

Article received on February 16th 2017

Article accepted on March 10th 2017

UDC: 783(498)"19"

78.071.1(498)"19"

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ROMANIAN COMPOSERS' SPIRITUAL CREATIVITY IN THE XX CENTURY – MUSICAL HAGIOGRAPHY OF THE ORDEAL OF A SOCIETY

Abstract: The spiritual musical creativity of Romanian composers in the XX century underwent numerous phases, between zenith and despair, due to social events specific for the whole of south-eastern Europe in the past century. Even though this creativity, in essence, expresses the tradition of the East, endeavouring to avoid any loss of its Byzantine roots, many composers, especially in the second half of the XX century, leave aside the elements of this esthetic and direct its creative focus to new creative tendencies. This work reviews compositions with spiritual themes by XX century Romanian composers, from the first decades, encompassing the years of communistic rule, till the days when it became immersed in a postmodern creative course, and it presents the names of the majority of composers who dedicated their works to the glory of the Almighty, analyzing thoroughly the information found at the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania from Bucharest.

Key words: spiritual repertoire, Vocal music, instrumental music, scenic pieces with a spiritual character

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Byzantine music and the music of Byzantine tradition represent an integral and very important part of the Romanian cultural space. It was preserved and handed down from generation to generation thanks to the few literate people, monks, teachers and preachers that carried out their activities near monastic settlements. Around these dwellings, in the course of many years, schools were founded for the creation of spiritual (ecclesiastic) music. It's impossible not to mention, for example, the existence of the famous *School in the monastery 'Neamt'* (*Școala de la Neamț*) in the XV century or the *School in the monastery 'Putna'* (*Școala muzicală de la Putna*) in the XV–XVI centuries.¹ The schools from Brasov or Bucharest were also known, and all of them preserved both the tradition of the music itself and old neumatic music notation.

When we talk about the Romanian cultural space and its historic side, we shouldn't omit one very important fact. The life of the Romanian people was destined to play out among three major *musical pillars*, and they were: folk music, religious music and music that originated in Western culture. Although these three pillars had separate developmental paths, they influenced and on many occasions intersected each other's paths and this fact helped them survive all the challenges that arose.

Contrary to folk music that was always conveyed orally, Byzantine music and the music of the Byzantine tradition² left numerous written traces in libraries and archives. Still, there were situations when religious music was also conveyed orally, especially ecclesiastical cantillation that existed in different parts of Romanian territory.

The manuscripts of Byzantine music include the ecclesiastic chants for Orthodox rites written in the so-called *old system*, and also those written in keeping with the *new or Christian system*, practiced from 1814 till nowadays. The majority of manuscripts found in present day Romania is of autochthonous origin and they were written in the monasteries by more or less known authors. Others were brought from Constantinople and from Mount Athos or from other Christian spiritual centers in the East, in different ways and under interesting circumstances.³

In Romania today, there are approximately 250 manuscripts of old music composed before 1814. As we have already said, the majority of them were writ-

¹ Titus Moiescu, *Muzica bizantină în spațiul cultural românesc* [Byzantine music in the Romanian cultural space], București, Editura Muzicala a Uniunii Compozitorilor și muzicologilor din România, 1996, 8.

² The term 'music of Byzantine tradition' was used by the musicologist Titus Moiescu in his works and by this term implies the religious music created in the Byzantine manner after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman empire in 1453.

³ Titus Moiescu, op. cit., 8.

ten in the territory of present day Romania and these works were usually grouped in anthologies whose titles derived from the place where they were kept. (For example *Antologhionul de la Putna*). The famous manuscripts from Putna, 10 of the 11 manuscripts are anthologies that include chants for Vespers, Matins or the Liturgies. On the whole, the manuscripts from Putna contain 478 chants, 374 in Greek and 104 in the Slavonic language (the Old Church Slavonic language).⁴ In musical ecclesiastic manuscripts the Romanian language would find its place later, thanks in particular to Philothei, son of Aga Jipa, a psalt from Metropolis of Ugrowallachia and his work *Psaltichia rumaneasca* written in 1713.⁵

The extraordinary value of Byzantine music became evident thanks to all the medieval manuscripts preserved in the Romanian cultural space. These manuscripts represented a rather valuable source of inspiration for future creators. The composers of the XX century were also familiar with this musical treasure. Actually, in that period the core investigation of Byzantine music and a return to Byzantine music really begins in a modern way, though there were some attempts previously, in the XIX century.⁶

Romanian musical creativity from the XX century inspired by religious music represents the natural sequel to the work of previous composers, those composers who laid the foundations of Romanian musical culture. One composer who had a remarkable impact on those of the XX century was Gavriil Musicescu (1847–1903). As an adherent of homophone choral chant, which, probably, was a consequence of his folklore studies and psaltic music, Musicescu steadfastly propagated the preservation of the modal specificities of ecclesiastic chants. He was very well acquainted with the works of Russian spiritual music, as one may confirm by analyzing his works, and we especially mention *Prohodul* for the 1st voice (sung in the liturgy on Good Friday).⁷

Musicescu was not the only composer to have left an evident impact on XX century composers. Another great *pillar of inspiration* for composers of religious music was Eusebiu Mandicevski (1857–1929). He composed Liturgies in the old Renaissance style, with Renaissance motets, imitations, modal harmony and tonal inflexions. In the chant *Evloghimenos* from the *Liturgy No. 12*, Mandicevski creates a fusion between eastern antiphonies, psalm music and the divided

⁴ Eugen Cinci, *Opusuri muzicale românești* [Romanian musical opuses], Vrșac, Književna opština Vrșac, 2006, 11.

