

Musicians from Braşov: Constantin Catrina – An integrated approach to musical folklore

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Abstract: *Constantin Catrina (1933-2013), a musician whose destiny was linked to the city of Braşov, carried out a diverse and consistent activity, materialized in numerous volumes, studies and articles. C. Catrina manifested himself in multiple fields: as a historian, chronicler of musical life, lexicographer, Byzantinist musicologist, composer, folklorist, pedagogue and cultural manager. While in the last two decades of his life he dedicated himself mainly to Byzantine musicology, the thousands of pages comprising his research work have remained, to this day, outstanding landmarks in the Romanian ethnomusicological literature. Apart from sketching a portrait of the musician, this paper summarizes his contributions to the field of musical folklore, emphasizing the way in which, throughout his career, he contributed to the collection, promotion and conservation of the folklore from the curvature area of the Carpathians. Through his research work and entire career, C. Catrina has remained a model researcher dedicated to highlighting the cultural values of the Romanian village.*

Key-words: *article, field research, ethnomusicology, ethnology, Cohalm area*

1. Introduction

One of the numerous folklore collectors, ethnomusicologists and composers involved in the extensive process of valorization of the musical culture of folk origin is Constantin Catrina (1933-2013) – musicologist, folklorist, teacher, composer and conductor, who worked for several decades in the city at the foot of Mount Tâmpa. During this time, the musician brought his contribution to a better knowledge of the musical folklore from the curvature area of the Carpathians and of the Byzantine musical tradition promoted at the old school from the Şchei district in Braşov.

Much has been written during the last three decades about C. Catrina and his so diverse and consistent activity. On his 75th birthday, a booklet entitled *Constantin*

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Catrina – privitor în oglinda timpului [Constantin Catrina – A Beholder in the Mirror of Time] was published in Râmnicu Vâlcea by Constantin Deaconu, pointing out his extensive activity, while 5 years later, a 556-page book dedicated to his memory completed the brief 2008 portrait with numerous texts signed by those who appreciated the tireless work of this beloved personality, including academician O. L. Cosma and over 20 other musicians, folklorists, writers etc. Earlier, on his 65th birthday, he himself had put together a booklet entitled *Fișe de jurnal* [Journal Sheets], in which he compiled a meticulously organized bio-bibliography of his activity and writings. As far as I am concerned, I came to know him more than three decades ago through his volume entitled *Studii și documente de muzică românească* (I) [Studies and Documents of Romanian Music (I)], and later personally, at scientific events, due to our common interest in Byzantine music. Consequently, a year later I published an anniversary article in the “*Renașterea*” journal and an interview; these modest notes were added to the countless reviews and references that appeared over the course of 50 years in the press and in specialized volumes.

In the last two decades of his life, C. Catrina's attention turned to old documents of Byzantine music which he had not had the opportunity to study during communism, and eventually he wrote a doctoral thesis on the subject. Therefore, we consider it necessary to bring his contribution up to date so as to include his over 10 volumes and over 150 studies of ethnography, collections and studies of musical folklore. Thus, this paper aims to synthesize this contribution and to highlight the various forms through which the musician promoted traditional music and the folk customs from the curvature area of the Carpathians.

2. A portrait sketch of the musician

Before dwelling on his contribution to the research and valorization of musical folklore, we will attempt to sketch a portrait of this “*Oltenian from Brașov*” (Deaconu 2009) – as he often characterized himself.

In the studies signed by C. Catrina, which I had read in the '80s of the last century (Catrina 1986), I discovered a passionate researcher, with thoroughly documented and carefully elaborated works, impressive in their wealth of information. Later, when I came to know Professor Catrina more closely, I noticed his human qualities: the warmth of his voice, his cheerfulness, his lack of ostentation and the generosity with which he would offer bibliographic or methodological guidance on a particular topic, or suggest new study topics and, especially, would patiently and willingly listen to everyone.

