

Musicology Today

Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest

Issue 4 (28) October-December 2016

Title: Troubled Times and Their Musics (2)

Author: Valentina Sandu-Dediu

E-mail: vdediu@nec.ro

Source: Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest / Volume 7 Issue 4 (28) / October-December 2016, pp 259-261

Link to this article: musicologytoday.ro/28/MT28editorialSanduDediu.pdf

How to cite this article: Valentina Sandu-Dediu, "Troubled Times and Their Musics (2)", *Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest*, 7/4 (28) (2016), 259-261.

Published by: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică București

Musicology Today: Journal of the National University of Music Bucharest is indexed by EBSCO, RILM, and ERIH PLUS

Valentina SANDU-DEDIU

Troubled Times and Their Musics (2)

The last two issues of *Musicology Today* for 2016 are the result of discussions hosted by the New Europe College (Institute for Advanced Study, Bucharest) in 2014. The debates here included were triggered by a number of factors. Initially, with a number of colleagues (all of them researching aspects of twentieth-century Romanian music), I identified an area that seems to have deliberately been avoided by Romanian musicologists so far. The period in question is the 1938–1948 decade, when social and cultural changes occurred in quick succession. The tentative attempts of the musical modernism of the 1930s to reach out were brutally hindered in the 1940s. Whereas Romanian musical institutions (philharmonics, the national radio, the Society of Romanian Composers, conservatoires) had taken rapid steps toward modernisation and internationalisation in the 1930s, the situation was to change dramatically in the decade that followed, when Romania went through several totalitarian regimes: a royal dictatorship, a far-right regime, a military dictatorship, and finally communism.

Hence we all began to ask questions, broadening the period and above all the space covered by our research. We found it interesting to explore the similarities and differences between the music written under various dictatorships in different regions of Europe. There are still questions to raise about the period roughly between 1930 and 1950, such as for example its unfortunate positioning between the High Modernism of the first three decades of the twentieth century and the emergence of the new musical avant-gardes after 1950. Does this period, marked by increasing nationalism, fascist and communist dictatorships, racism and war, have an identifiable musical outline? Or can we only speak of an involution after the innovations of the 1920s, with music becoming subservient to political and propagandistic ends, and of the withdrawal of prominent composers into isolated niches?

I formulated such questions with the help of my colleagues, Katharina Biegger and Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus from Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, who

saw in our intuition the potential for a well-structured research project that would focus energies from western and eastern Europe in the field of musicology, as well as other disciplines (history, art history, literature, sociology and political science). The first definite step was taken thanks to support from the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, which awarded the New Europe College a research grant aiming to support the start of a wider project. As a result we were able to hold a two-day meeting in Bucharest (*Music in Dark Times: Europe East and West, 1930–1950/Musik in finsternen Zeiten. Europa, Ost und West, 1930–1950*, 31 October–1 November 2014) with colleagues interested in the subject. We had intense changes of ideas and thoughts in English and German for hours, which alternated with lectures, debates, and a search for practical solutions as to how to structure and continue the project. I am deeply grateful to those colleagues who are not on the Contents page of these two issues of *Musicology Today*, who, rather than writing papers themselves, helped the rest of us with their enthusiasm, ideas, suggestions, and comments (which have certainly become part of the final versions of the studies published here). I warmly thank them for the astuteness, openness and generosity they brought to our discussions together: Katharina Biegger (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin), Jeanice Brooks (University of Southampton), Reinhart Meyes-Kalkus (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) and Dörte Schmidt (Universität der Künste, Berlin).

*

Hermann Danuser interprets two works by Arthur Honegger and Wladimir Vogel, both belonging to the same hybrid *drama-oratorio* genre, examining them from the perspective of the relationship between the spoken and the sung word and taking them as metaphors for the tyrannies of the twentieth century and opposition to tyranny. Joan of Arc and Thyl Claes (the first a historical figure, the second a fictional character) become modern protagonists, given musical embodiment before and during the Second World War by composers from a neutral country: Switzerland.

Some examples from the music of former Yugoslavia, Romania, the Ukraine, and Poland in the 1930s–1950s reveal, as expected, a number of similarities. The previous issue of *Musicology Today* already started to draw this kind of image. We add now other pieces, in providing a generous space for Romania, with authors putting together complementary segments to provide a picture that still leaves room for further additions. In his examination of Romanian inter-war studies on church music, Costin Moisil notes the emphasis placed on national features in the discourse on traditional folk music, in close connection with the discourse about Romanian church music, obviously

in the spirit of the ideas of the time and sometimes as a result of political pressure. However, it seems that the 1930s and 1940s were a flourishing period for debate on national church music. The dark ages for church music and musicology were yet to come, as can be seen from the other viewpoints on the Romanian space, which focus on the transition period between inter-war modernity and post-war socialist realism.

Anna G. Piotrowska discusses, on the other hand, the reasons why two Polish composers, Rathaus and Spisak, born at the beginning of the twentieth century, have played second violin in musical history, yet without neglecting the social and ideological conditions that have affected the reception of their music. Coming back to Romania, Nicolae Gheorghică looks at a different area, examining the function of politically dictated music and the music ensembles of the Romanian Army. The drastic restructuring of the Army was also immediately obvious from the musical repertoire after 1947, as compared with the preceding years, when the ideological imperative had been different. The effects on Romanian society of different, successive ideologies—the Nazi-style ideology of 1940–1944 and the Soviet ideology of the period starting in 1947—are also reflected in Florinela Popa’s study on Mihail Jora (1891–1971), regarded as one of the most important Romanian composers of the immediate post-Enescu generation. The case under discussion is all the more relevant as Jora repeatedly argued that music and politics should never mix.

Jora spoke in such terms following the traumatic experiences he himself went through. Likewise, musicologists educated under communism used to never combine musical analysis with its contextual positioning. While Romanian historiography, including the history of music, was profoundly perverted by communism and nationalist ideology, it was still possible to find (illusory) refuge in structuralist analysis, in dissecting the mechanisms of contemporary Romanian scores. Even there, though, one is prone to discover deeply rooted clichés, such as “the tension between the national and the universal,” the “transfiguration” of folk sources in avant-garde compositions, and so on. Only as late as the 1990s, with the opening of borders to the rest of the world, was it possible to reflect on the need to rediscover and reformulate histories of Romanian music. Even now, in 2016, research in the field is just taking its first steps.