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Murky Times and Ideologised Music in the Romania of 1938–1944

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An abundance of books and studies have been written about twentieth-century Romanian music, focusing on aspects of style, aesthetics and analytics, and on the histories of concert, operatic and educational institutions. The so volatile connexion between ideology and music has hitherto been dealt with only fleetingly, however. More often than not it has been deliberately avoided. In the period when music criticism and musicology had to find ways of getting past the censorship of one or another totalitarian regime (throughout the second half of the last century), those who wrote about music were wont to seek euphemisms and to avoid danger. In any event, the transition period between inter-war modernity and post-war socialist realism, the years leading up to the Second World War have been little researched. We know what major musical works appeared in this period,¹ but researchers have yet to turn the spotlight on the context in which these works were composed, on the political passions and opportunism reflected in musical scores placed in the service of totalitarian regimes that were very different and sometimes very similar: the regimes of King Carol II, the Iron Guard, Marshal Antonescu, and finally the communists. I therefore here propose brief overview that will serve

¹ The following are examples from a quantitatively rather limited body of compositions: George Enescu: Third Orchestral Suite, *Săteasca* [Rural] (1939), *Impresii din copilărie* [Impressions of Childhood] for violin and piano (1940), Piano Quintet (1940); Paul Constantinescu: *Nunta în Carpați* [Wedding in the Carpathians], choreographic poem (1938), *Patimile și Învierea Domnului* [The Passion and Resurrection of the Lord], Byzantine Easter oratorio (1943); Mihail Jora: *Demoiselle Măriuța*, ballet (1940), Piano Sonata, op. 21, Variations on a Theme by Schumann (1942–1943), Melodies to verses by Al. O. Teodoreanu and Ion Pillar (1938–1941).

as an invitation for more detailed research: a selection of information from the history of the Society of Romanian Composers, the press of the times (*Universul literar* and *Cuvântul*), and the works of Nello Manzatti (Ion Mânzatu).

THE END OF THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

The ferment of intellectual debate in inter-war Romania is well known: synchronisation with the West versus preservation of agrarian and Orthodox traditions, the so-called “national specificity.” There were, of course, some who proposed a third path, “which would provide Romanians with the opportunity to preserve all that was good in their traditional way of life, while giving them in addition the opportunity to take part in Europe’s general social and economic progress.”² Nor were Romanian composers immune to such soul-searching, seeking solutions that would assimilate European modernism, but which would also define a distinct, native voice. The questionnaire published by *Muzica* magazine in 1920–1921 aimed at canvassing composers’ opinions and at finding solutions (whether sceptical or idealist or realist and practical) for “treating” folk themes in symphonic contexts, brought the two predictable attitudes face to face. Supported mainly by ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu, the idea of traditional oral music as a means of regenerating classical music took shape. On the other hand, some voices claimed that folk music was predestined to the rhapsodic, miniature genre and that folk motifs were incapable of producing broad symphonic surfaces. In any event, the modern concept of the “national school” increasingly took shape in the 1920s and 30s, thanks to exploration of the morphological components of oral music (deduced from collections of folk music, whose champions were Belá Bartók and Constantin Brăiloiu) in traditional genres and forms (sonatas, symphonies, suites, instrumental miniatures, vocal-instrumental music, orchestral works). In the inter-war period, the national style led to a clash between structural data drawn from the peasant and urban folk tradition and from the monodic strain of Byzantine music, on the one hand, and the data of European styles (neo-classicism, impressionism, and, to a lesser extent, expressionism), on the other.³

The venue for musical meetings, dialogues, conflicts and pacts was the newly established (in 1920) Society of Romanian Composers (SRC),

² Keith Hitchins, “Desăvârșirea națiunii române” [Accomplishment of the Romanian Nation] in Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României* [History of Romania] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1999), 423.

³ See Clemansa Liliana Firca, *Modernitate și avangardă: Muzica ante- și interbelică a secolului XX (1900–1940)* [Modernity and Avant-garde in the Pre- and Interwar Music of the 20th Century: 1900–1940] (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2002).

headed until 1945 by George Enescu (president) and Constantin Brăiloiu (secretary). One unavoidable problem and source of discontent was the way in which the Society levied and distributed copyright fees. It is no wonder that the composers of entertainment music in particular were unhappy with the redistribution of copyright fees, as their works were performed more often and were more popular than those of their “classical” counterparts. The following is an example: the signatories of a protest published in *Curentul* newspaper on 15 June 1939⁴ included Nello Manzatti, a member of the Society since 1929, and a member of its audit commission between 1933 and 1940. A cross section⁵ of the fees received by composers reveals that in one quarter of 1936 only Elly Roman received more than Manzatti, but overall the sums were indeed insignificant. The 1939 episode seems not to have had any direct impact on the increasingly murky political context of Romanian society, but I cite it because shortly thereafter Nello Manzatti was to become a prominent figure, the ideologist-composer of the Iron Guard.

Musicologist Octavian Lazăr Cosma, who has examined the SRC archives, has found that in the late 1930s there were a number of problems with the tax authorities, copyright issues, and internal disputes between composers, but otherwise the institution was not caught up in any political declarations or activities. But the National Renaissance Front founded by King Carol II needed intellectuals and artists and so the SRC joined the political movement of the one-party totalitarian state in December 1938. In 1939, for propaganda purposes, representative composers were allocated counties, cities and regions, what O. L. Cosma calls the civic and honorary rather than political involvement of the Society.⁶ It should be noted, however, that the periods when nationalist ideas triumphed were from a certain point of view propitious to Romanian composers. On no few occasions the SRC came into conflict with performers and concert halls, one of the reasons undoubtedly being the fact that conservative Romanian audiences were quite content to do without the “new” music (from Debussy onward). The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, on the other hand, regardless of their political

⁴ See Octavian Lazăr Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești: Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor din România, 1920–1995* [The Universe of Romanian Music: The Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists, 1920–1995] (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1995), 104–106.

