

Musicology Today

Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest

Issue 1 (37) January-March 2019

Title: The story of Creative Resistance: Pascal Bentoiu, the Man and His Music

Author: Laura Otilia Vasiliu

E-mail: laura.vasiliu@arteiasi.ro

Source: Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest / Volume 10 / Issue 1 (37) / January-March 2019, pp 53-68

Link to this article: musicologytoday.ro/37/MT37studiesVasiliu.pdf

How to cite this article: Laura Otilia Vasiliu, "The story of Creative Resistance: Pascal Bentoiu, the Man and His Music", *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 10/1 (37) (2019), 53-68.

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

Laura Otilia VASILIU
George Enescu University of Arts, Iași

The Story of Creative Resistance: Pascal Bentoiu, the Man and His Music*

*Moral heroism is the only reasonable way we are left with.*¹
(Pascal Bentoiu, 1948)

Keywords: music and politics, music criticism, Socialist Realism in Romanian music

INTRODUCTION

Pascal Bentoiu's posterity rests upon a double image of his personality. First comes the image of a musician with a substantial, well-known and influential compositional and musicological body of work. At the same time, the configuration of a personality with an exceptionally powerful moral force and an artistic individuality of great calibre is revealed to us, one that did not give in to political pressure, under the circumstances that the man was deeply affected by the regime change in Romania after 1944. Pascal Bentoiu was a Romanian composer who wrote neither works dedicated to communist events, personalities, organisations, nor patriotic music in general. Moreover, he totally avoided the politicised and compromised choral and vocal-symphonic genres.

* Paper presented on October 18th, 2018 at the International Musicological Conference *The Musics of Power: Music and Musicians in Totalitarian Regimes in 20th Century Europe*, organized by the National University of Music Bucharest and hosted by New Europe College in Bucharest (October 18-19th, 2018). The conference was supported by the Doctoral School of the National University of Music Bucharest (Fondul de Dezvoltare Instituțională: CNFIS-FDI-2018-0365).

¹ "Eroismul moral e singura cale rezonabilă care ne rămâne" (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 65).

We focus our research on key moments in the making of his resistance to political pressure and manipulation: the period of cultural Stalinism (1948-1956) and the years of a violent reprise in the political repression of Gheorghe-Gheorghiu Dej's regime (1959-1963). We discover his acceptance of forced solutions and a subtle game with the political censorship.

At the heart of my research are two books of great documentary value: Annie Benteoiu's memoirs with the title *Timpul ce ni s-a dat* [The Time that Was Given to Us] (Benteoiu, A. 2006) and the historiographic volume *Universul muzicii românești* [The Universe of Romanian Music] by Octavian Lazăr Cosma (Cosma, O. L. 1995a). Other pieces of information have been extracted from the Romanian musical and political press in the decades 1950, 1960 and from the composer's private correspondence with the undersigned.

THE MUSICIAN'S EDUCATION AND THE SHOCK OF SOCIALIST REALISM

Intuition and confirmation in the years of Stalinist violence

When Pascal Benteoiu began his composition studies with Mihail Jora – December 1944 – Romanian society and culture entered the influence of Soviet communism by force and for a long period of time, with catastrophic consequences to be felt as of 1948. The beginning of his professional life as a member of the Union of Composers would take place in a different era altogether: in 1953, a culminating point of cultural Stalinism. Between these two dates (nine years), young Benteoiu's life would change dramatically. On the one hand he developed his passion for music and assimilated the compositional means of the time by writing his first compositions at the level of his master's (Mihail Jora's) expectations, which were also satisfying for the future mature composer, who registered them as his first opera. I am referring to *Sonata pentru pian* Op. 1 [Piano Sonata Op. 1] and to *Uvertura de concert* Op. 2 [Concert Overture Op. 2] (the first part of the Symphony composed in 1948) – both of them works of neoclassical modernity with refined jazzy sonic references. Parallel to his musical development, the young man with substantial cultural preoccupations, raised in wealth and care for intellectual activities, becomes gradually aware of the dangerous direction for which everything, including his life, heads. Thus, in 1947 he abandons the law university department, which had been ideologically prioritised, and discovers that he is unable to attend the lectures of the Conservatoire, after being directly admitted in the fourth year. He pays an increasing amount of attention to all the major changes, empathising dramatically with the removal of King Michael (December 30th,

