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Beginnings of Institutional Musical Life in the 19th-Century Romanian Principalities – Steps Towards a Much-Desired Modernisation

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The 19th century was, for the Romanian Principalities, the time of important transformations. The temporal arch includes metamorphosis in the political, social-economic and cultural structure of this area located in the East of Europe but under the influence of the Orient. The mixture of the two polarities manifested unevenly, concurrently with a sense of waking up to a national consciousness and with factors favouring emancipation.

The historical circumstances of the beginning of the century seemed to still tip the balance in favour of the Oriental side in the Romanian Principalities, territories under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, kept in isolation by the Phanariot dominion (through the Greek rulers imposed by the Turks). Nevertheless, at the end of the 18th century Enlightenment thought permeates Eastern Europe, and a new spiritual model thus begins to seem possible. The Romanian states are now more visible in the debates of the big European powers, which would arbitrate the events and changes of the Romanian Principalities, united into a single country, Romania, in the second half of the 19th century. Modernisation is felt starting with 1821 (the year of the Greek War of Independence). Until the end of the fifth decade, the old and the new coexist. Traces of Oriental tradition in clothing, behaviour, and language, the precarious living conditions and the social discrepancies are signs of the old world. But belief in progress and in science emerges. Openness to the West corresponds to a reconnection to the rhythm of the history, and modernization is seen as “transformation”, “awakening”, “light”. The effervescence of the 1848 Revolutions and realisation of the Union between

Wallachia and Moldavia in 1859 accelerated the process, and starting with 1866 “modern Romania’s institutional setting and intellectual climate is outlined” (Hitchins 2014: 311).

The portrait of the Wallachian Romanian, which Aurélie Soubiran Ghika (French-born high society lady married to a Romanian from an old aristocratic family of boyars) paints at the middle of the 19th century, indicates this process: the culture of this individual is divided between the French novels of the day, Italian opera and French vaudevilles, “he is imitative, without losing his originality, and remains himself underneath his French layer, for France is the one from which he takes his shape” (quoted in Iacob 2015: 17). The portrait of the Moldavian Romanian is rather similar, as described by Romanian writer Alecu Russo, participant in the Romanian 1848 Revolution: “we were born in Moldavia and we were fed at the breast of foreigners, our head is German, French, but our heart is still the heart of a Moldavian” (quoted in Iacob 2015: 18). The last decades of the 19th century didn’t completely remove the inherited Oriental patina – its sap would continue as one of the coordinates often invoked when characterising the Romanian society. Bucharest, the capital of the new state officially named Romania in 1864, is half-Oriental, half-Western: labyrinthine, it only has one straight and elegant street, it lacks boulevards, and is surrounded by insalubrious suburbs. But it is considered “one of the most entertaining capitals of Europe” (Pârvolescu 2005: 19), making “fast progress towards becoming a civilized city” (Pârvolescu 2005: 33), with electric lighting, horse-drawn trams, a hydraulic station providing water supply (in the Grozăvești neighbourhood, at the end of the century), a park, the Cișmigiu, featuring arrangements by a Berlin horticulturist, imposing buildings, such as the University, inaugurated in 1869 and built after the Western model, the Post Office Palace emulating its model in Geneva, the splendid Athenaeum and the National Bank, both by French architect Albert Geron, or the Great Theatre, inspired by La Scala. The intellectual elite steps into the limelight, replacing or overshadowing, by its liberal breath, the high boyars’ conservatism and social importance. Cultural life is richer, with concerts, theatre and opera performances. Foreign artists, transiting the Romanian Principalities on their way from the West of Europe to Odessa, Sankt Petersburg, and Constantinople, initiate stable cultural nuclei on Romanian territory in the second half of the 19th century. The boyars send their children to study abroad, choosing more and more frequently universities in Western Europe, so that in the ninth and tenth decades the top Romanian youth hold PhDs from institutions in Paris, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, or are members of impor-

tant foreign societies. Returning home, they in their turn establish societies, academies, libraries, schools, and universities.

Music and music making, too, slowly change, be it with regard to their role as background for recreational activities or as part of the education, their position in the private or the public environment, or their place in the first dedicated institutions just beginning to coagulate.

