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Salon Music in Nineteenth-Century London and Bucharest

Keywords: Porumbescu, Gardeev, women composers

A comparative study of nineteenth-century salon music in Bucharest and London proves as interesting for the similarities that it reveals as much as for the differences. It not only deepens our understanding of what was happening and why in both cities, but also demonstrates the impact that history and social conditions have on music-making. Like Bucharest, London had no contemporary high-status national art music to draw on in the nineteenth century. Both cities felt themselves to be on the margins of *ernste Musik*, and it was something they imported rather than created with any international success.

From 1830 on, Bucharest witnessed a period of modernization, during which it was gradually transformed from a large village into what was called "little Paris" (Boia 2001: 274). It was, of course, only the West and not the East that could offer a model of modernization. Where music was concerned, the adoption of Western instruments brought about a change of repertoire. Nicolae Gheorghiță has provided a neat illustration: after the new army of the Danubian Principalities was set up in 1830, the choice of Western wind and brass instruments for the military bands meant that Western repertoire replaced the music played by Ottoman bands, and the latter were abolished around the same time (Gheorghiță 2017: 367). The repertoire of the military bands (waltzes, marches, mazurkas, rondos and other short pieces) was not dissimilar to that of the salon. Eastern practices did continue after 1830, but the gulf between them grew wider as they began to cater for different audiences.

In Bucharest, nationalism only began to rise in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century, Bucharest was a cosmopolitan metropolis, home to people from many different countries. In London, a specific English nationalism was also slow to develop. The question of what was Englishness was prompted by the perception that Britishness was now shared with large numbers of people in countries throughout the British Empire. British and English had previously been more or less synonymous, but, towards the end of the century, this was creating identity problems. Such thoughts may have played a part in motivating Lucy Broadwood and Frank Kidson to begin collecting traditional music in the English countryside in the 1880s. Before this, the folk airs and arrangements heard in London drawing rooms were almost always Scottish or Irish. A refined style of pseudo-traditional song could achieve commercial success in the drawing-room market, as did the "Scottish" song *Mary of Argyle* (music by Sidney Nelson, words by Charles Jefferys, *c*. 1855) and the "Irish" song *The Rose of Tralee* (music by Charles Glover, words by E. Mordaunt Spencer, 1847).

In Bucharest, too, there were not always clear distinctions made between newly composed songs in the folk idiom and traditional songs (Sandu-Dediu 2017: 318). In addition, Florinela Popa has written of the desire to project "the ideals of the 1848 generation . . . onto the Romanian peasant" (Popa 2017: 349). An interest in the traditional music of Wallachia and Moldavia increased when imperial ties loosened and the two principalities united. The publication of the journal *Lyra română* claimed in its first issue in December 1879 that it wished "to sound the alarm for the awakening of our national music" ("Precuvântare", *Lyra română*, 1, 1 [1879], 1-2, quoted in Popa 2017: 343).

Growing nationalist sentiment in London and Bucharest in the last two decades of the nineteenth century created anxiety in both cities about the absence of high-status national musical achievements. An attempt to fill this vacuum was made by raising the status of indigenous folk music. However, there was a debate in both countries about whether or not a national music existed.

Social Class

Class differences were strongly marked in both London and Bucharest. The salons of Romanian boyars (landowners) first came under sustained Western musical influence during the Russian occupation of 1806-12, and, in the succeeding decades, an appetite grew for importing music from Paris, Leipzig, and Vienna (Preda-Schimek 2017: 396). Romanian regional folk music passed

into the salon via dances and songs arranged from the repertoire of the urban *lăutari* (folk musicians). However, the latter had an extensive repertoire that included Eastern styles, because flexibility of repertoire was essential to earning a living. Nevertheless, as the esteem for Western instruments increased in the 1820s, it began to affect what could be played. The piano, for example, granted automatic privilege to Western music. In the library of the Romanian Academy of Bucharest, music manuscript number 2575, dating from around 1830, contains a mixture of piano arrangements of songs and dance music from South-eastern and Western Europe, and in this collection the *hora* already finds itself in the company of the waltz and ecossaise (Gheorghiță 2019).

