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## *Laudatio* for Professor Hermann Danuser

Festive Meeting of the National University of Music  
Senate. Bucharest, November 3rd, 2014

Like many of my colleagues (composers and musicologists, alike), I was permanently obsessed – before 1990 – with being in tune with Western trends. Foreign publications were hard to come by, as we did not enjoy the right to travel and freely converse with our Western peers. We were all the more obsessed with what was happening “beyond”, if we were interested in 20th century music. After 1990, the first major library I spent weeks in was that of the University of Vienna. My main reading – volume 7 of *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, from *Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft* (1984), which has become a classic of international musicology – afforded me the tools needed for my own research. The image I had formed of the author of the impressive volume, Hermann Danuser, quite obviously invested him with a mythical and venerable aura. That is why, when I personally met him in Berlin, in 1997, I was shocked by his youth and unconventional bearing.

That meeting in Berlin was decisive in two different ways. As it happened, I had chosen to pursue a research scholarship at Humboldt-Universität. My project at the time was on the topic of style and musical rhetoric, and Hermann Danuser was teaching a course on rhetoric in that semester. The ideas we discussed and the bibliography I assembled were a precious deposit, which I only later brought to light. Besides rhetoric and mannerism, we talked at length about Romanian music and my belief that at least part of it (what was composed after 1960) should not remain obscure to the rest of Europe. The curiosity and open attitude with which Hermann Danuser met my plea for modern Romanian composition encouraged me to start working on a book dedicated to it. As regards the book’s content and research methods, I

combined the Romanian musicological tradition and concepts from modern musicology, more precisely such categories as *the moderate modern* and *the radical modern*, the new modern and the postmodern, as defined by Hermann Danuser, in the wake of Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno. I will not discuss these notion in detail here – I have done so in other contexts – but I will end the personal part of the *laudatio* by mentioning another debt I owe to Hermann Danuser: his *Neue Musik im politischen Wandel* (1991b) and *Sowjetische Musik im Licht der Perestroika* (1990), which proved crucial to my understanding of the unmistakable significance of the importance of political attitudes for composing music in a totalitarian regime.



**Fig. 1.** Hermann Danuser at the ceremony of receiving the Doctor Honoris Causa degree.



**Fig. 2.** Hermann Danuser surrounded by Antigona Rădulescu, Dan Dediu, Smaranda Murgan, Valentina Sandu-Dediu and Dan Buciu.

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The Romanian public knows too little of the life and work of one of the most important contemporary musicologists: we cannot of course hope that musicology should match composition and performance in popularity, but we can at least wish that there were a few translations of Hermann Danuser into Romanian. We would more easily discover the questions raised by the work

of the Swiss-German musicologist, who was born in the canton of Thurgau on October 3rd, 1946. His biography, to start with, shows him receiving an auspicious double training, both as a practitioner and a theoretician: he studied at Zürich – at the Musikhochschule and the University – the piano, the oboe, musicology, philosophy and German studies. As such, it is little wonder that when attending Hermann Danuser's lectures or classes, you see before you not a musicologist in his ivory tower, but a musician, who sits at the piano and illustrates and analyses scores and explains the most sophisticated concepts through musical examples.

After being awarded a doctorate under the supervision of Kurt von Fischer, with a dissertation on musical prose, he studied musicology in Berlin with Carl Dahlhaus and piano with Gerhard Puchelt, and obtained his habilitation in 1982 with the extensive study I mentioned at the beginning, *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Between 1974 and 1982, he worked as a research assistant at a number of Berlin institutions, between 1982 and 1988 he was employed as a teacher at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover, between 1988 and 1993 he taught at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg am Breisgau, and since 1993 he has been teaching at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His position as a leading figure in the world of musicology has brought him other honours and opportunities: for many years now he has been coordinating research at the Paul Sacher Foundation, he is a member of the board of trustees of the Ernst von Siemens Foundation for Music, a member of the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW), he was awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by Royal Holloway, University of London in 2005, and he has been a corresponding member of the American Musicological Society since 2006.

Hermann Danuser's research has been focused on the history of 18th-20th century music, musical performance (1992), the recent history of musical theory and aesthetics, and on musical analysis. A few composers seem to comprise the author's personal canon: Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Hindemith. His methodology coherently incorporates analysis, aesthetics, biography, and the history of institutions and genres. His understanding of music in the context of culture and politics draws on related academic disciplines – such as the theory of literature or philosophy, for example – in a highly professional manner. Danuser was one of the first German-speaking musicologists receptive to American "New Musicology" in the 1980s, and began a critical dialogue with it. He is a man always in search of the new, and the four volumes of studies and articles, published in 2014, and comprising more than 2000 pages, offer a stunning overview of one of

the most important contemporary musicologists. His writing, well-versed in paradox and ambiguity, raises crucial questions for the theory of musical performance, the aesthetics of reception, the notion of music as text, and the relationship between elements intrinsic and extrinsic to aesthetics in musical works (2009).

These seem like complicated concerns, and they are. The standard of such musicological writing presupposes a certain intellectual breadth, forcing the reader to keep up with the latest trends in the humanities. I will stick to a single example, which might be of interest to my colleagues at the National University of Music Bucharest, both at the Faculty of Musical Performance and at the Faculty of Composition, Musicology, and Pedagogy. It concerns a concept that is crucial to us all, that of interpretation, in both senses of the word: theoretical-hermeneutic and practical-performative (see “Interpretation” in Danuser 2014, 1: 471-87). Hermann Danuser has written extensively on the meaning that a musician ascribes to the written score, whether in the process of formulating theoretical principles, or in the course of making performance choices. He defines with clarity – both stylistically and historically – the three modes of musical interpretation: historical performance practice (which combines interpretation with musicology); the glorification of the classical-romantic tradition and the fidelity to the masterwork (after 1900, a repertoire of masterworks was conceived, a kind of imaginary museum of musical culture, proposed by conductors such as Otto von Klemperer, Herbert von Karajan, or Bruno Walter); and finally, the process of bringing up to date, the ability to project upon the past an image of the present (still illustrative, from this perspective, is Anton Webern’s 1935 orchestration of the *Ricercar* by Bach). Danuser challenges us to reflect on the manner in which tradition and modernisation have forever been joined, on the sense of time in performance (an aesthetic act that is historically determined) and on the relationship between time and character, on analysing and comparing interpretations, on musical reception and criticism, on improvisation and subjectivity, and on the differences between a live performance and a studio production (the example of Sergiu Celibidache and Glenn Gould, respectively).

Any reader longs to find herself in that which she reads. After more than a quarter of a century in which I have relished to find topics of great interest to me in the writings of Hermann Danuser (new music, mannerism, rhetoric, or interpretation), I recently sifted through his articles to find the pages of *laudationes* which he wrote for others, as a source of inspiration for my own writing. I admit that I could not abstain from smiling: the speech he wrote for Reinhold Brinkmann (in honour of the German musicologist being named

Honorary Professor of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) was delivered on July 1st, 1996, the day my son, Eugen, was born. It is pointless to note that I couldn't have imagined, more than 18 years ago, that I would have the chance to present to our academic community a brief portrait of Hermann Danuser. It is a privilege to count him, from now on, among our honoured members.

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English version by Dragoş Manea

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