

## The Specifics of Sacred Music of the Transylvanian Space. The Context. The Course. Representative Figures

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**Abstract:** *The political, social and even religious context in which the Transylvanian musical culture developed beginning with the second half of the 19th century until the 20th century, led to the shaping of a special artistic landscape, with specific identity sounds, different from the other historical provinces of the country. Ethnic and confessional mosaic generated influences regarding sacred singing, for the Eastern Church Byzantine music representing the secular analogion chant, integrated and framed into the church tradition, which was touched by the regional influences that created the musical ethos of a particular cultural area.*

Key-words: *sacred music, tradition, Orthodox Church, Byzantine music.*

### 1. Introduction

The coordinates of the political regime did not offer a fertile ground for Romanian manifestations to assert and promote the nation, even if, according to historians, Romanians have consistently represented throughout history, more than half of the population of the Principality of Transylvania. Even from the beginning the 17th century, the new ruler of Transylvania, the Habsburg Empire, tried to consolidate his rule by catholicizing the Romanians, who, being the majority in the region, could successfully be opposed to Hungarians, who had largely joined the Reformed Church. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, being in its entirety one of the most heterogeneous European political constructions, limited the emancipation of the Romanian nation, which it was deprived of an educational system in its own language, education, culture, art not being the elements that the country should support.

From this perspective the legislation that has governed the socio-political thinking of the political leaders of Transylvania over time, can be understood as:... we, not being able to understand those who belong to the cult of the Wallachians or Greeks and who are temporarily tolerated throughout the kindness of princes

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and the inhabitants of the country- *Approbatæ Constitutiones Pars I, tit. 1 art. 3*; ... although the Romanian nation is not one of the favourites among the states in this country- *Approbatæ Constitutiones Pars I, tit. 8 art. 1*; although the Romanian nation is admitted in this country for the public benefit, but without realizing its inferior state - *Approbatæ Constitutiones Pars I, tit. 9 art. 1*.

In this social framework, the Romanian culture had its own trajectory, which sometimes took the form of survival or of the minimum existence and it was supported especially by the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania, which played a major role in preserving the Romanian identity and its resilience in this geographical area. Religious music, although strongly influenced by elements of the Transylvanian folk song, continued to be the vector through which Romanian culture developed, resolutely promoting Romanian values in a multi-ethnic and implicitly multi-religious space.

Romanian choral art draws its essence from the authentic folklore, which, through its irradiating force, aroused the interest of several composers, urging them to reveal its mystery and to valorise it in the creations of high artistic inspiration. Thus, choral music, consolidated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was built on the foundation of Romanian folk art, expressed through monodic folk song, peasant dance and church melody. The effort of artistic production in the field of music was concentrated, especially in the last part of the nineteenth century and the period immediately following, in two major directions, which integrated the recovery of two centuries of European tradition in the field of compositional technique and musical stylistics and the achievement of national-folk specificity within the limits of a local colour obtained by quoting and imitating the so-called national songs.

## **2. Composers from Ardeal**

### **2.1. Gheorghe Dima, representative of the German school of composition**

One of the leading representatives of the Romanian choral movement in Transylvania was the teacher, composer and performer Gheorghe Dima (1847-1925), author of important sacred choral opuses, some of them still representing majestic musical pages, part of the repertoire of choirs in Romania. He reorganized the choir of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Sibiu, with which he had a special missionary-artistic activity, participating in numerous church and cultural events in Ardeal.

The creative personality of the musician Gheorghe Dima, vigorously outlined due to his studies in Vienna, with Otto Uffmann, later in Graz, guided by professors Ferdinand Thieriot and also at the Leipzig Conservatory, with famous pedagogues such as Jadassohn, Rebling, Reinecke and Rust (counterpoint, fugue and

composition), was for the history of Romanian music from over the mountains, an important landmark and vehement supporter of the Romanian cause in Transylvania, expressed through artistic manifestations. Synthesis between the European harmonic language and the ethos of the Romanian song, either folkloric-popular, ecclesiastical or analogion chant, proposing works having certainly European valences, (about 100 sacred choral -Opus type, including two harmonized Liturgies), it represents, even today, an important part of the musical repertoires within the divine services.

