

# GEORGE ENESCU – VOIX DE LA STEPPE. FEW PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS (I)

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**Abstract:** *A great Enescu performer should be raised and accustomed from early ages to understand and deal with both its musical and instrumental challenges. Getting accustomed to Enescu's philosophical approach of the music and its deep Romanian sense is a natural way leading to the finest achievements of his best comprehension. That's why a process of his deepest accomplishment opens up with a good start within the educational process. Voix de la Steppe can be a worthwhile step in this regard. Even not considered among the greatest Enescu's piano works it still shows a good deal of complexity of his musical style.*

**Key words:** *reflection, piano pedagogy, education, performing.*

## 1. Introduction

There are two main aspects of the following issue. First is that any opportunity of thinking over and over to the values or meaning of a great composer's work can be at any time worthwhile. And a second one is considering George Enescu's music as a great piano pedagogy material worthy maybe a better regard over sometime.

Even more when regarding the work of our great national composer as George Enescu is. We, as Romanians, are privileged to be conational with the great personality of music and thinking who George Enescu was. His personality and work open up to us a chance of contemplating our inner image filtered through his deep philosophy and love for his country. Being aware of this one may get revealed at any time more and more

valuable details of his music and therefore of a better understanding of ourselves- as a community.

In spite of a rather long period of staying under an undeserved shadow, Enescu started to gain more and more recognition. And happened was mostly abroad. Hopefully things changed in a right way if we'd mention just the actual 21<sup>st</sup> edition of the 'George Enescu Festival' where an impressive amount of his most difficult works have been performed by excellent ensembles of all over the Europe at a high quality of performance.

A century ago Enescu was mostly valued as a brilliant performer. He was not particularly happy with that and was trying to focus mainly on his composing activity as his dearest, most favourite one. In that period, in 1913, he was initiating, among others, to write his 3<sup>rd</sup> Piano Suite, originally called *Pieces Impromptu*. In

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1916 was finishing it and each of the seven pieces have been clearly dated and placed at its end.

The whole suite signifies a special moment in composer's mastery development. In this respect there is to be pointed out each of the 7 pieces is of a different musical achievement. They are: *Mélodie*, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1913; *Voix de la Steppe*, Paris, 13<sup>th</sup> of July, 1913; *Mazurka Melancolique*, Cracalia, 23<sup>th</sup> of June; *Burlesque*, Cracalia, 23<sup>rd</sup> of June; *Appassionato*, Cracalia, 22<sup>nd</sup> of April; *Choral, Carillon Nocturne*, Sinaia 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1916.

*Mélodie* and *Voix de la steppe* as the first two pieces have been written both in 1913, hundred years ago. It has been chosen the second one as the main subject for this article because of its programmatic sense of a special poetical meaning finely translated in piano sound and therefore its special pedagogical virtue.

## 2. Few of the main Enescu's concerns

Even though generally, and we reckon quite many would agree with, a performer with no much secret regarding the instrumental art would approach Enescu's music at a satisfying level there is still the privilege of a Romanian performer of getting the most of this music comprehension. Its quintessence and therefore most authentic expression is a most natural skill of the native performer. Therefore promoting further Enescu's music should remain a constant, a permanent aim of our native performer's artistic activity too. It looks like much evident that Enescu's psychological and entire emotional complexity is best up to a Romanian native but well educated musicianship! of getting its entire range of comprehension.

One of the best supports in promoting and mostly sharing Enescu's music values

should first consist in that of being well studied and, at a large extent, approached and meditated over during the whole educational process.

In the frame of Enescu's preoccupation and study one (be it a pedagogue or a student) should always keep in mind the composer has developed a wide and complex activity. The creator's personality was exceptionally doubled by the whole range of virtues as a musician: one of the greatest performers of the world of his times, a deep meditating human being and philosopher completing his broad personality with the side of a great pedagogue and character as well. The substantial edited number of interviews and dialogs are as many evidences of his nobles of thinking and acting. In this respect one may get more accurate the features of his art by taking him as a great model too.