In his history of Romania, Lucian Boia includes an image of an engraving of a princely salon in Bucharest in 1843 that shows the Eastern and the Western colliding. The women and young men wear Western European clothes, while some older boyars retain Ottoman dress (Boia 2001: 83). Despite the nationalist aspirations that have existed within Ottoman controlled regions, Barbara Jelavich, in her large-scale study of Balkan History, insists that "the legacy of Ottoman rule was an intimate part of the life of each individual and one that could not be easily obliterated" (Jelavich 1983: 104). Ottoman musical practices were able to fertilize local musical styles, rather than causing them to stagnate. The East was not strange; it was familiar.

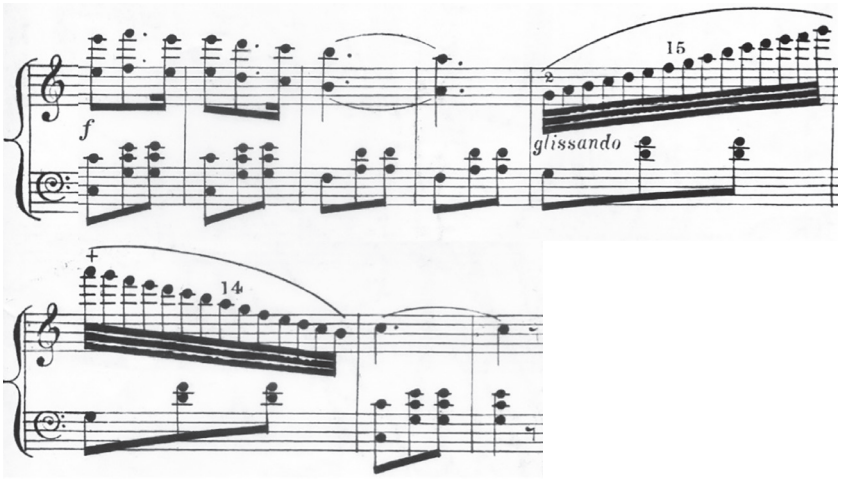
In London of the 1840s, the bourgeoisie were the drivers for social change, notably in their efforts to attain legislation to allow the import of cheap corn, which would allow them to cut the wages of their employees. Landowners opposed such change, wanting to protect their profits. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was one of the main reasons there was no English revolution in 1848. In contrast, the population of the Principalities at this time consisted largely of landowners and peasants, and the middle class was small in number. Thus, it was the liberal boyars and the intellectuals who fostered the ideas behind the 1848 Revolution, such as the emancipation of the peasantry. The Ottoman Turks and Russians put their differences aside in order to end this Revolution by re-occupying the Principalities during 1848-51. Agrarian reform in 1864 eventually gave land to the peasants in a compromise that preserved the large boyar domains (Boia 2001: 81). In that decade, Romania was still basically an agrarian economy, although the first statistical survey of Romanian industrial establishments took place in 1863 (Rogojanu and Badea 2012: 36). Insufficiency in industrial production and middle-class numbers were a stumbling block to modernization. To some extent the class structure was split into an exploited native peasantry and an urban elite, among whom foreigners were plentiful. Because the consumerism

of the latter was financed by the former, the growth of nationalist ideas in Romania took on a different meaning to those in European countries with a large, thriving middle class, and was more akin to an internal struggle for social equity (Boatcă 2007: 376-80).

The Bucharest middle class, the richest members of which were bankers and merchants, became the most important class for concert and theatre life from around the mid-1870s. Prior to that, the situation was complicated by the boyars, who could vary in status from high to middle and even low rank (*boiernaș*). However, from the mid-1860s on, when certain boyar privileges were abolished, social status in Bucharest became mainly a matter of property ownership and the level of education acquired. In London, the middle class was two-fold: there was a well-established mercantile middle class, and a newer industrial bourgeoisie. The former had already been important to the musical life of the later eighteenth century, and the middle class as a whole was the main target for urban musical events by the 1840s. There were two exceptions. First, the theatre was never found entirely respectable, partly because prostitutes were always in the vicinity, and sometimes in the theatre itself. However, by the 1880s, more theatres were gaining respectability by presenting "respectable" forms of musical entertainment. Music hall was a different matter: it remained a working-class and lower-middle-class (shopkeepers, clerks, and such) institution into the 1890s, when efforts to market variety entertainment for the family were being made. London was a cosmopolitan city, if not to the extent of Bucharest, and many musicians were German. Young composers often studied in Germany (especially Leipzig) and singers sought training in Italy. In Bucharest, the favoured places were France and Germany. The immigrants settling in Bucharest who had the greatest effect on the cultural life of the city were creative artists and private tutors.

