

# ROMANIAN MUSICAL NEOCLASSICISM – GATEWAY TOWARDS UNIVERSALITY

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**Abstract:** *Current facilitating the introduction of national creations into the circuit of universal values, Romanian Neoclassicism is the expression of the conciliation between national specificity and universal language, conciliation achieved through the synthesis between traditional forms and innovating modal language, and also through rethinking classical forms, with a view to implementing specific content, national ethos. Prominent representatives of the national musical patrimony, George Enescu, Filip Lazăr, Dinu Lipatti, Marţian Negrea, Theodor Rogalski, Paul Constantinescu, Zeno Vancea and others bring, through their creations, the essential renewals propelling Romanian music to the pantheon of world culture.*

**Key words:** *Neoclassicism, stylistic syntheses, revalorization, Byzantine element, folkloric element, tonal-modal symbiosis.*

## 1. Introduction

The field of Neoclassicism, covering a broad semantic area, neither makes reference here to the category of compositions characterised by objectivist content and expression manner nor resorts to the polyphonic forms of Baroque, but must be more broadly understood, in the sense of reconsidering classical, traditional patterns, amid the specificity and nationality of interwar Romanian musical culture.

Romanian musical Neoclassicism may be defined as the first great stylistic moment as regards configuring the prerequisites for integrating into universality and forming the bases of the national creation school. It is the moment when the two distinct realities – national and universal – turn into interdependent realities, in the way so plastically defined by Ştefan Niculescu: “[...] the national tends [...] towards a universal

value, and the universal relies, develops on national values”. With respect to the entry of our compositional art in the European plan, once with exceeding the precursors’ limits – oriented towards the Romantic current – one can therefore mention it simultaneously with the neoclassical option. “Gateway” to universality and modernity, Romanian musical Neoclassicism stands out – according to some scholars, such as Carmen-Antoaneta Stoianov – “during the most effervescent period experienced by our culture in general and by professional musical creation in particular”, i.e. precisely the interwar period, being deemed by her “one of the major upturns of the Romanian musical creation in this century and, anyway, the first stylistic current wherein our composition school comes into fruitful dialogue with the other European schools for which other orientations or currents held a significant share, too”.

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## 2. Content

The lack of a Classical foundation in our culture has resulted in replacing it with the synthesis of tangent aesthetics, with the achievement of stylistic syntheses between Neoclassicism and the other topical currents: folklorism, Impressionism, Neoromanticism, Neo-Byzantinism.

Romanian Neoclassicism is therefore a widespread phenomenon, which marks a maximal interest in the autochthonous composers' thinking, just when, at European level, this current loses its prominence (after the year 1930) reverberating its scope on stylistic directions of plainly differentiated aesthetics, in the localization action. The latest trends will absorb thereby manifold Neoclassical features:

- rethinking traditional patterns; laconism of form;
- reformulating Classical or pre-Classical techniques, procedures (even Bachian): specifically contrapuntal treatment-modalities, linearity of the polyphonic discourse;
- classically created themes and motives;
- definitely Classicizing features, concerting character, rhythmical-melodic motorism.

Speaking of the “extraordinary irradiation force, over time, of the Neoclassical genes”, Carmen Stoianov believes they hold a great capacity “to comply with modern compositional techniques”, and the “Romanian suggestions and proposals fall [...] under the dominant synthetic spirit of the time”.

Despite the absence of a Classical tradition in autochthonous musical culture, there are, nevertheless, “indices of a timid gesture possibly related to classical spirituality: Anton Pann’s action to polish popular song and to transform its publishing into musical and moral-

education activity, is Classically nuanced” (Carmen-Antoaneta Stoianov). Anton Pann is credited to have traced the two creative-adaptation paths of (Neo)Classicism to our specificity: discovery and enhancement of the Byzantinism underlying our music and inclusion of the folkloric element in the patterns of Western music: “[...] laconic character of musical expression, [...] playful nuance both of the collection title, *Love’s Hospital*, and of some pieces, moralizing tint of his approach, in-depth study of a clearly delimited territory – urban folklore – and horizon of psalm chanting on its adornment, operating as Hieromonk Macarius in a reductive sense [...], touch of fine humour – here are as many indices of Classical gestures in full Romantic century” (Carmen-Antoaneta Stoianov).

Regarded as the first representative of Romanian Neoclassicism, Enescu chooses this path to achieve the so-called “synthesis between Orient and Occident”. Reproducing Dan Voiculescu’s note, “it is appropriate to show that Enescu protochronically marked this phenomenon by such works as *Old-Style Suite for Piano*, *Octet*, *Dixtuor*, *The II<sup>nd</sup> Suite for Orchestra*, and so on”.

