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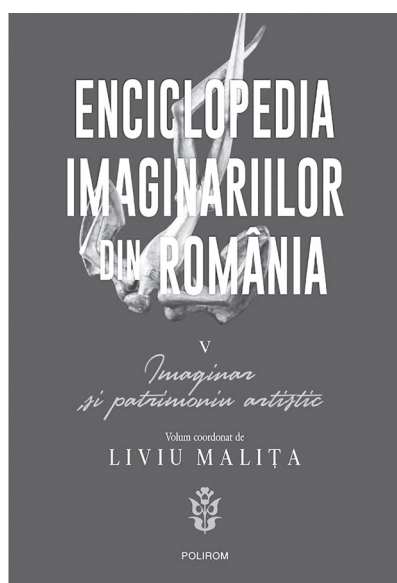
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Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România
[The Encyclopaedia of Romanian
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Vol. 5: *Imaginar și patrimoniu artistic*
[Imaginary and Artistic Heritage]
(ed. Liviu Malița)

Polirom, Bucharest, 2020



Two sets of books were launched in 2020 which shed light on how notions on music evolved in the history of the philosophy of art. Completely different structure-wise, one deals exclusively with music while the other only brings it up as part of the arts in general, being endowed with the power to mutate the way we look at artistic events. Both sets should be regarded as beacons for furthering the understanding of Romanian music history: *Noi istorii ale muzicilor românești* [New Histories of Romanian Musics] (see Sandu-Dediu and Gheorghiță 2020) and *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România* [The Encyclopaedia of

Romanian Imaginaries] (general coordinator Corin Braga), whose fifth volume focuses on the arts sector in *Imaginar și patrimoniu artistic* [Imaginary and Artistic Heritage] (edited by Liviu Malița). Quite the rich year when it comes to substantial books and to books in which music – while mapping mental trajectories over time – is shown to be a component of both our daily lives and of human history.

The imaginary lays at the core of the whole investigation conducted by the *Encyclopaedia*, which begins by presenting the way that French philosophers looked at it in the mid-20th century and subsequently attempts to define it based on various levels of collective human expression: literary, linguistic, historical, religious, artistic, hoping thus to catch the essence of a Romanian spiritual identity. The concept of the imaginary might seem difficult to grasp, all the more so as the term migrated from one field and school of thought to another (sociology, philosophy, anthropology), each with its own multiple notions on what exactly this term covers. Personally, getting familiar with it was like participating in a hunt, but I nevertheless found that it mainly, and no matter the approach, describes a creative force shaping the common language of a community. The palpable aside, we can know a world also by what it “imagines”, for instance by symbols and specific constellations of representation, which make up a parallel universe and describe a palette of images associated to a certain pattern of thought – geographical, social etc. In addition to its identity-related aspect, just as important is the imaginary’s exploratory function, which allows us to produce new meanings and formulate subjective, enriched realities (Corin Braga talks about the *modelling* of reality, as in effect the faculty of imagining allows us to explore the depths of the human soul and mind).

The *Encyclopaedia* captivates through the universe described by each branch, as well as by concepts transcending individual studies and showing a *common denominator of identity* – a blueprint of the human cultural heritage. But each field is an independent row of glass beads and has its specific challenges. The historical imaginary (volume 3) for instance was more easily accessed, foreshadowed as it was by Lucian Boia’s writings and governed by the understanding that history is essentially a repercussion of the inner worlds imagined by people of the past, their projections and desires. The linguistic imaginary (volume 2) was, on the contrary, initially seen as a speculative invention, the connexions between language and its speaker determined only later. The view thus shifts from the study of language as object to the speaker as protagonist – defined by his judgements, phantasy and opinions. The literary imaginary (volume 1) in its turn portrays alternative worlds plugged to the psychology of different time periods and adapted to their social contexts. The studies arrange writers by groups based not on the historical model of currents and periods, but rather on dominant themes (folklore, history, urban or rural studies, religion, psychology etc.), their authors united across time by the poetics to which they adhere. Finally, the religious imaginary (volume 4) of the Romanians takes us into the sphere of another

type of diversity, investigating four confessional directions (Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic and Reformed) and covering both the immaterial and the religious-themed artifacts (icons, stained glass, frescoes etc.) and the specific architecture.

