

The Romanian lied. The first National Festival of the Romanian lied in Braşov (II)

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Abstract: *The history of song, of romance, or more precisely of the Romanian lied, is very long, closely connected to the faith of the Romanian people. Romanians, who underwent poverty, wars, riots and social upheavels, felt the need to comfort this pain. They have always born their cross with resolution in times of need, but they have also lived their joy by singing holy songs during church services, through the songs known by those hiding in the mountains and forests – drafting songs, through the shepards who sang ballads and melancholic songs to their sheep, or mothers who sang lullabies to put their children to sleep, then through violin players and other traditional musicians performing for round dances and folk dances.*

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1. Romanian composers part II

In their book “A trip through music history”, Grigore Constantinescu and Irina Boga wrote about **George Enescu** (1881-1955) that “he truly represents the creative genius of the Romanian people, with universal vocation” (Constantinescu, 2008, 237, my translation). He composed lieder on his own lyrics *La Quarantaine*, *Souhait*, *Dedicace*, *De ziua ta* [On your birthday], but also on lyrics by Eminescu - *Revedere* [Meeting again] and *Eu mă duc, codrul rămâne* [I will die, the forest will live on], then on folk lyrics gathered in Vasile Alecsandri’s collection – *Doina* [Melancholic song], fourteen songs on the lyrics of the queen-poetess Carmen Sylva, a series of seven songs on lyrics by Clement Marot, four songs on lyrics by Fernand Gregh, then *Le Desert* on lyrics by Jules Lemâitre, *Le silence* on lyrics by Albert Samain, three songs on lyrics by Sully Prudhomme, *Wustenbild* on lyrics by Roderich. (See below the First National Festival of the Romanian Lied – the collection of all lieder composed by Enescu).

Alfred Alessandrescu (1893-1959) composed, during his studies in Paris, a series of French lieder on the lyrics of poetess Elena Văcărescu *Le rideau de ma voisin* (very popular). On returning to the country, he also composed other songs on

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lyrics by the French poets Edmond Rostand- *I Aube* (1915), and Tristan Klingsor- *Chanson triste* and *Berceuse* (1917).

Mihail Jora (1891-1971) started composing his first creations on German texts, namely *Patru cântece pentru voce și pian* [Four songs for voice and piano], op. 1 (1914). However, “the start of his rich lieder creation, including an important part of the Romanian lyrical poetry (lyrics by 15 poets such as Adrian Maniu, George Bacovia, Tudor Arghezi, Al. Teodorescu, Ion Pilat, V. Voiculescu, Lucian Blaga, George Lesnea, Zaharia Stancu, Mariana Dumitrescu, Mihai Eminescu, Rainer Maria Rilke – translated by Emanoil Ciomac) – totaling 23 series (namely 108 pieces) – is marked by *Five songs, opus 11* (1930), on lyrics by Octavian Goga.” (Vancea, 348) (my translation).

Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968) started studying “during WWI while he was a prisoner in Kiev, and his work also includes *10 cântece pentru voce și pian* [10 songs for voice and piano]. He published a collection of *303 colinde* [303 carols] (Edit. Scrisul românesc, Craiova, 1931), *21 cântece pentru voce și pian* [21 songs for voice and piano] (Edit. Mentor, Timișoara).” (Vancea, 1968, 375) (my translation). Also, he is one of the first Romanian composers to give importance to the rhythm of folk music.

Emil Monția (1882-1965) was very popular for his songs for voice and piano, but also for his carols harmonized for voice and piano.

Ion Borgovan (1889-1970) published several notebooks of songs for voice and piano, on lyrics by Șt. O. Iosif and O. Goga.