Promoting the artistic life which next to the moment of founding of the Reunion of songs, animated the cultural environment in Sibiu at the end of the 19th century, with which the composer will take steps forward regarding personal development, made possible his presence in the urban life events for almost 18 years. Thus, reaching the leadership of this choral musical group, Gheorghe Dima will offer the testimony of his own science linked to the improvement of the technique, by performing on stages of great concerts that illustrate the level of knowledge of the great European music. He will conduct complex vocal-symphonic works, such as *The Seasons* and the Oratorio *Creation* by Joseph Haydn, *Stabat Mater* by Gioachino Rossini, *Night of Valpurgis* by Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Missa Solemnis* by Ludwig van Beethoven or other compositions by Johannes Brahms or Franz Schubert.

Through his works, the composer contributes to the emancipation of the public and cultural life of the city, reaching to perform in 1895 in the great hall of the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest.

Due its maturity and prestige the Reunion of songs from Sibiu, conducted by Gheorghe Dima, is very appreciated. These features determine the *Hermanstädter Männergessang-Verein* choir to request the presence of the conductor Gheorghe Dima, a unique fact in the German musical history of Transylvania- a Romanian to conduct such a choir. From this position he will also contribute to the development and promotion of choral singing in the area located "in the heart" of Transylvania.

The sacred musical compositions, object of the successful preoccupations of the great musician who, benefiting from a generous instrument of interpretation, the Choir of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Sibiu, will bring to light very expressive liturgical Opus scores. Even nowadays are part of the repertoire of church choirs. The two Liturgies in G Major and A Major, as well as the tender harmonizations of the funeral songs, are part of the large number of musical works with a church character, original pieces or harmonizations. Regarding the original church choral creations, it should be emphasized that Gheorghe Dima composes some scores with a high degree of complexity, with a dramaturgy sometimes less common to the audience, using the principle of contrast, looking for variety in dispersing the choir in adjacent ensembles and ensuring the unity through harmonic thinking and polyphonic technique.

Dima was involved in an extensive process of systematization and transcription of Byzantine church music, by translating psaltic songs into linear notation, in order to make church singing as accessible as possible. Together with Gavriil Musicescu and Grigore Gheorghiu, notable musicians of the time, the author printed the work *Anastasimatarul* in 1883, their effort continuing in the following years with the sustained help of Bishop Melchizedek of the Roman, at whose expense will be published the *Structure of the Liturgy of St. John Chris* 1886), *Scale for Divine Service* (1884): four cherubikons, four axons and a Hymn at the bishop's moment of unclothing. He will also harmonize, in all 8 voices, liturgical songs from all over the year, totally eleven volumes. However, they will not receive the permission, from the church authorities from the Principality, to publish them, due to the fundamental consideration of the impossibility to faithfully reproduce the traditional psaltic microintervalic using the guidonic notation system.

The religious composition activity of Gheorghe Dima, the former Rector of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art from Cluj Napoca (1919-1925), leading position that he received following the rehabilitation after his release from prison, can be framed (according to some expressed opinions of the musicologist Doru Popovici in three main categories (Popovici 1980, 104). The first one is the romantic style or manner of composition, which includes the two Liturgies in G Major for men choir and in A Major, for mixed choir; the second category integrates funeral songs, choral compositions built in the German neo-romantic style, with less common melodic intervals and garnished sound speeches, the last category highlighting harmonizations made towards the end of his life, which have some musical themes, songs set in linear notation by Dimitrie Cunțan.