⁵ Titus Moiescu, op. cit., 8.

⁶ Eugen Cinci, “Muzica religioasă românească între glorie și declin” [Romanian religious music between ascent and disaster], in: *Dealul Vârșetului*, No. 7, year IV, 4.

⁷ Vasile, Herman, *Forma și stil în noua creație muzicală românească* [The form and style of new Romanian creation], București, Editura Muzicală, 1977, 30.

choirs specific to the Renaissance.⁸ Among the composers who also made their contribution to structuring the creative trend of the last century were: Alexandru Podoleanu, Gheorghe Ionescu, Ioan Bunescu. They played an important role in forming the national school of ecclesiastic music, both, monadic and harmonic. Gheorghe Cucu, Ioan D. Chirescu, Nicolae Lungu, Ioana Ghika – Comănești, Sabin V. Drăgoi and many others would pursue the same path. In the generations that followed, we single out Paul Constantinescu, Marțian Negrea, Doru Popovici, Viorel Munteanu, Ștefan Niculescu, Tudor Jarda, Liviu Comes, Gheorghe Firca, etc.

It is evident that every period leaves the visible trace of its creative style and, in general, the artistic language that is used. From this point of view, it seems, that the XX century surpassed all the preceding moments. In just a hundred years, religious music underwent tremendous changes. At the beginning of the century, composers did not dare to write anything that could not be performed during church services. In the second half of the century, the situation changed altogether, and new compositions appeared with no connection to sacral music other than in their titles.

In the first half of the XX century, composers concentrated on vocal *a cappella*⁹ music. They would write choral opuses which, thanks to their form, structure and adaptations could easily be included in any religious service, be it an Orthodox or Catholic service. Because of the previously mentioned motifs the music of this period can truly be called *ecclesiastic music*. In contrast to this kind of *church music*, compositions from the second half of the century focused more on the artistic scene.

As we can understand, Romanian music of the last century inspired by the religious repertoire followed the natural course of other genres of creation. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the musical genre we are discussing had many *dark moments* in the XX century – of course, we are thinking of the period after the Second World War, precisely, the period after the fifties. The regime installed in Romania, the new ideas and visions about art, about its role and society in general, created difficulties for religious Romanian music. The composers, in order to publish their works that were evidently of a sacral nature, had to modify the titles and sometimes even the content.¹⁰ Consequently, nowadays, the discovery of works with religious elements in the registers of the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania is difficult. The titles given to some

⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁹ Cf. Eugen Cinci, *Opusuri muzicale...*, op. cit., 33.

¹⁰ Cf. Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *Muzica românească între 1945–2000*, [Romanian music between 1945–2002], București, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002.

works, in order to pass the censorship, which more often than not cannot in any way be linked to any kind of religious content, frequently makes it impossible to discover their real character.

The post-monarchic period was not the only time when composers had to fulfill some political criteria in order to create freely. Therefore, in the forties of the previous century, while Romania was still governed by the Monarchy certain policy-based *selections* were made. At the end of 1944, so-called *cleaning commissions* were formed whose aim was to eliminate political opponents, mainly former legionnaires, from public life. The composer Dimitrie Cuclin was sent to do forced labor because of his legionary sympathies and Harry Brauner was arrested, along with his wife, on the pretext that he belonged to Patrascanu's politically inappropriate group, and that he was a dissident.¹¹

Nevertheless, against all obstacles, religious music managed to come to life again. In the second half of the last century, among Romanian composers there appeared names such as Valentin Gheorghiu, Tudor Ciortea, Liviu Glodeanu, Richard Waldemar, Sigismund Toduță, Franz Xaver Dressler, Hanz Weisz, Șerban Nechifor, etc.¹² They have brought a new vision to religious musical composition, especially where it concerns a distancing from liturgical elements and coming closer to its scenic function.

After the events in December 1989 when the political regime changed, new works with an obviously religious content appeared on the Romanian music scene. One could say that in the last few years, things have gone to the other extreme, and that saturation has come about of musical pieces with a spiritual character.

The XX century Romanian creations, whose source of inspiration came from the religious repertoire can be classified on the basis of two important criteria, such as:

- Music criteria and
- Religious criteria

According to music criteria, we can classify the works into:

- Vocal,
- Vocal instrumental and
- Instrumental.

