

## **Editorial News:**

### **At the piano with Alfred Cortot.**

### **Artists from Cluj at the École Normale de Musique**

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**Abstract:** *Starting from the premise that the topic of the Romanian descendants of the French interpretative school has not yet been approached in a scientific and integrative manner, the book **At the piano with Alfred Cortot. Artists from Cluj at the École Normale de Musique** presents a documented view on this major line of development that capitalized on the technical and artistic knowledge acquired by the Romanian musicians who attended the École Normale de Musique de Paris. As such, the express purpose of this paper is to highlight the noble descent of the Romanian pianistic school, represented by six Romanian piano teachers who enhanced their skills and knowledge in the elevated Parisian setting, at the institution founded by the famous pianist and teacher Alfred Cortot. In the order of their arrival at the Cluj Conservatory, these teachers are Ecaterina Fotino-Negru, George Ciolac, Eliza Ciolan, Alexandru Demetriad, Viorica Adelina Radu and Gabriela Țereanu.*

*Key-words: French pianism, Alfred Cortot, Romanian pianistic school*

*You, Clio, pick the withered flowers from the graves and make them  
alive again, blooming fresh like chicory in the fields, wet by the  
morning dew.*

Vasile Pârvan

#### **1. Introduction**

The book *At the piano with Alfred Cortot. Artists from Cluj at the École Normale de Musique*<sup>2</sup> is the result of the doctoral research I have carried out under the

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guidance of the university professor PhD Adrian Pop. The stated purpose of my research was to highlight the noble descent of the Cluj pianistic school, represented by six Romanian piano teachers who enhanced their skills in the elevated Parisian setting by attending the institution founded by the famous pianist and teacher Alfred Cortot. In the order of their arrival at the Cluj Conservatory, these teachers are Ecaterina Fotino-Negru, George Ciolac, Eliza Ciolan, Alexandru Demetriad, Viorica Adelina Radu and Gabriela Țereanu.

Starting from the premise that the topic of the Romanian descendants of the French interpretative school has not yet been approached in a scientific and integrative manner, the book *At the piano with Alfred Cortot. Artists from Cluj at the École Normale de Musique* presents a documented view on this major line of development, capitalizing on the technical and artistic skills and knowledge acquired by Romanian musicians who attended at the *Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris*.<sup>3</sup>

As for the content of this book, apart from what I found by thoroughly studying the available literature on this subject matter, I searched and discovered new material, to expand the scope of my research and thus acquire further knowledge. In addition to the libraries agglutinating a massive amount of knowledge, I tried to examine brand new documents, to add some “sparkling spots of liveliness”, as Nicolae Iorga puts it, revealing “the fact of life in its atmosphere of the ideas and feelings and in the style and attire of the time” (Iorga 1999, 73). In other words, my research is based on archive documents and on publications of the time, both French and Romanian, as well as on testimonies of the disciples of the personalities dealt with in the book.<sup>4</sup> I have organized the information gathered for

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously, this approach does neither exclude nor minimize the importance and influence of the other schools – the German, the Russian and the Hungarian schools - where the teachers of the music school of Cluj studied and perfected their skills over the time and which are presented in detail in the volume.

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, the Archives of the National Academy of Music “Gheorghe Dima”, the Médiathèque Musicale Mahler (currently the La Grange-Fleuret Music Library), the Institut de France in Paris and the *École Normale de Musique* are the institutions that allowed me the access to research sources and gave me the chance to get first-hand information. Also, in the archive of *Le Monde musical* newspaper I found a lot of data about the spirit of the School and its openness and about the great personality of its founders Auguste Mangeot and Alfred Cortot, as well as data about their management strategy and vision. At the same time, by attending the musical events organized by the students and teachers of the *École Normale de Musique de Paris*, I had the chance to feel the real pulse and spirit of the School.

this book into 8 large chapters, which I have further structured according to a few criteria, which vary from one chapter to another depending on their nature: chronologically, from the general to the particular or vice versa, from quotation to comment or interpretation, from general definition to particularizations, and from listed characteristics to synthetic definition. Below I am highlighting the main ideas of each chapter.



