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Author: Lavinia Coman

E-mail: nicolaecomman23@yahoo.com

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Lavinia COMAN
National University of Music Bucharest

Lipatti's Piano Oeuvre: From Knowledge to Instrumental Performance

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Any overview of Dinu Lipatti's piano oeuvre must render evident quite from the beginning that his very early international fame as a performer – he was still in his teens – absorbed most of his energy and time to work. The artist often complained, in letters or talking to his close ones, of lacking the time for writing. In other words, the inspired composer was held in restraint by the brilliant pianist. This is a drama that other great musicians lived too, the ultimate example being his revered maestro George Enescu. This chapter in Dinu Lipatti's artistic biography is even today not enough revealed, researched, known (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 193).

After several study pieces, the arrival in 1932 of the Piano Sonata in D minor marked the highly gifted teenager's first success: at 15 he was awarded First Mention at the Society of Romanian Composers Composition Competition, founded and supported by maestro George Enescu (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 297). With its musical expression evoking post-Romantic ambiance and its Romanian folklore overtones, this large work is proof of Lipatti's truly mastering the art of composing. Its first public appearance only dates from August 1st, 1987, when it was played by English pianist John Ogdon, laureate of the George Enescu International Competition. It was recorded for Radio Romania by Horia Maxim. On her album¹ dedicated to Lipatti's piano works, Luiza Borac comes up with a massive, dynamic ren-

¹ *Luiza Borac: Piano Music of Dinu Lipatti*, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Jaime Martin, 2CD AV, 2271 (London: Avie Records 2012).

dition, where excellent technique is put into the service of careful shaping of musical discourse, the pianist having also played the work live, between 2012 and 2015, in recitals in Hanover and Berlin.

The Concertino in Classical Style, Op. 3 for piano and chamber orchestra has been heavily researched and reviewed, as it probably is Lipatti's best-known work. Dedicated to his teacher Florica Musicescu, it was written in 1936, the year following Lipatti's completing his studies with her in order to move to Paris (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 299). As such, the Concertino can also be viewed as a charming exercise in style mixing, blending classical elements, Romanian folk music echoes, and baroque, Bachian reminiscences. It is his first work to be published by Universal Edition in Vienna and was first performed at the Romanian Athenaeum on October 5th, 1939, by the composer himself under maestro George Georgescu leading the Bucharest Philharmonic (V. Cosma 1968: 182; O. L. Cosma 2003: 565-566). After Lipatti left Romania permanently, maestro Corneliu Gheorghiu was the one to take over the mission of playing this highly successful piece in Romania and abroad, the Concertino thus becoming in a way his brand – all the more so as maestro Gheorghiu continued promoting it after he himself left the country in the 1970s (Gheorghiu 2014). It is Lipatti's most frequently played concert work. After Corneliu Gheorghiu, too, left Romania, successful local renditions were given by Ninuca Oșanu Pop, Maria Fotino, or, from the younger generation, Mihai Ungureanu. Among recorded versions of the Concertino we can single out Luiza Borac's, opening her CD *Luiza Borac: Piano Music of Dinu Lipatti*, a seductive version alongside Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields conducted by Jaime Martin.

The following year, in 1937, Lipatti wrote his first work for two pianos, *Three Dances*. Dedicated to Madeleine Cantacuzino, it incorporates, in addition to the new writing methods of the time, elements of Romanian folk music. The cimbalom effects in the first dance, the joyful peasant feast of the second, the animated finale plead for this organic connection the young musician had with his country. The *Three Dances for Two Pianos* were first performed on December 16th, 1939 at the Romanian Athenaeum by Lipatti and Smaranda Athanasoff (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 300).

Lipatti dedicated his *Nocturne in A minor*, which also dates from 1937, to his maestro Mihail Jora. First performed by the author in Paris in 1938, it was introduced to the Romanian public in 1984 by Lavinia Coman via her LP *Antologia creației românești pentru pian* [Romanian Piano Music Anthology] released by Electrecord (Bucharest, 1987), and beginning with 1990 it was

also given live by Viniciu Moroianu. The miniature is based on a carol from the Neamț area in northern Moldova, which Lipatti heard from one of his friends, pianist Miron Șoarec (Șoarec 1981).

The Nocturne in F# minor, Op. 6, written in 1939, is dedicated to Lipatti's devoted friend Clara Haskil. The elaborate writing expects the performer to be skilled in the configuring of two to five superposing aural levels and in the subtle differences of touch and nuance. Like the first nocturne, this one was, too, approached rather reservedly – being still played live – and both miniatures are more likely to be performed by piano students, as easier formulas for the Romanian music chapter in the curriculum (Oană-Pop 1967).