Tudor Ciortea (1903-1982) was born in Brașov and, after Jora, he is the author of most Romanian lieder. He wrote lieder on lyrics by Octavian Goga (1927), Lucian Blaga, Dumitru Ciurezu and Vasile Voiculescu (1951), as well as *Șapte lieduri* [Seven Lieder] on lyrics by Mihai Eminescu (1957). Starting with the lied *Însingurare* [Loneliness], on lyrics by Mariana Dumitrescu, the originality of the composer’s expression resides in a change of style and the enrichment of means of expression which come from the contemporary universal music. This expression can be found especially in lieder composed on lyrics by foreign poets such as Li-Tai Po, Federico Garcia Lorca (*Trei istorioare despre vânt* [Three stories about the wind]), five lieder on lyrics by Rainer Maria Rilke, and the most notable – the lied *Pasărea necunoscută* [The unknown bird], on lyrics by Tudor Arghezi. “In the lieder series *Culori* [Colours], on lyrics by Adrian Maniu (1969) – in which the arioso song is replaced by the melodic declamation (Sprechgesang), and the piano accompaniment suffers considerable alterations, consisting in a succession of isolated motives – the accompaniment seems inspired by Anton von Webern’s punctualist technique. In the four lieder based on lyrics from Nichita Stănescu’s poems *Cântecele de cireșar* [June Songs] (1973), and the four lieder on lyrics by Marin Sorescu (1976), the composer used even more consistently these means of expression in previous lieder written by Adrian Maniu.” (Vancea 1978, 78-79) (my translation).

Sigismund Toduță (1908-1991) composed a small number of lieder between 1951 and 1956, namely *Cinci lieduri* [Five lieder] on lyrics by M.Eminescu, *Bureții* [Sponges] on lyrics by Vlaicu Bârna, *Primăvara* [Spring] on lyrics by Ilie Bădea, *Dac-aș fi* [If I were you], on lyrics by Ion Brad, *Trei lieduri* [Three lieder] on lyrics by Lucian Blaga, and *Patru cântece populare* [Four folk songs] for voice and piano.

Constantin Silvestri (1913-1969) is considered the most complex artistic personality – as composer, conductor and piaist – after George Enescu. After studying with Mihail Jora, he wrote 10 lieder, op. 1, series of lieder composed on lyrics by Heine. “The lieder were composed under the strong influence of German romanticists, especially Schumann, but some of the lieder – the most visible in *Sterne mit den goldenen Fusschen* (Stars in golden shoes) in the first notebook, and *Sie floh von mir* (Running away from me) in notebook two – the young composer uses new harmonic means with a personal touch.” (Vancea 1978, 208) (my translation).

Gheorghe Dumitrescu (1914-1996) is a composer born in Oteșani, Vâlcea. He is the author of a vast creation in all genres, and among his lieder it is worth mentioning: *Trei cântece de leagăn* [Three lullabies] on his own lyrics (1941), *Cinci lieduri* [Five lieder] on lyrics by Lucian Blaga (1941), *Sub plopii în șir* [Under the row of poplars] – lyrics by Ion Pilat (1948), *Odă* [Ode] on lyrics by Horace (1948), *Șapte lieduri* [Seven lieder] on lyrics by George Bacovia (1956), *Trei cântece* [Three songs] on lyrics by Tudor Arghezi (1957). “Some of these compositions preserve the intimate atmosphere of this delicate genre of vocal chamber music, others, even in the same series (Blaga - Bacovia), are larger, closer to an opera air, in certain cases with increased dramatic tension.” (Vancea, 1978, 258) (my translation). Gheorghe Dumitrescu and his wife – the poetess Mariana Dumitrescu – were deeply marked by the death of their only son, Tudor – talented pianist – in March 1977 at the earthquake, and this state of mind is reflected in their works.

Ion Dumitrescu (1913-1996) is Gheorghe Dumitrescu’s brother, but also doctor Dumitru Velcovici’s, as well as pianist Ilinca Dumitrescu’s father. Also, from 1995 the Philharmonica in Ramnicu Vâlcea was named after him, as homage to his artistic personality. His first works are *Patru colinde* [Four carols] dated 1938. In 1942 we wrote *10 Cântece aromânești* [10 Macedo-Romanian Songs] for voice and piano, based on Ion Caranica’s collection of folklore. In the preface of this edition, Camelia Pavlenco wrote: “Through these lieder, Ion Dumitrescu defined himself from his youth as a classical Romanian composer, direction he pursued subsequently, achieving a unique position in the Romanian music – a cultural reply to an archaic civilization related to the Romanian one, that of Macedo-Romanians (from which his ancestors might have descended).” (Dumitrescu 2014, 5) (my translation).

