

NOI ISTORII ALE MUZICILOR ROMÂNEȘTI

2 VOLS:

I. DE LA VECHI MANUSCRISE LA PRIODA MODERNĂ A MUZICII ROMÂNEȘTI;

II. IDEOLOGI, INSTITUȚII ȘI DIRECȚII COMPOSITICE ÎN MUZICA
ROMÂNEASCĂ DIN SECOLELE XX–XXI.

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These are the first two volumes of three constituting a remarkable survey of the history of Romanian music. It is remarkable because of its historical breadth and because it brings together chapters by some of the finest Romanian musicologists working today. The third volume, still in production, will deal with the work of some sixty Romanian composers born after 1870 and up to 1970.

The first volume begins with a chapter by Costin Moisil, entitled “Instead of a history of early Romanian music”. It is, in effect, a history of musicology dedicated to that subject, but viewed through a wide-angle lens that takes in both the Romanian psaltic tradition and more Western genres, whether folk music or art music, with the aim (successfully achieved) of making the reader ponder and question what have been the dominant narratives in Romanian musicology until now. Nicolae Gheorghîță’s chapter deals with lay musical practices in the domestic courts of the lords and boyars of Wallachia and Moldova in the “Phanariot period” (1711–1821), tracing connections between Constantinople and Romania, and analysing music, texts and instruments within the rich context of the Ottoman world, a subject that the author has been working on in detail in a series of articles and books published during the course of the last decade or so.

A counterbalance to this, demonstrating further the remarkable extent of Romanian connections with both East and West, is provided by Vlad Văidean’s discussion of the pre-modern period in professional music making in Transylvania between the 16th and 18th centuries; the first phrase of his title, “Between cosmopolitanism and localism”, says it all. The fertile crosscurrents of Transylvanian, German, Hungarian and other cultures remind us that “global Europe” was a reality long before the 20th century. Costin Moisil returns with a survey of music in the Romanian Principalities during the long 18th century, discussing the influence of other European traditions within the Romanian educational context and the increasingly urgent question of what a national music might be, and covering all categories from folk and military bands to Orthodox church music. This theme is continued, in different ways, by Valentina Sandu-Dediu in her chapter on the beginnings of “Romanian composers, between nationalism and the obsession with synchronizing with the West”, a theme transversal to the Balkan countries but also reflected in the Mediterranean world,

where, for natural geographical reasons, the West was in fact the North. This tendency not only brings us to the ubiquitous figure of Liszt, but confronts us with the work of a concert composer such as Constantin Dimitrescu (1847–1928) and of a liturgical composer such as Gavriil Musicescu (1847–1903), two symbolic aspects, so to speak, of the cultural fascination exerted on Romania by various aspects of French, German and Slavic cultures and the importance of this in the complicated negotiations and struggles for a united Romania, entangled as they were with the events of the First World War.

The literary aspect of the background to this complex scenario is discussed by Haiganuş Preda-Schimek in her chapter on the absorption of other cultures in the Bucharest of the 19th century – she discusses the ethnic questions that form the background of this, and methodically examines domestic music-making, dances, theatre, cafés and more, as well as dealing with the role of the “elite” in the establishment of such tastes. Florinela Popa complements this with a discussion of nationalist propaganda in the Romanian musical press at the end of the 19th century, examining the dilemma of what “national characteristics” might actually be, and their manifestations and manipulations in folk, concert and church music. Nicolae Gheorghişă then discusses in some detail the importance of military music in Romania and Moldova and its complicated relationship with the socio-political climate of the period, and finally Vlad Văidean provides a fascinating and provocative reassessment of Enescu and his importance, both real and symbolic, in the context of Romanian musical history: “It is therefore obvious that Enescu could not conceive otherwise the fundamental joints of music except through the prism of the specific categories of the purest romantic idealism, which he lived with all sincerity, freeing them from any ostentation or morbidity, establishing through his music a reciprocity, incessant, seemingly implausible, between tumult and splendour, in fact between the affective mobile and the contemplative horizon” (p. 344).

Volume 2 covers a very wide range of material. Valentina Sandu-Dediu opens with a chapter discussing musical ideologies in 20th-century Romania, effectively picking up from the final chapter in the previous volume, and covering, for example, Bartók as an avatar of Romanian spirituality, the impact of socialism and the question of nationalism and the avant-garde. This is followed by an essential chapter covering the institutions created and involved in the construction of modern musical life, by Antígona Rădulescu and Alice Tacu, who discuss not only university education but concert organizations, associations, radio and festivals. Mihail Cosma then discusses the rich tradition of opera in Romania in the 20th century, including not only Bucharest but Cluj, Iaşi and Timişoara, and this is usefully complemented by Irina Boga’s discussion of operetta in Bucharest, certainly an area of research almost completely unknown outside Romania.

Fascinating indeed is the subsequent chapter by Speranţa Rădulescu on the trajectory of oral traditions in the long 20th century. While Bartók naturally appears in his role as an ethnomusicologist, what is truly remarkable here is the extent of the fieldwork and research that has been carried out by so many throughout this period. Her conclusion is simultaneously pessimistic and optimistic: “... the new urban mu-

sic remained alive, while that from the dawn of the twentieth century barely survive and this will find its meaning and fulfillment in the next century, the one in which we now live” (p. 216). Costin Moisil then discusses the construction of a national church music, moving from the period of Hieromonk Macarie and the romanianization of Greek-texted chant to the very visible presence of church music in Romania today.

Again, a repertoire certainly unfamiliar to most outside Romania is presented by Nicolae Gheorghitã in his chapter on 20th-century military music. It is full of detail and demonstrates the fundamental role this extensive body of music – and its performers – had in the affirmation of a Romanian national identity and the implementation of musical education. The following two chapters, by Alex Vasiliu and Andrei Tudor respectively, deal with Romanian jazz and light music, again, covering not only the composers and performers of these repertoires, but taking great care to place them in the context of institutions and musical promoters. The final, substantial chapter by Dan Dediu, deals with the huge range of techniques and aesthetics adopted by Romanian composers during the course of the 20th century, ending with a very useful summary in table form.

These two volumes provide, then, a hugely valuable and comprehensive overview of Romanian music, which will be usefully complemented with the publication of the third. An ideal future step would, of course, be an English translation of the text: Romanian music remains far too little-known outside the country’s borders, and the vast amount of information given here not only underlines its richness but, to this reader, suggests the potential of a much wider listenership and scholarly interest.

Ivan Moody