As synthesized by Clemensa Liliana Firca in her book “*Directii in muzica romaneasca 1900-1930*” [Directions in Romanian Music 1900-1930], one of the main elements that fit George Enescu’s creation in the aesthetics of Neoclassicism is the revalorization of Baroque, by resorting to specific forms and techniques, such as: suite, fugue, canon, chorus; the composer resorting to intensely contrapuntal scoring, to the use of the imitative counterpoint, of the contrapuntal-variation forms. (“*Suite for Piano op.1 in Old Style*”, “*Prelude and Fugue for Piano*”). The melodic contour unfolds in uninterrupted flux, of continuous metro-rhythmical pulsation, similar to the Bachian style.

As prominent Neoclassical-Neo-Baroque element, falling under the constructive-type Bachian melodies, the rondo-theme within Sonata the 2<sup>nd</sup> for Piano and Violin may be illustrated (p.III). We reproduce below the first four-beat phrase (classical pattern), as compared to the Bachian model, in order to note the “striking” resemblance:

Ex.

a) Enescu, *Sonata the II<sup>nd</sup>*, p.III



b) Bach, *Partita the 3<sup>rd</sup> for Violin – Bourrée*



Completing the classical scope of the work, the romantic-effusion character of the sonata, the expansiveness of solo playing, modelled between cantilena and declamation, outline a few specific elements of this work.

Under Enescu's stylistics there fall, in variegated genres of Neoclassical resonance, renowned musical personalities on European level: Dinu Lipatti, Marțian

Negrea, Theodor Rogalski, Paul Constantinescu, Zeno Vancea etc.

As regards Dinu Lipatti, for instance, the Neoclassicism whereto he adheres as reaction against Romanticism is manifested by the logic of construction and the formal balance of his creation. In “Sonatina for Piano and Violin”, composed in 1933, two extreme terms interweave: a stylized folkloric tint of the themes – recreated – and a treatment in the rigour of the Neo-Baroque polyphonic spirit of the themes, but in polytonal contrapuntal vision. The sonata form comprises sections sending to other patterns: the first part includes within the sonata-form, a treatment in the polyphonic-imitative spirit of an invention, and the other two parts interconnect in a theme with variations. A motive-filled quasi-cyclism unifies the themes throughout the work.

If, in terms of intonation, vague folkloric allusions reverberated out of the main theme, the secondary theme is clearly attached to a neoclassical specificity, by the language conveying Neo-Baroque techniques: imitation, sequence, pulsating rhythm in combinations of eights and sixteenths. The Bachian-type stretto at the end of part yields a special effect:

Ex. *Codetta*, p.I, m.142

Musical notation for the Codetta, p.I, m.142, showing Violin and Piano parts. The notation is in treble clef, 3/4 time, and key of D major. The Violin part starts with a quarter rest, followed by a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes, ending with a quarter rest. The Piano part starts with a quarter rest, followed by a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes, ending with a quarter rest. Dynamics include *pp* and *p*. A *rit.* marking is present above the Violin part.

In the concerto genre, there stand out Filip Lazăr (Concerto Grosso, 1927) and Dinu Lipatti (Concertino in Classical Style for Piano and String Orchestra, 1936), Paul Constantinescu, Sigismund Toduță, Ion Dumitrescu, Tudor Ciortea, Zeno Vancea (Concertos for String Orchestra), Sabin Drăgoi, Paul Constantinescu (Concertos for Soloist and Orchestra); orchestral miniatures are signed by Filip Lazăr, Sabin Drăgoi, Sigismund Toduță, Paul Constantinescu, and instrumental miniatures (especially for piano), are created by Filip Lazăr, Mihail Andricu, Marțian Negrea, Sabin Drăgoi, Mihail Jora, Paul Constantinescu.

The latter, in “Sonatina for Violin and Piano”, composed in 1933, a work deemed to be trailblazer both for his creation and for the entire Romanian creation of the genre, brings the same issue of the folkloric substance embedded in classical forms, initiated by Enescu or, not long ago, by Bartók, with the two sonatas for violin and piano (1921-1922).

Symphony, simfonietta stand out, during the delimited period, in the creation of Dimitrie Cuclin, Mihail Andricu, Paul Constantinescu etc. Specifically Baroque forms are cultivated – partita, prelude, fugue, invention, improvisation, toccata, chorus, passacaglia – in the creation of composers such as Zeno Vancea, Constantin Silvestri, Paul Constantinescu, Tudor Ciortea, Sigismund Toduță and so on.

