

Musicology Today

Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest

Issue 4 (32) October-December 2017

Title: Speranța Rădulescu's Ethnophonie Series: An Occasion for Reflection

Author: Ioan Haplea

E-mail: doina_haplea@yahoo.com

Source: Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest / Volume 8 / Issue 4 (32) / October-December 2017, pp 289-297

Link to this article: musicologytoday.ro/32/MT32thoughtsHaplea.pdf

How to cite this article: Ioan Haplea, "Speranța Rădulescu's Ethnophonie Series: An Occasion for Reflection", *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 8/4 (32) (2017), 289-297.

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

Ioan HAPLEA

Gheorghe Dima Music Academy, Cluj-Napoca

Speranța Rădulescu's Ethnophonie Series: An Occasion for Reflection

In March 1918, Bartók invites to Budapest, to give a demonstration of Edison's phonograph, four young people from Hunedoara, and, profiting from the newly-created situation regarding the relationship between researcher and performer, makes recordings of them singing and playing; these were 20 works of import, carefully chosen by somebody who had a thorough knowledge of the musical circumstances in the Cerbâl village as they were. The result is a two-way, 27-track disk (Bartók added 7 of his field recordings): on the one hand, it is archive material, to be legitimately consulted in research, on the other hand, it can be of interest also to those interested in the "music of the illiterate", wanting to listen, in the comfort of their home, to an exotic, rarer type of music (László 2003: 31-32).

This deliberately ambiguous positioning of the *captures of sound*, with a diffuse addressability, is the privileged space of many items, as interesting as they are beautiful, a sort of a tampered-with exit-poll which coerces a selection even from its acquisition. But beyond any theoretical speculation, these materials, dealing with the sediment of the contemporary layer, being, that is, testimonies of famous figures, redeemers of the truth of long ago, are valid documents of the *aggiornamento* of the archaic. They resemble Popicu's house in Maramureș, archaic on the outside and modern on the inside, making you marvel either at the discourse's infinite adaptability to today's conditions, or at the modernism's availability to host, under its generous roof, valid interpretations, in modern keys, of the olden.

Indeed, this piece is also meant as a comparative look at the scales' two pans which, if one eliminates the transition periods and only mentions the extremes, could from one point of view be termed *peasant music in the old, traditional village* – the music of farmers who earned their living by working their lands without any technological aid (approximately until the end of World War II), or else *peasant music relocated in a non-peasant context (concert hall, recording studio, restaurant)*. In the first pan, the creators and the performers are the peasants themselves; they sing and play in their homes and on their fields, and the function of their music derives from their very daily life. In the second pan, amateur artists or professional *lăutari* (fiddlers) perform the same peasant repertoires, but transfer them on stage, being thus motivated by financial remuneration, renown, and the implicit emulation of their performance there.

If in relation to a genuine music and its performance the central question was: “On the basis of what constitutive grammar does a person whose lifestyle we knew realise coherent discourses in an idiom which had been their matrix?”, it seems like the tables are now turned, and we are often tempted to ask ourselves, judging by what we hear, what life, and what goals, does a performer have? Because Gheorghe Negrea, Vasile Soporan, Ilie Chera, Emil Mihaiu, Ion Trifan, Vasile Batin, Nelu Petru Jolțe, Trăienuş Ardelean, Dumitru Iederan, Ioan Pop and all the others are in one way or another *revivalists* claiming to be the new centres of the preservation and coagulation of “authentic” discourse movements. The anonymous murmur of the statements of long ago is replaced by the contemporary subject's ego, which feels it speaks on behalf of the “innominate whole” of days gone by, in a course of evolution we might call *From anonymity to name*, an accelerated subjectification process under the theoretical assertions of de-subjectification.

Nevertheless, these emancipated repertoires, freed from the authority of their creators, do retain, even if they are no longer completely authentic, a general folkloric aura.

These recordings represent a particular case, which conforms to that theory of enunciation initiated by Emile Benveniste and crystallised by Foucault, where “[t]o describe a formulation *qua* statement . . . consist[s] . . . in determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it” (Foucault 1972: 95-96). We wonder as to the place of the performer, if they are to be the subject of that recording. But with reference to the musicians we are concerned with, the position of those making the statements – on the basis of what they perform, and of what they themselves say about what they perform – creates a stretch to be covered by the expressivity

of the addressability, the listener's necessary obligation. The intimist genres (the song, the *doină*) are obviously losing the battle with the centrifuge genres (vocal or instrumental dance music).