⁵ Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 89–90, puts forward a number of random examples, such as the second quarter of 1929, the first quarter of 1933 and the first quarter of 1936, to show how sums were allocated to composers. In the last case, of the other composers, only Tiberiu Brediceanu, one of the “classics,” received more than 1,000 lei, while Manzatti and Roman received 4,000 and 5,000 lei respectively.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

stripe, supported national music, whether it was ideologically subservient or whether it was independent.⁷ But before we move on to the colours taken by the nationalism of that period, as reflected in the musical press of the time, a number of historical explanations are necessary.

THE DICTATORSHIPS OF 1938–1944

In the 1930s, Romanian democracy was thrown into crisis by the Great Depression. In 1927, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu created the extreme nationalist Legion of the Archangel Michael, and three years later he founded its military wing, the Iron Guard, which was inspired by German and Italian fascism. Anti-Semitism became the ideological core of the new Romania,⁸ along with an emphasis on Orthodox Christianity and the cult of the peasant, and hostility towards cosmopolitanism, rationalism and industrialisation. The Iron Guard reached the peak of its popularity in the mid-1930s, becoming a mass movement, which led King Carol II to establish a royal dictatorship in 1938 and to take drastic measures against the Iron Guard, which he regarded as his archenemy and an agent of Nazi Germany. This marked the end of Romania's democratic experiment,⁹ which was not to be resumed until after 1990. But the dramatic international events of 1939–1940 caught King Carol II off guard:

The non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939 between Germany and the Soviet Union came as a shock to Romania's leaders, because they had based their foreign policy on the assumption that there was a deep hostility between Nazism and Communism. Now they felt more lacking in certainty than ever, and although they did not know the details of the secret protocol, whereby Germany recognised the Soviet Union's special interest in Bessarabia, the very existence of the treaty abolished the strategy of balance between the two powers. Carol and his ministers accepted the obvious: the foreign policy of the 1920s and 40s, which had been based on a system of interconnected alliances supported by France, and on subscription to international accords to promote international security, could no longer defend Romania's borders.¹⁰

⁷ In the communist period, all the country's concert halls were required to perform Romanian music in a significant quantity. For this reason, in 1991 there was a violent backlash, and everybody, from managers to performers, refused—for a time—to include Romanian works in their programmes.

⁸ Hitchins, "Desăvârșirea națiunii române," 429.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 438.

The King and Romania's politicians gradually gave up hope of any help from France and Great Britain, and on 29 May 1940 they decided that the only choice was to rely on Germany to protect the country's territorial integrity (the borders established by the Versailles Treaty). As a result of territories ceded to the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria, the Greater Romania established at the end of the First World War lost more than a third of its surface area and population, and therefore "Carol's reign could not survive the national catastrophe."¹¹

As a result, a new dictatorship was established between 1940 and 1944, the military regime of Ion Antonescu, the nationalist general who allied himself with Germany, convinced that it was for the good of the country and would restore its lost territories. He forced Carol II to abdicate and on the throne he placed King Michael, then aged nineteen. Forming a coalition government with the Iron Guard, he created a "national totalitarian state."¹² But conflicts with Horia Sima, who succeeded Zelea-Codreanu (murdered in prison at the King's orders in 1938), and the excesses of the Legionaries led to the deposition of the movement in 1941. According to the opinion of leading historians (on whose work I have based this summary of the Romanian context on the eve of the Second World War), the Antonescu regime cannot be described as fascist, but rather it was a non-ideological military dictatorship that was not backed by any political party.¹³

MUSIC REVIEWS IN THE IRON GUARD SPIRIT: 1940

The musical articles from a number of publications based in Bucharest provide quite a suggestive picture of the direction of Romanian society in the period. Music critic and composer Romeo Alexandrescu, who studied in Bucharest (under Muza Ghermani-Ciomac and Mihail Jora) and at the École Normale in Paris (under Nadia Boulanger and Paul Dukas), wrote a regular column for *Universul literar*. Besides reviews of various concerts held in Bucharest (some of which he reviewed from a biased position given that he was an adviser to the Philharmonic from 1939 to 1945 and a member of the committee of the Romanian Opera from 1936 to 1939), Alexandrescu also wrote essays on various topics, particularly during the holidays between concert seasons. Between August and December 1940,¹⁴ he criticised the

¹¹ Ibid., 451.

¹² Ibid., 455.

¹³ Ibid., 458.