1947) and comments on the decisions of the Resolution of February 10th, 1948 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR just a few days after promulgation. “I hope it is not censorship, so I can tell you that Prokofiev, Khachaturian and Shostakovich have fallen out of grace”² – he writes to his future wife on February 12th, 1948. In a little while he would have to earn his living, after his father is disbarred (April 1948). Encouraged by his teacher, he requested entry in the Society of Romanian Composers (July 1948). Beside the *honour of being a composer*, the status of member could offer a position in the society under constitution, minimal financial support. However, young Bentoiu regarded his entry among those professionals with uneasiness and lucidity:

At S.R.C., the lawyer of the society told me that Mendelsohn expressed his wish to “use” me to the maximum, on condition that I write along the political line. . . . The problem has two solutions: 1) If I understand to concede (and if you give these people a finger they will take your hand) I can earn my bread, however, with the well-known sacrifices; 2) if I do not want to back off, I’ll have to sit and do nothing.³ (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 102)

Bentoiu was not given a choice. His father, lawyer Aurelian Bentoiu’s arrest (October 31st, 1948), who had been Minister of Justice in Tătărăscu’s liberal government (May-June 1940) and the confiscation of his entire fortune permanently derailed the course of his existence. The status of a political prisoner’s son would mark his life and professional evolution for a long time. In the first years after that tragic event he would be completely eliminated from the professional environment, first by being excluded from the Union of Composers and then, a few months later, by being sent to special military service, within the General Directorate of the Work Service, for a long and burdensome period of three years. This blow would have been fatal for most. Bentoiu endured thanks to the force of his personality, the intellectual, spiritual and musical-compositional preoccupations, which he kept alive

² “Sper că nu e cenzură, așa că-ți pot spune că Prokofiev, Hacıaturian și Șostakovici au căzut în dizgrație” (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 59).

³ “La S.C.R., avocatul societății mi-a spus că Mendelsohn și-a exprimat dorința să mă ‘utilizeze’ la maximum, cu condiția să scriu mai pe linie. . . . Problema are două soluții: 1) Dacă înțeleg să fac concesii (și oamenilor ăstora dacă le dai un deget îți iau toată mâna) pot ajunge în pâine dar cu sacrificiile cunoscute. 2) Dacă nu vreau să dau deloc îndărăt, trebuie să stau și să tai căinilor frunză.”

under any circumstances. Here is a testimony in the letters addressed to his wife in 1951:

The longing for music is now permanent in me. Like a calling, like a reproach, sometimes sweet like a Sirens' song, sometimes violent and bitter. Yesterday I played around with an accordion. The harmonies, the sounds . . . Annie, pray for me. I want to succeed in being good, above all – and it is very difficult . . . I am looking passionately for peace of mind. . . . I am permanently visited by Wagner or Ravel or Debussy. Sounds, sounds, music, harmonies, melodies, all the time without a break . . . like a calling repeated on all tones. Maybe my way was decided as stronger here, in isolation, than at home, next to the piano and the notes. I am only wondering how I will go it . . .⁴ (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 303-4)

The last sentence reveals that young Bentoiu was aware of the radicalisation of ideological pressure. Jdanov's doctrine would also be formulated by the Union of Composers led by Matei Socor through the Resolution of the Plenary Session of February 4-5th, 1952:

The fight against all manifestations of formalism, impressionism, atonality, against cosmopolitanism, against bowing down before the decadent bourgeois art must be led with intransigence. Music is a huge ideological stand.⁵ ("Despre dezvoltarea muzicii în R.P.R." 1952: 10)

Published that same year in the *Muzica* magazine, the document which represented "the platform of mediocrity directed against artistic values", blocking for a while the evolution of Romanian creation, "bullying important com-

⁴ "Dorul de muzică e permanent acum în mine. Ca o chemare, ca un reproș, când dulce ca un cânt de Sirene, când violent și amar. Ieri m-am jucat cu un acordeon. Armoniile, sunetele . . . Annie, roagă-te pentru mine. Vreau să reușesc să fiu bun, peste toate – și e foarte greu . . . caut cu îndârjire liniștea. . . . Mă cuprinde întruna, ba Wagner, ba Ravel, ba Debussy. Sunete, sunete, muzică, armonii, melodii, tot timpul fără răgaz . . . ca o chemare repetată pe toate tonurile. Poate drumul meu s-a decis mai puternic aici, în sihăstrie, decât acasă lângă pian și note. Mă întreb numai cum îl voi străbate . . ."