The time's writings by foreign chroniclers, travellers, and diplomats reveal a general gradual change in taste and habits in Romanian society also as concerns music. Reports from 1788 (Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne, quoted in Iacob 2015: 166) show that balls (very important social events, where music was customarily played) proposed exclusively Oriental and local dances. In the twilight of one century and at the dawn of another, musics coexist: traditional folk and Oriental music is still played by fiddlers and Ottoman bands, but Western music brought in by the instrumental bands of the occupying troops (Russian and Austrian) is also performed. Demand for Romanian and Phanariot dance music would soon decrease at the Royal Court or at the social evenings and balls organised by the important boyar families; instead, waltzes, contredanses, minuets, polkas etc. gain ground. After 1830, the changes are even more visible: in the music of the Royal Court, the *mehterhane* is just a memory (military fanfares would take its place), the efforts of Hieromonk Macarie to render the sacred music of the local Orthodox Church Romanian are paying off, and popular music is increasingly ready to absorb repertoires imported from Western Europe.

Music is part of the education of the young boyars, at home or at boarding school. In Iași, the boarding school founded by Mrs A. Germont de Lemont in 1812 copied the requirements of the equivalent English education. Again in Moldavia, at the boarding schools of boyar Teodor Burada, of Elena Fotino or of Smaranda Bacinski, in the 1840s, vocal and instrumental music was taught (Iacob 2015: 251). The first boarding school in Wallachia, offering music and dance lessons, is founded in 1843, by royal initiative (Iacob 2015: 171). Public schools would follow, where students learned sacred and European music.

The next step was to establish dedicated schools and classes. The School of Vocal Music of the Philharmonic Society Bucharest was, in 1834, the first public institution of this kind in Wallachia. The goals of the Society were “the artistic development of the Romanian people”, “namely [that] of music and dramatic art” (Moldovanu 1939: 881), and, in addition to Ioan Câmpineanu,¹

¹ Romanian intellectual and politician participant in the 1848 Revolution, member of the Conservative Party and the first director of the National Bank of Romania.

Ion Heliade Rădulescu² and Constantin (Costache) Aristia,³ its founders were “all the capital’s boyars”: among the best-known, Scarlat Crețulescu, I. Russet, Grigore Cantacuzino, Iancu Filipescu, Ioan Oteteleşanu, Barbu Catargiu, Emanuil Băleanu, Constantin Manu (Moldovanu 1939: 881). A similar institution, the Dramatic Philharmonic Conservatory, is opened in Iași, in 1836, on the initiative of Gheorghe Asachi.⁴ The need was felt for some coherent forms to train Romanian musicians, capable to match the contemporary levels of artistic performances.

Romanian musical life was stimulated also by the tours of foreign opera companies (Italian, German, French), later to put together permanent seasons, giving the latest, most successful works by Rossini, Bellini, Meyerbeer, Weber, Verdi. Even if meteoric, the presence of celebrated European musicians leaves an indelible impression – for instance, Franz Liszt’s concerts in the Romanian Principalities (some of them hosted by such Romanian boyars as Alexandru “Alec” Balș in Iași, in 1847, and by Princess Cleopatra Trubetzkoi in Băicoi, in 1846-1847). To such events are added the efforts of constituting Romanian opera and theatre companies, which needed well-prepared local instrumentalists and singers.

With regard to choral music, *Corul cântăreților ștabului oștirii* [Choir of the Field Officer of the Army] stands out, considered to have been “the most accredited structure in the musical perimeter” in the 1840s (Cosma 2014: 24). To the choir’s conductor, Archimandrite Visarion, is attributed the introduction of the harmonic church singing as an alternative to monodic chant of Byzantine origin. The education of the choristers included violin (with Alexandru Flechtenmacher), theory of music and church music classes (with professor Grigore Manciu). After the Union of the Principalities, between 1863 and 1864, this structure would set in motion two other schools, the Ceremonial Choir and the School of Instrumental Music.

This effort to professionalize music education didn’t quite yet consolidate any superior and coherent form of organisation and teaching. It is in this context that we must look at the act of establishment of the Bucharest and Iași⁵ Conservatories of Music and Declamation, signed in 1864 by Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, ruler of the newly-founded Romania.⁶

² Writer, philologist, politician, founding member of the Romanian Academy.

³ Actor, writer and politician of Greek extraction.

⁴ Poet, writer and playwright.

⁵ The foundation of the Iași Conservatory is also heralded by the opening, in 1860, of the School of Music and Declamation.

⁶ Among Cuza’s reforms is the Law of General Education from 1864 (issued in the

A short study of the beginning of the Bucharest Conservatory in the second half of the 19th century mirrors the difficult evolution of the Romanian higher music education, which set out, with elan and idealistic goals, on the long road to becoming a truly professional institution.