¹⁴ On 14 September 1940, Ion Antonescu proclaimed the National Legionary State, of which he was the head, while Horia Sima, the leader of the Iron Guard, became vice-president of

country's musical institutions one by one, putting forward solutions for their "Romanianisation": "Supervision, co-ordination, systematisation have to weed out everything that has overrun Romanian musical life up to now." To this end, the Ministry of Arts would have to take on an active rôle, "to sift the chaff from our art, purging a medium hitherto confused and amorphous." Impresario work would be regulated and Romanianised; foreign musicians would be allowed only in limited numbers, only if they were Christian, and only after prior checks. Concert programmes would be vetted, and concert permits would be issued on a stringent basis: "Let it no longer be possible for us to hear hideous drivel and insolent jazz cacophony . . . in the auditorium of the Romanian Athenaeum under the great fresco of the nation's history."¹⁵

The communist censors would employ strikingly similar texts after 1944, despite their ideological differences with the militants of the Iron Guard and Antonescu regimes, just as Iron Guard and Communist anthems differed only in their lyrics, but not their musical characteristics. Let us look at some other texts on what music in nationalist Romania was supposed to sound like, music that would embody "the rights of Romanian spirituality": the major problem of arts propaganda was to be solved by means of special envoys to embassies and legations; arts propaganda over the radio was unsatisfactory, since "under names invented ad hoc, various Jews take to the microphone 'disguised' as Romanians, making a so-called music that is no more genuine than it is Romanian."¹⁶

In the spirit of the times, the anti-Semitic fury of the author of the articles in *Universul literar* sets out from a number of examples from the universal history of music and then focuses on the cases of Romanian concert and opera institutions. Knowledgeable in French culture, Romeo Alexandrescu draws on Vincent d'Indy, who in his composition course criticised the lack of inventiveness in the work of Felix Mendelssohn—an eclectic composer and imitator of Beethoven—and regarded Anton Rubinstein as an assimilative performer of genius, but unable to create original works.¹⁷ The quotations from d'Indy continue:

the Council of Ministers. In January 1941, the Legionary State was abolished and Marshal Antonescu established a military dictatorship.

¹⁵ Romeo Alexandrescu, "Reorganizarea vieții musicale românești" [Reorganizing Romanian Musical Life], *Universul literar*, 3 August 1940, 5.

¹⁶ Romeo Alexandrescu, "Alte desiderate ale muzicii în România naționalistă" [Other Desiderata of Music in Nationalist Romania], *Universul literar*, 17 August 1940, 5.

¹⁷ Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, Deuxième Livre, Première Partie (Paris: Durand, 1909), 415.

Although lacking in genuine originality and almost always mediocre in their talent for music, the Jews, through a crafty inflation of their limited artistic resources, systematically and tacitly supporting each other and seeking to obtain, the same as everywhere else, the maximum profit for the minimum investment, have been able to create for themselves a highly undeserved fame in the art of music.¹⁸

Making use of the anti-Semitism of the director of the Schola Cantorum (between 1900 and 1931), an institution attended by numerous Romanians studying in Paris, Romeo Alexandrescu deliberately picks quotations from d'Indy that will substantiate his own articles. Whereas nobody today denies the merits of d'Indy as a composer, nor can anybody overlook his political position in a France riven by the Dreyfus affair. For example, d'Indy subtitled his *La légende de Saint-Christophe* (1908–1915) “an anti-Dreyfusard opera.” In its style and symbolism, the work is a continuation of the ideas of Richard Wagner and it declares political opinions that he made no pains to hide in the aforementioned composition course.¹⁹

But the references to d'Indy are merely the prelude to Romeo Alexandrescu's development of the theme of “the Jews in music”: in his opinion, the Jews pursue short-term success, using noisy effects, but are devoid of spirit or sensibility. Ernest Bloch is “the only Jewish composer who might be reckoned to have written what might pass for music . . . authentically Hebrew music,” and among performers the major figures are in any case Christians (Alfred Cortot, Walter Gieseking, George Enescu, Pablo Casals).²⁰

Jewish sterility in music cannot escape any objective observer. . . . Can it be merely a consequence of racial exhaustion, of degeneracy, of particular inaptitude? . . . The Jews, although unassimilable, have endeavoured with ridiculous efforts to achieve a degree of aesthetic mimicry . . . They have striven in vain to make French music

¹⁸ D'Indy, quoted by Romeo Alexandrescu in “Vincent d'Indy despre evrei” [Vincent d'Indy About Jews], in *Universul literar*, 24 August 1940, 5.

¹⁹ See Jane Fulcher, “Style musical et symbolisme politique en France. L'impact de l'affaire Dreyfus,” *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* [online], 1|1988, uploaded 13 April 2009, accessed 27 December 2014. URL: <http://ccrh.revues.org/2971>; DOI:10.4000/ccrh.2971.

²⁰ Romeo Alexandrescu, “Iudeii în muzică” [Jews in Music], *Universul literar*, 21 September 1940, 5.

in France, German music in Germany, and, woe to us, Romanian music in Romania . . . without achieving anything except inert counterfeits, pitiful parody, body without soul.²¹

Having traced main features of a musical ideology of this type, Romeo Alexandrescu goes on to deal with the Royal Academy of Music, the Philharmonic, and the Romanian Opera. For example, the columnist proposes that the Royal Academy of Music should revert to the title of Conservatory, given that many of the teachers do not even have a full secondary education and the institution is in effect a “technical” school, without any advanced, doctoral expertise. He announces other necessary changes, for example modernisation of the syllabus, which has “remained stuck in the last century,” and the establishment of new departments (organ, harmonic analysis, musical forms, score reading, history of music, choreography) and performance classes, the identification of an appropriate site for the institution, the founding of a library of musical publications, and so on. But racist fanaticism is not long in rearing its head, linked with the “new surge of Romanianism”:

Jewish students must be removed completely. In the first place because they have no business at the founts of artistic initiation intended for Romanians, in a school that must become a sanctuary for the Romanian soul and musical traditions. Secondly because they will in effect no longer play any part in the Romanian musical movement, in which hitherto they have sought to stifle the national element, poisoning the pure atmosphere of Romanian tradition . . .²²

Where in previous articles Alexandrescu had pointed out the errors of the management of the Bucharest Philharmonic, in this series of texts from autumn 1940 he put forward a type of managerial strategy (he was soon to become the institution’s artistic adviser), tackling the weakness of the programmes and the lack of a permanent chamber orchestra, but also combating the import of representatives of “the foreign Jewish dross” and scheduling “Romanians” of the calibre of Miss Clara Haskil, Miletineanu” over Romanian soloists unable to get ahead in their own country. The Philharmonic “of today” no longer tolerated disorder and indiscipline or the “orchestra of

²¹ Ibid.

