

The role of Archdeacon Sebastian Barbu-Bucur in the reactivation of the Romanian Religious Musical Education

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Abstract: *Father Sebastian Barbu-Bucur's contribution, after 1990, to the reactivation of the institutionalized religious musical education in secondary schools and universities comprises three aspects: the didactic career, the scientific research in the field of byzantinology and the creative, compositional and interpretive activity. His name is related to the theological schools of Plumbuita, Antim and Neamţ Monasteries, and, thereafter, to the Universities of Bucharest and Constanţa. Being a researcher of the Romanian musical past, a reviver of the Byzantine music present in national musical life, both a musician and a theologian, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur paves the way for the future of the national psaltic music, not only through his own creations, but also through a diligent training of the future byzantinologists, teachers, composers and conductors.*

Keywords: *archdeacon, Psalmodia, didactic, conductor, promoter.*

1. Introduction

Father Sebastian Barbu-Bucur was one of the most important representatives of the Romanian Psaltic music from the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Byzantinologist, professor, conductor, composer and theologian, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur is acknowledged in Romanian and European music as being a promoter of the national character in what concerns church sacred chants. His ideas in what concerns the personality of the musical national culture carry on the principles formulated by Filotei sin Agăi Jipei.

2. Biography

Born in Talea, Prahova County, on the 6th of February, 1930, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur was one of the preservers of the Holy Trinity faith of each family. It is the village's

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priest, Iosif Popescu, and his son, Stelian Popescu, that taught him the art and the craft of psaltic music.

Afterwards, the maestro continued his studies at the Căldărușani Monastery (1941-1948), and later, at the Theological Seminary from the Neamț Monastery (1949-1952). He studied both theology and music in prestigious Universities from Bucharest. On the 8th of September, the maestro becomes a monk at the Cheia Monastery, in his county, being given the name of Sebastian. A year later, on the 8th of November, 1952, he is being ordained as a deacon by the future Patriarch of Romania, the patriarchal bishop-vicar Teoctist. Seven years later, in 1959, he is given the rank of Archdeacon. Father Sebastian Barbu-Bucur became himself an Emeritus Professor, being trained as a musicologist and as a theologian by illustrious professors, such as: Nicolae Lungu, Chiril Popescu, Dumitru Stăniloae, Iustin Moisescu, Ene Braniște, Orest Bucevschi, Gheorghe Moisescu or Teodor Popescu, from whom he acquired the didactic talent.

Maestro's didactic career can be structured in three stages. He taught in religious secondary schools (1952-1959), in secular secondary schools (1960-1990) and at the university (1970-1974 and 1990-2009).

Being gifted with a real didactic talent doubled by a complex and solid musical training, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur had managed to masterfully combine the qualities of the musicologist, conductor, psaltis and composer, which he had put in the service of teaching, by training genuine Church and Romanian culture personalities for more than five decades.

The maestro taught the psaltic chant at the theological schools of Plumbuita Monastery (1952-1953) and of Antim Monastery from Bucharest (1953-1957), and, later, at the Theological Seminary from the Neamț Monastery (1957-1959), where he was acknowledged for his professional integrity and impeccable character. His contribution in what concerns the qualitative improvement of the national religious musical school is outstanding. The scientific musical information given to the young generations and the enhancement of the psaltic heritage in concert and during the sacred services endow his musical art, placed in the service of prayer, with the strong confidence in the real value of the Byzantine chant in the history of the Romanian Church. Right from the very first stage, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur stood out as a great personality of the Romanian culture and of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The horrible decree no. 410 issued by the Great National Assembly that had forced the monks and nuns to leave their monasteries and occupy a place on the labour market, had a negative impact on the theological schools, and, thus, on his didactic activity; at that time, the maestro was a teacher at the Theological Seminary of Neamț Monastery. In this context, the maestro will move to secular institutions. Thus, he will work as a music teacher at the Constructions and Building Vocational School in Bucharest (1960-1963), High School No.32, also in the Capital (1963-1965), and at Music School No. 5 in Bucharest, too (1965-1990). At the same time, he would be professing as a lecturer at the Byzantine Paleography Faculty of the

Ciprian Porumbescu Conservatory in Bucharest (1970-1974). In this period, the maestro will complete his studies abroad, and, also, undergo a complex musical publicistic activity in what concerns the psaltic music; he will also prepare and sustain at Cluj, in 1982, an exceptional PhD Thesis entitled *Cultura muzicală de tradiție bizantină pe teritoriul României în secolul XVIII și începutul secolului XIX și aportul original al culturii autohtone* [Byzantine music culture in Romania in the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century and the original contribution of the local culture], elaborated under the scientific guidance of maestros Sigismund Toduță and Romeo Ghircoiașu. It is, also, in this period, that he would start drafting some important didactic works, an activity he will continue until his retirement from the didactic career in 2009. From 1990, he would start militating for the reactivation of the Academy of Religious Music in the Capital, being supported by the composer Nicolae Beloiu, the rector of the National University of Music Bucharest – the ex Ciprian Porumbescu Conservatory – and by the professor, composer, musicologist and theologian Dragoș Alexandrescu. This will succeed under the form of the Religious Music Section at the National University of Music Bucharest. Concerning the reviving of the religious music superior education, under the department of Bizantine Music, the professor Nicolae Gheorghîță says „established in 1990 due to a lot of hard work and efforts by the professor Sebastian Barbu Bucur, the Bizantine Music department brings again to the surface - after half a century- the nobile idea of the father of the Romanian music paleography I.D. Petrescu, the idea of placing the Bizantine musicology and the interpretation of this art on scientific grounds” (Gheorghîță 2000, 153). He will follow all the academic steps, by becoming an Associate professor in 1990, and, afterwards, a Professor since 1993. After his retirement in 2000, the maestro will remain an Emeritus Professor.

