

Distinguishing marks of the conductorial art, in Mariana Popescu's volume: *Ion Vanica. The Magic of the Children's Choir*

Ruxandra MIREA¹

Abstract. *Music is the art and science that builds and refines the human being. The voice is the most sensitive instrument that the man possesses, to fully complete himself in the musical art. The voice of child, the gift of each of us, of which we once enjoyed, can outline the most sublime sounds when it agglutinates in choral bands. In her book, Mariana Popescu penetrates the core of the most titled children's choral band in Romania, the Radio Children's Choir, conducted by Ion Vanica. The work, which was published in 2015, at the Bucharest Musical Publishing House, is structured in 10 chapters, including a comprehensive Bibliography. The passion of the conductor Ion Vanica for music and conductorial art, the style improved in the years of studies, the constancy and responsibility manifested in the labour of rehearsals and concerts, the joy and praise of the musicians who played or listened to musical moments are included in a thorough analysis, which reveals a true musical excellence of the author Mariana Popescu.*

Keywords: *choir, children, conductor, voice, Ion Vanica, Mariana Popescu.*

1.Introduction

In this study, we aim at revealing the working tools of the musicologist Mariana Popescu in her effort to highlight the image of the most titrated children's choir in Romania, the *Children's Choir of Radio Broadcasting*. We consider it to be a useful review of the volume *Ion Vanica. The Magic of the Radio Children's Choir*, published at the Musical Publishing House in 2015. The paper, which has 237 pages, is structured in eleven chapters, of quantitative and qualitative consistency.

¹PhD *Ovidius* University of Constanta, ruxandra.m63@gmail.com

Mariana Popescu is an authentic musicologist, educated and formed in the early years in the generous crucible of Botosani school, and then, at *Ciprian Porumbescu* Music Conservatory in Bucharest, to acquire deep musical knowledge. In 2005, she sustained her PhD thesis on *Folkloric Music*, a decisive factor in the elaboration of Romanian choral music, under the careful and competent guidance of the musicologist Gheorghe Firca. Mariana Popescu's artistic activity has an ascending path, marking areas that harmoniously blend in her evolution: of pedagogue, choir conductor, composer and musicologist. In each field, she has proved a miraculous force of expression, always being a model to follow. At the level of the university chair, she proved to be a valuable intellectual, educating generations of students who today are themselves teachers and conductors. The quality of musicologist is another attitude of the artist's manifestation, which, through constant scientific rigor, has brought an important contribution to our musical culture. As composer, she impressed the specialized juries, winning seven national awards and an international award in seven years. But above the three, it remains the passion for the chorus, the choral conduction, the respect for the human voice and the artistic act that led her to an applauded and recognized professional activity in the country and abroad. The volume reviewed is a proof of the author's particular inclination to the choral song, to the obvious appreciation of the human voice as well as to the person who polishes and leads them, meaning of the choir conductor.

2. Tools of the musicologist Mariana Popescu

The work is a double monograph, of the conductor Ion Vanica and of the choral band that he initiated and served with dedication and responsibility. It has been done after a long research, through some essential methods of the musicological act: historical investigation, descriptive, synthetic and comparative method. Based on the fundamental discipline of musicology, historiography, the author contributes to the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the activity of the conductor and of the children's choir.

3. The review of the work

In the first chapter, *Childhood. The Years of Study*, the author investigates with great precision the childhood of Ion Vanica, the period of medium studies, signaling his joy to sing, to listen to music. "Having a crystalline voice, Ionas was co-opted as a member of the church choir, being the main soloist, regularly attending the

rehearsals on Saturdays and Sundays at the Divine Liturgy” (Popescu 2015, 8). In the years of his youth, Ion Vanica continued his studies with university studies, proving maturity by choosing to pursue a musical career. As a sign of the major importance given to education, Mariana Popescu mentions the names of the teachers, “real models” (Popescu 2015, 8) who will imprint his professional training: Ștefan Popescu, Constantin Brăiloiu, Paul Constantinescu, Ion Popescu-Pasărea.

The second chapter marks the conducting activity of Ion Vanica: *The Conducting-Profession of Faith*. It is the chapter with the widest range, pp. 12-105. In its contents, the musicologist illustrates the conductor's entire professional career. Thus, we learn that the choral formation is a human instrument with multiple personality, behavioral and vocal valences. In particular, the children's choral formation, a reunion of voices in formation, a variety of timbered colors, forming a complex human apparatus, delicately to maneuver and orientate.

The systematic thinking of Mariana Popescu is also pleasantly surprising through the rigorous information on each stage in the professional development of Ion Vanica. The diachronic look of the conductor's career underlines the author's intention to mark his professionalism, attention to rehearsals, work on parties and even individually. In this respect, Ion Vanica militated for the equalization of children's musical knowledge, who did not have a musical basis, through permanent hours dedicated to the implementation of the knowledge of musical theory that preceded the rehearsals. “The explanation of this process must be sought in the working method of the animator of the band” (Popescu 2015, 116).