The *Sinfonia Concertante* for Two Pianos and Strings, Op. 5 dates from 1938 and is dedicated to Lipatti's teacher Charles Munch.² The second performance took place at Salle Pleyel in Paris, with Lipatti and Clara Haskil playing the piano and the dedicatee conducting, after a first performance given under Ionel Patin (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 223, 300). Afterwards the work was disseminated in Romania and recorded on LP disc by Sofia Cosma and Corneliu Gheorghiu. During the 1980s, this pinnacle of the Lipattian output was performed live in 1980, 1982, and 1987 by Suzana Szörenyi and Corneliu Rădulescu. Later, in 1997, on the opening night of the Dinu Lipatti International Festival, the two musicians played, as an encore, the second from the Three Romanian Dances for Two Pianos. The artists also have an LP recording of this work, released by Electrecord. Of significance was also the version given by Luiza Borac and Viniciu Moroianu in the 2011 edition of the George Enescu International Festival, together with the renowned Academy Saint Martin in the Fields under Jaime Martin.

We can say that the Concerto for Organ and Piano, written in his mansion at Fundățeanca in the summer of 1939 and dedicated to Lipatti's beloved teacher Nadia Boulanger, only had its first performance on December 8th, 1970 in Bucharest, when Horst Gehann and Corneliu Gheorghiu played it. It has a complex language and a free structure, being less approachable than its motto, taken from a poem by Charles Cros, would let on: "J'ai composé cette histoire – simple, simple, simple / Pour mettre en fureur les gens – graves, graves, graves" (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 302).

The Fantasy for Piano, Op. 8, written in 1940 in Fundățeanca for his wife, Madeleine Cantacuzino, was first performed by the composer in 1941 in

² Edited by Corneliu Rădulescu, the score was published by Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, in 1984.

Bucharest, in the concert marking the Society of Romanian Composers' 20th anniversary. A large, five-part work, intended to be turned into a symphony, it was thus described by maestro Mihail Jora in his speech opening the festivities that evening: "Dinu Lipatti is still searching for a personal style. His great talent is constantly troubled with the need to say old things in a new way." (Moroianu 2007: 20) As Olga Grigorescu argues in her monograph, multiple stylistic elements, such as "neoclassicism, impressionism, expressionism, Romanian folk music, which we don't find reunited in any other work", appear here in such a synthesis as to ensure "a profound organicity of motifs, finally justifying a balanced whole which melts together sonata and suite elements" (Grigorescu 2011: 56). Viniciu Moroianu's decisive contribution must be underlined, the pianist having given its first performance in 1992 – the year he was a laureate of the Lipatti Foundation Performance Award – and subsequently having recorded it for the Romanian Radio in 1988. Constantin Ionescu-Vovu published the score at Editura Muzicală in 1999 and we are also looking forward to the release of the highly competent edition prepared by Viniciu Moroianu. The Fantasy will thus leave the confined space of the few copies to be found in the libraries of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists and of the National University of Music Bucharest and will enjoy the publicity it rightly deserves. On her album Luiza Borac uses a variety of artistic methods with the help of which she raises the symphonic edifice to the scope and complexity characteristic to the text. For instance, the discourse is strongly dramatized, and such elements as colour, pitch, and dramaturgy are promptly altered.

The Sonatina for the Left Hand, Op. 10, produced during a small holiday spent at Fundăteanca in 1941, renders homage to two birthdays – Mihail Jora turning 50 and George Enescu turning 60. Lipatti gave its first performance, and his recording, remastered on the CD *Enescu și Lipatti interpretează Enescu și Lipatti* [Enescu and Lipatti Interpret Enescu and Lipatti] (Bucharest: Electrecord 2001), has today a historical value. Built on the classical sonata scheme, this short piece achieves exceptional eloquence with a minimum of instrumental means. An extremely restrictive, auto-imposed problem – using only one of the pianist's two hands, namely, the left, supposed to be the weakest one – is here solved. Just as in Ravel's Concerto, written nine years earlier, the left hand must cover the entire keyboard and sustain extensive arpeggios and ingenious overlapping as well as other complex, refined configurations. Maybe the Sonatina for the Left Hand is the work which best illustrates Lipatti's ideal pianism, which foresaw, in the fourth decade of the last century, that future piano playing would insist on developing a perfect

independence of the fingers of the same hand, so that one could simultaneously sustain different melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and especially timbral profiles. Viewed from this angle, we have in the *Sonatina* a jewel of both Romanian music and of universal repertoire. The lively, spontaneous atmosphere of the external movements, the charming cantilena of the middle slow movement, the whole of the work, replete with refined sonorities, the simple beauty of the writing, all contributed to singling out this *Sonatina*, from among all other solo piano pieces, as almost the only Lipattian score constantly played (Coman 1996: 39). We will highlight as a reference version Maria Fotino's recording on a Japanese disc, *Dinu Lipatti: Works, Vol. 2*. Among the pianists' intent on an in-depth study of this work is Alin Ionescu (Ionescu 2012: 111-126).