Although established in 1988, with the sustaining support of the Romanian Patriarchy, of the Patriarchal Teoctist Arăpașu, The Psalmodia goes, in 1990, at the same time with the reviving of the Religious Music Academy in Bucharest, under the sociality department of the National Music University, where it will find its origins. The professor Constantin Catrina says: “once, the Religious Music Department was set up, in the fall of the same year 1990, the Bizantine music band *Psalmodia* went under the “wing” of the Music Academy in Bucharest; the necessity of preparing specialists in the field of the Bizantine Music, as teachers and interpreters, as researchers, will give a new perspective to the other concertistical activities, that are related to the future of the Psalmodia” (Catrina 2010, 161). This way, the Psalmodia became the laboratory of the Romanian psalm, offering optimal conditions for the valuing of the scientific research, creation and musical interpretation.



Fig. 1. *The first promotion of Religious Music section at the Romanian Athenaeum (1994)*

Nevertheless, he will not leave his teaching career and will start teaching at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology *Ovidius* University of Constanta, Religious Music Section. It, is without any doubt, the peak of his didactic, musicological and artistic career; the maestro would, successively, conduct the Byzantine music choir *Psalmodia* of the National University of Music Bucharest and the Psaltic Choir *Gherontie Nicolau* (starting from 2002), which he would found and lead on the higher steps of artistic mastery. The discography records, the newspaper chronicles of those times and the filmed images from his concerts, placed among his family's and television's archives, are living proof of his wonderful activity.

Being convinced that the "Byzantine music is aimed to reach the human soul" (Popescu 2010, 68), the Archdeacon and professor Sebastian Barbu-Bucur made *Psalmodia* "the only Romanian Choir that revealed the heritage of the monodic Byzantine music, both from Romania and Greece-Mount Athos" (Popescu 2010, 68). The Byzantine music Choir *Psalmodia* made itself known abroad through the concerts it has given in Greece: Athens-Megaro Mousikis, Thessaloniki- The Imperial theatre and Dimitria Festival; in Italy- Ptolemaida (rome); in Israel: Jerusalem, Netanya, Bethlehem. In 1998, at *Psalmodia*'s ten year anniversary, the Patriarch of Romania His Beatitude Teoctist Arăpașu, would award father Barbu-Bucur the patriarchal cross for his entire activity.

Nicolae Gheorghîță, one of maestro's closest apprentices, wrote about the father and his choir *Psalmodia* that, at its time, it had been "the only Romanian choir that has ever revealed the heritage of the monodic Byzantine music, both from Romania and from Mount Athos" (Gheorghîță 2000, 17).

In an article published in the *Byzantion* magazine, edited by Academy of Arts „George Enescu” of Iași and entitled *Psalmodia-respirația rugăciunii* [*Psalmodia-*

the breath of prayer], his Beatitude Daniel, at that time, Archbishop of Iași and Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina wrote, making reference to the theological and musical message sent by the choir Psalmodia, conducted by Sebastian Barbu-Bucur: „the church sacred chant is an artistic and a theological composition aiming to heal the tarnished soul, to elevate the fallen soul, to gather the wandering thoughts and unite the man with God... The sacred chant is the breath of the sacred prayer. The Church cannot fully pray without chant, just as the body cannot live too long without breathing” (Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, 1996).

3. Sebastian Barbu Bucur’s contribution in the reactivation of the Romanian Religious Musical Education

A fragment from an article published in Iași, in 1999, helps us better understand father Barbu-Bucur’s strong faith in the exceptional value of the psaltic heritage of the Romanian sacred music and his contribution to the linkage of the national musical education with this treasure of incomparable beauty: “Having in mind the long existence of the religious music within the Music Academy, and taking into account the request of his Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist, as a result of the direct intervention of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in what concerns the necessity of training experts in the field of Byzantine Music for theological schools (schools for church singers, theological high schools and institutions) and for a specialised training of the future researchers of the huge Byzantine thesaurus of our country, we hope that, through the steps undergone by the Heads of the University of Music Bucharest, the Religious Music section will be excepted from accreditation for the motif that it had existed until 1946-when it was abusively closed- and it will be reorganized on other criteria, which will correspond to the purpose for which it was re-established in 1990 (Sebastian Barbu-Bucur, 1999, 8-9).