The musicologist Mariana Popescu, being a professional pianist, often mentions in the pages of her work, the constructive contribution of the co-operative master: Alexandru Șumski, Martha Joja, Nicolae Bucur. The pianist scores, instrumental miniatures of musical essence, often envisaged in a special writing of instrumental virtuoso, were interpreted impeccably, outlining the harmonization that the conductor asked for. The interpretation of the ensemble was a unitary construction that the conductor, just like an architect, could conduct. And his power to implement the artistic manifestation program is determined by motivation and, above all, by knowledge. And since “Knowledge is the definition of a thing, through feeling, state, it does not imply the demonstration of that information, but its living” (Gheorghiuță, 2015), we find in the pages of this chapter, the determination that the conductor Ion Vanica had in the construction, shaping and improvement of the *Radio Children's Choir*.

The same organizing methods of the conductor, which are duplicated by the experience of the years, are outlined by the musicologist during the period 1958-1968, when Ion Vanica, after being unjustly removed from the children's Radio choir,

directed various choral bands of amateurs, especially the prestigious Choir of the *Doina Ensemble of the Army*.

Also in this particularly important chapter, Mariana Popescu introduces the important moments of the tours, joy of musical expression offered to the public everywhere. Thus, concert dates, cities, countries, posters, and the artistic level of the shows are mentioned to us. The continuous self-improvement of the conductor led the choral band to approach more and more complex repertoires, representing various aesthetic tendencies. We also find out about the inclusion, in concerts, of concerting, extensive works reflecting the high artistic performance of the conductor. It is important for the reader the mention of the musicologist about the important orchestras next to which he made “memorable concerts of vocal-symphonic music” (Popescu 2015, 102).

The third chapter, *Composer Ion Vanica*, is dedicated to the creation of the composer Ion Vanica. The artist was a conductor who dedicated his life to the acknowledgement and affirmation of the Romanian choral life. An extensive activity that sustained his primordial passion was that of composer. “It can be said that Ion Vanica was stimulated in the compositional activity by his intensive conducting activity, as conductor of children’s choirs, mixed choirs and male choirs” (Popescu 2015, 106). The need for musical material dedicated to some special, festive, or creative artistic moments, generated, in time, a substantial creation. It belongs to the Coral Cameral genre, comprising works for children’s choirs, mixed choirs and male choirs, shaping their own style with modern ways of musical construction, of folkloric inspiration.

In the fourth chapter, *Electrecord Discs*, Mariana Popescu recommends to us the discography of the artist Ion Vanica. In the desire to promote the values of Romanian and universal culture, the conductor approached various repertoires within the three *Electrecord* discs. The quality of each record was provided by the correctness of the voice emission, imposture, accuracy and vocal hygiene.

The fifth chapter of the extensive monograph is entitled *Articles in the press*. Mariana Popescu built this chapter with remarkable tenacity, searching for and discovering testimonials given long time ago by the musicologists of the time. It is obvious the joy of every expression of emotion, appreciation and admiration of critics, which always reflected the public’s reaction. The knowledge of the musical phenomenon from the position of the performer allowed some particularly expressive evidences of branded musicologists which became a reward for the work and devotion of the conductor, of the little or the mature chorus singers: Alfred Hofmann, Petre Codreanu, Viorel Cosma, Costache Pârvulescu, Sorin Vulcu, Doru Popovici, Eugen Comarnescu, Alina Pârvulescu, Mioara Dobre and others.

Radio Broadcasts is the **sixth chapter** of the paper. The author builds in the 44 pages of this important section, by using one of the most common tools in scientific research, the interview. The credibility of such an investigation ensures the success of such a monograph, by the purpose of such a method: to acquire information, knowledge of attitudes, manifestations, beliefs, norms, values of some people. It is a flexible, easy method, but also a complex method through the deliberate and assumed conversation between two people. Thus, Mariana Popescu has as concrete source, the programs of three composers from different radio stations, Mihaela Doboş, Liliana Pispiris and Puşa Roth. Through the broadcasting approaches developed in the past years, the musicologist provides the reader with pleasant and informative moments from the activity of the band, of valuable people such as the conductor, the chorus singers, pianists, or other important people in the choir's definition: Voicu Enăchescu, Florin Enăceanu, Gheorghe Crăsnaru, Ileana Cotrubaş, Romeo Vanica, Grigore Constantinescu, Maria Hurduc, Alina Pârvolescu and others. Most interviews are directed to the admirer's characterization of the conductor, cognitively and emotionally transmitting his attitude and state at rehearsals and concerts: "There, in front of the choir, you were aware of his exceptional capacity to build from the voices of those children sounds, from the most ineffectual pianissimo to a controlled, unyielding forte" (Popescu 2015, 219). The author has identified through the interviews mentioned, opinions about the composers of the Radio Children's Choir during rehearsals, concerts or contests: "I have to tell you that *the Serb in the cart* rose up the hall, the Germans' feet danced under the chairs in the rhythm of the music. *Ave Maria* made them look at us with respect and piety while we sang" (Popescu 2015, 212). Very important is also the audience's proof about the public attitude: "It is an indescribable public reaction that was not only applause but it was tearful, it was a moment that I'm convinced, not only me as a member of the choir of that time, but all my former colleagues in the choir and the audience in the room - a moment I repeat, I think I cannot forget." (Popescu 2015, 216)