By going through the large number of volumes dedicated to Enescu's life, creation or wisdom (most of them are actually not being translated, therefore not available to most of foreign readers!) one may notice that a main concern of his was towards transcending as much as possible the most accurate Romanian spirit. He was looking towards getting its deepest essence through and into music. In fact was working towards creating and framing the inner portrait of the Romanian soul and feel.

Here, for instance, is a brief selection of Enescu's regard and concern on the subject: '[...] *there is a general characteristic which comes out from our national music, the same as the general idea taken from a thoughtful reflective work: it is about sadness dwelling in the joy. This sort of feeling got its inspiration from our valleys and hills, from the special nuance of our sky, from our specific thoughts which push us and provoke the birth of a longing sort of feeling which*

cannot be well defined’, ‘[...] that sort of undefined longing feeling but deeply moving seems to me being the most peculiar feature of the Romanian songs’- was reckoning in 1912 in an interview offered to A. I. Serban [1], one year before bounding over *Pieces Impromptu*.

One may see yet through the above quotation that composer was searching not just for the most peculiar Romanian sound and musicality but going far beyond its outwards features: he was aiming to reveal a most authentic nature of the Romanian tunes and sound and therefore its inwards movement. And this task compulsory has to pass into a performer concern.

On another hand performers have to face a high demand of both its technique and musical level. Without doubt Enescu’s greatest performer needs to be in the possession of, apart from a highly commended instrumental level and of some exceptional musical skills, a deep thoughtful concern towards getting an utmost human comprehension. This is a truth which may be found outlined too by the composer himself in various circumstances. His wise words born from a high humanity at any time sustained by his entire life and action get a special significance while enlightening too the sense of his work. The great musician had the subtlety of expressing his noble thoughts and feelings on everything he was concerned in (regarding life, art and surrounding world) in a most simple and direct way.

‘One of the picks of my tragedy consists in the fact I can see everything on its large dimension’ – he admitted once in a candid self-mockery, an usual habit of him as the author Marin Marian asserts in his book on G.Enescu [3]. To better get these words one may find an another statement: ‘Do not lose itself in the small history’- said with another opportunity the great composer. Apparently the two statements

refer to two different issues: first one as a critique note on own personality while the second regards the performer’s artistry. Thoroughly the two statements complete and enlighten each other while fundamentally meets in a same point: a great care towards comprehending and spreading through music some of the major and eternal human spirit values [2].

As one may notice any of the Enescu’s views are and will ever be of great, remarkable pedagogical value.

### 3. Performing Enescu at the earliest age.

Any Romanian musician may feel a powerful call under Enescu’s wisdom influence towards getting the utmost sense of his art, of his thinking or even sense of his acting. The increasing number of books and writings are quite much testifying that.

In this respect one may find a great support in another statement carefully expressed by our Maestro: ‘In all compositions, the personality and intentions of the composer should be born in our mind.

There is necessary to read his biography, to carefully note his character features, to know what his work means to him, and what he wanted it to mean to humanity and the world in general’ – published in USA, in *The Washington Stars* in 1934. The entire piece of this attentive concern may be found in a splendid Anthology of texts and thoughts of George Enescu under the title *A Personality of the Thinking and of the Art*. [4] As one may be aware the concern doesn’t necessarily refer just to students or performers at the beginning of their professional way. Any musician studying or willing to perform a certain work at a certain moment can find in these words a great support of his activity and without any doubt it makes a great use to the pedagogical and educative area.

In order to get used to Enescu's instrumental technique or musical challenges the approach of his music at the earliest age possible would be most appropriate, with a special look towards piano pedagogy. Enescu's work implies a wide performing difficulty range either regarding technique or musical level. Among his music there is always an appropriate choice either for a mature greatly developed performer or for a young student on his way towards achieving an exceptional level.