²² Romeo Alexandrescu, “Academia Regală de Muzică trebuie reorganizată” [The Royal Academy of Music Must Be Reorganized], *Universul literar*, 28 September 1940, 5.

the race reeking of the ghetto,” since “the vigorous and passionate rebirth of today’s Romanianism . . . has uprooted the poisonous weeds from the fields of Romanian art.”²³

In another article, published in the newspaper a week later (alongside an interview with the general director of theatres and operas, Iron Guard poet Radu Gyr), the plea for national casts maintains the same tone: “we will no longer see our country’s opera singers expropriated from their rights by all kinds of Jewish intruders.” To this end, the “antiseptic” measures would range from putting a stop to intrigues to putting all the institution’s performers to the test, until the “Romanian ideal of performance” be found.²⁴ In his articles published in 1941, particularly given that the building had been damaged in the great earthquake of November 1940,²⁵ the columnist continued to deplore the state of the Romanian Opera:

We have been pained to witness crises of direction, crises of funding . . . the Jewish weed overrunning the Romanian element . . . For the first time since its foundation, as soon as the Romanian Opera, under the beneficent action of the National Legionary State, implemented its great desideratum of “total purification,” elevating itself by merit to the emblematic status of “Romanian” opera . . . there had to come another trial [i.e. the earthquake—*my note*].²⁶

His final article of the year 1940 is about a concert held at the Athenaeum in memory of Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu (“The Captain”), with works by Dimitrie Cuclin, Alexandru Zirra, Nicolae Brânzeu, Nicolae Agârbiceanu and Paul Jelescu. Romeo Alexandrescu heaps superlative praise on composer and conductor Brânzeu, a “great talent” unjustly ignored by the Philharmonic, the same as Agârbiceanu.²⁷ In another publication, *Cuvântul* [The Word], music reviewer Al. Cosmovici writes about the concert of 6 December 1940 at greater length and in greater detail, following a series of solemn announcements

²³ Romeo Alexandrescu, “Îndatoririle Filarmonice” [The Duties of the Philharmony], in *Universul literar*, 5 October 1940, 5.

²⁴ Romeo Alexandrescu, “Ce trebuie să așteptăm de la Opera Română” [What is Expected from the Romanian Opera], *Universul literar*, 12 October 1940, 5.

²⁵ The first major earthquake in modern Romania occurred on 10 November 1940, with a magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale, lasting 45 seconds. The effects were devastating, but the exact number of victims is unknown due to wartime censorship.

²⁶ Romeo Alexandrescu, “Vitrega ursită a Operei Române” [The Pitiful Fate of the Romanian Opera], *Universul literar*, 11 January 1941, 6.

²⁷ Romeo Alexandrescu [no title], *Universul literar*, 14 December 1940, 6.

published on 4, 5 and 6 December (“Evening dress obligatory. For Legionaries: green shirts”). The only hint of criticism is for Brânzeu’s lack of experience as a conductor, too young to cope with such an extensive programme (six works, two by the conductor, glorifying the Captain: *The Song of the Fir Tree* and *Cantata*, then *Processional* by Paul Jelescu, *Solemn Overture* by Agârbiceanu, *Legendary Lands* by Zirra, and *First Symphony* by Cuclin): “Authors who would have had to wait two, even three decades to make their works finally heard in public perhaps had the right to enjoy on this first hearing a better and more just performance and execution.”²⁸ Apart from the fact that it is difficult to understand the subtle distinction between “performance” and “execution,” it is obvious that Al. Cosmovici would have preferred it if Antonin Ciolan had been conducting, as he goes on to declare. In any event, the second part of his article is dedicated to the concert that Ciolan conducted on 8 December,

appearing at the head of our Philharmonic for the first time. The concert was a true revelation! Who, apart from folk from Jassy, previously knew Mr A. Ciolan as an orchestra conductor? It required the Legionary movement to do unbiased justice to all our artists, in the light of day, according to their abilities, merits and labour, some of whom were better known abroad than here in our own country!²⁹

If we were to weigh up the opinions of the two reviewers strictly in terms of performance, then Al. Cosmovici was probably right. The decades to come were to demonstrate Nicolae Brânzeu’s mediocrity as a composer and conductor, on the one hand, and Antonin Ciolan’s respectable conducting career, on the other.

THE CHANGE IN DICTATORSHIP AS REFLECTED IN PHILO-GERMAN MUSIC REVIEWS (1941–1943)

In December 1940, the violent ideological eruption of the Iron Guard dictatorship was reflected in the proclamation of censorship, laid out in an article entitled “Every Literary, Artistic, and Academic Work shall be presented to the General Secretariat of the Legionary Movement”:

²⁸ Al. Cosmovici, “Filarmonica: două concerte simfonice” [The Philharmony: Two Symphonic Concerts], in *Cuvântul*, 11 December 1940, 8.

