

Gheorghe Dima, the Hallmark of Romanian music in Sibiu and Braşov

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Abstract: *The pages to follow describe the activity of composer Gheorghe Dima in Sibiu and Brasov. After graduating from the sciences high school in Vienna, Gheorghe Dima headed towards the Polytechnic University in Karlsruhe (1866), which he quit in favour of the musical ones. The first period of the musical studies was in Leipzig between 1872 and 1874. After graduation, he settled in Braşov, where he occupied a music professor chair at the Central Romanian Schools and took over the leadership of the Romanian Reunion for Gymnastics and Music. He continued his activity for four years, until 1878, when he returned to Leipzig to complete his musical studies. In 1899, he returned to Braşov and stayed here for a long period of time. He hallmarked the cultural and musical activity of Braşov through an extensive teaching, composing, and performance activity. The analysis of this activity largely relies on the musician's personal documents.*

Key-words: *Dima, Sibiu, Braşov, compositions, concerts, customs*

1. Introduction

The old city of Braşov dating since the 13th century, the town that witnessed the coming to light of the first printed Romanian books, the town of the first Romanian newspaper, the town of Diaconu Coresi, Gheorghe Bariţ, and of Mureşeanu family is an important economic, intellectual, and cultural centre.

Merchant George Dima arrived in this location fostering material prosperity and spiritual growth from Buzău area, and, together with Păuna Pulpaş, born in Şcheii Braşovului, he raised a family of four children: Luca, Nicolae, Ion, and Maria.

From amongst them, Nicolae Dima (1786 – 1852) was the only one who became a merchant in Şcheii Braşovului and married Zoe Voinescu, member of a very wealthy family of merchants in Braşov. On the maternal lineage, Zoe was the descendant of the influent Braşov family of Ciurculeşti, and her mother, Eufrosina Ciurcu, was related to the family of Sevastiei Nicolau, the wife of academician Iacob Mureşianu (1812 – 1887).

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Nicolae and Zoe Dima had four boys: Pantelimon, Manase, Nicolae, and Gheorghe (George), the musician to be, born in the parental home in Șchei (no. 284), on September 28th (October 10th, according to the new style) 1847.

During the first part of his musical education at the Conservatory in Leipzig, he studied composition with Carl Reinecke, harmony and counterpoint with Salomon Jadassohn, and music history with Oscar Paul. The city forever marked his artistic destiny, allowing him, in addition to the in-depth specialized studies, to gain a solid and great erudition of musical culture.

His bass voice stood out during the concerts and recitals held as a concert artist, as well as in his performances on the stages of the opera houses in Klagenfurt and Zürich between 1873 and 1874, when he completed the first stage of his education in Leipzig. That period marked the initial artistic success of performer Gheorghe Dima. He appeared in a solo vocal quintet by Peter Cornelius, then in an octet, with Anton Depresse's accompaniment. He held a series of vocal concerts at Gewandhaus Hall in Leipzig, as well as in Karlsruhe, in Vienna, and other German cities, mostly performing lieds and oratorio airs.

Because he desired to put the knowledge acquired during his studies into practice, during the years he spent in Brasov and until he returned to the Conservatory, Gheorghe Dima was also interested in a teaching career. To this end, there is a correspondence with the Association "Eforia școlilor din Brașov".

He did the musical initiation following modern and efficient teaching methods widely used in Germany, which are still in practice nowadays, with songs rendered by ear, gradually going from one to several sounds, according to the children's vocal development, followed by gradual note singing exercises, starting from the songs heard. The purpose was to get students used to clean note singing, and, as far as possible, have them also write down the musical symbols.

2. Content

Gheorghe Dima's most extensive activity, where he actually felt at home in the musical realm, was that of conductor of the Romanian Reunion for Gymnastics and Music. In this capacity, the artistic work meets the administrative activity of selecting and presenting the repertoire through the best possible means; so that the audience understands and appreciates art, according to the conductor's exquisite taste.

Upon his first contact with the Romanian Reunion for Gymnastics and Music in Brașov, in the autumn of 1873, after he realized what the local artistic potential was, he managed, through assiduous work, to develop an artistic performance programme for the "reunion of professionals" of October 28, 1873, hosting composers such as: Franz Schubert, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Gaetano Donizetti, and for New Year's Eve, he prepared an artistic performance programme for poor children, which included: Felix Mendelssohn-Bartoldy, - Psalm, 42, choir;

Grigore Ventura - "Doi ochi eu am iubit" (I Loved Two Eyes); Georg Friedrich Händel: choir from the oratorio "Judas Machabeus"; Niels Wilhelm Gade: "The Crusaders", choir.

