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Revisiting George Enescu

As Romania's first internationally relevant composer, George Enescu opened wide perspectives not only for successive generations of Romanian composers, but also for the Romanian musicology. In the more than half a century since the musician's death, what has not infrequently come to be called 'enescology' has established itself as one of the most fertile branches of Romanian musicology, in fact contributing to a large extent to turning it into a professional endeavor. For a time (i.e. until around the 1989 Romanian Revolution), the most sustained research efforts coagulated – as was only natural – in the form of a "George Enescu" Study Centre (an organization under the patronage of the Institute of Art History of the Romanian Academy). Over the years, some of the most important specialists – composers and musicologists alike – in the research of George Enescu's oeuvre and biography have worked here. To them we owe the only detailed dedicated monograph (published by the Romanian Academy in 1971, in two volumes of over 1100 pages, which received the following year the Prix de l'Institut de France), and which to this day – despite the obvious need to undergo updating and correction – remains the main working tool that no serious researcher of Enescu's legacy can do without. At the same time, the Enescu Centre has helped bring together many individual endeavours, organising 18 scientific sessions whose papers have been collected in the 6-volume *Enesciana* (printed by the Romanian Academy Publishing House), which are also well known to any Enescu enthusiast, even though even at the time of their launch (let alone today) they did not have the wide international circulation that the editors had in fact intended (by publishing the studies exclusively in French, German and English). In the end, for all the professional probity of most of the researchers involved, 'enescology' suf-

focused – like all other fields of knowledge – under the pressure of the unrivalled obtuse autarchy that was the hallmark of the nationalist-communist regime in Ceausescu's Romania.

In the meantime, the Enescu Centre no longer exists, nor does 'enescology' currently represent a concern as consistently and prolifically pursued by Romanian musicologists. The only framework that still allows for a regular collective coordination of Enescu researchers remains the international symposium that accompanies each edition of the Festival held in Bucharest in honour of the composer. This symposium, organised by the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists, was initiated in 1967, on the occasion of the fourth edition of the Enescu Festival, and before the collapse of the Ceausescu regime printing the papers was only intermittently possible (in 1968, 1984 and 1988), and not always as independent works, but in journals (as was the case with the last two volumes of *Enesciana*, which appeared very late, in 1995 and 1997, in *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Théâtre-Musique-Cinematographie*). After 1989, however, the symposium established itself as a traditional, indispensable component of each edition of the Enescu Festival; thus, in 2023, the 15th such musicological meeting was held after Romania's return to democracy. With this issue devoted exclusively to George Enescu, *Musicology Today* turns its attention for the first time to this prestigious event, selecting some of the papers previously published in the 2023 volume, but exclusively in Romanian (although they were presented in English). Some of them have even been substantially revised and expanded on the occasion of this republication, and their reunion between the covers of this journal appears as a convincing plea for the fact that George Enescu's effervescent activity still requires meticulous documentation which does not exclude the discovery of new information, and that his oeuvre can still be the source of various readings (musicological or even compositional).

Thus, my study could be seen, in this issue's structure, as an introductory meditation. On the one hand, I take a brief retrospective look at the ways which I consider the most viable to situate George Enescu stylistically in the context of his era, comparing his compositional path with that of his main contemporaries from the same Eastern European area (Karol Szymanowski and Béla Bartók). On the other hand, I am also attempting a kind of methodological prospection, proposing – at the suggestion of some recent readings by British musicologists – a so-called "aesthetic constellation" through whose filter I believe that George Enescu's music must be passed in order to understand its idiomatic data.

Precisely one of the main ingredients of this aesthetic constellation – the bells (as they are suggested in his piece *Carillon nocturne*) – is the subject of Oana Kariotoglou Popescu's analysis, starting from a scrupulous critical examination of the quite numerous previous readings of this famous work. She also makes the most viable argumentation so far in the sense of a more precisely delimiting the degree to which *Carillon nocturne* fits into the rich tradition of piano pieces conceived as onomatopoeic imitations or as poetic evocations of the sound of bells. The study in its entirety is a contribution of great importance for a proper understanding of a score that over the years has been – for various reasons, as explained by her – subject to more or less distorted interpretations.

Sára Aksza Grosz provides the most rigorous historical analysis and documentation of *Cantabile and Presto* for flute and piano, the first of the four competition pieces written by the young George Enescu in 1904 and 1906 for the Paris Conservatoire. In addition to placing it in the tradition to which it belongs (parallels are suggested with similar *morceaux de concours* by Louis Ganne, Paul Taffanel and Philippe Gaubert), the study also draws on research of the French, Romanian and Hungarian press to establish the most relevant information about the public career of this popular Enescu piece.

Irina Nițu also identifies and analyses concert reviews – but this time drawn from the pre-war American press –, aiming to reveal one of the decisive factors that contributed to the extremely favorable reception of George Enescu's personality in the United States: long before his first tour there (in 1923), his reputation as a composer had already been consolidated in the consciousness of the American public, for a considerable number of his works (no fewer than 11) had been repeatedly performed and generally well received. This early inclusion of Enescu's compositions into the American concert life proved to be an essential dimension in building his fame, and Irina Nițu's study has the merit of documenting for the first time some of the most important episodes in this regard.

Finally, Olguța Lupu considers a hypostasis of a different type of reception – the posthumous reception of Enescu's music as present in Romanian composition in the second half of the 20th century. Apart from the fact that many Romanian composers saw George Enescu as a symbol of creative excellence, some of them even deliberately took his music as a source of stylistic inspiration, cultivating it more or less overtly in their own scores. The style and general aesthetics of Doina Rotaru's music present perhaps the most striking conjunction with certain data of the Enescian model; it is a kinship clearly demonstrated by Olguța Lupu's astute analysis, which identifies in

the recent Violin Concerto *Himere* [Chimeras] multiple Enescian suggestions, ultimately concretized even in the form of the explicit quote that imposes itself, at the end of the work, as a long sought-for destination, as a Pole star that secretly guided the entire journey.

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