The text of this article published in 1990 at Iași had generated both positive critics as well as negative remarks, defeated, though, by the maestro’s perseverance and of those around him in what concerns the official acknowledgement of needing higher religious music studies, properly institutionalised.

The argument the maestro’s enemies, who were also against the Religious Music section, went from, was that the archives contained no document that could prove the foundation of the Academy of Religious Music. In the end, it was discovered that after 1948, Alfred Mendelssohn’s sister and his wife (Gherțovici) had committed the unpatriotic and anti-cultural crime of burning all the documents regarding the Romanian Byzantine music, including the one that demonstrated its foundation. This testimony taken by Sebastian Barbu-Bucur belongs to the composer and professor Ion Dumitrescu, who was contemporaneous with the events of 1948-1959. The attacks continued, in spite of the fact that the file of accreditation was complete and had already been researched by the National Council of Academic

Accreditations, being considered perfect and approved. In 1998, the same heads of the Council invalidated the document on the grounds that it violated a 1995 law which stipulates that “proselytism is forbidden in education” (UNM Bucharest Archive, fax no. 222 from 19th of March 1998). The Decree-Law is number 84 and the text the members of the National Council of Academic Accreditations were making reference is on Article II, the 3rd paragraph (Official Gazette of Romania).

From this point of view, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur can be compared with the great Romanian Composer-Protopsaltis of the Brancoveanu period, Filotei sin Agăi Jipei; the maestro had been an indefatigable toiler in what concerns the Romanian school and Romanian music, and for a national culture unaltered by people such as Mendelssohn or Gherțovici.

The maestro and Byzantinologist would continue the restoration of Dobrudja’s religious musical education at Constanța, having the blessing of His Eminence PhD Prof. Teodosie Petrescu, the Archbishop of Tomis, who is a remarkable musician, and the support of the university lecturers, some of them trained at the Religious Music section of the National University of Music Bucharest, such as Rev. PhD. Prof. Bogdan Moise and PhD, Assoc. Prof. Valeriu Roman. The city of Tomis has an important tradition in what concerns the religious musical education. The institutions founded with this purpose by Bishop and musician Gherontie Nicolau in 1923 and which were abusively closed in 1948 would be reactivated through the hard work of Professor Sebastian Barbu-Bucur.

Still being on the peak of his career, father Barbu-Bucur retires in 2010 due to medical reasons, only to pass away, five years later, on the 1st of April, 2015, being buried at the cemetery of Cheia Monastery, the place where he had become a monk. The maestro was escorted to his final resting place by a group of priests led by His Eminence Teodosie Petrescu, the Archbishop of Tomis and His Grace Timotei Prahoveanul (of Prahova), delegated by His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of Romania, by ex pupils and students.

Even from his lifetime, the maestro required that his tombstone be inscribed with a text from one of his chants, taken from Psalm 103: „I will sing praise to my God as long as I live” (Psalm 103, 34).

The Faculty of Theology Constanta’s press release on what concerns the maestro’s departure, states that „in 2001, the Archdeacon and PhD Prof. Sebastian Barbu-Bucur had been actively involved in organizing bachelor’s degree study programmes for studying Byzantine music within the Faculty of Letters and Theology of OUC (Ovidius University of Constanta A/N); as a result of his effort, the section had received a double specialisation, unique in the whole country: Didactic Theology-Musical Pedagogy. For eight years (2001-2009), the father and Professor had been a university lecturer of “Saint Andrew” Orthodox Theological faculty of OUC; during this period, he had instructed as many batches of students, being the founder and the conductor of Faculty’s Byzantine music choir, “Gherontie Nicolau” (Ovidius University of Constanta, 2nd of April 2015).

The greatest joy for a professor is to see his students having, also, become, professors, musicologists, researchers or composers. That had, also, been, father Sebastian Barbu-Bucur's fulfilment. Not only had he taught and guided his students, but he had, also, left as an inheritance to the generations a massive amount of works, among which one could find maestro's own didactic works, some of them already printed, some of them in manuscript form, waiting for them to be published.

It is only after we read them, once they will be published, that we will understand the reason why the Byzantinologist professor is present all the time, in the Romanian musical education and in the national culture. In this respect, musicologist Grigore Constantinescu, also, makes a statement: "the maestro had fought for a superior religious education and for the development of a new generation who could take over from him the Christian teachings" (Constantinescu, 2015).

His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of Romania, reckons that "his work and his appearance continue to be examples of wisdom, of dedication and devotion, and a manner of promoting the nowadays so much needed values" (His beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of Romania, 2015, April 3rd).

There is no doubt that Archdeacon Professor Sebastian Barbu-Bucur left to the posterity many aspects of his musical heritage that haven't been explored well enough. Having been one of maestro's students, I consider myself to be his follower with regard to theology and didactic, musicology and art, for which I undertake the mission of continually bringing to light unreleased documents and other remaining evidences that will, undoubtedly, reveal more and more clues regarding maestro's personality.



Fig. 2. Father Sebastian Barbu-Bucur's Tomb

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