⁵ "Lupta împotriva tuturor manifestărilor formalismului, impresionismului, atonalismului, împotriva cosmopolitismului, a ploconirii în fața artei decadente burgheze trebuie dusă cu intransigență. Muzica este o uriașă tribună ideologică."

posers, reducing their options” – as ascertained by Octavian Lazăr Cosma (Cosma, O. L. 1995b: 73) – also came to the knowledge of musicians outside the Union, like Bentoiu, during his leaves in Bucharest.

A dignified attempt at adaptation at the beginning of his compositional career: assimilating folklore

In the period of the long military service of forced labour (1950-1953), Pascal Bentoiu had a single advantage, that of being absent from the activity of the Union of Composers, which experienced the most dreadful years. He was thus “protected” from direct contact with the political terror supported through cleansing commissions, ideological persuasion and the encouragement of servile works, the large-scale application of “the music for the masses” etc. When he would register again with the professional organisation and be accepted as an intern – December 12th, 1953 – (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 450) with a brilliant recommendation by Mihail Jora,⁶ the violent installation of the new regime had fulfilled its mission and had cooled down to a certain extent. The following year, Matei Socor would be deposed, with the leadership of the Union of Composers being left in the hands of a collective gathered around Ion Dumitrescu, officially appointed president in 1956.

However, the artistic environment was dominated by the ideas of socialist realism. The young composer’s solution for living and creating was approaching folklore, a complementary source of the works written in the army (the String Quartet No. 1, Op. 3, in the 3rd movement) and immediately after discharge (May 1st, 1953): Four songs on poems by Ștefan Octavian Iosif and the Concert for Piano and Orchestra No. 1, Op. 5. The compositional solution

⁶ “Pascal Bentoiu este cel mai strălucit talent creator muzical al generației tinerilor în vârstă de 25 de ani. . . . Intelligent, muncitor, echilibrat în gândire, doritor să-și adâncească cunoștințele, cercetător asiduă al literaturii bune și al sistemelor filosofice, Bentoiu se cultiva cetind pe latini, învățând apoi germana și franceza, pentru a putea ceti în original literatura și filosofia acestor popoare. De o desăvârșită modestie în tot ce gândește și creează, corect, conștiincios și perfect cinstit, acest om care a fost membru al vechii Societăți a Compozitorilor, merită tot sprijinul actualei Unii, căreia îi va face cinste orișicând.” [Pascal Bentoiu is the most brilliant musically creative talent of the young generation aged 25. . . . Intelligent, hard-working, well-balanced in his thinking, willing to deepen his knowledge, a tireless researcher of good literature and the philosophical systems, Bentoiu became cultivated by reading the Latins, then by learning German and French in order to read the original literature and philosophy of these peoples. Perfectly modest in everything he conceives and creates, fair, conscientious and completely honest, this man, who used to be a member of the former Composers’ Society, deserves the full support of the present Union, which he will honour at all times.] (Rațiu, Bentoiu 1995: 374).

which brought him his first public success and the first fee out of composition would be emphasised by his work as a researcher at the Institute for Folklore (December 1953 - August 1956).⁷ Thus, we consider that it was natural for Pascal Benteoiu to choose a folkloric quotation for the ending of the Piano Concerto Op. 5 next to more elaborate means of capitalising on traditional music, and for the Transylvanian Suite Op. 6 written in 1955 (which later the author considered a “sin of his youth” and did not print the score of). Expert criticism noted, however, the noble, refined character of the traditional melodies that were chosen and processed symphonically by the author.⁸ Here is an author’s note (conveyed to me in 1981):

