

# Musicology Today

Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest

Volume 7 Issue 3 (27) July-September 2016

**Title:** Troubled Times and Their Musics (1)

**Author:** Valentina Sandu-Dediu

**E-mail:** vdediu@nec.ro

**Source:** Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest / Volume 7 / Issue 3 (27) / July-September 2016, pp 155-157

**Link to this article:** [musicologytoday.ro/27/MT27editorialSanduDediu.pdf](http://musicologytoday.ro/27/MT27editorialSanduDediu.pdf)

**How to cite this article:** Valentina Sandu-Dediu, "Troubled Times and Their Musics (1)", *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 7/3 (27) (2016), 155-157.

**Published by:** Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică București

*Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest* is indexed by EBSCO, RILM, and ERIH PLUS

Valentina SANDU-DEDIU

## Troubled Times and Their Musics (1)

The last two issues of *Musicology Today* for 2016 are the result of discussions hosted by the New Europe College (Institute for Advanced Study, Bucharest) in 2014. The debates here included were triggered by a number of factors. Initially, with a number of colleagues (all of them researching aspects of twentieth-century Romanian music), I identified an area that seems to have deliberately been avoided by Romanian musicologists so far. The period in question is the 1938–1948 decade, when social and cultural changes occurred in quick succession. The tentative attempts of the musical modernism of the 1930s to reach out were brutally hindered in the 1940s. Whereas Romanian musical institutions (philharmonics, the national radio, the Society of Romanian Composers, conservatoires) had taken rapid steps toward modernisation and internationalisation in the 1930s, the situation was to change dramatically in the decade that followed, when Romania went through several totalitarian regimes: a royal dictatorship, a far-right regime, a military dictatorship, and finally communism.

Hence we all began to ask questions, broadening the period and above all the space covered by our research. We found it interesting to explore the similarities and differences between the music written under various dictatorships in different regions of Europe. There are still questions to raise about the period roughly between 1930 and 1950, such as for example its unfortunate positioning between the High Modernism of the first three decades of the twentieth century and the emergence of the new musical avant-gardes after 1950. Does this period, marked by increasing nationalism, fascist and communist dictatorships, racism and war, have an identifiable musical outline? Or can we only speak of an involution after the innovations of the 1920s, with music becoming subservient to political and propagandistic ends, and of the withdrawal of prominent composers into isolated niches?

I formulated such questions with the help of my colleagues, Katharina Biegger and Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus from Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin,

who saw in our intuition the potential for a well-structured research project that would focus energies from western and eastern Europe in the field of musicology, as well as other disciplines (history, art history, literature, sociology and political science). The first definite step was taken thanks to support from the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, which awarded the New Europe College a research grant aiming to support the start of a wider project. As a result we were able to hold a two-day meeting in Bucharest (*Music in Dark Times: Europe East and West, 1930–1950/Musik in finsternen Zeiten. Europa, Ost und West, 1930–1950*, 31 October–1 November 2014) with colleagues interested in the subject. We had intense changes of ideas and thoughts in English and German for hours, which alternated with lectures, debates, and a search for practical solutions as to how to structure and continue the project. I am deeply grateful to those colleagues who are not on the Contents page of these two issues of *Musicology Today*, who, rather than writing papers themselves, helped the rest of us with their enthusiasm, ideas, suggestions, and comments (which have certainly become part of the final versions of the studies published here). I warmly thank them for the astuteness, openness and generosity they brought to our discussions together: Katharina Biegger (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin), Jeanice Brooks (University of Southampton), Reinhart Meyes-Kalkus (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) and Dörte Schmidt (Universität der Künste, Berlin).

\*

The five papers which you can read in this issue do propose an imaginary journey through music histories “in dark times” in the United States, Romania, Germany, Serbia, and Ukraine. Even though apparently far from the Europe-oriented topic of our conference, Annegret Fauser actually added to it through an analysis of the way in which Eastern European music has been a fertile ground for Americans. The author explores imaginary geographies of Eastern European folk song, mostly Polish, Czech and Russian musical images in American concert halls, with George Enescu also being mentioned. She also discusses the construction of a national identity in the case of a few American musicians whose families originated from Eastern Europe, such as Aaron Copland.

In the symposium at the NEC, in 2014, four Romanian authors tried to assemble complementary segments to provide a picture that still leaves room for further additions. In my own study, for example, I chose to present some information from the history of the Society of Romanian Composers, taken from the press of the time (1939–1941), focusing on the anti-Semitic diatribes of various journalists and on the propagandist songs of the far right.

Of Helmut Loos's criticism of representations of music as a progressive force, marked by Darwin's evolutionism in traditional German musicology, I will select, for the sake of our topic here, Adorno's ideas. It is worth remembering that, for Adorno, evolutionary theories in biology play no part whatsoever, yet his thinking is dialectically oriented towards progress. *The Philosophy of New Music*, published in 1947 and consisting of two different essays—"Schoenberg and Progress" and "Stravinsky and Reaction"—triggered enormous debate and marked not only musicology, but also German avant-garde music for a long time

Some examples from the music of former Yugoslavia, Romania, and the Ukraine in the 1930s–1950s reveal, as expected, a number of similarities. Melita Milin draws interesting conclusions about stylistic discontinuities and transformations in Serbian composition: although socialist realism served as a bridge between pre- and post-war music, it also proved to be a serious cause of discontinuity in the development of national music, whose effects took more than two decades to overcome. Only after 1960 did composers in the region (including Romanian ones) feel ready to join the wider circle of European avant-gardes. In the Ukraine, the Stalinist regime acted harshly both before and after the Second World War, as we discover from Luba Kyyanovska's account of the repression against Ukrainian intellectuals after 1933, and in particular the tragic fates that befell musicians and composers.

Generally, musicologists educated under communism used to never combine musical analysis with its contextual positioning. While Romanian historiography, including the history of music, was profoundly perverted by communism and nationalist ideology, it was still possible to find (illusory) refuge in structuralist analysis, in dissecting the mechanisms of contemporary Romanian scores. Even there, though, one is prone to discover deeply rooted clichés, such as “the tension between the national and the universal,” the “transfiguration” of folk sources in avant-garde compositions, and so on. Only as late as the 1990s, with the opening of borders to the rest of the world, was it possible to reflect on the need to rediscover and reformulate histories of Romanian music. Even now, in 2016, research in the field is just taking its first steps.