Fig. 1. The book's cover

## 2. Pleading for the (re)construction of the past

Before moving forward with the presentation of this book, I would like to emphasize that my research is a plea for the reconstruction of the past, inspired by the saying of the French historian Henri-Irénée Marrou: “Each generation rebuilds its history, not on ruins, but on the acquisitions of the previous generation. Each instant of the present sheds light on the past from a different angle, creating unexpected reliefs” (Marrou 1961, 9). I also wish to point out the fact that the words the academician Vasile Pârvan, which I chose as a *motto*, do not have a simple *captatio benevolentiae* role. Instead, they evoke the very purpose of history, namely that of collecting and interpreting traces of the past and turning them into a base of reflection that comes in handy to us, contemporaries.

Starting from this propensity towards arranging the facts of the past in order and gathering “withered flowers” in a bouquet and place it in the light of the present, I embarked on this arduous mission, regarding it as a duty of honor that stands up as a stronghold against oblivion and its voraciousness, against the ruthless “bite” of time.

My excursus on *Biography and its pitfalls*, which is the topic of the first chapter, is, I believe, a useful preamble, since I base my research work on biographical reconstruction. Interpreting information and documents and correlating and arranging them in a coherent order were a real challenge. Questions like “how can I realistically reconstruct a past historical reality?” and “how can I accurately put together a *puzzle* of facts of the past that is not altered by bias and makes perfect sense?” used to constantly come to my mind. Fortunately, there were pundits who have the right answers to my questions. One such pundit was the literary critic Eugen Simion, who wrote a bulky two-volume book, called “Biography Genres” (“Genurile biograficului”), which helped me discover the key to understanding the issues I was pondering on. A biographer is an interpreter who inserts into his approach some bits and pieces of his own subjectivity. Deciphering the “narrative logic” behind documents is the fruit of what sometimes is an intuitive reading of information and records. That is why a biographer should avoid several pitfalls in his interpretation attempts. One such pitfall is the rhetoric of apologetics, which is typical of the past times when the main character was seen as a hero of mythic dimensions, as an exceptional creature, the absolute moral role-model. The rhetoric of verisimilitude is salutary, and so is emotional balance (a biographer must not be too engaged with, nor too distant from his subject, nor should he surrender to the so-called ontological temptation, i.e. the temptation of covering his subject’s existence through and through. There will always be quests left unanswered, missing pieces in the puzzle, shortage of information and uncertainties when trying to encompass the whole span of one’s life. And this is a natural thing to happen, for that matter, as far as, no matter how much we would try to capture and understand one’s every single action and thought, the fact is that nothing is more intricate, more unfathomable and more surprising than the human being.

One’s identity is part of a larger and more varied identity, that of the world in which the individual grows and lives. That is why the reconstruction of one’s biography should start from the reconstruction of the whole picture that incorporates it. Coming back to my research, I tried to understand the historical, cultural and musical context of the time covered by this paper. That is why I allocated a significant chapter to the subject dealing with *Evolution of Piano Teaching* (chapter 2), i.e., a short introductory foray into the coming into existence and the evolution of the piano as an instrument, the first pianists, the first piano teachers, the crystallization and the evolution of the national piano schools (institutions and representatives) and their (direct and indirect) influence on the Romanian pianists. I also dealt with a sensitive and controversial concept, that of

the national piano schools; I was interested in understanding it and in studying it in depth, precisely because all my investigative approach is grafted on the existence of the French school and its influence on our culture. I looked for studies and research that answered my questions and I talked to musicians from Cluj.

The conclusion I came to after all these endeavors is that there is indeed a correlation between characteristics such as aesthetics, technique, pianistic repertoire and a certain geographical area. But the piano school concept has, after all, a functional determination and is instrumental in analyzing the universe of piano playing, while serving as a relevant framework for study. However, that fact is that, when we attend a piano recital, it is the individual artistic personality of the soloist that stands out, and not a such-and-such piano school.

I continued with an approach to Romanian music school and **Romanian Piano Teaching**, in chapter 3. I studied the history of the music schools in Iași, Bucharest, and, of course, in Cluj, where the roots of professional Romanian piano education are firmly anchored in the European tradition, starting with the first generations of pianists, who had a thorough training in Germany, France, Austria.

Naturally, I have devoted a large chapter of this book to the **École Normale de Musique in Paris** (chapter 5). I studied the history of the School, the socio-political background in which it was founded, its stated mission, its syllabus and its way of organizing classes, exams and artistic events, as well as its teaching principles. The documents standing at the basis of Chapter 5 and reflecting the history of this famous school are the Report to the Ministry, signed by Auguste Mangeot, the Statute of the School, drawn up by Mangeot and Alfred Cortot, various articles from the magazine *Le Monde musical*, plus a vast bibliography from the French musicological space.