Dance music

The popular European dance rhythms were those of the couple dances, the waltz and the polka, and the galop, which could be either a couple dance or group dance. The best-selling English drawing-room waltz was Joseph W. Turner's *The Fairy Wedding* (*c*. 1863), which reveals the commercial benefits to be accrued from catering to need for middle-class girls to demonstrate "musical accomplishment" rather than deep understanding, or the disciplined technical expertise that required hours of practice. In this piece, the rapid scaled can be played using a fingernail on an upturned hand (Ex. 1).



Ex. 1. *Joseph W. Turner,* The Fairy Wedding Waltz.

It is rare to find anything as technically difficult to play as certain piano pieces by the Romanian composer Esmeralda Gardeev. This would seem to indicate a more high-minded attitude in the Romanian salon. In London, high mindedness was man's realm, as an article in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1860 makes clear (Macdonnell 1860: 383-89). The structure of *The Fairy Wedding* is unusual in its being a rondo with two subsidiary themes. The waltz was normally a waltz cycle comprised of five different waltzes. However, a 5-waltz cycle in a middle-class drawing room where nobody danced was just too long. In an aristocratic salon, space would be available for dancing. Waltzes targeting the middle-class home tended to consist of an introduction, three waltzes, and a coda – examples being *Pride o' the Clyde* waltz (*c*. 1885) by J. Dalziel, and *The Cascade* waltz (1887) by Henry Neville. In Bucharest, Ion Ivanovici opts for something a little longer with *Valurile Dunării* [Waves of the Danube] (1880), which have an introduction, four waltzes and a finale.

In London, because there were no dance styles that were recognizably English, if a dance rhythm was to represent something national, then it would have to be the Irish jig or Scottish reel. Bucharest was able to fall back on the traditional round dance, the *hora*. Among the first to arrange the *hora* for the salon piano was Ciprian Porumbescu (1853-83) after whom the National University of Music, Bucharest, was once named. He was born into a musical family in Şipote, now Шепіт [Shepit], Ukraine, and went on to study at the Vienna Conservatory (Ghircoiaşiu and Vasiliu 2015). He was an important

founder of a Romanian style of composition, despite his death aged 29 in 1883. He achieved this status by not only composing the first Romanian operetta *Crai nou* [New Moon], but also through his output of songs and piano pieces for the salon.

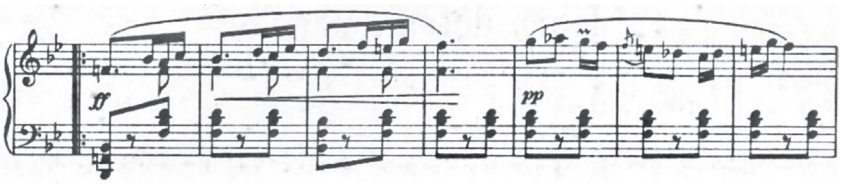
Porumbesco's *Hora detrunchiaților* [Hora of the Decapitated], for piano, is in 3/8 time. The rural *hora* was usually in duple time, but the nineteenth-century urban *hora* was typically compound duple or triple time. This piece dates from 1878 but, even at this late date, it carries some Eastern inflections, thereby demonstrating that Westernization did not necessarily entail driving out the East. Orientalism, by which I mean the use of an Eastern or pseudo-Eastern style to signify difference, appears to be rare in Romanian salon music. An occasional Eastern element may appear as part of a piece, but without its being structured so to stand out in an oppositional manner.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the East in London drawing room ballads was likely to feature in the words only, as happens, for example, in Caroline Norton's poem *The Arab's Farewell to His Favourite Steed*, set to music by John Blockley in the late 1840s. In the second half of the century, the East begins to be represented by richer harmony – for example, *I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby* (lyrics by W. Wills, music by Frederick Clay, 1877) – or vigorous rhythm, as in *A Son of the Desert Am I* (lyrics by John P. Wilson, music by Walter A. Phillips, 1889).