²⁹ Ibid. At the concert Ciolan conducted Wagner’s *Eine Faust-Ouverture*, Zirra’s symphonic triptych *The Gypsies*, and Beethoven’s *Eroica*.

Around every great spiritual renewal in history, the human spirit has surged up from its very depths and as if at a signal has begun to labour, to sing and to pray.

Thus, around the phenomenon of the Legionary Movement, all the Romanian spirit has erupted in a true torrent of spiritual manifestations.

But in order not to lose anything, not one flower from all these Legionary manifestations, be it because of a lack of connexion to the central driving idea of Legionary movement Command, be it because of a lack of unity and uniformity in presenting them to the public, be it for any other reason, and at the same time, in order that erroneous forms of Legionary manifestation will not slip in under the shelter of the sign of the Legionary movement, Legionary movement Command has decided that every literary, artistic, historical, academic etc. work be first presented to the propaganda office at the Secretariat of the Legionary movement. Here, every work will be subject to examination from the viewpoint of the Legionary idea and will be placed within a particular series according to the subject it deals with, and its method of presentation, i.e. the academic apparatus and technical form, will be established. This only for Legionary works or those that wish to be integrated into the spirit of the Legionary movement.

In a few days we shall make public the plan for separating every work by category and also the method for academic presentation of works.³⁰

Fortunately, the final promise was never fulfilled, as political events came to a head in January 1941, when Marshal Antonescu deposed the Legionaries and established a military dictatorship. What was happening at the Society of Romanian Composers in the meantime? The pressures of the Legionary State had been making themselves felt since the autumn of 1940 in the directives of the Ministry of Religions and Arts, which demanded the removal of Jews from the theatres and the ranks of the SRC, which secretary Constantin Brăiloiu tried to delay for as long as possible. The state created the “Legionary Council for Music.” There were changes to the Managing Board of the SRC, which now included Radu Gyr, Nelu Manzatti, Paul Constantinescu, Romeo

³⁰ [No author], *Cuvântul*, 18 December 1940, 3.

Alexandrescu and Nicolae Brânzeu.³¹ The five left the board in January, but not before organising the two politicised concerts by the Philharmonic on 5 and 8 December 1940, which, as we have seen, were reviewed by Al. Cosmovici and Romeo Alexandrescu.

After the change of regime, things calmed down within the SRC, which resumed its usual activities, celebrating the twentieth anniversary of its foundation and then the sixtieth birthday of its president, George Enescu, who was admired by colleagues, the public and Marshal Antonescu alike.³² The war years were difficult for the institution, but for the time being there were no further political pressures, not until the end of 1944, when yet another dictatorship made itself felt, via the communist “purification commissions.” Up until then, Romania’s position as an ally of Germany and Italy had been reflected in the music press. From 1941, Romeo Alexandrescu turned his attention to the two “exceptional” examples of Germany and Italy, which could guide Romanian music on its path, even when they were “triumphantly waging the greatest war that mankind has known,” because “they contribute in all the splendour of their means, and with ever-augmented thrust, to the betterment of mankind’s cultural heritage.”³³ At the opposite pole, French art is corrupt, “led by sterile minds into the artistic creation of the Jews,” and therefore displays “a dreadful decline in moral powers, vitality, national pride. The inept mumblings of the likes of Wiener, Ferrond and other poisoners of French taste have been welcomed with admiration, instead of producing disgust and scorn, they have found a destructive echo in young artists.” Fortunately, “Paul Constantinescu, Silivestri [*sic*], Lipatti, Brânzeu, the Dumitrescu brothers, all our young composers have remained immune to every attempt to infiltrate the disorienting vagueness and barren content of musical Jewry,” and also to “the bacilli of internationalism that destroys the national soul in art.”³⁴

Leafing through the pages of *Universul literar*, we notice how the music reviewer gradually tones down his anti-Semitism; although it does not completely vanish, it is no longer a priority. On the other hand, we find frequent references to “the great and advanced German people,” which

³¹ Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 111–14.

³² See Ion Antonescu’s letter to the vice-president of the RSC, Mihail Jora, quoted by O. L. Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 119.

³³ Romeo Alexandrescu, “Muzica și artiștii noștri așteaptă o soartă mai bună” [Our Music and Artists Wait for a Better Fate], *Universul literar*, 8 March 1941, 2.

³⁴ Romeo Alexandrescu, “Calea muzicii românești” [The Path of Romanian Music], *Universul literar*, 19 July 1941, 2.

has made possible the existence of 175 symphony orchestras in Germany and ought to guide the reform of Romanian musical life.³⁵ For example, it is necessary that the Ministry of Propaganda impose organisation of the country's musical life, as its counterparts do in Germany and Italy, in order to alter the musical mentality of the provinces, presently defined by "restaurant, soirée, ball."³⁶ Up until 1943, Romeo Alexandrescu continued to promote the need to develop a specialist music library and museum, to discuss the problems of musical institutions (the lack of a chamber orchestra or permanent string quartet or concerts to promote new Romanian compositions, musical life in the provinces),³⁷ and to advocate contemporary Romanian music, the SRC, Enescu, Brăiloiu and Paul Constantinescu.³⁸ There are also frequent reviews of concerts by German and Italian musicians in Bucharest, as well as articles encouraging Romanian–Bulgarian friendship . . .