Chapter seven, *The Disciples of Master Ion Vanica* is a *crescendo* of the work through which Mariana Popescu focuses our attention on those who followed his teachings. The complex personality of the artist Ion Vanica gave strength and expression to the training of other artists, who had an important international career: Ileana Cotrubaş, Voicu Enăchescu, Silvia Voinea, Petre Geambaşu and others. "The Radio Children's Choir led by Master Ion Vanica was not only a performance ensemble, but a musical school, a real nursery for the musicians who would later fill the professional choirs or opera distributions, with remarkable voices affirmed on the stages in the country or on the major stages of the world: Ileana Cotrubaş,

Gheorghe Crăsnaru, Cornelia Angelescu, Elena Grigorescu, Silvia Voinea, Liliana Pagu; Voicu Enăchescu; in light music Petre Geambașu; or in other artistic fields - in the acting world: Ștefan Bănică Senior, Ion Dichiseanu, Emil Hossu; the balet dancer Victor Vlase; the musical illustrator – radio Mihai Roman; in television: Beatrice Drugă, Marin Traian, Lucia Catană, Irina Bora Iordăchescu, etc.” (Popescu 2015, 5-6)

Chapter eight, *Memories about Ion Vanica*. The pedagogical dimension has always been traced on the conductorial activity, in the work of Ion Vanica. Practicing a thorough analysis, Mariana Popescu reveals the testimonies of some of the chorus singers of the time, today distinguished artistic personalities. Recognizing qualities such as tenacity, safety and perseverance in the conducting act of Ion Vanica, Mariana Popescu presents statements that carry the image of a true mentor. Statements of appreciation, admirative interviews, information, metaphors, comparisons. Throughout 35 pages we have a synaesthetic picture of the originally expressed memories, leading to the same reflection, of a valuable conductor, the initiator of the most titrated choral band of children, initiated in 1945. The systematization of the musicologist Mariana Popescu, 19 testimonies, is significant and useful in illustrating the psychological, pedagogic, artistic profile of the conductor Ion Vanica.

Chapter nine is an original concept of the author to present the five anniversaries of the Radio Children's Choir. Mariana Popescu always includes the concert program, from which the thrill of the joy of the past repertoires comes through. Also, there are five expositions that preceded the concerts - an event showing the impressive size of a professional choir conductor of talented and competent children, the sensitivity and support of accompanying pianists. «The concert required intensive training, especially that the conductor intended to present in the anniversary concert, as a tribute works from the repertoire of her predecessors, the three great V: Ion Vanica, Elena Vicică, Elena Văcărescu.” (Popescu 2015, 300)

Chapter ten is a foray into the *Album of Memories*. The photographic images have now replaced the consecrated pattern of the work. The musicologist's call to the memory of the past is ingenious and emotional, because “It brings the past back to the present, but it does so in the light of today's changed circumstances” (Zlate, 2009, 166). The selected images are a valuable attempt to embody the professional work, as well as moments of communion and juvenile exuberance. The last paragraph thought by the author is dedicated to the family, who “built for Ion Vanica an ideal setting of harmonization with his work as a passionate conductor for the choral music.” (Popescu 2015, 318)

In the comprehensive Bibliography, which is the **11th chapter**, the musicologist's effort to investigate, to explore, to clearly and expressively highlight important events from the Romanian choral culture is visible.

4. Conclusions

Although the work is of considerable size, its reading happens unexpectedly quickly. It is a work that can be used to the urge: **musical education by means of specialized books**. From this double monograph, the understanding of the phenomenon of musical education comes out through its two aspects, theoretical and practical, which best solves the intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth and development of the children. It is a demonstration of the prosocial behavior of children that can be constantly supported by parents and educators through music. The mental discipline that arises through artistic activity builds future adults with attitudes engaged in cultural approaches.

Mariana Popescu managed to impose on the work a thoughtful plan, with a significant number of chapters, eleven, each carrying a special emotional load. All chapters are uniquely designed. The information gathered, sometimes under very difficult conditions (time, correspondence, death of some people, mites) is carefully selected and then combined in a natural order. It has resulted a work written in the enthusiasm of the musician and the conductor who worked and applauded, understood, appreciated and evoked the work of the ancestors. From each page the reality that impresses and excites, sometimes up to tears comes out. The image brought to present, of the community of children who seriously studied and sung with the ardor of the age, but especially of the conductor who imposed himself through the firmness and suppleness of the gesture, is the proof of Mariana Popescu's respect for professionalism, for the true musical art.

5. References

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