

Sebastian Barbu-Bucur – A Life in the service of the Romanian Psaltic Music

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Abstract: *Sebastian Barbu-Bucur was a diligent researcher of the Romanian psaltic music, an accomplished composer, a conductor-Protopsaltis, and a gifted professor, as well; he left the posterity a valuable work, by unceasingly promoting the Romanian national spirit through the orthodox sacred chants. I had the honor to be among those whom the professor and Byzantinologist revealed the mysteries of the psaltic music, as I had been his student at the Faculty of Theology, Sacred Music section, in Constanta. The melodic beauty and the calmness of the rhythm inspires one to pray, meditate and have a spiritual experience when listening to the chant. The maestro passed away a couple of days after celebrating his 85th anniversary and is buried in the Cemetery of Cheia Monastery, the final resting place of the deceased, where he was escorted on the 3rd of April, 2015.*

Key-words: *psaltic, musicologist, professor, composer, conductor.*

1. Introduction

Archdeacon and Professor Sebastian Barbu-Bucur had always considered himself to be God's servant through the religious music. His entire life had been guided by the sacred chant; thus, the professor required that his tombstone be inscribed with a fragment from psalm 103: *I will sing praise to my God as long as I live* (Psalm 103, 34).

Sebastian Barbu-Bucur was a diligent researcher of the Romanian psaltic music, an accomplished composer, a conductor-Protopsaltis, and a gifted professor, as well; he left the posterity a valuable work, by unceasingly promoting the Romanian national spirit through the orthodox sacred chants. I had the honor to be among those whom the professor and Byzantinologist revealed the mysteries of the psaltic music, as I had been his student at the Faculty of Theology, Sacred Music section, in Constanta.

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2. Biography

Sebastian Barbu-Bucur was born on the 6th of February, 1930, in Talea, Prahova County, in the family of the hard-working and devoted Christians Barbu and Salomeea, being given the name of Stelian at birth. His family had eight children, of which four of them entered the monastery. Near the end of her life, the professor's mother entered the Viforâta Monastery, under the name of Sophia. None of his family's members had any interest in music.

It is the village's priest, Iosif Popescu, and his son, teacher Stelian Popescu, the ones that help Stelian make his first steps on the road of psaltic music; afterwards, he continued his musical studies at the School for church singers from Căldărușani Monastery (between 1941-1945), where he was under the guidance of Archimandrite Mitrophor Atanasie Dincă in what concerns the psaltic music, of Protosyngellos Silvan Nistor and Calistrat Stoleru in linear music and Protosyngellos Chiril Arvinte as a professor of Typikon. Professor Nicolae Gheorghîță. One of maestro's closest apprentices describes this period to have been "one of the most important steps in becoming a psaltis, a key-moment in his development as a musicologist- byzantinologist" (Gheorghîță 2000, 11).

After graduating the school from the Căldărușani Monastery, young Stelian retires to Cheia Monastery, where he decides to expand his knowledge in what concerns the Romanian psaltic chant, Innography, Typikon, Liturgies, History of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Universal Church History, Dogmatics etc. It is here where he meets the Archimandrite Calist Rădulescu, an accomplished calligraphist, who would later become his monastic Godfather, Archimandrite Ghenadie, the abbot of Cheia Monastery, who was endowed with a beautiful lyric tenor voice and with Protosyngellos Gherasim Negulescu. It is in the company of these people so devoted to the psaltic music that the young Stelian received "the two fundamental dimensions of his life: the scientific and the spiritual one" (Gheorghîță 2000, 11).

At the age of 18, Stelian enrolls to the Theological seminary of the Neamț Monastery.

In 1950, he becomes a monk, under the name of Sebastian, being ordained as a deacon by the patriarchal bishop-vicar Teoctist, the future Patriarch of Romania, and in 1959, Sebastian is given the rank of Archdeacon.

After the graduation of the Seminary, the Archdeacon enrolls to the Theological Institute of București, from where he graduates in 1957 with the Bachelor thesis entitled "The School of Psaltic Music of Buzău, a Romanian Centre of Psaltic Chant Culture and Development", under the guidance of Professor Nicolae Lungu.

In 1959, as a consequence of the horrible decree no. 410, issued by the communist regime, father Barbu-Bucur is forced to leave the monastery and the monastic life, thus, continuing his studies at the "Ciprian Porumbescu"

Conservatory-București, the pedagogic section (1957-1963). There, he was the student of maestros Victor Iușceanu and Ioan Șerfezi (theory-solfege), Cheorghe Dumitrescu (concord), Zeno Vancea (counterpoint), Tudor Ciortea (musical forms), Emilia Comișel (folklore), Dumitru Botez and Ion Vicol (conducting and choral assembly), Ovidiu Varga and Adriana Sachelarie (The history of the universal music) etc.

Being passionate about byzantinology, the father attended specialization courses at the Macedonian Conservatory of Byzantine Music, Thessalonica-Greece (1983-1985), receiving a scholarship from the Mitropolite Apostolos Dimelos of Rhodes, graduating with the Arista distinction (Excellent, equivalent to “cum laude”) in all the disciplines. In the same period, he collaborates with one of the greatest experts in the field of Byzantine music, Professor Dimitrie Surlatzis.