The liturgy for men choir in G major is considered a standard of genre creation, in which the composer used with great inspiration and originality polyphonic structures in harmonies which remind us the German School of Composition. The work is transposed into a composition on original themes, the Litany, the Cherubic Hymn, and the final part of the Liturgy being built in original thematic structures, specific to the composer. The Great Answers ... The Father ... The Mercy of Peace ... Worthily ... or We Praise You ... are compositions that explore the Byzantine themes of chants for the reader, the old Romanian church songs (Negrea 1941, 5). The author of the Liturgy in the G, knowing these songs that are specific to reader, he could not get over their beauty so adopting them in his Liturgy, he coated them in such a bright harmonic style that they look like the old Byzantine icons. The clear expression of Dima's counterpoint concept is given in his funeral works (Funeral Songs). The discourse of the religious melody of these creations is modern; neo-romantic procedures being relevant. In this case we notice the presence of melodic phrases made up of less common intervals, unexpected

bounces, passages of virtuosity (*coloratura*), linearism, more complex procedures, such as *fugato*. From time to time, the melodic discourses attributed to the choral parties imprint instrumental valences, this aspect requiring a very rigorous theoretical musical training but especially of vocal-interpretative technique.

## 2.2. Sacred music in the vision of Ion Vidu

Ion Vidu (1863-1931), another representative composer of Romanian choral music, author of three Choral Liturgies, the Liturgy for men choir, for mixed choir and the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom for schoolchildren, with rich harmonic “vestments”, as well as Timotei Popovici (1870 -1950), the least owes to the Greek Liturgy, written by the Ranthantinger, the multiple elements of melodic inspiration, both represent other authentic paradigms of the Romanian religious composition effort, which outlined a special identity in the choral literature of the intra-Carpathian area.

The composer Ion Vidu built his musical work relying on the card of simplicity (Ardereanu 2017, 142) meaning that the techniques of compositions he used during of the creative act, integrate mainly, simple musical procedures, homophony, heterophony, harmonic pedal reminding the ison of the psaltic music and in some place’s short polyphonic insertions. Relevant to the musical currents of the time, and this needs to be emphasized, is that this technique is not exclusively present in Vidu's creation, but it is only imposed as a constituent element, Vidu using as base material in his compositions, two musical different musical categories that certainly can be found in the hearts of all community members. to whom his entire work is destined: the orthodox church music of Byzantine tradition from Banat and the popular and patriotic music from the west of the country. Within his liturgical creations, these two syntaxes are found in a successful harmonic synergy, the composer managing to preserve the spirituality of Banat music and also the mother lode of the Romanian ethos through the church music transposed in the European harmonic language. Along with the composition, in his entire activity, he was preoccupied collecting, taking notes and processing the musical folklore from Banat.

The musical language and the thinking of the harmonic structure of the composer Ion Vidu concentrate largely on the mainly use of the major-minor modes with the specific ending on the sixth stage of the mode. In most cases, harmonization procedures are limited to the use of harmonics of the main steps. Representative for his choral composition is the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom for the parishes and people, designated for an ensemble of four voices and transposed on oriental music by Archdeacon I. Mardale, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Cozia Printing House, 1930.

### **2.3. Composer Timotei Popovici, creator of choral religious music with Byzantine specifics**

Timotei Popovici (1870-1950), who was dedicated to the sacerdotal service, is a landmark of the musical cultural movement in Ardeal, due to his skills that led him in taking many positions: conductor, teacher, composer or being main part of artistic and church life. Conductor of the Choir of St. Nicholas Church in Șcheii Brașovului, but also of other groups of this city located near Tâmpa, the composer will train young talents in a large choral instrument, the Choir of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Sibiu, which will become a standard formation for Romanian artistic events in Ardeal.

At the time when he was a teacher of vocal and instrumental music at the Școala Normală from Sibiu, joined Candid Popa and Aurel Popovici, Timotei Popovici, teachers also, in order to make changes in the second edition of Church Songs by Dimitrie Cunțan, decision considered imperative being imposed by needs and requirements of the time and due to the oral transmission characteristic of church singing. Starting from the premise that for the discovery and promotion of church music in Transylvania it must be admitted that folk music is structurally linked to church singing, Timotei Popovici will enrich the liturgical choral heritage with many church musical harmonized opuses, filtered and inspired by local artistic resources, including the Songs of the Liturgy of St. John Chrisostom for children choir (1902), the Liturgy for men choir, the Liturgy Songs for two and three equal voices (1942) and, the most famous and common religious choral composition for divine service, the Liturgy for mixed choir (1943). The creations are accessible to both the listener and the choir who perform the harmonization, which are often simplistic, and the polyphony almost non-existent (Popovici 1966, 341).