Due to the success of the event, in the following year, Gheorghe Dima was in charge with the musical part of all reunion concerts, so that in the programme of April 14/26, 1874 he also presented his own work, "Între piatra Detunata" (Between the Detunata Rocks), lyrics by Grigore Asachi, and on January 3/15, 1875 he performed his own round dance for choir, "Ploaia" (The Rain) or "Garofița" (Small Carnation).

Gheorghe Dima also organised the two-part concert of February 22, 1875, with a diversified repertoire, which included the works of the illustrious composers: Joseph Haydn, Niels Wilhelm Gade, Carl Maria von Weber.

On February 27/March 11, 1875, journalist Ion Darin published the concert review in issue 16 of "Gazeta Transilvaniei" (The Transylvania Gazette) of February 27/March 11, 1875: "... above all, we should congratulate the composer and the choir master, Gheorghe Dima, vocal performance teacher in Braşov secondary schools. Apart from his natural musical talent, he also possesses the necessary qualifications thanks to his education in Leipzig. Our reunion, as well as the gymnasium, can take pride in such a leader".

"România Jună", the academic society of Romanian students in Vienna, included the vocal quartet "Adunarea" (The Gathering) by Gheorghe Dima at the end of their 1876 New Year's Eve performance, which the press of the time noted as a crucial point, since this is sought to be the musician's first original work.

In the evolution of the artistic concept of the Reunion for Gymnastics and Music in Braşov, the choice and preparation of the programme items is a milestone that mirrors Gheorghe Dima's first creation efforts towards bringing Romanian music to the forefront.

In the concert on November 14/26, 1876, the programme also included two choral compositions of the musician: "Ce ți-am făcut acuma" (What Have I Done to You) and "Două inimi nu-mi dau pace" (Two Hearts Won't Let Me Be), echoes of their impact onto the audience being rendered in issue 37 of Gazeta Transilvaniei of May 22/June 3, 1875:

"... they've gotten the most enthusiastic applause on behalf of the audience who were so pleasantly impressed by the plays that they called the maestro back on stage countless times...".

A testimony of the musician's activity in Șcheii Braşovului during 1877 and 1878 helps cast light on a misunderstanding. A document addressed to "Sfânta Treime" (Holy Trinity) Church in Braşov City, where Gheorghe Dima worked during this period, may be found at "Sfântul Nicolae" (Saint Nicholas) Church, where he started working on September 1, 1859, as a permanent employee.

Gheorghe Dima proposed the reorganisation of Braşov City choir as follows: fewer, but more compact and productive rehearsals; apart from the special occasions, the

choir will perform on all holidays in the Church calendar; choir members will be advised to learn a bit of musical theory, to be able to read scores.

He would only accept to be the master of the choir in the light of these prerequisites. The Church Parish Committee did not openly accept his suggestions.

This is the time when Gheorghe Dima returned to the Leipzig Conservatory to complete his studies. In 1881, he settled in Sibiu, opening the path for a new stage in the artistic, cultural, social, and national life of this important Romanian city in southern Transylvania. He was offered the position of master of the Orthodox Cathedral choir and the vocal and instrumental music chairs at the Theological Seminary, School of Pedagogy, and The Civil School for Girls.

He thus becomes the leader and tutor of the musical life in Sibiu for almost two decades.

In "Pagini din istoria muzicii românești" (Pages of Romanian Music), George Breazul wrote on Sibiu: "... The Music Reunion in Sibiu has leaned towards the harsher, but more original beauty of the national soul, towards the serene gentleness of folklore music, towards the ornamental beauty of the Byzantine chants, thus assimilating the specific national ethos in the artistic activity. Transylvania, a pioneer in this field, finds in the Sibiu Reunion, the exponent of its musical artistic animus".

Employed as the musical leader of the Romanian Reunion for Music, Gheorghe Dima was only paid a minimum for living wage, which he supplemented with canto and piano lessons, as a private teacher.

The first artistic manifestation as a recently appointed conductor was the preparation of a concert upon the occasion of the Romanian exhibition in Sibiu, organised by the Cultural Association "Astra" in Transylvania and held at "Împăratul Romanilor" Hall, half of the revenue thus obtained being donated to the exhibition. The performance included two Romanian folklore songs for mixed choir: "Hei leliță din cel sat" (Hey, wench in that village), Cucuruz cu frunza-n sus" (Raised-Leaf Maize) and "Două inimi nu-mi dau pace" (Two Hearts Won't Let Me Be) – mixed choir a capella with piano accompaniment.

The activity in Sibiu was rich, offered him the satisfaction of acknowledged work, through the establishment of a vocal and instrumental music chair Archdiocesan Seminary, thus becoming one of the professors with material rights established under the laws in force.