Where did all these qualities come from? They are certainly part of the “Oltenian dowry, naturally stemming from his peasant background” about which, years earlier, Gh. Deaconu, Ph.D. wrote in a “portrait sketch” dedicated to Catrina, who was born on November 6, 1933, in a village called Țiu, Dolj county. Leaving his native village at the age of 12 (1945), C. Catrina attended the Theological Seminary in Craiova (1945-1947) and then the Seminary attached to the Mofleni Monastery (1947-1950), where he studied with the best teachers of the time. The change of the political regime, in 1947, and the Sovietization of the country interrupted this path and determined him to enrol in the courses of the Middle School of Music in Craiova (1950-1952), specializing in conducting; for administrative reasons, two years later, the students were moved to the school with the same name in the city of Braşov, then called the city of Stalin. The purpose of these schools was to train specialists for what was then called the “artistic mass movement” (Lăcătuşu 2013, 88). This explains the jobs that the graduate of the conducting class had in the cultural field, during the following years: in Rupea, he was, successively, a methodology guide and then conductor of the choir and fanfare of the Rupea District House of Culture (Braşov county) (1957-1963), a substitute teacher at the “Șt. O. Iosif” High School (1957-1963) and a secretary and inspector of the District Culture Committee (1962-1967).

His musical training continued as he enrolled in the evening courses of the Bucharest Conservatory (1960-1963) and was later completed in Cluj (1969-1971). Shortly after graduating from the Conservatory of Music in Bucharest, he moved to Braşov, where he continued to work in the field of culture, fulfilling various functions, mostly in leading positions: methodology inspector at the Regional Committee of Culture and Art of the county (1967-1968), vice-president of the Culture and Art Committee of the county (1968-1971), director of the County Center for Guidance of Folk Creation and Mass Artistic Movement (1971-1977), vice-president of the Committee on Culture and Socialist Education of the Braşov County (1977-1990). The recognition of his expertise in ethnomusicology allowed him to become associate professor at the Faculty of Music of the “Transylvania” University in Braşov, between 1990 and 2003.

Alongside the administrative activity he carried out during his youth and maturity, C. Catrina established himself as an accomplished musician with multiple interests, who sought to give answers to the numerous questions stemming from his innate curiosity. While showing a keen interest in musical and literary folklore, but also in ethnography, composition, musicology and Byzantinology, with the passage of time he discovered “*his true vocation, that of historiographer*”, as recounted by academician O. L. Cosma (Lăcătuşu 2013, 10). In fact, he first made his debut in the press at the age of 23, with an article published in the “Drum nou”

magazine from Braşov, reporting on a local event. It was only a few years later, in 1965 (at the age of 32), that he tried his hand at composition, with a mixed choir, while three years later he made his editorial debut, as co-author of the volume *Portul popular românesc de pe Târnave* [The Romanian Folk Costume from the Târnave Region] (Catrina 1968). Other volumes would follow including musicology studies and choral compositions, which allowed him to become a member of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists, in 1977. In 1978, his first personal volume was published, dedicated to Ciprian Porumbescu, one hundred and twenty-five years after the composer's birth.

Summarizing his entire activity, we find, as Professor Petre Marcel Vârlan also points out, that it totals over 4000 pages of articles and studies, 1100 pages of books, "... contained in 32 volumes – personal books, supervised editions, folklore collections, didactic works and others – totaling 607 titles" (Lăcătuşu 2013, 73), along with almost 100 references about his work. "An exceptional accomplishment", as George Deaconu, Ph.D. said, pointing out that all these are based on his intellectual self-discipline and thirst for knowledge, because "Constantin Catrina's life was a perpetual process of «learning», training and «modelling», apart from his formal «instruction»" (Deaconu 2013, 10). Thus, C. Catrina became – according to academician Octavian Lazăr Cosma – "an outstanding intellectual of unparalleled erudition" (Lăcătuşu 2013, 13).