Later, unusual melodic intervals, tritones or augmented seconds, are employed to signify exoticism, as in the opening of Amy Woodforde-Finden's *Kashmiri Song* of 1902 (lyrics by Laurence Hope). In most cases, unlike the Romanian salon, the ideology of Orientalism is at work. The East is represented as strange, alternately frightening and alluring, and in opposition to Western values. This could not happen in the same way in Bucharest, because the East was well known, not alien. Even after Ottoman styles of chamber music and military music disappeared in the 1830s, the interest in the Eastern flavoured "wordly songs" (secular songs) persisted into the 1860s. Anton Pann published his collection *Spitalul amorului sau Cîntătorul dorului* [Songs of Love and Longing] in Bucharest, 1850-52.

The term "ecumene" is often used to refer to a geographical zone of cultural interaction, where a criss-crossing of styles and idioms may be observed. Jim Samson has pointed out that such ecumenism in the Balkans is what allows Maria Todorova to distinguish Balkanism from Orientalism, in that the former deals with differences *within* a type, rather than between one type and another (Todorova 1997: 19, cited by Samson 2005: 40). The third theme of Porumbesco's *Hora detrunchiaților* (bars 33-48) provides an example of

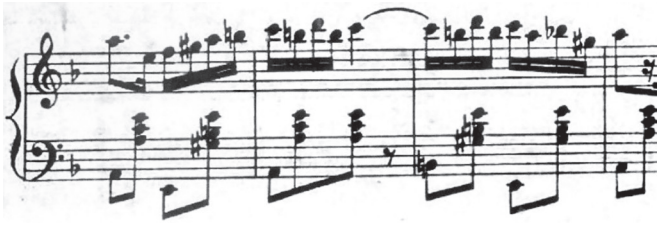
ecumenical musical partnership, moving from West to East and back again. Note how the dynamic level falls for the Eastern-sounding phrase, an effect that seems designed to avoid making a strong contrast with the Western style (Ex. 2).



Ex. 2. *Ciprian Porumbescu,* Hora detrunchiaților, *mm. 33-39.*

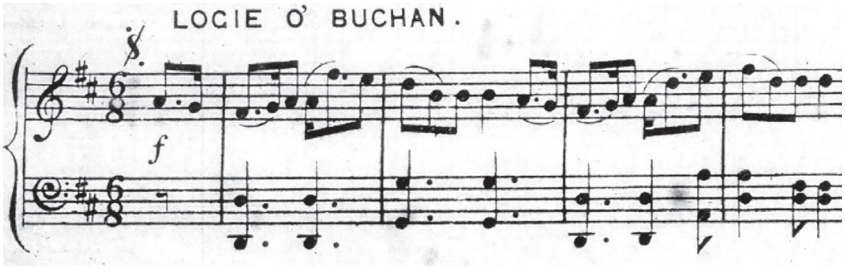
Quadrilles were played in the salon, but when they were listened to rather than danced to, the short sections registered as a disjointed stop-and-start affair. Waltz cycles had more in the way of flow and transition, and, of course, maintained the same tempo and metre. However, the structure of the quadrille meant that it offered more opportunity to incorporate traditional airs into its structure. As examples, I am comparing Porumbescu's *Coloane Române*, Op. 7 (*c*. 1875), a quadrille on Romanian airs, with the anonymous *The Caledonian Quadrilles* (*c*. 1880).