During this period, Gheorghe Dima had several concerts in Caransebeș, upon invitation of his friend, Nicolae Popovici, who also was a choir composer and conductor very active in Sibiu and Brașov. During these tours, Gheorghe Dima launched as first auditions, the compositions: "Stelele" (The Stars) and "La un țărm cumplit, sălbatec" (A Dreadful, Wild Shore), vocal and piano works.

The requests for his compositions kept stacking up on the musician's table. Choir leaders from the farthest corners of the country were interested in materials for their repertoires.

In the autumn of 1884, Gheorghe Dima and Matei Voileanu organised a national artistic tour, but being a great lover of nature, the composer enjoyed each and every site. After Gheorghe Dima left Sibiu, the one who accompanied him in this travels noted: "... In Bran, at the foot of Bucegi Mountains that this nature lover so briskly climbed until late in life, was where he liked to go in summers and work...", wrote A. P. Bănuţ in the biography dedicated to the composer. Matei Voileanu also reminded us that it was at the foot of Bucegi that Gheorghe Dima wrote his most important compositions.

One of Gheorghe Dima's friends and important musicians, was Dimitrie Popovici-Bayreuth, who, in 1885, on the composer's invitation, held his first concert in Sibiu, including some of his friend's compositions in the programme, i.e.: "Codru verde nu mai este" (The Green Forest's Gone), "Ziua bună" (Good Day), "Eu simt a ta suflare" (I Can Feel You Breathing). The two musicians had exchanged letters for a long time, during the period when Gheorghe Dima carried out his activity in Sibiu, but also later on, after the artist moved to Braşov.

The concerts of the Romanian Reunion for Music in Sibiu, under the guidance of maestro Gheorghe Dima, continued to be important events, due to the professionalism of the performance and the diversity of the repertoire: "... there was such whirlwind of a applause at the end that the experienced conductor of the Reunion, maestro Gheorghe Dima simply couldn't leave the scene...", "...the choir and the orchestra competed in flawlessness ...", to only quote some of the reviews of the time.

Gheorghe Dima's departure to Braşov was due not so much to personal dissatisfaction in the collaboration with the Reunion, but rather to the opposition towards his ideas manifested by the new Metropolitan Priest, Ioan Meşianu, who suggested the musician should resign because he didn't understand his avant-garde music. Facing this situation, Gheorghe Dima complied and submitted his resignation to Matei Voileanu, the chairman of the Romanian Reunion for Music in Sibiu at the time:

"... because of my relocation to Braşov, I'm forced to resign from my position as musical manager, which I have continuously held since the summer of 1881, prior to the general assembly. And now that we're parting, looking back on the struggles and victories of the Reunion, I really wish that the Reunion for Music in Sibiu would grow and become an increasingly important player in the cultural body of our people..." wrote Gheorghe Dima in Sibiu, on September 26, 1899 (document kept in Gheorghe Dima Archives of "Casa Mureşenilor" Museum in Braşov, uncatalogued). Gheorghe Dima's return to Braşov in the autumn of 1899 marked a new flourishing period for the musical movement of the city, an era of reverberating triumph that Braşov dwellers regarded with respect and appreciation. 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.

The local press generously covered this event: "... when the Association "Eforia școlilor centrale" in Brasov asked Mr. Dima to take over the secondary school music chair, Mr. Dima accepted the offer of the Archdiocesan Committee. And this was the beginning of a somewhat apostolic cultural mission...", quoted from "Telegraful român" (The Romanian Telegraph) issue 96 of September 7/19, 1899. 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 Brasov's artistic culture.

Gheorghe Dima was also involved in the development of a further training programme for choir masters. He led these courses using his own work as reference. Apart from the music chair in the Romanian school, the management of the Romanian Reunion for Gymnastics and Music and of the Romanian Theatre School "Reduta", the musician was also appointed as master of "Sfântul Nicolae" (Saint Nicholas) Orthodox Church choir in Șchei. With his organizing skills and his ever fresh initiative, Gheorghe Dima found new opportunities for the development of the musical activity in Brasov.

The archives of the Romanian culture museum in Șcheii Brașovului hosts documents attesting the musician's hard work with the church choir, starting the very first days after his arrival.

In time, many organizational flaws of the parish committee surfaced, directly affecting the activity of the choir, and Gheorghe Dima promptly mentioned them in his defence letters, a situation not always pleasant for him.

The start of 1900 brought Gheorghe Dima professional satisfaction in his work alongside the Romanian Reunion for Gymnastics and Music, with very successful concerts, always covered in the local press.

