

The Activity of the Composer Iacob Mureşianu in Blaj. Cultural Heritage and Traditions

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Abstract: *I have written this article bearing in mind the musical education in Blaj. It includes social and historical specific to Iacob Mureşianu's years of professional practice in Blaj; it lists cultural and musical personalities shaped by that cultural centre. Moreover, it covers the stages specific to his work as a teacher, composer, musical education organizer, promoter of authentic folklore. In addition, the article reviews his piano compositions that served as a didactic material, but also as concert pieces. The influence of the Romanian folk music predominates, even though he did some of his musical studies abroad. The portray of composer Iacob Mureşianu is crayoned in the context of his family, with the influences, ideas and ideals instilled by its members. The pages of the article will, however, mention the close connection the musician Iacob Mureşianu had with his father, journalist Iacob Mureşianu.*

Key-words: *culture, traditions, Blaj, Iacob Mureşianu, piano, folklore.*

1. Introduction

For a while, Iacob Mureşianu carried out his activity in Blaj, a place full of culture, emotion and history. The city of beginnings, faith and light was waiting for an acknowledgement of the Romanian spirit and culture.

Blaj was established on October 11th 1754, when Bishop Petru Pavel Aron sent out a circular letter to spread the word on the birth of the first Romanian schools.

It is the beginning of the struggles for the spiritual revival of the Romanians in this province.

Bishop Inocenţie Micu Klein dedicated his whole life to defending the civil and political rights of the Romanian people and its spiritual growth.

A first key figure of Blaj education, who actually became the principal of the High School (Şcoala Normală) between 1782 and 1794, was Gheorghe Şincai, the one who established almost 300 schools throughout the territory of Transylvania.

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From amongst the teachers of those schools, we mention: Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Șincai, Petru Maior.

Starting 1837, the Theological Seminary had been organized on the model of Saint Barbara Seminar in Vienna. The teachers at this Seminar were monks and priests. Some of the key graduates of the Seminar are: Ion Budai-Deleanu, Andrei Mureșanu, George Barițiu, Timotei Cipariu, Simion Bărnuțiu.

The students came from various social classes, but most of them belonged to the poorer ones.

Since the teachers led very modest lives, quite often, after their death, they left amounts of money used to establish funds and foundations meant to support poor students during their studies. This was how the Basilitan, Șuluțian and Vancean Funds were established, managed by the representatives of the Mitropoly.

The School of Commons (Școala de Obște) was at the roots of the pedagogical education in Blaj, being called, in turn, High School (Școala Normală) and the Pedagogical Institute. Since it was a school that trained teachers and cantors, it was but natural for the musical education to rank highly in its curricula.

1885 was a memorable year for the musical education in the “City of Schools”, as the composer Iacob Mureșianu moved to Blaj. Regarding Iacob Mureșianu’s special contribution to the Romanian music, we recall the words of Sabin Drăgoi who wrote in an article: “Though I did not have the honour to feast on Iacob Mureșianu’s teachings at first hand, I do admire him and I am grateful to the one who is the founder of the Transylvanian school”. Composer Iacob Mureșianu made his artistic debut in 1863, during the concert organized by violinist Elena Circa, where he had a piano performance of the work “Deșteaptă-te, române” (The Romanian National Anthem).

In 1885, the Mitropoly in Blaj requested him to take over the vacant vocal and instrumental music department, which involved teaching classes in all the schools in the city. Because there were too few songs in one or several voices, he compiled the “Collection of choir songs for elementary schools”, published in 1921, after the author’s death, which comprised own compositions, with the lyrics of the Romanian poets: Mihai Eminescu, Vasile Alecsandri, Dimitrie Bolintineanu.

He placed great focus on the teaching of musical instruments, and turned his home into an actual music academy, where all those who had a passion for the art could benefit from the guidance of the maestro. His restless activity brought to life a whole generation of musicians that left a trace on the musical history of Romania: Tiberiu Brediceanu, Guilelm Șorban, Leonida Domide, Nicodim Ganea, Augustin Bena, Celestin Cherebețiu and others.

2. Content

Composer Iacob Mureșianu greatly contributed to the history of Romanian music through his personality and his talent.

In the Iacob Mureșianu's biography in his volume "Opere alese" (Selected Works), musicologist Nicolae Parocescu said:

"... the first Romanian composer who understood that his role as an artist was to contribute all his talent and energy to the establishment of the musical school meant to support the assertion of the national artistic individuality, raise the cultural level and the awareness on the rights of the Romanian people".

The scholars in Blaj have brought to light the cultural heritage of Transylvania dwellers and passed it on to the future generations and thus, to the whole world. The literary and musical folklore creations and customs represented an acknowledgement of the Romanian nation.

The folkloric creation has always been at the centre of attention of Blaj cultural personalities.

The first mention regarding the enhancement of folklore customs dates as of 1756. The students in Blaj put up a performance inspired from religious and Romanian folk songs. It was prepared around Christmas time, and the performances were held between December 24th and January 6th. The performance was organized by monk Grigore Maior, and the event was entitled "Comedia Ambulatoria Alumnorum", as mentioned in "Observatoriului" newspaper, year 1878, issue no. II.

One of the aspirations of the Transylvanian intellectuals was to impose a dance that would represent the national equivalent of fashionable dances at the time. In 1850, the great man of culture, Iacob Mureșianu-the father, also educated trained in Blaj schools, created the dance "Romana", relying on choreographies specific to Romanian folk dances.

It shortly became the dance that opened the reunions of Transylvanian intellectuals.