During his musical studies in Greece, father Barbu-Bucur had also done some musicological research activity in what concerns the Romanian and Greek manuscripts from Mount Athos, thus, updating over 250 manuscripts.

In 1982, he receives the title of doctor in Musicology- Bizantinology of the Conservatory of Music “Gheorghe Dima” - Cluj-Napoca, sustaining the thesis “Byzantine music culture in Romania in the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century and the original contribution of the local culture”, under the guidance of Professors Sigismund Toduță and Romeo Ghircoiașu.

3. The teacher and the conductor

After having acquired an impressive knowledge regarding music, the maestro revealed to his apprentices its mysteries, from his positions as a chanter, a conductor and a music teacher at Plumbuita Monastery (1952-1953) and Antim Monastery (1953-1957), at the Theological Seminary of Neamț Monastery (1957-1959). He had, also, taught, in secular institutions, such as: Constructions and Building Vocational School (1960-1963), High School, no. 32 (1963-1965), Music School No. 5 in București, professing, at the same time, as a lecturer at the Byzantine Paleography Faculty of the Ciprian Porumbescu Conservatory in București (1970-1973).

In 1990, father Sebastian-Barbu-Bucur manages to achieve the reactivation of the Academy of Religious Music, by creating a special section at the National University of Music București. As PhD. Associate professor Nicolae Gheorghiiță states, it was a “special moment, of great professional satisfaction” (Gheorghiiță 2000, 11).

At the same time, the father is given the title of associate professor at Byzantine Music and Byzantine musical Paleography. In 1993, he becomes a University Professor, in 1997, a scientific coordinator for the title of PhD, until his retirement in 2000, and from then on, a consulting professor.

Within the National University of Music București, he had put the basis and had, also, conducted the Byzantine music choir “Psalmodia” (1988); with it, he had performed both in Romania and abroad and had registered a huge chant repertoire, which included his personal works and the ones of the Byzantine music composers from Romania and Mount Athos.

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 etc. 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.

In parallel, he had also taught at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology - “Ovidius” University of Constanta, Religious Music section (2002-2009). There, from 2002, he put the basis of and, also, conducted the Byzantine music choir Gherontie Nicolau, with which he had given concerts and had taken part in festivals.

His ideas in what concerns the Romanian psaltic music and the results of the scientific researchers were presented during sessions, symposiums and musicology-byzantinology congresses, both in Romania and abroad (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Poland, Russia, and Germany). In 1969, he became a member of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists.

Maestro’s effort, devotion and competence in what concerns Byzantine music’s research and evaluation were highly appreciated and rewarded with prizes and distinctions from various prestigious institutions.

4. The musicologist and the composer

During his more than 40 years of musicological activity and creation in the field of Byzantine music, the archdeacon Sebastian Barbu-Bucur had published an impressive number of books, critical editions, didactic works, studies, articles and reviews. Obviously, the lexicographic portrait of the author of these thousand of pages of Byzantine musicology can be completed only if his work would be presented in a couple of well-defined sequences:

a. Author’s volumes: under the name of Romanian music origins (Documenta et Transcripta) the following works were published at Muzicala Publishing house: Filothei sin Agăi Jipei, Psaltichie rumânească, [Filothei sin Agăi Jipei, Romanian Psaltic Book] vol. I, Catavasier [Book of Hymns] (1981); vol. II, Anastasimatar [Anastasimatarion] (1984); vol. III Stihirariul [Sticherarion] (1986); vol. IV, Stihirar-Penticostar [Sticherarion- Pentekostarion] (1992).

Other works: *Ghelasie Basarabeanul, Vecernier, Utrenier, Doxastar* [*Ghelasie Basarabeanul, Vespers, Compline and Doxology Service Book*](2 vol) and *Liturghier* [Divine Liturgy Service Book] in collaboration with father Ion Isăroiu (2004-2007); Mihalache Moldovlahul (2008), as well as: *Catalogul manuscriselor muzicale românești de la Muntele Athos* (2000) [The catalogue of the Romanian musical manuscripts from Mount Athos].

b. Critical editions: *Liturghier de strana* [Divine Liturgy Pew Book] by Ion Popescu-Pasărea, (1991, reed. 2001); *Idiomelar* (a book containing idiomelons) by Dimitrie Suceveanu, vol. I-III (1992-1997); *Anastasimatar* [Anastasimatarion] by Victor Ojog in collaboration with Alexie Al. Buzera (1998); *Cântări la înmormântare și parastas* (1991) [Chants for funerals and memorial services].

c. More than 100 diverse studies, essays and articles regarding Byzantine music personalities and its problems, as well as didactic works published at the National university of Music Publishing House, București

d. Psaltic music works:

- *Cântări la Vecernia și Utrenia Sfinților români* [Romanian Saints' Vespers and Compline Chants], published in three volumes at the Biblical Institute of Orthodox Mission Publishing House (1st and 2nd volume in 2013 and the 3rd volume in 2014). The work comprises 35 services of the Romanian saints celebrated by the Romanian Orthodox Church;
- *Cântări la Vecernie, Utrenie și Sfânta Liturghie* [Vespers, Compline and Divine Liturgy Chants], work that contains over 150 of Byzantine monodies on eight modes;
- *Cântări la Sfânta Liturghie* [Divine Liturgy Chants], published at Semne publishing House, București, in 2014.