3. The world of the Romanian village – one of the musician's constant preoccupations

Attracted by folklore since his adolescence – his first attempts to collect folklore were made in his native village – C. Catrina always placed this field at the centre of his concerns, regardless of his working place or professional obligations. Even when his interest in church music, always close to his soul, could manifest itself, gaining an important place in his research work, folklore remained his primary focus, as illustrated by the numerous studies and articles published in the years of preparation of his doctoral thesis (defended in 2000), or by his monumental work *Tezaur de etnografie și folclor în județele Covasna și Harghita* [A Treasure of Ethnography and Folklore from the Covasna and Harghita Counties] (2012).

The consistency of his research work and the variety of ways in which his interest in folk culture generally manifested itself point to four areas of activity illustrating his interest in folk culture. As a hierarchy thereof is difficult to make, we will list and comment on them in alphabetical order: cultural-artistic activity, field research, folk-inspired musical creation, scientific creation. All these combined

harmoniously during his more than five decades of tireless work, in which the world of the Dolj county village from which he originated was pulsating in his soul and amplified his interest in traditional culture and civilization.

3.1. Folklore and his cultural-artistic activity

Shortly after graduating from the Middle School of Music in Braşov, C. Catrina was appointed director of the Cultural Centre of Homorod, Braşov County (1956-1957), and, a year later, methodology instructor at the District House of Culture in Rupea. The 10 years spent in the town located 63 km north-west of Braşov (1957-1967) were years of accumulations and notable initiatives and achievements.

Ever since his school days at the Middle School of Music, he distinguished himself among his colleagues by his interest in choral conducting. Here is what his colleague Rodica Dănescu Drăghia recalled on the occasion of his anniversary: “The first candidate for the preparation of the choir with a Romanian repertoire was Titi Catrina. Ever since then, he was attracted to folklore and to the choral art of folk inspiration, to which he paid more attention than any of us” (Lăcătuşu 2013, 40). Therefore, when he arrived in Rupea, he immediately took over the leadership of the choir and marching band of the House of Culture, whose activity he directed for several years (1957-1963), and in 1977, at the first edition of the “Cântarea României” [Song to Romania] National Festival, he won the first prize and the title of laureate in the national final, as conductor of this band. A special place in the repertoire of the festival and of the choir in particular was always held by reworkings of folk songs or of works inspired by folk lyrics or melodies.

The cultural-artistic activities he was involved in, exploring the folk culture treasure, also included the initiatives to establish village collections and museums, an Archive of Folk Art and Folklore (1971), to organize an inter-county folklore festival entitled “Cântecele Oltului” [Olt River Songs] (Făgăraş, 1969), to guide folk ensembles and groups, to coordinate peasant performances reproducing various folk customs and traditions and to militate and stimulate the systematic investigation of folklore and folk art, in his capacity as Director of the Centre for the Guidance of Folk Creation and Mass Artistic Movement, (1971-1977). Added to these were his numerous participations in music festivals or tours in Romania and abroad – Turkey (1969), Belgium (1971), France (1974), Italy (1977), Slovakia (1978), Russia (1958, 1987, 1989) – during which he contributed significantly to the promotion of the Romanian folklore.

A conductor of choral or instrumental ensembles, a specialist in competition commissions and juries, a coordinator of various activities or workshops, an active participant in the entire cultural activity of the city of Braşov, holding leading

positions, C. Catrina was always “a Protean figure”, “an authoritarian, unmistakable voice, who always has something to say and does it with clairvoyance and emotional thrill” (Lăcătușu 2013, 13-14).