As mentioned, linguistics required a deliberate search for the imaginary, which places it at the opposing pole from the arts, characterized by a rich palette of imaginaries more difficult to harmonize and sometimes even to delineate. The heterogeneous discourse employed by volume 5 (*Imaginary and Artistic Heritage*) is the consequence of an ample investigation of imaginaries in various fields: theatre, film, music, architecture, visual arts, with different topics engendering different methodologies and approaches supporting this very diversity. A quick overview shows how theatre was addressed in a nuanced way, both in terms of the dramatic text and in terms of productions and performances. Regarding Romanian cinematography, there are several recurring themes: the rural (using the village either as a setting or as an element of national identity), history (the manipulative portrayal of Romanianism under political pressure, the act of mythologizing history and then its demystification after the 1990s), politics and anti-communism. In turn, the architectural imaginary proves to be inscribed in polemical views on Romanian architecture – the polemics also touching on the problematics of its very existence, that is, of a national specificity –, which led to different responses for different areas and traditions (a special mention to how deformation is looked at, interestingly, from two different standpoints: either as failed copy or, on the contrary, as creative attitude). As for the imaginary in the visual arts, it is richly presented across its multiple components – nature, folklore, religion, technology – while also focusing on the reconfiguration of the position of the creator, from artisan to having an identity in the digital world.

On the subject of music, the discourse is divided into the so-called art music and the traditional music, via three contributions: the imaginary up to World War II (Florinela Popa), in the post-war era (Valentina Sandu-Dediu) and in the media-folklore (Corina Iosif and Adrian T. Sîrbu) seen as a product of radio and television. Superficially turning folklore into a means of elevating tradition to a large-scale social and ethnocultural identity meant catering to the audience's desire for self-identification by handing them, on a plate, a ready-made "national specificity". The image of exemplary rurality becomes a mix of disparate traditional elements chosen for strategic reasons. In a dissemination-efficient aesthetics, important were those clear, easy-to-spot symbols of peasantry which would create, through repetition, a stereotypical image of folkloric culture. The source of the tradition/object/song/dance may

have been local, but it was invested with a general symbolic value, providing the entire country with an (eventually uniformising) “ethnic identity”. The specific visual discourse also had a hand in this – outdoor filming, the pitch-fork, traditional cloth, low fence as background etc. The magnetism of such a product reappears diversified in the 21st century, in hybrid types of performance joining folklore and entertainment, meant to strengthen the folklore imaginary, or rather the mental print of this “traditional” *en masse*.

Even if the other two studies, addressing art music, divide their respective research in pre- and post-1945, they are united by a common theme: the interest for a national specificity, typical of the end of the 19th and then of the 20th century. There’s tension on the musical scene, as shown by the quest for a Romanian identity and for an individual voice in the European geographical milieu. Having a late start, music as well as the other arts tried to quickly assimilate Western models. Florinela Popa paints a picture of the varied set of elements in 19th-century Romania, from the influence of Greek and Turk culture to emulating European institutional models and to the gradual and increasingly systematized gravitation towards Western forms of expression. It was a joint effort towards an essential goal at that time, one linked to the necessity of developing a national music identity. Continuing into the 20th century, such endeavours allowed the appearance of modern institutions and the overall ripening of Romanian musical life.

In connection to a young culture complex we notice the composers’ diverse stance on folklore, Byzantine music heritage, vernacular idioms and a specific Romanian sound, as well as their varied compositional solutions, be it predominantly national or European. The ideological cleavage between *national* and *universal*, or between *local* and *European* – and as such between *isolation* or *synchronization* – is tackled by Valentina Sandu-Dediu’s study. The “ideal” Goldilocks solution in finding the right means of expression – in a balanced and viable combination – is a constant concern in the creation of a Romanian national school. This impacted among others the search for the right proportion of new music techniques, for the elaboration of one’s own compositional systems, as well as finding the extent to which local folklore can dictate the way music articulates or its Romanian character. With other words the exploration of modern writing techniques and of Western ideas in a Romanian context. Synchronizing Romanian composition with musical trends worldwide was severely limited by the imposed ideological directions. The diversity of creative responses led to the impossibility to judge the compositional phenomenon of the 20th century as a whole, thus requiring contextualisation and a nuanced view in understanding the big picture.

To go back to the central concept of the *musical imaginary* in Florinela Popa's and Valentina Sandu-Dediu's studies, a certain superposition with the *Romanian identity imaginary* must be noted – the borders between the two terms probably being impossible to differentiate. Last but not least, the phrase “Enescu's imaginary folklore” comes to attention, highlighting the composer's importance as a road opener in the communication between these two imaginaries. As such, the dedicated volume engenders an unlimited terrain of interdisciplinary associations and is – as it promises from the very beginning – a fertile ground for further research into the Romanian collective consciousness.

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English version by Maria Monica Bojin and Alice Tacu

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