After examining all these sources, a few important ideas emerged. The *École Normale de Musique in Paris* was created as an instrument of French and anti-German cultural propaganda. Nevertheless, that did not diminish the quality of its education process, but quite the contrary. Its founders did not skip any aspect. They created a diversified, reasonable, progressive and universal (in its diversity) and humanistic (by constantly focusing on the student and his or her needs) syllabus and, more importantly, one that was complementary to that of the Paris Conservatoire. The syllabus concentrated on developing the student's technical skills, on raising music virtuosos and stage performers. *École Normale de Musique* in Paris, apart from providing a thorough musical training, trained students to become teachers.

The all-encompassing vision of the founders of the School is remarkable: from the choice of a suitable school building, the selection of the teaching staff and

its steering by means of strict pedagogical principles, to the fair yet exigent student performance evaluation system, to the school's concern for teaching students to spend their free time in a way that helped them with their artistic striving. Although many biographies have been written about Alfred Cortot, I chose to ponder on his personality, capturing various aspects of his life, which I compiled and wrote about in Chapter<sup>5</sup> - **Alfred Cortot. The Biography of a School Founder**. I thought it necessary to read about Cortot's private and professional life, incorporating in my research various data about his family, studies, skills and interests, about the cultural environment he was educated in, his mentors and role-models, his professional profile and work, about how he adapted himself to the historical, political and institutional conditions of his time, his interpretive vision and teaching methods, as well as about the posthumous echo of his personality.

Unlike other great pianists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cortot was not a child prodigy, but the fruit of "encounters" that left a mark on his development. Therefore, the key to reading his biography is that of his becoming in terms of his "privileged encounters" (physical and spiritual) that played a part in his evolution. Émile Decombes, Edouard Reisler, Jacques Thibaud and Pablo Casals were personalities that marked Cortot's human and artistic career. On a spiritual level, Chopin and Wagner were the composers that had a strong bearing on his artistic pursuits and to whom the musician devoted much of his interpretative and teaching efforts. Cortot's role was not only to give new meanings to the performing art, but to restructure the musical education system as a whole, along with the way piano classes were organized and the way students' performance was evaluated. All of these innovations were taken over, implemented and preserved to these days by the Music School in Cluj. That is why I believe that highlighting the Parisian artistic descent of the Romanian school has been for me a mandatory anamnesis.

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting that in Greek language the etymon of the word "school" is *skholé*, which means "leisure". School means the apprenticeship of freedom through learning, school is "the time of the essential contained in the pursuits of the spirit." In the same line of reasoning, Constantin Noica wrote in his Journal of 1944 that it was important for a school and a teacher to deliver mindsets, not just knowledge, advice and contents. A good education means forming and transforming, creating complete, "symphonic" people. In this regard, Alfred Cortot was the teacher who always gave his students something to think about and to live for; he was a personality that emanated generosity and illuminated the path of many generations of pianists.

### 3. Mosaic portraits

Chapter 8, *Pianistic Education of French Descent at the Cluj Academy of Music from its Foundation to the Present*, is dedicated to the six Cluj pianists who studied with Alfred Cortot.

**Ecaterina Fotino-Negru (1902-1991)** was a pioneer in terms of “importing” the principles of the French music school. Her work on this front materialized into establishing a new interpretative technique, publishing new editions of music scores (edited by Bruno Mugellini, Alfredo Casella, Alfred Cortot), initiating the approach to the French repertoire (the music of Fauré, Debussy, Ravel starts to be studied), alongside the local repertoire (composers Mihail Jora, Sabin Drăgoi, Mihail Andricu, Marțian Negrea were constantly brought to the forefront), and into putting in place an innovative student evaluation system (starting with the 1931–1932 academic year, the piano class graduation exam included a public concert played with a symphony orchestra). Ecaterina Fotino-Negru had a rich career that lasted from 1925 to 1961, during which time she gave numerous concerts, recitals and trained generations of musicians who became major personalities: Sigismund Toduță, Ninuca Oșanu Pop, Voichița Tiniș, Mihai Moldovan and Emil Simon. She is remembered by her students as a demanding teacher, but one who was aware that artistic evolvment can only be achieved by a profound and long-lasting teacher-disciple relationship. A creed so close to that of Cortot.