Among the numerous liturgical chants of the Orthodox Church and the Romanian culture, I have selected one of the most beautiful songs, that, although short and simple, stirs emotions into the hearts of those who hear it during the Divine Liturgy.

The chant *Iubi-Te-voi, Doamne* [I will love Thee, o Lord], written by the author in both forms (psaltic and linear), is motet-structured and contains four melodic lines corresponding to the four lines of the prayer: *Iubi-Te-voi, Doamne, virtutea mea!/Domnul este întărirea mea/ și scăparea mea/ și izbăvitorul meu* [I will love Thee O Lord, my strength the Lord is my foundation and my refuge and my deliverer].

The mode chosen by the composer is plagyos protos (5th mode), a diatonic mode which is the plagal of the first mode, with which shares common traits. The 5th mode is, usually, built on the final ke (A).

Nevertheless, in practice, due to vocal ambitus reasons, the varies form of the mode, based on pa (D), is the one used in various situations. The low, the pitched and high pitched registers are, thus, avoided; if used, they would be incongruent with the chant's religious character.

The mode scale used by Sebastian Barbu-Bucur is:

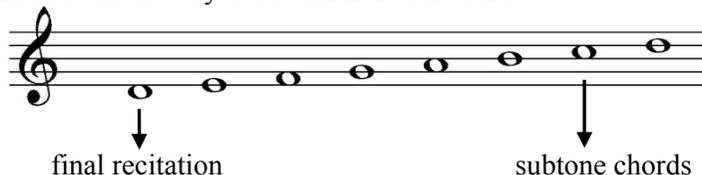


Fig. 1. *The mode scale*

In embroideries, melodic appoggiaturas and musical compositions, some steps become mobile, due to the attraction the main steps (the final cadence, the recitation chord and the sub-tone) exert upon the sounds of the melodic formulas. It is the case of ni, (C), which, sometimes transforms into ni sharp (C#) if the melodic line scales towards pa (D), and, which, in melodic decrease, attracted by A becomes zo ifes (B flat), of ga (F) which, attracted by G becomes ga sharp (F#), and even of vu (E), which, as an exchange in the final cadence (being an embroidery), becomes vu ifes (E flat). These melodic notes do not modify the internal structure and the diatonic character of the tone.

The first section of the motet has an anacrusic character, beginning with a minor sixth interval (A-F²) followed by a descending scale. The entire chant has a stichiraric rhythmic system, with 1:2 rapport values. The groups of two sounds, or the special ones, of three quavers, appear through the division of the time interval on a single syllable.



Fig. 2. *I will love Thee O Lord, my strength*

The melody is gradually constructed. The intermediate cadence for the first melodic line is on final pa (D).

The second melodic line is shorter than the first one, and its cadence falls on the reciting chord 1 ke-(A).



Fig. 3. *The Lord is my foundation*

The third melodic line, as short as the last one, also has the cadence falling on the reciting chord 2 di-(G).



Fig. 4. *And my refuge*

The last section has a concludent character, and its cadence, obviously, falls on the final pa (D).



Fig. 5. *And my deliverer*

The composer constructs the melody by using mode specific formulas, such as:



Fig. 6. *My foundation*

Or this formula which is used in the final cadence.



Fig. 7. *My deliverer*

The melodic beauty and the calmness of the rhythm inspirits one to pray, meditate and have a spiritual experience when listening to the chant. The melodic tempo is moderato, not too rare, and the musical execution nuances are, also, slow (Piano-mezzo-piano). The ambitus of the chant is a perfect eleventh (C1-F2), having the breaking point in the acute at the beginning of the chant, while the minimum is in final cadence. This aspect endows the melody with a descending profile and with a perfect symbiosis of the melody-text relationship. This is the specific stylistic

feature in Sebastian Barbu-Bucur's musical work, which emphasizes, through the chant and the text semantics, the beauty of uttering into the Romanian language any prayer chanted in the religious and secular space.

Apart from his psaltic works, maestro Sebastian Barbu-Bucur had also composed some choral works: *Imnul Potirului* [The Hymn of the Cup] a poem written by Nichifor Crainic, for male choir, in four modes (1985); *Rugaciune* [Prayer] written by Vasile Militaru (1990) and *Imn Patriarhal* [Patriarchal Hymn] for mixed and male choir (1993).

On the 6th of December, 2011, the Local Council and the City Hall of Talea grants the maestro the title of "Citizen of Honour".

The maestro passed away a couple of days after celebrating his 85th anniversary and is buried in the Cemetery of Cheia Monastery, the final resting place of the deceased, where he was escorted on the 3rd of April, 2015.

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