The performers here recorded are known and admired in the respective community for their musical achievements, in a sort of the-star-who-makes-a-recording-and-the-recording-which-makes-the-star circle. Becoming a local celebrity under the pressure put by the sound recording and reproduction device is part of phenomenon whose essence was identified by Walter Benjamin in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

Wo nämlich früher Vorbildlichkeit moralisch gefördert wurde, fordert die Gegenwart Reproduzierbarkeit. Sie erkennt als richtig und zweckentsprechend nur diejenigen Denk- und Verhaltensweisen [an], die neben ihrer Vorbildlichkeit ihre Erlernbarkeit nachweisen. . . . Das ergibt eine neue Auslese, eine Auslese vor der Apparatur, aus der der Star . . . als Sieger [hervorgeht]. (Benjamin 1974: 1042, 455 and 491, footnote)

The evolution of practices towards ritual, specific to archaic groups, is replaced with an entertainment-oriented attitude, the *then and there* is substituted by with *anytime and anywhere*, we now speak about traditional music as consumer goods, classify them, frequent them because we find them profitable. Upon listening, these CDs foregrounds, as indicated by generativism, the fact that the structures' acoustic material (excepting free-form works) actually represent a set of various sound permutations, couplets of a box of magnetised marbles (see Umberto Eco) where a preferential grouping of sounds into cells, motifs, lines, couplets is due to a long-time habit of proximity to preferential strata of a certain ethnic colour. The stateless "simple musical bodies" (Brăiloiu 1984a: 52) at the microstructural level acquire other configurations, superficial and local, while it nevertheless seems that they all are dialects of a single language.

Chomsky says that an alien's perception of the languages spoken on Earth, for us so diverse and distinct, would be that they are dialects of the same language. The outer colour is in great measure due to the timbrality of the diverse instrumental combinations, sometimes on wider areas, sometimes local, concentrated.

Speranța Rădulescu, the collection's initiator and coordinator, has refined expertise in the domain. One or two titles are sufficient to prove my case – the ample six-LP series *The Traditional Folk Music Band* (Electrecord, 1982-1984),

in collaboration with Carmen Betea, the set of three CDs *Roumanie: Musique de village/Village Music from Romania* with Laurent Aubert (AIMP, 1988), to which I can add a large number of other etched plates evocative of certain periods, territories, instrumental ensembles, genres, or ethnic groups. She elaborates her work with the discipline of the investigator with long experience as a field researcher, with in-depth understanding of places, times, and moods; without exaggerated sentimental adherences to the “cause”, she is a close observer of the significant detail and a knowledgeable reader of the signs, possessing the skill of the specialist taught in prestigious music education institutions focusing on interrogating sound and sound-related issues. The unwavering frankness of her ethnomusicologic statements, the constant synchronism with the best of contemporary research, the assurance and the elegance in handling the verb, and the scholarly analysis turn this tenacious worker into a model difficult to match; sometimes one cannot but envy her conceptual youth, her openness to a profound thinker’s reflection accompanied by an equidistant interpretation, her capacity become a neutral barometer of a specific time, free from any sentimental bias. With a disarming sincerity, Speranța Rădulescu once wrote: “while endeavoring to select and group the pieces in the most rigorous fashion possible, we were nevertheless guided by artistic criteria” (Rădulescu 1988).

When Laurent Aubert specifies the place of the three CDs with materials from the Brăiloiu Collection, he speaks for the Ethnophonie series, too: “a scientifically relevant publication, while putting the latter into the reach of a larger audience of music lovers” (Aubert 1988). And our short reflection thus returns to the beginning. The collection offers us the chance “to see an ageless bodiless spiritual world emerge . . . to the surface of the visible and present” (Brăiloiu 1948b: 93).

We would like to conclude by proposing a selective overview of the sizeable booklets accompanying each CD and containing the author’s thoughts and descriptions, remarking that when the performers’ manner of speaking is enlightening, full of local flavour and sometimes piquant, Speranța Rădulescu, showing ladylike grace, class, and fine discernment, allows them their “modal” expression. We will reiterate some of the author’s remarks, in no particular order. Thus, the music of Oaș is “far more of an ‘emblem of identity’ than a shared communal practice”, representing a “musical ID card” (Lortat-Jacob and Rădulescu 2014: 11, 14)”. Close by, “the Bihor dance is still theirs, even in noisy clubs swept by dazzling lights at night” (Rădulescu 2014: 8). In Chioar and Codru, “Sorin, born and raised in the city, became a *manelist* (musician specializing in *manele*, i.e. a new ethno-pop in fashion in