The pianist **George Ciolac (1903-1977)** was one of Romania's most gifted pianists, whose career was unfortunately and unfairly short. Born in Botoșani, trained as a pianist in Bucharest and acting as a teacher in Cluj, he was appointed rector of the Cluj Conservatory during the refuge in Timișoara. As the musicologist Francisc László said, “I personally don't think there has ever been a Romanian artist of his value, who was so organically integrated in all the four large historical provinces of Romania”( Făclia 2007, 4). George Ciolac taught piano for 21 years at the Cluj Conservatory, while also engaging into a prodigious national and international career as a soloist. He had all the chances to have a brilliant career, but fate decided otherwise. Due to health problems, he retired in 1950, abandoning and outstanding, yet meteoric career. He is still remembered by his disciples, top-rank Romanian musicians like Dorin Pop, Miron Șaorec, Max Eisikovits, Tosca Nistor Șorban, Romeo Ghircoiașiu, Eva Radeș and Enea Borza.

**Eliza Ciolan (1900-1970)** was one of the most complex pianists, over whom nature poured the grace of music to eternity. She was born, raised and educated in an environment that was conducive to development of her natural musical talent. Important personalities of the Romanian musical culture contributed to her evolution as a musician: Eduard Caudella, Enrico Mezzetti, Emil Mihail, Alexandru Zirra, and Antonin Ciolan. She married the latter, the founder of the Cluj Philharmonic, in 1930, forming a harmonious tandem both on stage and in life. Eliza Ciolan taught piano classes in Iași, played on stages all over the country and, from 1949, she taught in Cluj. Here, during her almost three decades of teaching work, she trained generations of pianists and musicians: Romeo Ghircoiașiu, Harald Enghiurliu, Cornel Țăranu, Walter Metzger, Tiberiu Szász (Tibor Szász). Time has proved that her disciples became renowned artistic professionals, some of whom were valuable additions to the Piano Department of the Music High School and of the Cluj Conservatory.

**Alexandru Demetriad (1903-1983)** was an artist that concentrated on interpretative art. From the six pianists that are the subject of my paper, Demetriad was the one who studied for the longest period of time in Paris, i.e. for 7 years, which he dedicated to improving both his composition and his pianistic skills. Returning to the country, Alexandru Demetriad gave numerous recitals, concerts, music educational events, following in the footsteps of his Parisian masters, and was an active promoter of the Romantic repertoire. Unfortunately, I could not find any documents about Alexandru Demetriad, due to his very short stay with the Cluj Conservatory. But thanks to his highly concentrated interpretative activity, I found numerous chronicles, articles written by musical critics, including one signed by Profira Sadoveanu, the daughter of the famous writer, who suggestively called Demetriad “the piano tamer”. Thanks to his rich interpretative career, spanning over five decades, Demetriad left posterity the memory of a talented and persevering pianist, always eager to improve his performance.

**Viorica Radu (1900-1956) and Gabriela Țereanu (1917-1990)** were accompanists and auxiliary piano teachers. Each of them contributed significantly to the promotion and maintenance of a high standard at the Cluj piano school. Viorica Radu taught for 29 years at the Cluj Conservatory. She translated from German a number of treatises and brochures for piano students, including treaties on the art of conducting. Gabriela Țereanu taught for 16 years at the Cluj Conservatory. She was a pianist trained in the spirit of the German, French and Hungarian schools, all of which turned her into a sophisticated soloist. She had a rich teaching career, exercised in Arad and in



Cluj. The documents kept in the ANMGD Archive about Gabriela Țereanu describe her as a devoted teacher, a persevering pianist, eager to enrich her knowledge and share the secrets of music with her students.

#### 4. Conclusion

*Rich in the infinity of all the lights kindled by those who from the beginning and without end created light, we, the children of an brief yet eternal instance of time in its perpetual rebirth from what things of the past (...) – we shine in the light of their souls.*

Vasile Pârvan

Paraphrasing the words of the academician Vasile Pârvan, which I chose as a motto for the end of my book, I may say that, enriched as we are by the light of the teachings of the first teachers, school founders and trailblazers, who understood that the role of a teacher is to share generously from the wealth his or her knowledge, we, today, are building the present on the valuable cultural heritage they have passed on to us.

From Alfred Cortot, to Ecaterina Fotino-Negru, George Ciolac, Eliza Ciolan, Alexandru Demetriad, Viorica Radu and Gabriela Țereanu, our history as a school, our present as disciples, is written with the certainty that we have taken over a precious legacy. The teachers I talk about in the book have all contributed to the establishment and consolidation of an artistic and pedagogical style in the Transylvanian perimeter, as de facto exponents of French education, raising the quality of the Romanian artistic education to the highest international standards.

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