 36.

have the evident features of the Eastern Church but, considering their form, they cannot constitute part of religious services. The composers are given according to the registries of the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania, in alphabetical order.

- Andricu Mihail (1894–1974): *Legenda op. 6* based on liturgical topics (1927);
- Constantinescu Paul (1909–1963): *Two Etudes In The Byzantine Style* for String Trio (1929), *Byzantine Sonatina* for Solo Violoncello (1940), *Triple Concerto* for Violin, Violoncello, Piano and Orchestra based on ecclesiastic chant.
- Dănceanu Liviu (1954): *Holy Communion* for Chamber Orchestra – premiered in Bucharest, 1998.
- Drăgoi Sabin (1894–1968): *Spiritual Divertimento* for Chamber Orchestra – premiered in Bucharest, 1935.
- Dumitrescu Gheorghe (1914–1966): *Suit No. 2 for Orchestra, op. 23 – Four Byzantine Frescoes* (1943), *Tenth, Sacral Symphony – Holy Trinity, op.168* (1990).
- Firca Gheorghe (1935): *Three preludes for organs* with quotes of the School from Putna (1987).
- Georgescu Remus (1932): *Symphony Requiem* – premiered in Timisoara 1973.
- Grigoriu Theodor (1926): *Byzantium after Byzantium – Concert* for Violin and Orchestra (1994), *Byzantium after Byzantium – Sonata* for Violin and Piano (1999).
- Maiorovici Harry (1918–2000): *The Flood* – stage music (1941), *King Solomon* stage music (1941).
- Mânzat Laura Ana (1969): *The First Stihira* – for Solo Piano (1994), *The Second Stihira* – for Clarinet, Violin And Piano (1996), *The Third Stihira* – for Two Violoncellos (1998).
- Nechifor Șerban (1954): *Epikaleitai* – Recitation and Chamber Orchestra, Text
- written by Saint Simenon New Theologian (1994), *Petra* – for Clarinet, Fagot, Guitar, Violin, Violoncello, Piano And Percussion (1989).
- Popovici Doru (1932): *Symphony* – based on Byzantine quotes (1954), *Byzantine Poem* based on topics from the 10th and 11th centuries (1967–68).
- Vieru Anatol (1926): *Psalm 1993* for Orchestra.

Conclusion

The creativity of Romanian composers of the 20th century inspired by the ecclesiastic repertoire represents a typical aspect of the *public confession* of the collective temptations, suffering and sins of the entire nation. The fate of this kind of creation has not been easy, at all. Often, the content of a piece had to be corrected or changed in order to pass the censorship and to be published or performed. Despite all of this, the last century brought many interesting pieces of a religious character to the Romanian music scene. Although, it was not long ago that a new century began, some works already show some features of exceptional musical value. The creators will certainly look for new and unexplored sources of inspiration and compose to worship the *Savior* of all people.