But all this comes to an abrupt halt in 1944, when Romania joins the Allied side, and a new dictatorship, communism, can be glimpsed on the horizon. The first sign of this new dictatorship is the "purification commissions," set up by law on 24 November 1944, which assiduously remove from Romanian institutions former Legionaries, representatives of the Antonescu regime, and "collaborators" with the Nazi armies. Soon, the repression was to extend to any "enemy of the working class," real or imagined, but that is a different story. For the time being, Manzatti resigns from the SRC, and Romeo Alexandrescu is suspended from his position at the Philharmonic by a Ministry of Arts commission made up of Matei Socor, Mircea Bîrsan and Romulus Vrăbiescu.³⁹ In the next chapter in the history of Romanian musicians different names

³⁵ Romeo Alexandrescu, [no title], *Universul literar*, 2 August 1941, 2. Such examples were in keeping with the publication's ideological line. For example, we might cite Ovidiu Papadima's article (16 May 1942, pp. 1–2) about how deeply and completely German National Socialism was and about what a great genius Hitler was "many Romanians even today ought to go to National-Socialist Germany—leaving behind them their baggage of preconceptions . . . they should live there for a few years without any other ambition than to know and understand, in order to be able to comprehend the Hitlerist phenomenon in all its plenitude."

³⁶ Romeo Alexandrescu, "Organizarea muzicală a României, o necesitate națională" [The Musical Structure of Romania, a National Necessity], *Universul literar*, 9 August 1941, 2.

³⁷ Romeo Alexandrescu, "Lipsuri în organizarea muzicii" [Deficiencies in Organizing Musical Life], *Universul literar*, 20 August 1943, 2.

³⁸ Paul Constantinescu's position in this political context requires a separate study: he was suspected of being a Jew by some, accused of being a Legionary by others, given that he orchestrated Manzatti's anthems. See: Ioana Raluca Voicu-Arnăuțoiu, "Paul Constantinescu: Parallel Biographies," *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 1 (2010), www.musicologytoday.ro

³⁹ See Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 129.

were to come to the fore, those who subscribed to the new ideology. What was to come was in fact the most dramatic period in the existence of the SRC, renamed the Union of Composers from the Romanian People's Republic in 1949, when purges, arrests, denunciations, censorship and opportunism reached unprecedented levels.⁴⁰

THE MANIPULATIVE EFFECT OF THE LEGIONARY CHOIRS

But let us go back to the murky years prior to those events: before resuming his regular music reviews when the season recommenced, Romeo Alexandrescu concluded his series of themed articles published in the summer and autumn of 1940 with remarks on "The Musical Education of the Romanian Provinces." In every region of the country, choral associations had to be created, with a view to educating by means of Legionary songs and anthems, "an occasion for elevation of the national feeling." Travelling teams of performers and lecturers would travel the length and breadth of the country, disseminating religious, folk and classical choral music.⁴¹ It was neither the first nor the last time that the choir would be the preferred instrument of ideological propaganda. A century previously, professional choirs began to take off in Romania, and by the end of the nineteenth century they were supreme in the musical life of the Principalities and Transylvania. The spirit of nationalist romanticism had reached Eastern Europe, inspiring the construction of a national musical canon. Composers were able to adapt folk and Byzantine melodies to simple compositions for choirs, a far easier task than writing sophisticated, abstract instrumental or symphonic discourses. And during the totalitarian regimes leading up to and during the Second World War, the choir returned to the fore, and certain composers were willing to write to political order.

Romanian musicological literature contains very few references to the politically engaged music of the Legionary dictatorship. True, the subject has always sensitive and complicated, both during communist times, when the accusation of "Legionary sympathies" could lead to a prison sentence, and since 1990, when the objective tone of the researcher may in any case be misinterpreted. Some say you have no right to judge a period and a movement of which you have no experience, you cannot understand how national(ist) ideals inspired the inter-war generation. Others say that if you deal with such a subject, the reason behind it must be some secret and reprobate affinity with

⁴⁰ See Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *Rumänische Musik nach 1944* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2006).

⁴¹ Romeo Alexandrescu, "Educarea muzicală a provinciei românești" [The Musical Training of the Romanian Province], *Universul literar*, 7 December 1940, 6.

the Legionary ideology. Whatever the case, the years I describe in this article have been treated with deliberate superficiality in histories of Romanian music.

There exists only succinct information about composer of “light” music Ion Mănzatu (1905–1986), who Italianised his name to Nello Manzatti after studying public relations in Parma, but reverted to his original Romanian name when he became a Legionary.⁴² The Library of the Romanian Academy holds a book, rather a strange one to contemporary minds, published in Romanian in Munich in 1996, in a print run of one thousand copies: *Cum am compus cântecele legionare* [How I Composed the Legionary Anthems] by Ion Mănzatu.⁴³ Mănzatu’s confession is brief (around twenty pages), and for obviously propagandistic purposes the book also includes introductory texts by Ion Mării and Radu Budişteanu, an excerpt from an article by Radu Gyr, and the scores and lyrics of the marches *Sfântă tinerețe legionară* [Sacred Legionary Youth], *Cântecul eroilor Moța–Marin* [The Song of the Heroes Moța and Marin], *La luptă, muncitori!* [To Work, Labourers!], *Imnul românilor secuizați* [The Hymn of the Hungarianised Romanians], *Imnul Biruinței Legionare* [The Hymn of Legionary Victory], and *Marșul legionarilor vrânceni* [The March of the Vrancea Legionaries]. All these anthems can be listened to on YouTube and prompt reflection on a number of ideas.