The Pantalon, the first dance figure of *Coloane Române*, features Eastern augmented seconds. It bears the title "Corăbiasca," which relate it to a dance of Moldovan sailors who were part of the Black Sea fleet. The third dance, Poule, begins with the very Western "Carnival of Venice" but ends with a *hora* in the Dorian mode that includes augmented 2nds between the third and fourth degree. This section of the quadrille is a neat illustration of cultural differences existing side by side. The fifth dance, Pastourelle, is built of three tunes ("Of! Of!", "Dragă mi oița", and "Dac' așa eac' așa"), all showing Romanian characteristics, flattened 7ths, augmented 2nds, ostinato figures, and drones. A peculiarity, here, is that the tune "Dragă mi oița" is notated in D major, yet the notes C-sharp and F-sharp are individually cancelled with natural signs. In the Finale, "Poporal," bars 5-8 of the second tune reveal that things do not *always* go hand in hand in ecumenical partnership. There is sometimes an uncomfortable disagreement. At the A minor cadence in bars 7-8, the Phrygian B-flat in the melody clashes with a B-natural in the harmony (Ex. 3). Here, two cultural types might be said to be colliding – an Eastern-influenced melody and Western-influenced tonal harmony.



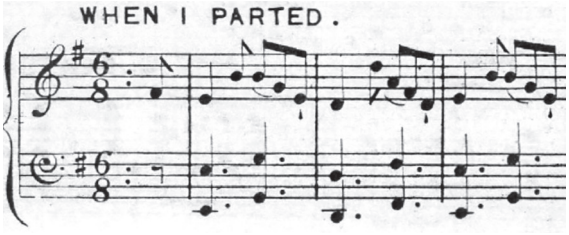
Ex. 3. *Ciprian Porumbescu,* Coloane Române, *Finale, "Poporal".*

The composer of *The Caledonian Quadrilles* shows a similar desire to characterize the individual dances with local colour. The second dance, *L'Été,* is entitled "Logie o' Buchan" and includes examples of the rhythm known as the "Scotch snap," which consists of an accented short note followed by a long note (Ex. 4).



Ex. 4. *The Caledonian Quadrilles,* L'Été, *"Logie o' Buchan".*

No. 4, *La Pastourelle,* "When I Parted," contains a characteristically Scottish melodic whole-tone shift from tonic to flattened seventh, implying parallel fifths and octaves in the harmony. It is found in the Scottish tunes "Reel of Tulloch", "Alexander Duff's Reel", and "Donald MacGillavry", and is a feature sometimes described as a "double tonic" (Ex. 5).



Ex. 5. *The Caledonian Quadrilles,* La Pastourelle, *"When I Parted".*

The Finale, "Gordon of Lesmor", has drone 5ths (the absence of a 3rd in the harmony) with their Highland bagpipe connotations, and the cadences suggests pipe "doublings", in which a note is reiterated. *The Caledonian Quadrilles* adopts the pattern of British and French quadrilles, which contain five parts, not six as in the Viennese quadrille, the model for *Coloane Române*.

Women and the Salon

In the salon, women in both Bucharest and London exercised a power they rarely possessed outside of the home. That is because the home was woman's domain in the ideology of separate spheres that pervaded nineteenth-century gender politics, creating a gender norm for nineteenth-century London and, as the century progressed, for Bucharest also (Mihăilă 2011: 147-49). By the late nineteenth century, Ramona Mihăilă perceives the cult of Victorian domesticity prevailing in Romanian society (2011: 151).

Young women of affluent families played a crucial role in the Westernization of domestic music in Bucharest, because they learned European dances at boarding schools and were taught to play the piano at home by private tutors, many of whom came from abroad (Preda-Schimek 2017: 402). After mid-century, dance music played in a salon was usually Western, because it was in the salon that the piano reigned supreme. At a ball in the first half of the century, the music might have been played by a Western instrumental ensemble, but it might also have been played by a *taraf*, a folk ensemble that included Eastern European instruments.

Gradually, it came to be seen as important for a family's social status if a daughter possessed the skill to play Western music. In London, too, music had a role to play in the esteem a family could attain. However, whereas in Bucharest being able to play Western music was a sign of education, in London playing music was primarily linked to moral respectability. Music was thought to improve the mind and character, but, although that meant it was not an idle pursuit, neither did it mean that it was to demand complete dedication. For a girl in London, music was an attractive accomplishment.