The Transylvanian suite comes after assembling a collection of 100 dances from Transylvania (in collaboration with Rodica Weiss), for which I researched at least five times as much material. So, I am talking about a minute aesthetic selection; it seems to me that in the Transylvanian suite, the (melodic) beauty of the themes and the authenticity of the harmonisation take precedence (I was writing the study on the harmony of Transylvanian traditional players).⁹

His entry in the world of theatre music,¹⁰ which ensured his financial stability, the exhausting activity as a researcher of folklore, which threatened to “somehow pulverise his world of musical ideas” (Benteoiu, A. 2006: 483) and

⁷ The Institute featured the two folklore archives, which had been open in the interwar period, represented by the two great Romanian ethnomusicologists George Breazul and Constantin Brăiloiu, and hosted a huge fund of recordings. At that time, the Institute for Folklore was managed by composer Sabin Drăgoi, while the employee folklorists who would have a scientific career were Gheorghe Ciobanu, Tiberiu Alexandru, Ovidiu Bârlea, Adrian Vicol, Paula Carp.

⁸ Ada Brumararu wrote in 1958: “Deosebit de atrăgătoare, suita lui Pascal Benteoiu este o lucrare muzicală fără mari și complicate probleme, dar care îți face plăcere prin ceea ce are în ea sincer ca inspirație și ingenios ca tratare” [Extremely alluring, Pascal Benteoiu’s suite is a musical work devoid of great and complicated problems, but which creates pleasure by its honest inspiration and ingenious treatment] (Brumararu 2012: 85).

⁹ “Suita ardelenescă vine după alcătuirea unei culegeri de 100 dansuri din Ardeal (în colaborare cu Rodica Weiss), pentru care am cercetat cel puțin de cinci ori atâta material. Deci e vorba de o selecție estetică extrem de exigentă; mi se pare că în Suita ardelenescă primează frumusețea (melodică) a temelor și autenticitatea armonizării (scriam studiul despre armonia lăutarilor ardeleni).”

¹⁰ Through director Vlad Mugur, a school colleague, one of the great names of the Romanian stage until the early 1970s, when he emigrates.

especially his father's acquittal and release from prison (July 13th, 1956), an event which created for him the illusion of a return to normality, motivated Pascal Bentoiu to give up his secure position from the Institute of Folklore and begin a life as a free-lance composer (August 11th, 1956).

As if by chance – remembers Annie Bentoiu –, one evening he relistened on the radio to Shostakovich's¹¹ 10th symphony “with terrible emotion”. And during that month of solitude with his father (freed for a while from his long detention) he started to work on the symphonic poem which would be one of his most poetic and appreciated compositions, *Lucaefărul* [The Morning Star].¹² (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 503)

This work still presents a folkloric reminiscence: two bars quoted from a melody collected by the author, featuring the text “Când era badea-n Cindrel” [When My Man Was in Cindrel].

RESISTANCE TECHNIQUES IN THE YEARS OF THE BRUTAL RETURN OF POLITICAL REPRESSION (1958-1963)

Illusory but welcome political and cultural relaxation

For Bentoiu the illusion of normality lasted for a year and a few months until his father's second arrest (November 10th, 1957). In this short period, he enjoyed, together with his colleagues, the new élan of activity in the Union of Composers after Ion Dumitrescu's appointment as leader, a personality capable of keeping the balance between administering works and the political compromise necessary to the survival of the organisation. The condemnation of Jdanov's cultural policy, the increase of royalties by up to 80%, the actions of encouraging and promoting young creators, the establishment of the Editura Muzicală publishing house (Cosma, O. L. 1995a: 289-94), taking part in the young composers' Monday meetings in Mihail Andricu's house in order to become acquainted with the new directions in composition (next to Aurel

¹¹ The temporal context of the first audition – the end of the year 1953 –, its position as the first symphonic work realised after the author's denunciation of 1948, and the violent character of the scherzo rendered the symphony an unintended programme: probably the Stalinist era.

¹² “Ca din întâmplare, a reascultat la radio, seara, ‘cu o emoție teribilă’, simfonia a X-a de Șostacoviți. Și în acea lună de singurătate cu tatăl său (eliberat pentru un timp din lunga sa detenție) a început să lucreze la poemul simfonic ce urma să fie una dintre cele mai poetice și mai apreciate compoziții ale sale, *Lucaefărul*.”