The first concert held on January 16/28, 1900 with the programme:

- Quartet op. 74 no. 1 in C major by Joseph Haydn
- "Feriți sunt cei goniți" (Merry Renegades) – mixed choir by Gheorghe Dima
- Recitative and tenor aria for the oratorio "The Creation" by Joseph Haydn.
- Three old Romanian songs for the mixed choir by Gheorghe Dima:
 - "Scumpă dragă copilă" (Dear Sweet Child)
 - "Așa mi-a fost ursita" (That's My Faith)
 - "Nu-i dreptate" (There's No Justice)

had a generous space in "Gazeta Transilvaniei", issue 11 of February 1, 1900: "...Our Music Reunion that barely gave any signs over the past years, now artfully led by Mr. Gheorghe Dima, has risen from the ashes. Yesterday's brilliant concert proved this to us with new and salutary reforms for the progress and reputation of the Reunion...".

The Braşov archives host the correspondence between Gheorghe Dima and well-known translators. We mention Andrei Bârsean, whom the composer periodically asked to perform translations from German into Romanian.

The document in figure 1 is a letter in which Gheorghe Dima requested the translation of the ballad "Crăiasa ielelor" (The Goddess of Fairies) from German into Romanian, while he was going to take care of the musical part.

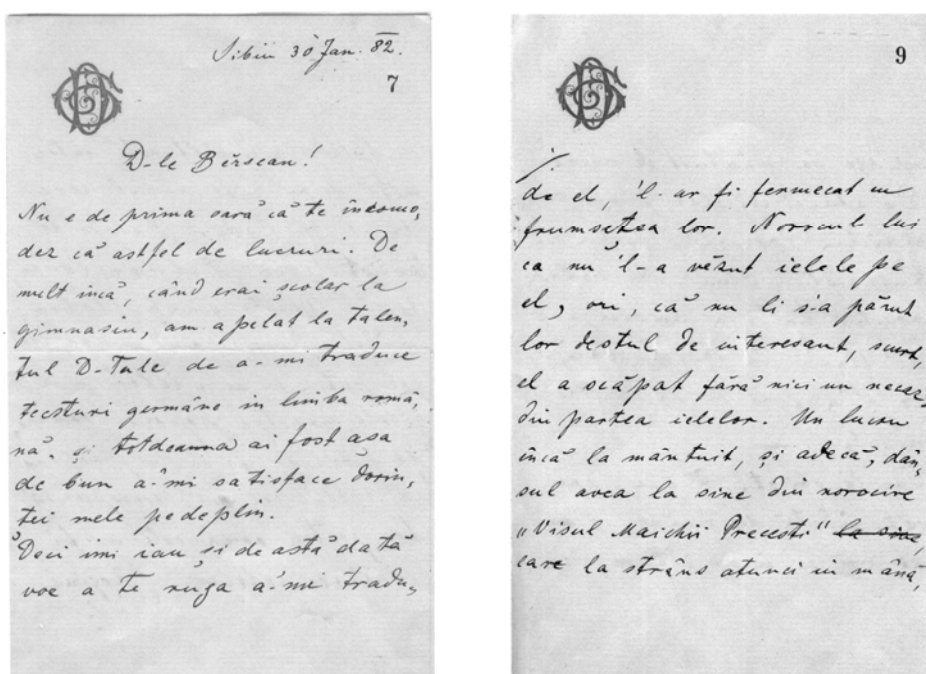


Fig. 1. Gheorghe Dima's letter to Andrei Bârsean (sheet 7 and sheet 9) Sibiu, January 30, 1882. "Casa Mureşenilor" Archives, Dima Fund, uncatalogued

3. Conclusions

This article reviews the most important aspects in the life and activity of musician Gheorghe Dima, from his young age until 1900, while he was working intensively in Braşov.

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.

As part of the activities meant to spread the culture for all, theatre and music also developed in the towns and villages in Transylvania due to the contribution of the representatives of Romanian culture: Timotei Cipariu, George Barițiu, Ion Slavici. They set up and led renowned cultural societies, printed newspapers and magazines, the pages whereof disclose special historical and cultural events.

If the set up of the first Romanian gymnasium library (again, in Brasov) is related to George Barițiu's name, the care for the organization, preservation and use of the score library are amongst Gheorghe Dima's merits. Since he was familiar with the organization of the German musical societies in the cities where he had studied, the working methods of the Romanian and German reunions in Sibiu, at the head of which he had contributed to the configuration of a prosperous era for the Romanian musical life in Transylvania, newly encouraged the musical life in his home town.

Equally interested in promoting Romanian musical creation, and in organizing the musical life in the main cities in Transylvania: Braşov, Sibiu, and Cluj, Gheorghe Dima initiated the reorganization of the musical library of Sf. Nicolae Church choir.

All documents bearing the signature: "G. Dima, Sf. Nicolae Church Choir Master", reveal the musician's interest in enriching the library with valuable Romanian musical creations. He was also the initiator of the score library at "Andrei Şaguna" High School in Şcheii Braşovului, and the lists in the school's yearbook speak about the very complex composition activity of the musician and his concern for enriching the choir repertoire.

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