The salons of the Romanian nobility and wealthy elite were marked by some distinctive features. In the early nineteenth century, during the Phanariot era, Ion Ghica tells us that the salon of Rallou Karadja, the daughter of the Hospodar [Governor] of Wallachia, echoed to the sound of high Western culture, the music of Mozart and Beethoven (Ghica 2010: 22-30, cited in Xepapadakou and Charkiolakis 2017: 6). In the second half of the nineteenth century, artistic and literary salons were being organized by

women whom Ramona Mihăilă describes as "rich and respectable" (2011: 159). She cites the description in Nicolae Petrașcu's novel *Marin Gelea* (1905) of Lady Secaly's salon, which was one of the best in Bucharest, to which only the nobility was invited, and which scarcely included anything Romanian. The aristocratic home in England was also more likely to promote the music of German and Italian composers than that of English origin. Queen Victoria passed from her close engagement with the music of Felix Mendelssohn to a later musical association with Paolo Tosti. In contrast, middle-class homes in London were dominated by drawing-room ballads of British origin.

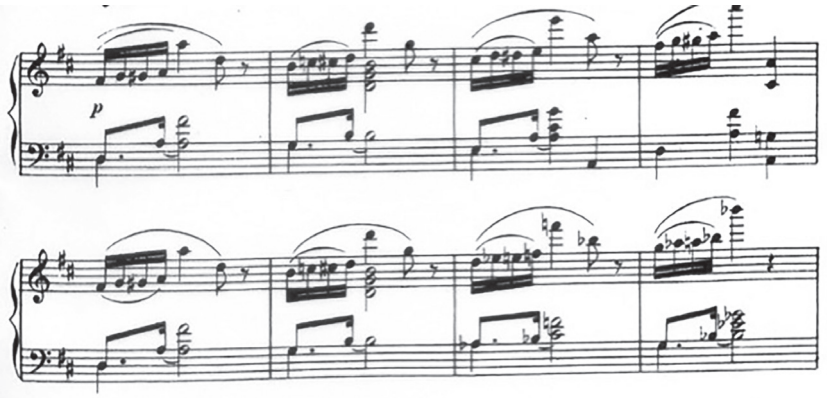
The opportunities that the salon offered to creative women are evident in the rise of British women ballad composers in the 1860s. By the end of the decade, they were beginning to rival men. Some modestly chose pseudonyms, for instance, Claribel (Mrs Charlotte Alington Barnard) and Dolores (Ellen Dickson); some did not, for example, Virginia Gabriel. It is significant that one composer chose to be named as Miss M. Lindsay for her secular ballads but as Mrs J. Worthington Bliss for her sacred ballads. In the later nineteenth century, salon compositions of Esmeralda Athanasiu-Gardeev (1834-1913) were published in Bucharest and were considerable in number. Although she Frenchified her name to Esméralda Athanassiou-Gardéev, she did not feel any need to use a pseudonym, or the title "Madame".

She was born in eastern Moldavia, in Galați, which operated as a free trading port on the Danube from 1834-82. After studying initially in Bucharest, she went on to study piano and composition with Julius Schulhoff in Paris. It was her second husband, the Russian General Gardeev, who introduced her to European aristocratic circles and to the salons of George Sand, Sophie Menter, Camillo Sivori, Vasile Alecsandri, Anton Rubinstein and others (Cosma 2001). She pursued further studies in composition with Anton Rubinstein in St. Petersburg. She became a teacher of piano, guitar, and voice in Bucharest after the War of Independence (1877-78) and died in that city in 1917.