The picture of the Romanian liturgical choral art is completed by the suggestive, for the space it represents, musical opuses, which integrate the perfume and the influence of the popular ethos, relevant for some Banat and Transylvanian compositions. Antoniu Sequens (1865-1938), Romanian conductor and composer of Czech origin is the author of seven harmonized Liturgies (the first one being strongly influenced by the sound of the melodies from Banat), which are, next to Nicolae Popovici's Liturgy, few of the paradigms of the effort to build a choral literature with a Romanian identity. This in the same context in which in this part of the country, the Viennese Liturgy of Randhartinger, composed on Greek songs chanted in the Greek church from Vienna, was sung for many years, in the first half of the 19th century, especially by Serbs from Banat (Vancea 1944, 15).

Some of these songs were performed during services in Romanian churches, being much easier to be assimilated by both choristers and participants at the

divine service as the opuses integrated the ethos and fragrance of the ethnic specificity of popular music. Despite of his Slavic origin, Sequens imposed himself in the history of music as an appreciated Romanian composer, his artistic work expresses a strong and authentic Romanian national imprint especially after his arrival in Caransebeș and after he started to work for the music department from the Orthodox Theological Seminary. It can be noticed even from the catalog of his liturgical creation: Liturgy in F major, op.11, Liturgy in G major, op.12 - for male choir, Liturgy in G major for mixed choir in six voices, op. 9 (1903).

#### **2.4. Iacob Mureșianu and his role in promoting Romanian sacred music**

Following the same history, the artistic effort of the composer Iacob Mureșianu (1857-1917) will be related to his musical activity and to the musical schools from the Western Europe. His choral creation is imposed by an accentuated dynamic, fragments of his works sometimes expressing a pronounced dramatic character, by introducing the solos, as in the Cherubion in A minor, for male choir, baritone solo, Great Answers ... Holy, Holy, Saint ... solo tenor, etc. Although he expresses his opinion that music is one of the most powerful elements of civilization, the composer still confesses that the Romanian people in this historical region, due to circumstances, could not cross the boundaries of folk music, musicians having the responsibility to collect folk songs and to harmonize them in order to spread them among the people (Sbârcea 1976, 199). Iacob Mureșianu offered religious choral literature 10 Harmonized Liturgies, in a consistent search for his own style.

Particularly expressive is the sound of the Liturgy in G Major, for male choir, which suggestively reflects the sensitivity and compositional refinement of the author. The appreciation at that time highlight the relationship between the text and the music, of the author's liturgical compositions: The text and the melody are braided with such admirable perfection that it seems impossible to separate them. The song and the text are both the warmest prayer of the poor human soul (Suciu 2007, 147). Iacob Mureșianu also enriched the liturgical repertoire of the Greek Catholic Church, especially after his appointment to the music department of the schools from Blaj, but a large part of his choral creations is also found in the repertoire of the Romanian Orthodox Church choirs, the composer being always guided by the most honest intentions to serve the cause of Romanian music. Part of the dominant current of the era, the one of the discoveries and the valorisation of the national musical treasure, in order to promote of the art of sound with Romanian inspiration, Mureșianu saw in the seductive melodic waves of our musical speech, the second national language of Romanians (Stoianov 2005, 34).

### 3. Conclusions

Music serves the evangelical word, but when it is not close to the spirituality, developed and inherited by the Church, the one validated by time and the challenges of history, this music is only a means of facile propaganda, relaxation and entertainment, in which a person finds a momentary aesthetic and artistic satisfaction. However, church music - by its very essence - can shed light upon the night of a human heart in order to later enjoy the light that exists beyond the heart boundaries. The Transylvanian composers seeking, through the creative effort, to promote the national identity, bringing to light precious gems, choral creations, whose sonority charms, even today, with its vigor, dynamics and artistic sensitivity.

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