Carmen Petra-Basacopol (born in 1926) is a great composer in the history of Romanian chamber music and especially lied music. She was born in “Sibiu, the town that combines the distant and austere Middle Ages with the warm images of the sky under which we leave, surrounded by Carpathian peaks” (my translation), in a loving family. She is doctor Alexandru Basacopol’s wife and baritone Paul Basacopol’s mother. Her lied creation represents a touching expression and a

confession of devotion and faith for the Romanian lyrical creation. Thus, Carmen-Petra Basacopol wrote songs, poems and lieder (over 140 opus) for all types of voices (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass) with accompaniment by piano, flute, clarinet, harp and percussion, on lyrics by Romanian poets such as: George Coșbuc, Zaharia Stancu, Mihai Eminescu, Mariana Dumitrescu, Nina Cassian, Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Eugen Jebeleanu, Nichita Stănescu, Victor Tulbure, Ion Sângereanu, Ioan Alexandru, Valeriu Anania (*File de acatist* [Akathist page], op. 68 for voice and flute), Alexandru Bidian, Marin Sorescu, George Bacovia, but also on texts from David's Psalms, lyrics by Paul Verlaine (*Poeme mistice pentru voce și clarinet* [Mystical poems for voice and clarinet], op. 139, and *Kyrie Eleison - Poemes pour soprano et piano*, op. 122), and on lyrics by Robert Boissy (*Poeme marocane* [Moroccan poems]).

Also, **Felicia Donceanu** (born in 1931) is one of the greatest Romanian composers. Originary from Bucovina, she writes sensitive music, deeply Romanian. Her music raises and descends one's soul, it makes you vibrate with the forest, with nature's brooks and to look up towards the sky and God. It is worth mentioning the works for voice and piano accompaniment: *Rugăciunea domnească* [Lord's prayer], *Mărgele* [Beads] – four songs on lyrics by Tudor Arghezi, *Trei cântece pentru Til* [Three songs for Til] on lyrics by George Călinescu, *Imagini* [Images] on lyrics by Mihai Eminescu, *Mărturisiri* [Confessions] – a series of five songs for bass-baritone on texts by Alexandru Voitin, *Cântece de fată frumoasă* [A beautiful girl's song], *Cântând cu Ienăchiță Văcărescu* [Singing with Ienăchiță Văcărescu] (this series includes touching historical *Testament* of Ienăchiță Văcărescu), *Odinioară* [In older days] – series of songs for mezzo-soprano and piano, *Rugăciune* [Prayer] on lyrics by Mihai Eminescu, *Salve Regina* and many others, to recall this particularity of his creation, of the Romanian spirit.

Other Romanian composers of national and international value who have also written lieder are: **Nicolae Bretan** (1887-1968) – wrote over 200 lieder, **Marțian Negrea** (1893-1973), **Dinu Lipatti** (1917-1950), **Tudor Jarda** (1922-2007), **Theodor Grigoriu** (1926-2014), **Pascal Bentoiu** (1927-2016), **Dumitru Capoianu** (1929-2012), **Aurel Stroe** (1932-2008), **Doru Popovici** (1932-), **Valentin Timaru** (1940), **Cornel Țăranu** (1934-), **Liana Alexandra** (1947-2011), **Șerban Nichifor** (1954-), **Adrian Pop** (1951-), **Dan Dediu** (1967-), etc.

The history of Romanian chamber music, of the lied with piano accompaniment, must include the First National Festival of the Romanian Lied organized in Brașov and the Interpretation Contest held in 2003. At the latter the jury - presided over by Mariana Nicolesco – included great music creators and Romanian musicologists such as: Pascal Bentoiu, Dumitru Capoianu, Octavian Lazăr Cosma, Dan Dediu, Felicia Donceanu, Adrian Iorgulescu, Carmen Petra-Basacopol, Cornel Țăranu. “An impressive number of young musicians, around 60, participated in the contest, most of them were talented students from music conservatories, this made the ‘fight’ for awards especially balanced, and the level of the contest was excellent.” (Cosma 2003, 2) (my translation). The first prize I won at