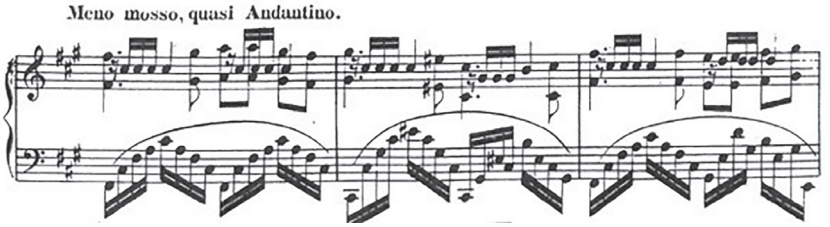
Her fantasy for piano, *Rumänisches Charakterstück*, Op. 44, composed around 1861, was dedicated to Rubinstein. The last page of the sheet music of this piece lists her salon compositions. They are described as "pour piano seul" [for piano solo], but some of them are songs. They are all published by A. Gebauer in Bucharest. The majority of her compositions have French titles and Op. 40 contains songs with French lyrics, but Op. 33 and Ops. 35-36 are collections of songs to German texts. Op. 39 contains popular Serbian songs, and Op. 41 consists of two Romanian national songs.

Her Rumänisches Charakterstück contains examples of rich romantic harmony, such as half-diminished sevenths and dominant ninths, and there

is a Lisztian cadenza in bar 92. Despite her composition lessons, there are plenty of examples of amateurish technique. The piece relies heavily on four-square phrasing, and there is sometimes a tendency to lapse into shorter repetitive phrasing, as, for instance, with the string of two-bar phrases in bars 93-120, or one-bar phrases in bars 133-42 (Ex. 6). There is also an odd quartal harmony in bar 139, where the unresolved dissonance between the B-flat in the melody and the bass notes C and F could have been avoided by having D instead of C in the bass. Although there is a tendency to overdo arpeggio accompaniment patterns, the piece is not without some inventive figuration (Ex. 7).



Ex. 6. *Esmeralda Athanasiu-Gardeev,* Rumänisches Charakterstück, *mm. 133-40.*



Ex. 7. *Esmeralda Athanasiu-Gardeev,* Rumänisches Charakterstück, *Meno mosso.*

Conclusion

British and Romanian salon music may suffer from a lack of critical endorsement of its cultural value, whether consumed as a product for the home product or exported as a commodity elsewhere. It is necessary, however, to recognize that this is an evaluation that arises from a particular set of artistic preferences and values that has its own history and cultural context. The artistic merit of salon music is measured against an aesthetic normativity established by certain composers and critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The lack of enthusiasm for nineteenth-century Romanian salon music on the part of a more general audience may also be related to lack of opportunity to hear it, as a consequence of its not having had the benefit of efficient marketing and promotional mechanisms for its dissemination.

When promotion existed, circumstances could change dramatically. One of the best-known Romanian compositions, Iosif Ivanovici's waltz *Waves of the Danube*, is, in fact, an example of this disdained salon music. It was first published in Bucharest in 1880 as *Valurile Dunării*, and dedicated to Emma Gebauer, the wife of music publisher Constantin Gebauer. It no doubt existed as a military band piece as well as a piano piece, because Ivanovici was the musical director of the military bands of Galați and Bucharest (Ghircoiașiu 2001). It was first orchestrated by French pianist and composer Émile Waldteufel in 1886 and was awarded a prize following its performance at the Paris Exposition of 1889. It was published in the USA in 1896 and was soon heard all around the globe, even if rarely performed on high-status concert platforms. In 1926, Korean singer Yun Sim-deok recorded it in Osaka for the Nitto Recording Company as the song 윤심덕 사의 찬미 [In Praise of Death]. Soon after her recording, she and her lover, a Korean writer, committed joint suicide by jumping off a boat. The incident inspired two films (*Yun Sim-deok*, 1969 and *Death Song*, 1991), and a TV series, *The Hymn of Death*, in 2018. In 1946, *Waves of the Danube* became "The Anniversary Song" for Al Jolson (arranged by himself and Saul Chaplin), and Jolson's recording (Decca 23714) climbed to No. 2 in the American hit parade the next year.

By far the most important reason to study British and Romanian salon music is because without a knowledge of this music, our understanding of nineteenth-century musical life in both countries is inadequate. In London and Bucharest, the salon was uniquely placed to allow the public and private aspects of music-making to be observed: public, because the music was published and publicly marketed; and private, because the salon, although open to guests, was part of a domestic space.

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