

The Braşov's musical life at the dawn of the 20th century, mirrored in the activity of the musician Gheorghe Dima

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Abstract: *This article explores the musical life of Braşov at the dawn of the 20th century, as it transpires from the thinking and activity of musician Gheorghe Dima.*

The bibliographical research relies on documents, which, beyond everyday thoughts and acts, also disclose a whole problematic related to the history of music, folkloric creation, aesthetics, composition and performance. With his organizing skills and his ever-fresh initiative, Gheorghe Dima found new opportunities for the development of the musical activity in Brasov, with the goal of cultivating music in Transylvania. This research relies on the representative documents hosted by: The Archives of the Museum of Romanian Culture in Şchei Neighborhood of Braşov, "Iacob Mureşianu" Memorial Home, the archives of "Gazeta Transilvaniei" Newspaper collection. Concert programmes and reviews of Braşov music ensembles are brought to light: The town orchestra, the Philharmonic Society, the musical reunions, the school choirs, the choir of "Saint Nicholas" Church, as well as of other cultural societies in Transylvania whose activity is documentarily attested.

Keywords: *concerts, traditions, folklore, documents, culture*

1. Introduction

As a Romanian cultural centre, Braşov has quickly developed along the centuries, as the dwellers were able to engage in an intense commercial activity, which helped build a nucleus of intellectual life. Laying on one of the large European trade arteries, the town flourished ever since its early days, imposing itself as a fortress of humanistic sciences.

In a history of Romanian cultural centres, Braşov would occupy an important place, both because it would crayon, sometimes better than other towns, the

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development of our national country, as well as due to the fact that it was the home of key spiritual life figures, including musician Gheorghe Dima.

The artistic personalities, characterised by modesty and discretion, find it easier to express themselves in writing. That is why his letters are brief life recounts, a charter of national value of the Romanian music history, marking an important step on the route to scientific investigation.

Some of the documents and writings might have a formal artistic and social routine character, focus on family events or on acknowledgements to those whose support was requested and finally obtained. These documents help us grasp a better understanding of the historical background musician Gheorghe Dima and other personalities of the time had to cope with.

For Braşov, the year 1899 marked yet another period of musical movement flourishing, due to Gheorghe Dima's presence in our town.

His authority as a recognized maestro had a strong impact on Braşov's artistic institutions, which gained in dynamism, refinement, performance and repertoire value. This Braşov period was fruitful for Gheorghe Dima also due to the numerous and complex musical manifestations held: concerts, recitals, performances, religious services, and artistic tours.

It was not easy for the musician to part with the cultural environment of Sibiu, his collaborators and admirers.

The Musical Reunion historian, Matei Voileanu lingers on this moment in his paper: "25 de ani din viaţa Reuniunii române de muzică din Sibiu", writing: "...his departure from the artistic management of the Reunion was very unexpected. The Reunion bid Gheorghe Dima farewell offering him an album with their signature and a golden ring, a symbol of the connection that lasted for so long...".

When the news reached Braşov, the joy of music lovers and of all other supporters of the initiatives of the Reunion for Gymnastics and Music went hand in hand with the hope towards a new flourishing period for Braşov's artistic culture.

"Gazeta Transilvaniei" Newspaper closely followed this memorable event in the life of the city, recording it in issue 225, 10/23 October 1899, p.2: "...master Gheorghe Dima was officially appointed as the conductor of our choir, a most emotional moment, filled with words of praise and admiration...".

2. Content

Starting with the first half of the 19th century, the choir movement became widely spread throughout Europe, specific to both the urban and the rural environment. It

was a way of signing, listening to music, and understanding it; it was the time of dynamic progress in all fields of culture.

Music also knows the same progress through the intensification of the means in musical life, through the conceptions that generated it as an expression of the profound social changes, through the original creations, the diversified genres, and the refined themes.