It is a widely known truth that the most songs in the march genre and march rhythm can be adapted to ideologically opposing lyrics. If instead of poems by Radu Gyr we were to set communist lyrics to Mănzatu’s music, it would preserve the same rousing effect, albeit aimed in a completely different direction. On the other hand, Mănzatu declares that the anthems were born of a kind of epiphany, after he underwent a profound change. In 1936 he took part in a meeting of a Legionary cell (having been a member of the Liberal Party since 1927, as the young director of a textiles factory). At the time, his musical interests had taken the concrete form of light music (on YouTube it is possible to listen to his ballad *Frumoasa mea cu ochii verzi* [My Beautiful Green-eyed Girl], for example) and in articles for the *Vremea* literary magazine.

⁴² Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 54, 76, 82, 83, 84, 88, 93, 95, 96, 105, 109, 113, 115, 117, 129, 139; Viorel Cosma, *Muzicieni din România: Lexicon biobibliografic* [Musicians from Romania: Bio-Bibliographic Lexicon], vol. 5 (K–M) (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 2002), 272–75.

⁴³ Ion Mănzatu, *Cum am compus cântecele legionare* [How I Composed the Legionary Anthems] (Munich: Colecția Europa, 1996), published by Ion Mării.

I came from a bourgeois world in which music had been expressed by the great composers of the world in symphonic concerts, in chamber music or operas, and the cloying, romantic melodies I composed had nothing in common with the incandescence or rebellious emphasis of the Legionary song.⁴⁴

At the meeting he heard various marches. Some he found lacking in melodic coherence, others too aggressive, but he admired Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu's attention to the battle anthem's strength of conviction ("public galvanisation through marches and military bands"⁴⁵). He saw as providential his meeting with Radu Gyr, and both were to work on "a lean melody dedicated to Legionary youth."⁴⁶ They then sought the approval of Codreanu, who was delighted and gave the anthem the title *Sacred Legionary Youth*. It was printed in five thousand copies and became the official anthem of the Legion.⁴⁷ Gyr and Manzatti went on to write a number of other propagandistic anthems in 1937–1938: *The Song of the Heroes Moța and Marin*, which Codreanu ordered to celebrate the fallen Spanish Civil War heroes of Majadahonda; *To Work, Labourers!*, aimed at drawing the working class to the Legion and thereby competing with the communist *International*, "which had spread like a scabies, being intoned by all the universal adepts of Soviet ideology,"⁴⁸ *The Hymn of Legionary Victory*, which was written "mentally" during captivity (when King Carol clamped down on the Iron Guard) in the prison camp in the Ciucului mountains.⁴⁹ From the musical viewpoint, the anthems are generally simplistic in composition. The last of the aforementioned displays greater melodic, rhythmic and harmonic coherence than the others: the melodic arc is broad, with appropriately chosen culminating points, the rhythmic forms are diverse and suited to the metre of the lyrics, and the minor-major modulation potentiates the rousing effect aimed at. Finally, Mânzatu also mentioned *The Hymn of the Hungarianised Romanians*, with lyrics by Horațiu Comănicu, composed with the aim of condemning the Hungarianisation of Romanians on the Transylvanian frontier and their absorption into the Habsburg Empire.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁸ Mânzatu goes on to quote Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu: "We fight for the victory of not only the peasants but also the Romanian working class. . . . I would like you to compose a battle anthem for the workers, *better than the Internationale*." (Ibid., 12.)

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

In 1940, during the Iron Guard regime, Mânzatu became director general of the Radio Broadcasting Company. Impressed by the model of German radio broadcasting and the propaganda anthems it carefully orchestrated and recorded, but also aware of his own limits, Mânzatu asked Paul Constantinescu to adapt the aforementioned anthems for choir and orchestra. The augmented versions were recorded at the end of December 1940, under the baton of Theodor Rogalski, the then conductor of the Radio Orchestra. After the Iron Guard was deposed, Mânzatu resigned from the Radio Broadcasting Company, and he did not hear the recording until 1973, when his compatriot Ion Mării brought it to Italy.⁵⁰

Somewhat later, in 1942, at the height of the war against the Soviet Union, Mânzatu recounts that he was called to the Ministry of Public Education, where he was ordered to compose a martial anthem to boost the morale of the troops on the eastern front. He asked that Radu Gyr write the lyrics, which was impossible, however, as the poet was in prison. It was proposed that he work with Victor Eftimiu, the then president of the Society of Writers. Mânzatu managed to evade the task, however: “working with Eftimiu would have been repugnant to me: a man of undeniable talent, but an unscrupulous political mercenary. He had been a National Peasant Party member, a supporter of Antonescu, and he died a communist.”⁵¹

In the book we find out a number of details about the society of the time, as viewed by the composer, about whom other sources record only that he committed irregularities during his tenure in key posts in Romanian musical institutions, which in any case he held only for a short time. After the war he went into exile. Mânzatu became Manzatti once more. He went to Buenos Aires and then Milan, as much a nationalist as ever, even if at a distance. In 1948, he met Ion Mării, the editor of the book, in Argentina, where the musician organised “national celebrations” within the Romanian community and was the editor-in-chief of *România* magazine. The two met up again in Milan in 1962. And in 1978 Manzatti gave Mării the manuscript of his memoir, which the latter published after the composer’s death.

EPILOGUE?