3.2. Approaching the regional folklore through field collections

During the years spent in Rupea, field research was facilitated, on the one hand, by the folklore and ethnographic treasure waiting to be discovered and, on the other hand, by the advantage represented by the leading position held by Mr. Catrina. The idea of establishing a sub-branch for the research and collection of the folklore from the Rupea region (or of the Cohalm Region) implied providing an administrative and official framework for the manifestation of the personal interests in the material and spiritual culture of the region. This led to an intense program of field collection, which resulted in the revelation of many unexplored elements of the folk culture of this region. C. Catrina collected over two thousand *doinas* and outlaw songs, wedding and funeral songs, carols and dance tunes, and gathered information about the rites of passage and calendar ceremonies, objects of use, folk costumes and traditional instruments, which he recorded on hundreds of field data sheets. Dedicated to capturing every detail of a custom, ceremony or rite, the musician came up with the idea of filming the ongoing event, producing, in the '60s, two documentary films on ethnographic themes (Lăcătușu 2013, p. 82).

3.3. The valorization of folklore in musical composition musical creation of folk inspiration

The interest in musical composition manifested itself in the musician's youth, due to his passion for choral singing. Thus, after attending the courses of the Bucharest Conservatory of Music, the cultural animator from Rupea was tempted to use the folk verse and melody in reworkings of folk songs for various types of vocal groups – equal voice choir, mixed choir, children's choir. His compositions were published in personal volumes (*Coruri* [Choral Pieces], 1988 and *10 Coruri* [10 Choral Pieces], 2013), as well as in choral volumes and collections published between 1965-1993. On the occasion of the publication of the 1988 volume of Choirs, composer Irina Odăgescu emphasized the composer's affinity with the Transylvanian line of classical works of his great forerunners Dima and Mureșianu, along with his original approach to the modal-polyphonic structures, as well as his use of typically Romanian folk ornamentation (Lăcătușu 2013, 48). The folk origin of the songs is evident already from the title of some of the choral pieces included in the last volume published (*10 Coruri* [10 Choral Pieces]): *La casa cu grădiniță* [At the House

with a Small Garden], *Cântec şi joc* [Song and Dance], *Spune-mi tu puiuş de cuc* [Tell me, Little Cuckoo], *Acolo-n jos şi mai în jos* [Down There and Further Down].

Regarding the melodic attire of the folk-inspired texts, the harmonic or polyphonic techniques used by the composer are appropriate to the specific nature of the Romanian traditional music, such as the simple texture, easy to sing and based on modal, ingeniously harmonized structures.

3.4. Ethnomusicological contributions

The musician's scientific work –articles, studies and books – illustrates his interest in folk culture as a whole, from the furrier's trade or folk costumes, to organology and ethnomusicology or the compilation of a bibliography of musical folklore. Limiting ourselves to a simple inventory, we find that in the field of **ethnography** he edited and supervised three books and wrote 57 studies, articles and reviews; added to these are five books, collections and supervised editions, along with 29 studies, articles and reviews on **literary folklore**, as well as six collections and supervised editions (including one in collaboration), along with 65 studies, articles and reviews on **musicalfolklore**. Once he settled in Transylvania, the focus of his research shifted to geographical areas bordering the city of Braşov. In addition to the villages from the Land of Bârsa, the focus of his research included the area of the Târnavе rivers, Întorsura Buzăului and the Lands of Făgăraş and Bran, which determined Ioan Lăcătuşu, Ph.D.from St. Gheorghe to say that C. Catrina is one of the most knowledgeable specialists in the Romanian folklore from the intra-Carpathian arc (Lăcătuşu 2013, 65).

After his 1957 debut in the press, the first article signed by him was in the field of music: *Taraful lui Ion Rusu Băţan* [Ion Rusu Băţan's Folk Music Band], in the April 1, 1964 issue of the "Drum nou" newspaper, followed, two months later, by an ethnographic article published in the same newspaper from (Catrina 1997, 8). In April of the same year he published another article, in the daily newspaper "Albina", in Bucharest: *Soliştii vocali şi repertoriul* [The Vocal Soloists and the Repertoire]. Looking back, we find that during his five decades of activity he collaborated with 38 magazines published in various Romanian cities, promoting in their pages the musical creation and the ethnography of those areas.