this contest of such magnitude had a strong influence on me as a soloist and interpreter of Romanian lied. I believe an important role was played by my collaboration with famous pianists in the country and from abroad – as accompanists - including: Inna Emilia Oncescu, Alexandru Petrovici, Silvia Totan, Sena Ducariu, Simona Patriche, Carolina Goshman, Raluca Gheorghiu, Ilia Semionov, Ana-Maria Negrea, Crimhilda Cristescu, Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu, Carmen Rotaru, Alina Pavalache, Mary Gow, etc. Next to them I gave recitals of Romanian chamber music on various stages across the country and abroad. As a result of the First National Festival of the Romanian Lied organized in Braşov and of the Interpretation Contest, many symposia dedicated to the Romanian lied were held by Romanian composers – members in the jury of the interpretation contest mentioned above, starting from the first editions of the festival, namely from May 2003 and 2004. In 2005 a symposium was dedicated to the creation of George Enescu, who “represents the creative genius of the Romanian people, with universal vocation” (Constantinescu, 2008, 237) (my translation). Also, “the *George Enescu* international year, announced by UNESCO, marked on 5 May 2005 half of century after the death of the great Romanian composer. *TVR Cultural* and *Radio Romania* broadcast *live* on 21 and 22 April the world premiere of all of his lied (voice – piano) identified until then, and interpreted as part of “the wonderful edition” 2005 of the National Festival and Contest of the Romanian Lied”(Nicolesco, 2005) (my translation). Among the topics approached at the symposium I would like to mention: “The Apotheosis of Enescu’s lied”, by Pascal Benteoiu, “Enescu and his spirituality” by Octavian Lazăr Cosma, “Enescu and the aura of mystery” by Felicia Donceanu, “A big step in discovering Enescu’s universe” by Mihai Cosma, “The priority of the melody” by Carmen Petra-Basacopol, “The composer and his lied” by Dumitru Capoianu, and “Enescu’s creation under the sign of vocality” by Adrian Iorgulescu. Then, in October 2006, there was a symposium dedicated to the Romanian lied in the universal context, and in 2008 the national symposium dedicated to the Romanian lied in the European tradition – the melancholic song and the French-inspired lied. The national symposium dedicated to the Romanian lied in the European tradition – the melancholic song and the Italian-inspired lied was organized in October 2009 and, finally, the national symposium dedicated to the Romanian lied in the European tradition - the melancholic song and the Russian-inspired lied was held in October 2013. At the first event dedicated to the Romanian lied organized in Braşov, Mariana Nicolesco stated: “The *lied*, universally known term, which refers to a genre and a style, emerged in our country against a millennial poetic, musical and interpretative background, and is the equivalent of a *melancholic song*. *Melancoly* is the eternal expression form of the Romanian soul, summed up in song under the most complex word in our vocabulary which makes our language unique among the other poetic ones, through its semantic and dramatic potential. The melancholy song fills a void in the soul, an absence of the loved one or of divine love. It involves a recovery through the magic of the word and of the song, it defines a universe full of nostalgia and is manifested as a form of meditation. Thus, the Romanian lied

emerged from a state of mind expressed by the traditional poet throughout time, which refined the means to express melancholy, as endless mourning, or as the longing for the loved one, when the heart melted with melancholy, or it abandoned itself to melancholy. The lyrics of our national poet: *Mai am un singur dor* [I only have one nostalgia], is, in its turn, a metaphysical appeal to cosmic integration.”(Nicolesco, 2003) (my translation). While Pascal Bentoiu concluded: “Nothing is eternal in our world. The lied, as we know it, and which in its classical shape has been around for over two hundred years, could at a given moment be overshadowed, even replaced by something else, deriving – perhaps – from the current globalizing music: rock, rap, soul, country, etc. I hope this will happen as late as possible. Nevertheless, it might be that the faith of the lied is connected to that of the lyrical poetry. If the latter continues to exist, in an acceptable shapes, then its musical equivalent will also survive. At present it seems that the world still needs the subtleties of the lied, the thousands wonderful pieces that the compact disc technology can offer to music lovers. The preference for the lied will always place its listener in a special class, maybe an elite. Then all I can say is: long live the elites, they are the salt of the earth.”(Bentoiu, 2003) (my translation). In the words of Maestro Pascal Bentoiu – who passed away in February 2006 – all I can do is bow to his memory and to express my increasing commitment to the Romanian lied, but also to the Romanian songs and music in general.

2. References

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