Braşov National Archives, doc. no.1072, excerpt from "Gazeta Transilvaniei", issue 72, of March 30th/April 12th, 1900, in the article "Voci din presă" mentions the success of "The Night Camp Granada" by Rodolphe Kreutzer, under Gheorghe Dima's musical leadership and the following cast: (the article hosted by Braşov National Archives is signed by: „Mangeat. A")

The Hunter: Dumitru Popovici – Bayreuth

Gabriela: Eugenia Moga (Gheorghe Dima's student from Sibiu)

Gomez: C. Popovici (bel canto student at the Conservatory of Bucharest)

"Kronstädter Zeitung" mentions in its columns:

"... it is, by all means, the merit of the new choir master, Mr. Dima, the soul that gave a new life to the choir. We can state, without a trace of doubt, that staging "The Night Camp in Granada" with an association that, as far as we know, has not yet tested its resources on this territory, is a remarkable achievement. We would like to congratulate the Romanian Reunion both for the success of the opera, and, especially, for the brilliant artistic performance of the conductor..."

Despite his most busy schedule, Gheorghe Dima did manage to find time to coordinate the initiatives of other city reunions, especially if their concerts served a humanitarian purpose.

All these testimonies, recorded by local newspapers, add to the available information on Gheorghe Dima's life, highlight his performance and enhance the prestige acquired in Brasov's musical movement.

The last concert of the Reunion, of 1900, included the Christmas carol programme that the Brasov public so much expected and desired, Gheorghe Dima's way of expressing his thankfulness for their support after his arrival to Braşov: " ...three Christmas songs composed by conductor Dima, for the choir, could be recognized as such even without actually speaking Romanian, especially the third one, a most original creation, where the choir fragments alternated with the individual performance, masterfully executed (and the same applies for the tenor song "Mugur, mugure!"), may be rejoiced in any concert hall as veritable pearls of folkloric musical literature...", an excerpt of the article: "Pagină de Crăciun", published in "Kronstädter Zeitung" Brasov Daily, issue 583, of December 28th, 1900, hosted by the Black Church Archives.

Upon the golden jubilee of the Romanian Greek Oriental Gymnasium in Braşov, the Reunion performed, under the baton of Gheorghe Dima:

- "Rugăciune", mixed choir and orchestra
- "Cantata", mixed choir, tenor solo and orchestra,

both composed by the conductor, lyrics by Andrei Bârseanu.

Present at this event, as always, "Gazeta Transilvaniei" noted:

"...when we went to listen to the "Cantata" in the gymnasium hall and to the "Concert" at Reduta, we left home with great expectations, convinced that we were going to hear something new. Within an amazingly short period of time, Mr. Dima has presented us with such amazing performances that we have grown quite demanding. Our expectations were by far exceeded."

Starting with the first half of the 19th century, the choir movement became widely spread throughout Europe, specific to both the urban and the rural environment. It was a way of singing, listening to music, and understanding it; it was the time of dynamic progress in all fields of culture.

Music also knows the same progress through the intensification of the means in musical life, through the conceptions that generated it as an expression of the profound social changes, through the original creations, the diversified genres, and the refined themes. A newly established choir assembly obliges the organizers to most sensibly approach a proper repertoire and also make sure it is maintained it in circulation.

Braşov gained a good renown at the dawn of the 20th century. The town orchestra, the Philharmonic Society, the musical reunions, the school choirs, "Astra" Musical Conservatory have marked their existence through various musical manifestations, concerts, of which testimonies have been preserved in the musical collections and libraries.

(In the case of private musical libraries, they are a valuable means for the collection of documents regarding the musical ensembles, and the notes on the musical scores are also important. "Studii şi cercetări de istoria artei", theatre, music, cinematography series, Excerpt, volume 23, 1976).

In 20th century Braşov, the concerts and highly diversified performance programmes are renowned. There actually is a tradition in this regard.

The 20th century musical life relies on a solid tradition, it is a continuation of the 19th century musical endeavours.

The concert posters, hosted by Braşov Archives (Fig.1) stand as proof.

We cannot disregard the acknowledgement the musical history grants to Gheorghe Dima, as founder of the Romanian madrigal.

Even though he was primarily interested in choir works, Lieds and religious musical works, his mastery also resonated in the composition of the madrigals through the purposeful movement of voices as the text required.

For the sake of example, we could mention the work "Primăvara", lyrics by Vasile Alecsandri, where Gheorghe Dima, with his composition mastery, manages to suggest a succession of season changing images.