He made his editorial début in this field at the age of 35, as co-author of the aforementioned volume, writing about the folk costume from the area of the Târnavе rivers, and in 1967 and 1968 he published several collections of *Folclor poetic din zona Braşov* [Poetic Folklore from the Braşov Area], in the two volumes of *Folclor poetic* [Poetic Folklore], edited by Pavel Ruxănoiu and Zaharia Baltasiu, respectively (Catrina 1967, 1968). In the following decade, he edited several

volumes of ethnography and literary and musical folklore: *Cât îi soarele de sus* [As Long as the Sun is Up] (1972), *Meșteri populari – artiști amatori* [Folk Craftsmen – Amateur Artists] (1973), *Drag mi-e cântecul și jocul* [I Love Singing and Dancing] (1982) and continued to publish in daily newspapers and specialized magazines in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and St. Gheorghe.

Many of his articles and studies referred to the traditional culture of south-eastern Transylvania, but also to the local folklorists, or to the specialized literature on the Romanian folklore (Catrina 1978). His constant preoccupation with this geographical area resulted in the large volume entitled *Tezaur de etnografie și folclor în județele Covasna și Harghita* [A Treasure of Ethnography and Folklore from the Covasna and Harghita Counties] (2012), co-edited with Nicolae Bucur. The volume brings to attention a less researched area and raises interest through its unique approach, as the two sections of the book include specialized studies on folklorists and folklore from those counties, traditional customs from the Lands of Bârsa and Covasna, shepherd customs and songs from south-eastern Transylvania. Added to these is his attempt to compile a bibliography of the Romanian folklore from the Covasna and Harghita counties. The bibliography of the book, which included everything that was published over the course of 155 years, consists of 2080 titles of works on the local ethnography and folklore. This large volume will for a long time be an indispensable working tool for those interested in that geographical region – ethnomusicologists, ethnographers, bibliographers, researchers and students.

We also note that the cultural activities carried out over the decades generated, in turn, articles and studies materialized in the brochure *Cercetarea sociologică și acțiunea culturală* [Sociological Research and Cultural Action] (1973), or articles published in journals such as “Astra”, “Revista muzeelor și monumentelor”, “Îndrumătorul cultural”, “Cumidava”, “Revista bibliotecarilor”. Ethnography and folklore are also dealt with in articles such as: *Un sat – un muzeu* [A Village – a Museum], *Un act de valorificare a folclorului autentic (O arhivă contemporană de folclor, obiectiv al folcloriștilor brașoveni)* [An Act of Valorization of the Authentic Folklore (A Contemporary Folklore Archive as an Objective of the Folklorists from Brașov)].

4. Conclusions

Such a diverse and rich activity, doubled by the passion and boundless love for folklore, can hardly be sifted through and confined within the limits of a few evocative pages. To conclude, we can say that the life of the Romanian village and

the various forms of folk culture were the hallmarks of the entire activity carried out by Constantin Catrina. Thus, as an animator, he managed to boost the cultural activity in the localities of Braşov County by organizing various events (festivals, competitions, international tours), but also by involving himself personally in the organization and direction of musical groups (choral ensemble, marching band). Stemming from his love for his native village, his interest in ethnography and folklore led to his formation as an expert researcher of all the elements of folk culture, which he knew how to exploit through articles, studies and books that recommend him as a specialist in the curvature area of the Carpathians. His contributions to a better knowledge of the folklore from this geographical area are points of reference in the Romanian specialized literature. His fascination with the traditional creation often inspired him, while the solutions for choir harmonization of some of the songs he collected prove his skill in the treatment of modal melodic lines and reveal a suitable writing style for this kind of music.

However, behind the numerous works that have long entered the history of ethnology, folkloristics, Byzantinology and musicology, there was Constantin Catrina, the man: a knowledgeable interlocutor for ethnomusicologists and Byzantinologists, a model researcher, a guide for his younger collaborators and a generous friend to all those who had the chance to know him and to enjoy together the beauty of an age-old folk song, of a folk costume, or of a psaltic manuscript.

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