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Beethoven 250 in Romania

From the 19th century onwards, Ludwig van Beethoven's often-distorted reception in Romania mirrored the times, ideologies, mindsets permanently changing and resetting. And this is because the musician's popularity was not infrequently exploited for extra-musical, political stakes and thus heavily deformed. If in the first decades of the 20th century local press would candidly perpetuate myths about a Beethoven being "the stuff of which the gods are made", the ulterior totalitarian political regimes converted him into a tool of propaganda and of ideological manipulation. In the wake of the legionnaire dictatorship at the beginning of the 1940s, Beethoven's name circulated in fascist Romanian press as a landmark of "Germanness", of "racial purity", and was mentioned in virulent anti-Semitic speeches. After the war and during the Communist rule his image was reconfigured, turned into that of a composer fighting the battle of "class struggle", driven by *avant la lettre* Socialist Realist views. Only in the 1970s did the local publishing industry see some balanced, ideological parti pris-free studies, such as those by Tudor Ciortea, Wilhelm Georg Berger and, in the more recent 1990s, by Valentina Sandu-Dediu.

This issue of *Musicology Today* challenges you to take a look at how today's Romania writes about Beethoven and to see what the main related themes and concerns are. Specifically, the intention is to illustrate the way that the very young generation of still-developing musicologists sees him 250 years after his birth through four winning studies in the April 2020 National Students' Musicology Competition organised by the National University of Music Bucharest in its annual *Chei* Festival.

Interested in Beethoven's reception in Romania, Ana Diaconu puts under the microscope Vincent d'Indy's texts about the German composer and aims to decrypt the historiographical relevance of an "idealized and at times deformed image" that the Schola Cantorum founder promoted in his teaching,

musicological and compositional activity. The conclusion has her reflect on Beethoven's mythised image in contemporary times: "250 years after his birth, he is, maybe no more and no less than he was in 1850, both a great composer whose oeuvre made him immortal for most of us, and an idol, a fantasy, an industrial object, a marketing opportunity for others" (p. 198).

In her turn, Larisa Scumpu initiates a rhetorical "reading" of *Missa solemnis*, an analytical endeavour she considers a viable alternative to the various ideologically twisted interpretations to which the work was subjected over time. Her analytical method on the one hand highlights the close, organic tie between the music and its religious text, and on the other hand shows Beethoven's profound affiliations with the tradition of sacred music and the rhetorical devices commonly used in the Baroque.

Csala Orbán focuses on one of Beethoven's less popular music genres as she reviews his eleven overtures. Showing their impact on the later evolution and diversification of orchestral music, she argues that, through the bridges they created between the spirit of the dramatic opera and the symphonic tradition, they contributed significantly to the development of program music.

Ana Maria Cazacu's study reconstructs another of the composer's faces – one as unusual as a literary character, in the stories *Appassionata* (1934), *Preludiu la Beethoven* [Prelude to Beethoven] (1938) and in the novel *Beethoven Omul* [Beethoven, the Man] (1964) by Ury Benador (1895-1971), Romanian writer of Jewish extraction. Despite some clear differences between Beethoven's portrayals in, respectively, the inter-war period (a "messenger of music and of the divine voice") and in full Communist rule (an ardent "revolutionary spirit"), some traits remain constant in Benador's view of Beethoven over time.

The concluding piece is a shift from the *Beethovenian imaginary* towards the *Romanian artistic imaginary*: starting from the notion of *imaginary* on which the 2020 5-volume *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România* [The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries] (general coordinator Corin Braga) is based, Alice Tacu concentrates her review on the area where "musical imaginary" and "local identity-related imaginary" intersect, and thus incites us to read the final volume, *Imaginar și patrimoniu artistic* [Imaginary and Artistic Heritage] (edited by Liviu Malița).

English version by Maria Monica Bojin