The three Romanian Dances for Two Pianos were written in 1943 and are dedicated to Ernest Ansermet. The first dance develops on the uneven *geampara* rhythm while the main theme meets with free, intensely chromaticized variations. There are bold modulations, bitonal overlapping layers, creative ways of processing melody and rhythm, free treatment of the single movement form. If the first dance unfolds in a lively, entertaining atmosphere, the second one is somewhat slower, with brief meditative moments. The first theme, in the Lydian mode, unfolds on an ostinato formula, the second one, tranquil as well, accumulates tension as it progresses towards a climax, and the end brings back a concise reminiscence of the main theme. The discourse is organised in a two-movement form. The last dance breaks out exuberantly and energetically, bringing with it the atmosphere of a village dancing party. The theme of the first section is shared by the two pianos through a bitonal superposition and is accompanied by a long, high-pitched, cimbalom-specific sound. The median section comes with a contrasting atmosphere by means of a theme undergoing varied transfigurations and reaching a four-voice fugal exposition. The dance ends with a free reprise of the first section, thus attaining the symmetry of the three-part ABA pattern.

Originating in the triptych written in 1943, the Three Romanian Dances for Piano and Orchestra were remodelled by Lipatti two years later, when he orchestrated the second piano. The work was first performed in Geneva in a concert given by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande on October 10th, 1945, with the composer as soloist and the dedicatee, Ernest Ansermet, conducting (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 306). The first Romanian performance took place 70 years later, on November 19th, 2015, at the Romanian Atheneum, and was given by Mihai Ungureanu and the Bucharest Philharmonic under

Horia Andreescu. This concertante version, featuring brilliant virtuosity moments both in the piano and the orchestral part, is both majestic, in the tradition of the French school, as well as suggestive, fresh, with a strong ethnic ethos, and skilfully crafted, in the European spirit.

Lipatti's last work, *The March of Henri*, a musical joke for piano four hands dedicated to his devoted doctor and friend Henri Dubois-Ferrière, was written in 1950, in the months prior to his passing away. This is a concise, rather simple music, and features folk dance motifs (Bărgăuanu and Tănăsescu 2000: 205). Whether played by professionals or by talented students, who thus become familiar with a more modern, still highly attractive, musical language, it gives great pleasure both to the performer and the public.

Luiza Borac's album also features some other exceptionally well played works: *Navarra* by Isaac Albéniz, unfinished and completed by his student Déodat de Séverac, and Bach's Pastorale BWV 590 in F major for organ, and two arias from the Cantata BWV 208 *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd*, namely, *Weil die wollenreichen Herden* and *Schafe können sicher weiden*, in Lipatti's piano transcription. The album thus gives the feeling of spiritual fulfilment, comfort and joy. It will be a real challenge for other artists to surpass the standard set by this achievement. We must also note that the album's international successful release was followed by Luiza Borac's ample project of disseminating Lipatti's works in live recitals. Consequently, the two Nocturnes and the three Bach transcriptions were performed in Berlin, Hanover, Konstanz, London, Bucharest, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Dresden, Zürich, Cologne, Linz, Bern.

An important factor in the promoting of the Lipatti's heritage were the four editions of the International Dinu Lipatti Festival and Competition, organized in the 1990s under the aegis of the Romanian National Commission for UNESCO (1991, 1993, 1995, 1997). In the last two editions, the Sonatina for the Left Hand and the Nocturne in F# minor were mandatory works (Gheorghiu 2014). These editions also comprised an international musicology symposium concentrating and stimulating the in-depth investigation of this spiritual heritage. We must also mention the symposium on December 10th, 2010, organized at the National University of Music Bucharest to mark Lipatti's 60th death anniversary.

As for the stage of the recuperation of the manuscripts, we are still in a transitional period. Performers wanting to disseminate Dinu Lipatti's piano music most frequently complain of a lack of printed scores, the majority of these works being either out of print or inedited. Most of them still circulate

as photocopies of poorly written manuscripts, discouraging approach and subsequent practice. They should be given particular attention through their integration in the curricula of music schools and universities. Almost 70 years after Dinu Lipatti's departure, his oeuvre should find its rightful place on the concert stage and in the formation of the young pianists.

English version by Maria Monica Bojin

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