The personalities interested in folklore initially focused on the literary one, because it could be more easily written down. Later, music professors, who studied at universities in Europe, collected and wrote down folkloric creations. In this context, the figure of composer Iacob Mureșianu becomes prominent, as his vocal and instruments creations are strongly influenced by the Romanian folk creations.

In the magazine "Musa Română", a musical and literary publication, musician Iacob Mureșianu, in his article entitled "Romanian Music" (issue no.1, January 1889), speaks of the status of the musical folklore. He states that folk creations can only be saved if composers process and publish them, to make them known to the

world. He insists on the development of a music repertoire that can be published in “Musa Română”, to help spread national music. The pages of this magazine also comprise the lives and creations of important composers, so that they are known and taken as a model (figure 1).



Fig. 1 (Casa Mureșenilor Archives document), no catalogue number

Alongside his original creations, Iacob Mureșianu also published in “Musa Română” magazine variants of Romanian folk songs belonging to his students.

A representative work for Iacob Mureșianu is “Marș jubiliar” (Jubilee March), which he wrote in memory of the Gazette of Transylvania (figure 2) and that was also published in “Musa Română”. He dedicated it to his brother, Aurel Mureșianu, with whom the composer had a special relation throughout his musical studies in Leipzig and who was the composer’s advisor and confident.



Fig. 2. (Casa Mureșenilor Archives document), no catalogue number

The evolution of the national music in Iacob Mureșianu's vision is held back because it does not benefit from sufficient support. His hopes as to the redressing of the situation fluctuate, depending on the perspectives, on the confidence in the future, on the historical framework. Hoping that his ideas on promoting the national culture and music will be brought to life, Iacob Mureșianu-the father ceaselessly sends them to his successors, wanting to make them part of his goals, and wishing for his sons to be the ones to carry on his initiative.

He also supported, as best he could, the composer's education in Vienna and Leipzig, insisting that all the knowledge thus gained must be put to good use in his home country. It must reflect in the composer and educational activity, but especially in the promotion of the national spirit.

Casa Mureșenilor Archives in Brașov host a correspondence between journalist Iacob Mureșianu and the composer. It abounds in advice, encouragements and ideas, which, in the journalist's opinion, could be turned into reality. He wanted to support and help all initiatives that could contribute to the achievement of his ideals (figures 3 and 4).

longer appreciated, unless he offered them as gifts, and “Musa” magazine no longer had subscribers. He turned to his family, trying to put into words the difficult times he was going through and that he hoped he could overcome, with their support.

Since he was unwilling to resign to the circumstances, but instead, he wanted to continue his efforts and struggles, Iacob Mureșianu asks people to trust that his writings express nothing but the bare truth. He requested support to save the belief in his ideals instilled by his family and said that he did not want to be a disappointment for his late father.

A number of piano compositions date since the period of Iacob Mureșianu’s activity in Blaj, actual musical gems that have crossed the barriers of time. They are concert pieces, also written with a didactic purpose.

The diversity of the musical genres and forms that the composers in the second half of the 19th century approached, either as supporters of the Western style, or under the influence of the Romanian folk music, reveals, as a whole, a piano literature with multiple valences.

Some of Iacob Mureșianu’s more famous, more frequently performed creations will be mentioned, in an attempt to analyse them in terms of the form, of the means used to render, as faithfully as possible, the idea that underpinned their creation.

“Cimpoiul” (The Bagpipe), which is, maybe, Iacob Mureșianu’s most representative piano creation, a fact actually mentioned at the time (“Gazeta Transilvaniei” issue no. 166 of July 19th 1888).

The original musical piece is written in an authentic folk line thus advocating the highest aesthetic outlook that opened new perspectives for the Romanian musical creation.

The work was written in D minor, the background of the same accompaniment exposing a phrase made up of two motifs, a dynamic and a syncopated one. It is divided into three sections: A, B, C. The transition passage towards section C, which is of folkloric essence, is worth mentioning (figure 5).



Fig. 5. *Caprice no. 1 "Cimpoiul" (Bagpipe)*

The novelette "O clipă" (A Brief Moment), nuanced, melodious, short, but highly complex in terms of the coloristic palette, leaves the audience under the impression that Iacob Mureșianu was forced to betray his youth ideals of virtuosity at the time, and focus on the principle of immediate usefulness. The work renders the conflictual situation through the presence of the polyrhythm. On the background of a ternary accompaniment, the descant exposes a binary musical concept, with a descending melodic contour.

The middle part brings a note of optimism and hope, achieved through the ascending, chromatic pace (figure 6).



Fig. 6 *Novelette "O clipă" (A Brief Moment)*

The impromptu "Ardeleanca" (Transylvanian Woman), a dynamic, temperamental work, with complex composition and tempo fluctuations, still is part of the piano repertoire of those who embraced this instrument. (e.g. figure 7)



Fig.7. Impromptu "Ardeleanca" (Transylvanian Woman)

3. Conclusions

These pages traced the activity of Composer Iacob Mureșianu in Blaj, as a composer, teacher and concert performer.

They have mentioned the influence of his family, of his father, journalist Iacob Mureșianu, as well as of his brother, the man of letters Aurel Mureșianu.

The years the composer spent in Blaj brought him a lot of satisfaction, but also financial challenges.

His collaboration with key personalities of the time greatly influenced the musician. He supported them in promoting the respect for the Romanian folk song amongst their own students. The influence of the authentic Romanian folklore resonated in most of his compositions, even though he spent quite some time in Leipzig and Vienna for studies.

The article only mentions a few piano compositions. The analysis of his compositions requires a more ample space.

The elements specific to the music school in Blaj are mentioned, while also insisting on the historical background; composer Iacob Mureșianu from the cultural emanation of Transylvania.

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