This madrigal, relying on the collage technique, where the whole is achieved by putting together four non-repetitive sections, highlights an image in motion:



Fig. 1. "Casa Mureşenilor" Archives, Braşov, document, April 10th/22nd, 1892, Dima Fund, no catalogue number



The first, Andante (4/4) in A major, has as a theme the longing for the green woods, through a homophonous and isorhythmic choir composition, subordinated to the melodic line. The second one, “Tranquillo a dolores” (6/8), in the minor homonymous, is rather playful in nature, but will acquire a melancholy and expectation note starting the dominant seventh cord, which becomes the A minor tonality dominant. The third section is shorter, serving a connection purpose. The previous metre is preserved, the tonality is A major and the tempo is Meno mosso. The fourth section in E minor, Molto vivo (3/4), energetic, dynamic, marks the transition from contemplation to movement, the facture becomes polyphonic, and the theme becomes recitative, with short motifs operating with repetitive pointed notes, directed towards the end into what seems an uncontrollable rush.

The combination of “Primăvara” choir fragments, the exquisite artistry with which Gheorghe Dima managed to achieve it, reveals to us a highly imaginative melodist musician, fully mastering the Romanticists’ technique.

Another specificity of Braşov’s music life is the close connection between musicians and writers. Sometimes, compositions require lyrics.

The following document stands as testimony of the musicians’ turning towards poets for lyrics.

Gheorghe Dima thanks for the text received to support his compositions (Fig.2 and Fig. 3)

11
Braşov 31 Ian. 1907. v.
16.140
11-17
Mult stimată Doamnă!

Vă rog respectuos să buce.
voni a primi, dect semide
de cea mai deosebită stină
ce vă păstrezi, aceste cantece,
ca care ş. Dnastră at. con,
lucrat cu frumoasele ş. buice
meritele traducerii a mai multor
poesii din această colecţiune,

Fig. 2

pentru care ş. acum. de acum
Vă mulţămesc.

Primitiv, Vă rog, Mult
stimată Doamnă, asigurarea
deosebită mele stine.

Gheorghe

Fig. 3

“Casa Mureşenilor” Archives, Braşov, document-letter,
January 31st, 1907, Dima Fund, no catalogue number

After 1900, the donations and purchases of original Romanian composers' work replenish an extremely valuable fund. The inventory of the fund of such a library does not comprise all the musical scores, since many of them are lent, according to an agreement, such as, for instance the musical score fund of singer and composer Nicolae Popivici, which is hosted by the "Museum of the First Romanian School" (Colan.Ion "Ciprian Porumbescu și Braşovul", in "Mitropolia Ardealului, an 9, 1964, issue 6-8, p.451).

The research of such a library discloses, on the one hand, the role the predecessor composers have played in promoting Romanian music and, on the other hand, the circulation of their works in current musical practice. The documents mention that the original Reunion composers' and conductors' works, known to the choir singers and conductors of the various musical ensembles in the country, were borrowed from Braşov dwellers. Braşov dwellers not only borrowed, but they actually also received musical scores from various choir reunions, to help them expand their repertoire and library.

A letter Dumitru Georgescu Kiriac sent to Gheorghe Dima confirms the receipt of the "Rhapsody" by Johannes Brahms, to be copied and proposed a list of choir works for Gheorghe Dima to select from:

- ◆ "Peste deal" by Ion Vidu, under the orchestration of Alfonso Castaldi
- ◆ "Imnul românismului", for mixed choir and orchestra by Alfonso Castaldi
- ◆ 3 choir works by Paul Ciureta
- ◆ "Saltarello" by Camille Saint-Saëns
- ◆ (The Archives of the Library in Şchei Neighbourhood of Braşov. Files of Saint Nicholas Church choir).

3. Conclusions

The tradition of Braşov musical life stands out in several ways: the musical figures who came to Braşov and organised a number of concerts have proposed a high-toned programme to their audiences, and thus managed to cultivate and refine their musical tastes.

- the orchestras and the choir ensembles were organised following in the footsteps of the professional ones
- the musical library attached to Saint Nicholas church provided the repertoire the choir needed

The Archives of the Library in Şchei Neighbourhood of Braşov (file no. 61/69) accommodate the choir operation rules, which, apart from the obligation to attend

religious masses, also was established for a number of choir concerts in Braşov and in the country.

The musical score fund was established through purchases, donations, loans amongst the various ensembles.

Being familiar with the organisation structure of German musical societies, the instrumental and choir musical ensemble working methods in the cities where he had studied, Gheorghe Dima also applied and skilfully improved them in the city of his childhood.

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