When we talk about religious criteria, the works can be classified as follows:

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Franz Metz, "Muzica bisericesca si cea sacra după 1945 în România" [Ecclesiastic and religious music in Romania after 1945], in: Muzica, No. 2/2002, 120.

- Proper religious works
- Works largely influenced by religious topics
- Works with less influence of religious topics

The first category encompasses works that can be used in any religious service without being adapted, considering that their content and form correspond to church needs. These, generally, are Orthodox Liturgies, Catholic Masses and parts of them that can appear as independent works. They are mostly written for choirs (*Răspunsuri Liturgice, Trisaghion, Heruvicul, Pre Tine, Tatăl Nostru, Priceasna, etc.*). The same category includes musical pieces that are part of the evensong and of the Matins chants of Orthodox rites, or even the complete services (Matins hymns or stihirs and sedelne – chants that can be performed while the listeners sit down), pieces that are included in the liturgy of the Sacred Mysteries or the special services found in the Molitvenik (Service for a stillborn's funeral, Prayer when entering the church, Prayer for schoolchildren, etc.).

The second category consists of pieces that owing to their content, approach and form cannot be part of a religious service. They often have a title that could lead us to include them among religious works. We refer here to vocal-instrumental, instrumental or just vocal works which, due to their content, cannot be included in a religious service, especially in Orthodox churches.

The works from the third category are those works that do not penetrate deeply in the religious sphere but only use certain elements, quotes from the religious repertoire. They are written for the stage and are not for religious practice. The lyrics of some of them are based on the composers' creations, not on spiritual or canonic texts, or are the works of some famous Romanian poets. The works that have appeared in the last few years mostly belong to this category and they represent a new way of approaching the religious repertoire (e.g. Liturgy for choir and rhythm section).¹³

It is almost impossible to describe on just a few pages the musical creation that marked the entire XX century in the Romanian space. The registers of the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania list hundreds of them, regardless of whether their titles obviously refer to spiritual and ecclesiastic themes or the religious elements should be sought between the title and the content. In this work, we list the compositions of only a few composers who wrote instrumental religious music which by its structure and form could not be part of a religious service of any Church, but is exclusively dedicated to artistic performance. Some of them have the evident features of the Eastern Church, but given their form they cannot be part of the liturgy. The composers are given in accor-

¹³ Cf. Eugen Cinci, *Opusuri muzicale...*, op. cit., 36.

dance to the registers of the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania in alphabetical order:

- Andricu Mihail (1894–?): *Legenda op.6* based on liturgical topics (1927);
- Constantinescu Paul (1909–1963): *Two Etudes in Byzantine Style* for string trio (1929), *Byzantine Sonatina* for solo violoncello (1940), *Triple Violin Concert for violin, violoncello, piano and orchestra* based on ecclesiastic chant.
- Dănceanu Liviu (1954): *Holy Communion* for chamber orchestra – premiere in Bucharest, 1998.
- Drăgoi Sabin (1894–1968): *Spiritual Divertimento* for chamber orchestra – premiere in Bucharest, 1935.
- Dumitrescu Gheorghe (1914–1966): *Suite No. 2 for orchestra, op. 23* – Four Byzantine Frescoes (1943), *Tenth, Sacral Symphony – Holy Trinity, op. 168* (1990).
- Firca Gheorghe (1935): *Three Preludes for organs* with quotes from works of the School of Putna (1987).
- Georgescu Remus (1932): *Symphony Requiem* – premiere Timisoara 1973.
- Grigoriu Theodor (1926): *Byzantium after Byzantium* – concert for violin and orchestra (1994), *Byzantium after Byzantium* – sonata for violin and piano (1999).
- Maiorovici Harry (1918–2000): *The Flood* – stage music (1941), *King Solomon* stage music (1941).
- Mânzat Laura Ana (1969): *The First Stihira* – for solo piano (1994), *The Second Stihira* – for clarinet, violin and piano (1996), *The Third Stihira* – for two violoncellos (1998).
- Nechifor Șerban (1954): *Epikaleitai* – recitation and chamber orchestra, according to a text by Saint Simenon the New Theologian (1994), *Phtora* – for clarinet, fagot, guitar, violin, violoncello, piano and percussion (1989).
- Popovici Doru (1932): *Symphony* – based on Byzantine quotations (1954), *Byzantine Poem* based on themes from the X and XI centuries (1967–68).
- Vieru Anatol (1926): *Psalm 1993* for orchestra.

Conclusion

The creativity of Romanian composers of the XX century, inspired by the ecclesiastic repertoire, represents a unique form of *public confession* of the collective ordeals, suffering and sins of the entire nation. The fate of this kind of creativity has by no means been easy. Often, the content of a piece had to be corrected or changed, in order to pass the censorship and be published or performed. Despite all this, the last century brought forth many interesting pieces of a spiritual char-

acter on the Romanian music scene. Even though it was not so long ago that a new century and millenium dawned, some works are already expressing the elements of their exceptional musical value. Their creators will certainly look for new and unexplored sources of inspiration and compose to worship the *Savior* of all people.

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