contemporary Romania), because 'today it's the *manele* that make you money' (Rădulescu 2011: 9). In Banat "Yugoslav popular music (*novokomponovana narodna muzika*) . . . had fused erratically with local music. . . . This is where the new, 'interesting' music of the day is born, which our musicians hasten to adopt", and "young people are no longer eager to learn music unless they plan to become wedding musicians or TV stars" (Rădulescu 2008: 8, 14). According to Ilie "Iucu" Chera, "musicians are ever-thirstier for novelty and ready to throw 'old stuff' overboard. What now matters to them is the often inexpressive rapidity or virtuosity of the execution" (Rădulescu 2008: 14). The music as played by Dumitru Iederan's "purist" groups "is majestic and elegant, while its clarity is comparable to that of the early Viennese classicism" (Rădulescu 2005: 15). In the Transylvanian Plain, Emil Mihaiu, who has "a *diffuse* belief that the music of the past lies at the foundation of the music of the present, illuminates its meaning, and orients its progress", is the one who "during the work-week . . . makes a living making records, which he records in a Cluj studio with various vocalists from the 'motherland'". His e-mail address, given as a suggestive anecdote, says it all: *mihai_emil_vioristul_patriei@yahoo.com* (i.e. "Mihai Emil fiddler of the motherland"; Rădulescu and Mihaiu 2013: 3, 5, emphasis added).

We would like to insist on the position taken by two instrumentalists more conceptual, more theory-inclined as regards the argumentative aspect of their art: Ion "Popicu" Pop and Dumitru Iederan.

Ion "Popicu" Pop attempts to solve on stage the old-new relation, in the same architectural manner he adopted in building his strange house. Atypical peasant, "[h]e wants the peasant music of Maramureș to withstand the disintegrating pressure exerted by folklorism, on the one hand, and world music, on the other. He also wants this music to go on stage with dignity". He continues however to perform at wedding ceremonies, to finance his architectural fantasies and "to keep up with the latest party music of the villages". Showing no doubts and no hesitations, he trusts he is on the right track, and "he expresses a conscious and militant understanding of tradition", also benefiting from "economic and social success". His beliefs and objectives "may be discussed at length from one theoretical perspective or another", and while he himself is self-assured, misgivings are nevertheless planted in the researcher's mind:

But, from a certain point on, spontaneity, considerably diluted in the artificial context of the stage, may come to be mimicked by the musicians and a new convention may be born. . . . Isn't he about to con-

trive a new brand of folklorism – far more relaxed, imaginative and convincing, and yet folklorism? Hard to say. (Rădulescu 2002: 5, 7-8)

Dumitru Iederan also feels that folklorization is by no means the way to do things. “[F]aithfu[l] . . . but with a creative tinge added to the details” (Rădulescu 2005: 17), Iederan begins by being the apprentice of Isidor Șerban, a Gypsy fiddler from the Stâna village, and then teaches at the School of Arts in Satu Mare.

Nevertheless, the quite “purists” requirements of his revivalism look akin to the esthetic requirements of those involved in the promotion of official folklore (arrangers, conductors, cultural apparatchiks, show hosts and producers, etc.); and the music he resuscitates is no longer really traditional, as it has already been detached from the context of its creation and performance and invested with other functions and meanings. In view of that, why would Iederan’s revivalism be different from the “folklorization” that has been so well-appreciated and supported by officialdom? (Rădulescu 2005: 18)

We might give the same answer as earlier: “Hard to say”.

Like a refined fencer lunging with Mediaeval elegance, Speranța Rădulescu finally argues that “Transylvania has always shown a diversity of musics and *timbres* characteristic of traditional societies. . . . Historically speaking, Romanians have had an additional reason to make such efforts” (Rădulescu 2014: 18, emphasis added).

The Ethnophonie series, featuring a diverse repertoire, highlighting various areas, offering an assortment of musical genres, and containing works and renditions of considerable merit, is a sound archive whose weight and value will exponentially grow with time.