The Conservatory's first director was Alexandru Flechtenmacher, who synthesised the institution's goals thus: "to form artists in the domain of church, instrumental, and vocal music and of dramatic art, as well as to work with all means available towards the expansion and the improvement of musical taste in the country" (Moldovanu 1939: 885). Composer and violinist, Flechtenmacher was well acquainted with the difficulties of music education and the requirements of the Romanian artistic life. He had studied violin, harmony and composition in Vienna (with boyar Costache Conachi's support), he had played in the orchestras of various opera companies as well as in the orchestra of the National Theatre in Iași, as first violinist and Kapellmeister. Settled in Bucharest, Flechtenmacher taught violin at the Choir of the Field Officer of the Army and led the School of Instrumental Music later set up.

The classes, inaugurated on January 11th, 1865, were given by several teachers organised into 11 sections, whose mission was to train the students following a Regulation adopted in 1864 and a program published one year later. Part of them were foreigners settled in Romania – Janvier Gargiulo, Andrei Nesler, Giuseppe Mazzadri, Casimiro Biscottini, Johann Neudörfler. Others were Romanians or naturalised Romanian citizens, some of them having studied abroad (in Vienna, Paris, Dresden): Ioan Cartu, Ion Nițescu, Archimandrite Visarion, Eduard Wachmann, Grigore Manciu (Rădulescu 2014: 14-15). Ioan Cartu, for example, had been educated at the Neamț Monastery and then in Paris. He recognized the beneficial "lights of Western civilisation which, in their sublime aspiration to become universal, slowly shine through the old but fiery regions of the Orient" (quoted in Cosma 2014: 65). Another significant example is that of Austrian composer, conductor and violinist Ludwig Wiest, graduate of the Vienna Conservatory, employed by the violin department of the Bucharest Conservatory shortly after the latter's foundation. His biography shows the destiny of a musician active starting with the first half of the 19th century in almost all the important musical institutions of the time: he was concertmaster and Kapellmeister of the Royal Court Orchestra at the Wallachian Court (1838-1845), conductor of the Music of the Guards of

same year the Bucharest and Iași Conservatories were founded), by which the state provided education, with emphasis on the primary education, free and compulsory, to all social classes.

the Army in Bucharest (1839-1863), first violinist in the orchestra of the Italian Opera (1844-1860), concertmaster and conductor of the Bucharest National Theatre (1860-1880), concertmaster of the Romanian Philharmonic Society in Bucharest, between 1868 and 1877 (Cosma 2006: 293).

The specialisations covered by the newly-founded Conservatory were at that time few, and referred to both musical and dramatic art: singing, violin, cello, double bass, piano, theory of music, church choir, declamation.

Over time, the number of teachers and specialisations grew, and student skill levels improved. A report of Director Flechtenmacher written five years after the establishment of the Conservatory shows that the best graduates had found good jobs as teachers, choristers or choir instructors, others continuing their studies at conservatories in Paris, Vienna, Milan, Naples or Leipzig.

A new phase of the Conservatory of Music and Declamation Bucharest in the second half of the 19th century is closely tied to Eduard Wachmann,⁷ the institution's second director, starting with 1869. Throughout his 34-year tenure he fought to ensure the continuity of a music education built on modern bases.

A multilateral, skilled musician, Wachmann had studied in Vienna, Dresden, and Munich. He was familiar with the activity of Romanian theatres, where he had long worked as a pianist, conductor, and composer, and had been a teacher himself, at the School of Instrumental Music in Bucharest. He was admired for his intellect and solid musical knowledge, which guided him not only as Director of the Conservatory, but also in his efforts to promote Romanian musical life – as initiator, in 1868, and as conductor and director of the Romanian Philharmonic Society (1868-1903), or as conductor and organiser of performances and concerts at the Bucharest National Theatre (1872-1875). He knew all about the events hosted by the country's cultural hubs and was acquainted with the needs of the Romanian musical life and the society's expectations.

Eduard Wachmann would concentrate his efforts in attracting in the teaching staff stars capable to train good musicians and actors, to both recuperate and match the European level of music education, and, not least, to ensure some specialities which couldn't be given by competent local teachers. He hired, for example, Italian double bassist Ercole Carini, who had studied in Milan and who taught at the Conservatory between 1873 and 1910, or internationally-renowned Spanish pianist Santiago Riera, who would impress

⁷ Composer and conductor of German extraction.

with the results of his piano class and with the concerts he himself gave in Romania. The departments expand, and among the new specialisations we find winds (starting with 1870), orchestra (from 1873), history of music (1833), harp, chamber music, choral singing (towards the end of the century). Particular attention was given to the improvement of the curricula, disciplines were restructured and new subjects were introduced. From this period, year-books are preserved, with information on teachers and students, admission requirements, school year structure, programs, musical and dramatic events.

The dawn of a new century approaches. With a short existence of only 34 years at the end of the 1800s, the Bucharest Conservatory was only getting started, and was on its way to stability and a genuine university status.

English version by Maria Monica Bojin

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