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Music, Nationalism and Political Power (2)

Issue 2/2019 continues the debate on the impact of ideology on music initiated in the last issue, highlighting several other works presented in project I referred to, *The Musics of Power: Music and Musicians in Totalitarian Regimes in 20th Century Europe*, coordinated by Nicolae Gheorghîță in 2018: four case studies treating Romanian music during the Communist rule.

Nicolae Gheorghîță investigates the early period of the new political regime, when Stalin's 70th birthday occasioned a veritable emulation among Romanian composers – many, mediocre or simple opportunists – in dedicating works to the Soviet leader. The fact presented is symptomatic for the aggressive Sovietization which had put Romania on its knees and which the author exemplifies through a series of key-events of 1949, such as the transformation of the Society of Romanian Composers in a “creative union” after the Soviet model, the change in repertorial policy of the orchestras of the public Radio or socialist realism as both mandatory and the only compositional method allowed.

In his study, Gabriel Banciu examines the case of Sigismund Toduță, founder of the Cluj school of composition and the first PhD advisor in Romania. Using information found in archives and the Romanian press of the time, Banciu illustrates the pressure that the Communist apparatus put on Toduță. Criticized by both his colleagues, at the meetings of the Union of Composers, and by the press subject to power, he was charged, as the ideology demanded, with alleged “formalist” slip-ups and with a musical interest in religion in particular. The paper offers clues too as to Toduță's secret compositional life during the Communist years: a series of desk drawer works whose existence was only revealed after 1989.

Although the totalitarian regime in Romania didn't look kindly on religious music, in the 1970s-1980s it encouraged, in what was apparently a paradox, research in the field of Byzantine studies. Costin Moisil's analysis is as lucid as it is subtly humorous, revealing the ideological mainsprings which aroused the interest of an atheist state in such a field: protochronist ideas of reconstructing "the glorious past of our homeland", now heavily promoted by Nicolae Ceaușescu's isolationist-nationalist politics.

Romanian jazz was much less favoured. Alex Vasiliu's magnifying glass shows that this symbol of "the decadent bourgeoisie", of the United States of America, harshly criticized by the state propaganda, couldn't overcome its sensitive statute, despite some sporadic (and desperate) attempts to adjust it to the official requirements, among which the ideological adaptation of texts. The case of such musicians as Richard Oschanitzky and Eugen Ciceu, expelled from the Conservatory because of their interest in jazz, are eloquent to a high degree.

Evoking a completely different time, space, cultural universe, Irina Boga's concluding reading suggestion, *Tokyo Listening: Sound and Sense in a Contemporary City* (2019) by Lorraine Plourde, guides the modern listener in distinguishing and listening to the many voices of the Japanese metropole. A welcome change of soundscape after the dark and gloomy world of the *musics of power*!

English version by Maria Monica Bojin