Having found out what became of Manzatti after he left Romania, I was curious to see what happened to the other figures mentioned above in the complicated context of the post-war period. Like at the end of a film, when a text rolls across the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵¹ Ibid., 20.

screen telling us about what later happened to the characters, let us take a look at their subsequent fates. In the late-1940s and early-1950s, communist repression of political opponents of course included the Legionaries. Among others, Romeo Alexandrescu was struck from the list of members of the Union of Composers from the Romanian People's Republic. But once the dust had settled, and the musicologist had shed his ideological past (with the tacit acceptance of his peers), he was to publish with Editura Muzicală (the publishing house of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists) a number of well-received monographs on Claude Debussy (1962), Maurice Ravel (1964), Gabriel Fauré (1968) and Paul Dukas (1971), going back to what he was best at: criticism of French music. Nobody in the music world was to incriminate him for or even mention his articles in *Universul literar*. In 1970 he even published a carefully selected collection of reviews: *Spicuri din trecut* [Gleanings from the Past]. Leafing through the volume, you would never guess that he had written ideological diatribes for *Universul literar*. And in an interview given in the 1970s, Romeo Alexandrescu paints a portrait of himself as a Francophile intellectual, with aspirations as a composer and a broad knowledge of musical history.⁵² All trace of his past errors was carefully erased in post-war Romanian society, and we can observe the same thing in an interview with Nicolae Brânzeu.⁵³

There, we find details about Brânzeu's beginnings as a composer, when he was a disciple of Castaldi and then a student of the Schola Cantorum (where he took a course given by Vincent d'Indy in 1931), but absolutely nothing about the way in which the Legionary press promoted his career. After the war, he retired to the provinces, first to Sibiu and then to Arad, where from 1948 he headed the Philharmonic for more than two decades. He continued to compose operatic works, in a traditionalist, tonal style, with folk accents. The only references to his deplorable attitude towards his colleagues in the Society of Romanian Composers in the years when he was viewed well by the Legionary regime occur in the extensive history of the institution published by Octavian Lazăr Cosma in 1995.⁵⁴ Likewise, the history also informs the reader of the public declarations of Ion Mânzatu, Romeo Alexandrescu and Dimitrie Cuclin at various critical moments in the existence of the Society.

Among other things, in the interview Brânzeu describes his friendship with a fellow student at the Schola Cantorum, Nicolae Agârbiceanu, the

⁵² Despina Petecel, *Muzicienii noștri se destăinuie* [Our Musicians Confess] vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 1990), 39–47.

⁵³ Petecel, *Muzicienii noștri*, 23–38.

⁵⁴ Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 113–15.

son of writer Ion Agârbiceanu. Very little information can be found about Agârbiceanu's post-war life: he is supposed to have gradually given up music and turned to sculpture and to have settled in Germany.⁵⁵

In an *in memoriam* article published in *Muzica* in 1995, we discover that Alexandru Cosmovici (1901–1995) was a first cousin of George Enescu (the composer's mother, Maria, née Cosmovici, was the sister of Alexandru's father, Leon), that he studied in Italy in France, that he wrote symphonic and vocal-symphonic works, lieder, chamber music, including after 1945, and wrote reviews for *Vremea* between 1939 and 1944. There is no mention of his articles for *Cuvântul*, however.⁵⁶

Finally, in the same book Octavian Lazăr Cosma reveals a few details of the communist repression of well-known musicians known to have been members of the Legionary movement: "persecuted, condemned, marginalised, banned, even arrested, as in the case of Dimitrie Cuclin."⁵⁷ In 1949, Cuclin was held at the Danube–Black Sea Canal for a number of months, where he was given forced labour. He is mentioned again in 1953, when it seems he quietly re-joined the Union of Composers. In 1954, the Union granted him an honorary pension.⁵⁸ Gradually, Dimitrie Cuclin's compositions and essays restored him to good standing among his peers, who even organised a celebration for the musician in 1955: "Ion Dumitrescu [the new head of the Composers' Union—*my note*] encourages the positive endeavours of D. Cuclin."⁵⁹ Cuclin reached the venerable age of ninety-three, steadfastly remaining a disciple of Vincent d'Indy. He holds a place in recent Romanian musical history thanks to his prolific symphonic work (twenty symphonies) and the ideas he put forward in his 1933 treatise on musical aesthetics, which have drawn quite a lot of comment from subsequent generations of Romanian musicians.

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Romanian musicology still maintains a certain degree of embarrassment when it comes to examination of the communist period. A number of welcome attempts to examine the archives of the *Securitate* (Romanian secret police) and those of the musical institutions have brought to light information that is sometimes ambiguous and controversial, and the documents that have been preserved are inevitably fragmentary. The period of the dictatorships between

⁵⁵ Cosma, *Muzicieni din România*, vol. 10 (Addenda A–B), (2011), 31–32.

⁵⁶ Mihai Popescu and Mihaela Marinescu, "In memoriam Alexandru Cosmovici," *Muzica*, new series, 2 (22), 1995, 152–53.

⁵⁷ Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 142.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 260, 267.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.

1938 and 1944 and their impact on musical art have been studied even less. For example, those who have looked at the Romanian composers who studied at the Schola Cantorum⁶⁰ do not go into the implications of Vincent d'Indy's ideology and his obvious influence on Romanian writers (Romeo Alexandrescu is by no means the only example). Modes of thought that have become traditional in the Romanian music and musicology of the last hundred years could have been far more nuanced if sources that have hitherto remained in the shadows had been available for objective examination.

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⁶⁰ Doina Anca Paron Floriștean, *Muzicieni români la Schola Cantorum din Paris* [Romanian Musicians at Schola Cantorum in Paris] (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 2010).

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