Stroe, Anatol Vieru, Ștefan Niculescu, Tiberiu Olah, Dan Constantinescu, Dumitru Capoianu, critics Alfred Hoffmann, François Schapira) (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 532) – all these stimulated Bentoiu’s compositional aspirations. On the day he finished the symphonic poem *Luceafărul* (March 28th 1957), an inspired postromantic work (dedicated to George Enescu), but in which he uses for the first time the chromatic total in restrained space (the theme of the introduction), the author noted down a significant thought in his diary: “I would wish, however, that whatever I write from now on be pushed towards modernism as much as possible (both technically and psychologically).”¹³

His ambitious plans projected in a time of hope, even under the circumstances of severe financial limitations of the first year of independent activity (Bentoiu A. 2006: 531), would cave in once his father is arrested, with the crisis deepening at the moment the sentence is found out: 25 years of prison time. The first external effect was endangering the first audition of the Concert for piano, programmed at the Romanian Athenaeum on December 22th, 1957 (next to works by Dumitru Capoianu, Aurel Stroe and Tiberiu Olah). The fact that Bentoiu’s work stayed on the poster was due to Ion Dumitrescu’s intervention in the environment of political censorship; “if we take him out of the programme now, we are damaging his career for the rest of his life” – was the argument displayed before Pavel Țugui, the head of the cultural department of the Central Committee (Bentoiu A. 2006: 538).

Techniques of artistic survival in the years of repression of Gheorghe-Gheorghiu Dej’s regime (1958-1963)

The son’s personal drama, who knows that his father is condemned while innocent and living in an awful detention regime until the end of his life, is continued in his professional status, endangered by his burdensome and compromising political file. Pascal Bentoiu’s chances of advancement or even survival were made even more difficult by harsher censorship and repression in the following four years. It was the period of a powerful come-back of political terror following the revolution in Hungary (1956) and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the Romanian state (1958). Historian Alexandru Zub explains:

First of all, the regime needed to signal its power and control to Kremlin, on the other hand, it had to discourage any attempt at structuring internal opposition. The Hungarian and Polish exam-

¹³ “[A]ș dori însă ca orice aș scrie acum să fie împins la maxim spre modernism (și tehnicește, și psihologic)” (Bentoiu, A. 2006: 528).

ples were visibly at hand for the artisans of the regime, who were able to operate a pre-emptive policy of sorts. This actually characterised the moment: that the new type of repression was not only an effect of what had happened, but also a measure against the future. (Vasiliu 2014: 51)

The liberals' trial (his father's) from July 1958, the censorship of the premiere of opera *Oedip* during the first Enescu festival, followed by conductor Constantin Silvestri's leaving the country, the series of indictments and exclusions of important composers from the Union of Composers (Mihail Andricu, Mansi Barberis, the highly talented critic Mihai Rădulescu) from 1959 – peak moments in the series of repressive actions – were experienced by Pascal Bentoiu with great intensity.

Advancement becomes increasingly difficult. For a few years the composer's professional life branches out. The audience and critical success (Rădulescu 1958) of the symphonic poem *Luceafărul* (f.a. March 19th, 1958, the Radio Orchestra, the hall of the Romanian Athenaeum, conductor Alfred Alexandrescu) confirmed the composer's decision of 1956 of developing his creative capacity by increasingly enveloping existential meanings and the expressive means of modernity. He continues to compose major works with a high level of ordering sonic matter, of intense and rich expressiveness offered either by the symphonic dramaturgy of postromantic filiation (in the Concert for Violin and Orchestra Op. 9 from 1958, and in the Concert for Piano and Orchestra No. 2, Op. 12, written in 1960¹⁴) or by the process of abstraction/metamorphosis of folkloric melodies (The Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 14, 1962). It is to be retained that these works, which have long entered the concert circuit in Romania and beyond, were programmed for a first audition two to three years after having been composed, as the complexity of the scores and especially the freedom of expression and content were used to postpone indefinitely.