This account explored the following Transylvanian music CDs from the Ethnophonie series:

- 05 *Romanian and Hungarian Music from Central Transylvania/Musique roumaine et magyare de Transylvanie centrale*
- 06 *Romanian, Ukrainian and Jewish Music from Maramureș/Musique roumaine, ukrainienne et juive de Maramureș*
- 07 *Muzică țigănească din Transilvania/Gypsy Music from Transylvania*

- 11 *Muzică de ceatarâși din Chioar și Codru/Fiddler Music from Chioar and Codru*
- 15 *Cântările lui Vasile Soporan din satul Frata/The Songs of Vasile Soporan from the Village of Frata*
- 17 *Doine, cântece și jocuri cu Fanfara din Lăpușnicu Mare – Banat/Songs and Dances with the Brass Band from Lăpușnicu Mare – Banat*
- 20 *Muzică de joc din Chioarul de altădată/Dance Music from Old-Time Chioar*
- 23 *Dansuri țărănești din ținutul Gherlei/Peasant Dances from the Region of Gherla, Transylvania*
- 24 *Glasuri și cetere din Oaș/Voices and Fiddles of Oaș*
- 25 *Instrumente neobișnuite din Transilvania/Unusual Instruments from Transylvania*
- 27 *Trei generații de muzicanți din Căstău, Hunedoara/Three Generations of Musicians from Căstău, Hunedoara*

English version by Maria Monica Bojin

REFERENCES

Aubert, Laurent

1988 "Introduction", transl. Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff, in the booklet of the set of CDs *Roumanie: Musique de villages: Olténie – Moldavie – Transylvanie/Village Music from Romania: Oltenia – Moldavia – Transylvania*, AIMP 9-11 (Geneva: Archives internationales de musique populaire), 3.

Benjamin, Walter

1942 "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, with the contribution of Theodor Adorno and Gershom Sholem, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkampverlag).

Brăiloiu, Constantin

1984a "Musical Folklore", in Constantin Brăiloiu, *Problems of Ethnomusicology*, ed. and transl. A. L. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1-58.

1984b, "Musicology and Ethnomusicology Today", in Constantin Brăiloiu, *Problems of Ethnomusicology*, ed. and transl. A. L. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 86-101.

Foucault, Michel

1972 *The Archeology of Knowledge*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books).

László, Francisc

2003 *Béla Bartók și muzica populară a românilor din Banat și Transilvania* [Béla Bartók and the Folk Music of Romanians in Banat and Transylvania] (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon).

Lortat-Jacob, Bernard and Speranța Rădulescu

2014 “Voices and Fiddles of Oaș”, transl. Samuel Willcocks and Laurence Fayet, liner notes of the CD *Glășuri și cetere din Oaș/Voices and Fiddles of Oaș*, Ethnophonie 24 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 11-28.

Rădulescu, Speranța

1988 “The Present Edition”, transl. Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff, in the booklet of the set of CDs *Roumanie: Musique de villages: Olténie – Moldavie – Transylvanie/Village Music from Romania: Oltenia – Moldavia – Transylvania*, AIMP 9-11 (Geneva: Archives internationales de musique populaire), 9.

2002 “Romanian, Ukrainian and Jewish Music from Maramureș”, transl. Adrian Solomon, liner notes of the CD *Romanian, Ukrainian and Jewish Music from Maramureș/Musique roumaine, ukrainienne et juive de Maramureș*, Ethnophonie 06 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 3-18.

2005 “Fiddler Music from Chioar and Codru”, transl. Adrian Solomon, liner notes of the CD *Muzică de ceatarăși din Chioar și Codru/Fiddler Music from Chioar and Codru*, Ethnophonie 11 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 14-22.

2008 “Songs and Dances with the Brass Band from Lăpușnicu Mare – Banat”, transl. Adrian Solomon, liner notes of the CD *Doine, cântece și jocuri cu Fanfara din Lăpușnicu Mare – Banat/Songs and Dances with the Brass Band from Lăpușnicu Mare – Banat*, Ethnophonie 17 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 8-15.

2011 “Dance Music from Old-Time Chioar”, transl. Adrian Solomon, liner notes of the CD *Muzică de joc din Chioarul de altădată/Dance Music from Old-Time Chioar*, Ethnophonie 20 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 3-17.

2014 “Unusual Instruments from Transylvania”, transl. Adrian Solomon, liner notes of the CD *Instrumente neobișnuite din Transilvania/Unusual Instruments from Transylvania*, Ethnophonie 25 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 3-23.

Rădulescu, Speranța and Emil Mihaiu

2013 “Peasant Dances from the Region of Gherla, Transylvania”, transl. Adrian Solomon, liner notes of the CD *Dansuri țărănești din ținutul Gherlei/ Peasant Dances from the Region of Gherla, Transylvania*, Ethnophonie 23 (Bucharest: Fundația Alexandru Tzigara Samurcaș), 3-21.