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Nationalism and Ideologization in Romanian Music and Musicology

In the past few years, a group of young researchers, all of them PhD students at the National University of Music Bucharest (UNMB), has distinguished itself by investigating topical themes of Romanian musicology from “fresh” perspectives and accessing little-known sources, such as the archives of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists (UCMR), the National Archives of Romania or those of the former *Securitate* (the Romanian communist secret police).

A framework for the presentation of such concerns was provided by the international conference *National Discourses on Music in Central and Eastern Europe (late 19th c. – 2000)*, held on November 25-26, 2021, at UNMB, coordinated by Prof. Nicolae Gheorghiuță. The round table held in this context by UNMB PhD students and moderated by Prof. Valentina Sandu-Dediu revealed a strong interest in the impact of nationalism and ideologies on 20th century Romanian music. Five of the articles presented at this event – and proposed to be read in the current issue of *Musicology Today* – illustrate how various political and ideological phases have marked music and musicology in Romania: from the pro-European opening of the interwar period to the Legionary fascism of the early 1940s, then to the post-war communism imposed in Romania under Soviet influence, but later dominated by nationalist accents. Throughout this time, the desire to build a “national identity” through music has been a permanent goal, manifesting itself both in creation and perhaps especially in the discourse on music.

Vlad Văidean chose to address the case of an exemplary musician, who became himself, after his death in 1955, the object of nationalist mythologization: George Enescu. In a cultural climate imbued since the early decades of the 20th century with the obsession of “national specificity”, Enescu was often “challenged” with questions about *what is and what is not Romanian in music*,

and he did not hesitate to admit the difficulty of answering them – as Văidean’s excellently documented study reveals.

Desiela Ion focused on the case of Mihail Jora, a prominent composer of the generation immediately after Enescu, who was strongly affected by the political changes in post-war Romania. Based extensively on research of the Bucharest Philharmonic’s programmes, the study provides insights into the dynamics of Jora’s music in concert life: from his ascension in the interwar period – despite a divided reception among those critics who were keen to detect the “national character” – to the downfall of his career for a few years, amid the musician’s intransigence towards the communist regime.

Likewise Jora, during the Stalinist phase of communism many other composers were accused of “formalism”, “elitism”, “decadentism” etc. The powerful distortions that ensued in Romanian culture with the enforcement of socialist realism as the sole method of creation are brought up by Andreea Mitu in her case study focused on the June 27, 1952 meeting of the Romanian Creative Unions. Beyond the ideological imbuing, the debates on “right-wing deviation” and “appeasement” – the themes imposed by the party on that occasion – hint at the terror felt by creators in all fields.

The following article written by Cecilia Benedicta Pavel, on the subject of the political “unmasking” trial filed against the composer Mihail Andricu in 1959, proves that fear was a key instrument of communist power in Romania. Using numerous sources, including documents from the former *Securitate*, the author reconstructs the “picture” of this terrifying and absurd event, in which Andricu was accused of various “crimes of opinion and abusive interpretations”, such as cosmopolitanism, lack of patriotism or listening to records of “decadent” music received from the West.

Although the official separation from socialist realism – once Nicolae Ceaușescu took over the leadership of the Communist Party in 1965 – brought a certain openness to the West, implicitly towards the music from there, the approach of Romanian composers to the avant-garde phenomenon continued to be met with hostility. Ana Diaconu illustrates with examples from the UCMR archive the criticism directed towards two promoters of “experimentalism” in creation, Costin Mioreanu and Mihai Mitrea-Celarianu, who in the late 1960s chose to emigrate to France.

With the latter case, we have a broad picture, covering approximately the first seven decades of the 20th century, of the complicated relationship between Romanian music, nationalism and ideologization.

English version by Ana Lica