In order to support his art, Pascal Bentoiu would agree to make slight "compliments" to the ideas of the day, practicing a subtle game with censorship. The first case of a difference between the declared intent and content (in order to safeguard the freedom of expression) can be found in the work *Imagini bucureștene* [Bucharest Images] Op. 10 (initial title: "Bucharest 59"),

¹⁴ In an excerpt from one of his comments conveyed personally in 1981, the composer writes: "În sala de concert, prima audiție a acestei lucrări mi-a adus al doilea mare succes al vieții mele (al doilea ca dimensiune, primul fiind reacția publicului la *Hamlet*)" [In the concert hall, the first audition of this work brought to me the second major success in my life (the second in dimension, the first being the audience's reaction to *Hamlet*)].

three symphonic sketches with the contemporary titles: *Șantiere, Grădini, Stadion* [Building Sites. Gardens. Stadium]. Although he accepts the order of the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania to write the work for the celebration of fifteen years from the Liberation (that was the name given to the act of switching sides to join the Allies on August 23th, 1944), the composer also becomes associated with a complementary anniversary project, the celebration of 500 years of attestation of the city of Bucharest (Cosma, O. L. 1995a: 328). In the end he writes a modern, spectacular work, which, albeit criticised at the Union for the lack of a festive character (Cosma, O. L. 1995a: 331), would have its score performed, recorded and published before long. Here is the composer's testimony from a note he conveyed to me in 1981:

The work was an order by the ministry. It was the first order and I swore it would be the last one. Which it was: never before and never after that did I write anything else than what I wanted to. I conceived this one myself, of course, but I had to deliver it at a deadline. I wrote it very quickly, nervously and with summery perspiration. And since it was minimised and criticised by parties who should not have done it, I said to myself: *I shall not change one note in it* (although the ending did not wholly satisfy me). The consequence: it was published festively with an advertising band for I do not know which anniversary and it was performed I do not know how many times in Romanian representative concerts abroad (USSR, GDR, Bulgaria a.s.o.). And the tape was sent enthusiastically to many foreign radio stations (broadcast for example at Radio Paris during the week of Romanian music, coinciding with the visit of the Romanian head of state).¹⁵

An impressive number of authors accepted the order for that occasion, writing works which were much better adapted to the moment: Ștefan Niculescu

¹⁵ "Lucrarea a fost o comandă a ministerului. Era prima comandă și mi-am jurat că va fi ultima. Ceea ce a și fost: niciodată înainte și niciodată după n-am scris decât ceea ce am apucat eu să vreau. Și pe asta am conceput-o, firește, tot eu dar am avut obligația de a o preda la un termen fix. Am scris-o extrem de repede, cu draci și nădușeală estivală. Iar pentru că a fost minimalizată și criticată de cine nu se cuvenea, am zis: *nu voi schimba o notă din ea* (cu toate că finalul nu mă mulțumea pe deplin). Urmare: s-a publicat festiv, cu banderolă la nu știu ce aniversare și a fost cântată de nu știu câte ori în concerte reprezentative românești în străinătate (URSS, RDG, Bulgaria, ș.a.m.d.). Iar banda a fost trimisă cu entuziasm la multe radiodifuziuni străine (dată de pildă la Radio-Paris în săptămâna muzicii românești, coincizând (?) cu vizita șefului de stat român)."

wrote the Cantata No. 1 on poems by Nina Cassian; Tiberiu Olah, the Cantata *Prind visele aripi* [Dreams Can Fly] on poems by Maria Bănuș; Mihail Jora, the Cantata *Mărire ție, Patria mea* [Praise to You, My Fatherland] on poems by Mariana Dumitrescu; Sigismund Toduță, *Festive Ouverture*; Anatol Vieru, *Cantata anilor lumină* [The Cantata of the Light Years] on poems by Nina Cassian; a.o. (Cosma, O. L. 1995a: 331).