Scenic genres acquire – by Sabin Drăgoi (Kir Ianulea, 1937) or Paul Constantinescu (A Stormy Night, 1934), Ion Nonna Otescu (From Matthew Reading, 1938) – a Neoclassical dimension; exploring areas of the situation and character humour, of the daily life. Vocal-symphonic creation – oratory and cantata – is put into circulation by such composers as Paul Constantinescu (the two religious oratories, 1946-1948), Sigismund Toduță (ballad-oratory Ewe, 1957).

This spirit that, according to Clemansa Firca, we might call classical, “far from being confused with the refuge in academic precepts, firstly emanates from a land Classicism of popular music itself”. In autochthonous compositional thinking, it is particularized by cooperating with other two paramount-importance factors consisting of:

- inclusion in the creative circuit of modal inflections, sometimes as tonal-modal symbiosis;
- enhancement of the folkloric and Byzantine intonations.

For many representatives of our interwar compositional art, the Neoclassical formula stands for an advanced phase of the synthesis between Western and folkloric-autochthonous tradition, being approached from various perspectives. If the influences of Romanticism were hardly compatible to the features of our popular melodies, being directly responsible for taking over the European major-minor system, the influences of the Neoclassical-Neo-Baroque style were much stronger as by their modal origin they are better suited to the structure of popular music.

It is known that the initial stage of the musical-language formation in our creation (the first two decades of the twentieth century) consisted in creatively processing popular melodies, either in guise of rhapsodies – as in Enescu’s early creation – or of popular-dance suites or choral processing. Nevertheless, during this period, the demonstration of the national-school viability was overshadowed by certain universalistic preoccupations, such as Castaldi School. “Folkloric Academism” – as this position was called by Zeno Vancea, asserted ever since Romanticism within national schools – had settled in the Romanian school perimeter before 1920, unable to solve – as noticed by Cl. L. Firca – “that conflict between

academic forms and misfit content to these forms”, which problem was solved in the immediate aftermath. The forerunning composers’ intention was, once with the enhancement of the expression possibilities of the autochthonous modes, to attempt a conciliation between universal and national, through – by Vasile Herman’s expression - «their tuning» to the great classical vocal or instrumental forms, and detaching, as far as possible, our specific ethos in the context of the other national schools”.

In the interwar period, a prominent place was held by the processing wherein the folkloric melodies were the theme of an extensive work, such as the sonata. Works of this genre were composed by representative composers of the time we are dealing with (Zeno Vancea, Tudor Ciortea, Sabin Drăgoi, Paul Constantinescu, Constantin Silvestri, Sigismund Toduță, Martioan Negrea and others).

Most composers’ preoccupation to resort to rethinking classical patterns with a view to achieving the fusion national-universal is placed in the interwar musicians’ common goal to militate for an authentically Romanian art. In this context, by V. Herman’s note, “sonata and symphony continue to fascinate many contemporary composers. Each of them attempts, in line with the force of his fantasy and technical knowledge, to bring a personal touch to the vast and complicate gear of elements that contribute to achieving such forms in the scoring style and modalities of our days.”

Under the treatment-direction in the spirit of the Neo-Baroque polyphonic rigour (imitation, canon) of the popular-origin set of themes, since the fourth decade, composers as Zeno Vancea, Sigismund Toduță, Ludovic Feldman and others have fallen. Neo-Baroque, Neo-

Renaissance being as many particular cases of Neoclassicism; Concerto grosso (1927) by Filip Lazăr, Prelude, Fugue and Toccata for Piano (1926) by Zeno Vancea refer to these currents if only by name...

### 3. Conclusions

Outstanding personality and visionary of his time, George Enescu is credited, beside being the first great Neoclassic, as called by D. Voiculescu, to be the trailblazer and mentor of the composers following him, creating the modern Romanian composition school.

This composer’s greatness and genius are firstly given by the two phenomena merging in his masterpieces.

- organic synthesis of all major experiences acquired by Western music, with a clear overall vision, in his own original conception.
- achievement, in the third decade, of that symbiosis “between the typically Romanian substance and feeling, exposed in particular, solid and original forms, rooted in the best traditions of the genre”

We dare say therefore that the stylistic direction of Neoclassicism, present in the Romanian creation, pertains to the field of syntheses

- Synthesis between the Neoclassical and folkloric style; a particular case, the less common synthesis between the Neoclassical and Byzantine-psalm style, universally achieved in a similar fusion of the Neoclassicism or Neo-Baroque with the Gregorian intonation (Respighi, Hindemith, Stravinski etc.);
- Synthesis between the traditional form and the innovating modal language or oscillation between Neoclassicism and modernity.

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