In a further two cases of censorship manipulation, Bentoiu used the names of two poets, who were proletcultist at that date, Nina Cassian and Mihai Beniuc, in order to compose two cycles of lieder with an increased degree of accessibility compared to the works of the time, with the obvious aim of having them accepted and entered in the performing circuit as soon as possible. Upon closer inspection, neither in Five Songs Op. 11 on poems by Nina Cassian (1959), nor in Four Songs Op. 13 on poems by Mihai Beniuc (1961) does Bentoiu capitalise on the authors' political poetry, but chooses beautiful poems with universal, uncircumstantial themes. A single title – *Vis. 1907* [Dream. 1907] (Mihai Beniuc) – calls to mind a tragic event in Romanian history (the peasants' revolt of 1907), which in that era had become a telling example of class struggle and exploitation. However, two musical pieces have remained in the repertory of sopranos until today: *Despre război* [On War] and *Obârșii* [Origins] from Op. 11! It is significant that Bentoiu did not have the scores of the two cycles published.

However, the composer's most efficient strategy of saving himself from an unavoidable judgement on account of his political file was his increasingly active presence in the theoretical debates at the Union of Composers after becoming a permanent member (June 25th, 1958). The publishing of his depositions in the magazines *Muzica*, *Contemporanul* and (even) *Scînteia*¹⁶ would keep them in public memory; thus we can ascertain nowadays that the author approached the current themes of that period – programmatism, the optimism of creation, accessibility, the relation between tradition, novelty and originality – but treated them professionally, anticipating through his aesthetic speculation and cultural argumentation his status as a musicologist earned through the books published after 1970. In those texts, Bentoiu has the courage to comment upon political topics, as his observations indirectly criticised the waves of circumstantial compositions, devoid of artistic value, written at that time. In a first example (excerpt from the article “Muzica populară ca izvor al creației programatice și cu text” [Traditional Music as a Spring of Programmatic Work and of Work Featuring Text]) he refers to the

¹⁶ Daily *Scînteia* was the organ of the Romanian Communist Party.

old labourers' revolutionary songs as a possible source of inspiration for contemporary work intending such content:

From a musical point of view, the labourers' song originates both with the Russian revolutionary songs, Western (German and French), and with local compositions, when it is not directly inspired by traditional Romanian melodies (as is the case with *Doina Haşului* [The Doina of the H Prison Cells]). In order to illustrate the élan of revolutionary struggle, no other music is better fit than these labourers' songs, as demonstrated by the poem *Prăbuşirea Doftanei* [The Fall of Doftana] by Alfred Mendelsohn or Shostakovich's recent 11th Symphony, dedicated to the revolution of 1905 and based on older Russian revolutionary songs.¹⁷ (Bentoiu, P. 1959: 10)

The author never characterised the aesthetics of socialist realism, but reminded them in a secondary manner to other tendencies, as in the article "Programatism şi text" [Programmatism and Text]:

The landscape of Romanian programmatic music created in recent years is extremely varied: diverse themes, various approaches, as per the composers' sensitiveness and artistic convictions, which does not exclude in any case the general realist-socialist orientation, which presupposes this variety of treatment.¹⁸ (Bentoiu, P. 1963)

The advocacy for the quality and cultural character of artistic products is resumed in almost every text, also fulfilled through the choice of the inspiring texts:

¹⁷ "Din punct de vedere muzical, cântecul muncitoresc îşi trage esenţa atât din cântecele revoluţionare ruse, apusene (germane şi franceze) cât şi din creaţiile autohtone, atunci când nu preia chiar melodii populare româneşti (cum e cazul *Doinei Haşului*). Pentru a reda avântul luptei revoluţionare, nici un fel de muzică nu se pretează mai bine decât tocmai aceste cântece muncitoreşti, aşa cum demonstrează poemul *Prăbuşirea Doftanei* de Alfred Mendelsohn sau recenta Simfonie a XI-a a lui Şostakoviici, închinată revoluţiei de la 1905 şi bazată pe vechi cântece revoluţionare ruse."

¹⁸ "Peisajul muzicii programatice româneşti, create în ultimii ani, este extrem de variat: teme diverse, moduri de tratare felurite, potrivit sensibilităţii şi convingerilor artistice ale diversilor compozitori, ceea ce nu exclude cătuşi de puţin orientarea generală realist-socialistă, care tocmai presupune această varietate de tratare."

I believe that in the case of literary topics themselves we have a duty to avoid typical subjects. An always vigilant sensibility, the permanent contact with new life under its multiple aspects, constantly attending the valuable poetic and dramatic productions, as well as an interest for the wonderful progress of science nowadays guarantee an original and forceful thematic orientation.¹⁹ (Bentoiu, P. 1963)

One of the great dangers of keeping the composition under the umbrella of socialist realism was some Romanian creators' openness towards the techniques of Western avant-garde in the early 1960s. Consequently, an important part of the discussions during the Country-wide conference of the Union of Composers in 1963 focused on strong criticism of the new tendencies. Bentoiu's discourse has a special nuance given by his personal reflection on the phenomenon:

I confess that after a lot of reflection on these things, I have come to attribute greater importance to the organic and authentic character of a culture than to the quantity of novelty that it presents. . . . However, art without the search for novelty has no value . . . It must be found in depth, not necessarily in extension. . . . The idea of novelty has become absolute, novelty has been brought on a par with value and the avant-garde of artistic avant-garde in our century has fallen (or is about to fall) in the abstract and inexpressive ocean of sterile and gratuitous combinations.²⁰ ("Creația muzicală în dezbaterile compozitorilor" 1963)

¹⁹ "Cred că și în privința tematicii literare propriu-zise avem datoria să ne ferim de subiecte-tip. O sensibilitate mereu trează, contactul permanent cu viața nouă, sub aspectele ei multiple, frecventarea asiduă a producțiilor poetice și dramatice valoroase, ca și interesul pentru progresul minunat al științei în zilele noastre sunt garanții pentru o orientare tematică originală și plină de forță."

²⁰ "Mărturisesc că după multă reflecție asupra acestor lucruri, am ajuns să acord mai mare importanță organicității și autenticității unei culturi decât cantității de inedit pe care o afișează. . . . Și totuși arta fără căutarea noului nu are valoare. . . . El trebuie aflat în profunzime, nu neapărat în extensie. . . . S-a absolutizat ideea de noutate, s-a pus un semn de egalitate dintre inedit și valoare iar avangarda avangărzii artistice a veacului nostru a căzut (sau este pe cale să cadă) în oceanul abstract și inexpressiv al combinațiilor sterile și gratuite."

CONCLUSIONS

Pascal Bentoiu's availability to approach topical themes and the quality of his commentaries contributed to his acknowledgement as a personality of Romanian music and determined his election, in 1963, in the Commission of symphonic and chamber music and in the Committee of the Union of Composers. This success helped him to overcome his personal drama (the death of his father in prison, 1962) and to capitalise on the period of cultural openness of 1965-1971 in Romania by conceiving ample works (the operas *Amorul doctor* [Doctor Cupid], *Hamlet*, and Symphony No. 1), which brought him great satisfaction as a creator and real international recognition. However, the texts published between the years 1959 and 1964²¹ had the same regime as the cycles of lieder on poems by Nina Cassian and Mihai Beniuc: considered as having immediate goals, they were not included in the essay collection *Deschideri spre lumea muzicii* [An Opening Towards the World of Music] (Bentoiu, P. 1973) and most of them were excluded from the composer's biographies published in Viorel Cosma's lexicographic volumes (Cosma, V. 1989: 113; Cosma, V. 2000: 531).

If for the period of extreme totalitarianism of the communist regime (1949-1965), Bentoiu's solution for artistic and moral survival was the minimal compromise and the manipulation of censorship, in the creative years after 1974 (when he withdraws from the leadership positions of the Union of Composers) he would amputate his richest reserve of musical talent, that of opera creator (due to the control on subjects and librettos), continuing to write only pure music and thus remaining outside any ideological intrusion. This would lead, among other things, to his failure to be awarded the Great Prize of the Union in 1988, because of his "open apolitical stance" (Cosma, O. L. 1995a: 504).

The story goes on. There are many aspects of the relationship between Bentoiu's works and the politics of the times. The most interesting could be formulated as follows: was his rejection of avant-garde styles an aesthetic or a political problem?

²¹ Besides articles already cited, see also Bentoiu, P. 1960, 1963a, 1963b, 1964 (Ed.).

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