Through the point of view of the pedagogy it rather goes without saying that Enescu's musical character may easier be captured and 'handled' by a native performer, mostly with regards to the youngest performers sensitivity. It would be constructive if the last would be raised and educated on this base. The fruits of this approach would be clearly perceived in one's development, and this certainly would be of a special significance. At least in the sense, or senses, pointed out till this point of the paper.

Two points of this demonstration aroused yet as a first conclusion. They look to two important aspects of Enescu's music performance and comprehension. Above the Romanian sense and character of the music as a first aspect arises the high composer's philosophic and psychological overview.

Therefore the performer of this music should take a special responsibility in how and what is expressing or even spotting among the multiple and, so often, complicated polyphonic layers. Building and carefully preparing either its artistic and nevertheless human personality is another compulsory requirement of an authentic performer of Enescu's music.

#### **4. Short overlook on Enescu's activity and work during 1913 - 1916**

1913 was marking the beginning of a period of some achievements of great plans in Enescu's life. He succeeded instituting a national prize for composition in order to encourage and promote the young Romanian talents and the Romanian music. For its accomplishment he donated a generous amount of money.

As representative period of Enescu's activity, 1913-1916, has been one of the busiest too: Enescu was achieving a glorious worldwide career as a brilliant virtuoso while trying his best in bringing to life some of his greatest works.

Composer was though not feeling particularly happy with his extensive performing career as was too much preventing him from his favourite activity: composing. Therefore he was doing special efforts towards the accomplishment of his favourite regard. In that period were born masterworks or great works like *Symphony No 2*, *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Orchestral Suite op.20*, *Three melodies on Fernand Gregh Lyrics op.19* and while extensively performing throughout Europe he was completing as well his *Third Piano Suite* (1913-16) under the title of *Pieces Impromptu op.18*.

*Pieces op.18* were placed in the middle of his piano compositions stage as a transitory one. They are characterised by a gradual process of crystallization of his originality of his mastery. His preminent features were growing while withdrawing from external influences. Even though a certain fine impressionistic touch is to be remarked *Pieces Impromptu op.18* is of a special significance. It represents the composers' gradual search towards defining his original musical way and is laying on a clear improvisatory style.

Some of main features of Enescu's arising musical originality this paper briefly indicated them in the chapters

above. As referred earlier one of the most important was his great attention towards catching the most authentic and deepest Romanian music individuality and that was taking a clear and ample form too.

Trying to musically frame such a high purpose may be appreciated as of a great philosopher following a high spiritual path too apart from the one of a great musician.

#### 4.1. About the 3<sup>rd</sup> piano Suite

Originally titled by its author as *Pieces Impromptu*, the 7 pieces have been written in a representative period of his life. As it is shown above Enescu was extensively performing throughout Europe and USA. In spite of his busy time as a performer he was still looking for some little time towards writing and thinking over his favourite activity.

Instead of the usual accept of a suite one would find in fact a miscellaneous approach of the pieces. As there is announced in their generic title composer was concerned in a variety of characters and images. As title suggests is written in an improvisatory style which makes it even more attractive. In this respect pieces are heterogeneous as a musical style, language and message and therefore regarding the piano art involved. Enescu's programmatic orientation and preference is also coming out from most of them.

We'd like to remark here as an important point that through the qualities mentioned above the whole suite recommends itself as a great piano pedagogy material. As a constant feature of the improvisatory suite each piece is individually different to the others showing composer's most peculiar inclination to lyricism and poetry - a mixture of both contemplative and volcanic sides. Rather same as in *Symphony No 2*, the ethos of this piano Suite seems to be orientated more towards dreaming, poetry, usage of

colours. One may notice a certain impressionistic pictorial French style as a preference for the piano touch. A leading atmosphere of reflection and meditation comes out from the whole of this music.

There is a general strong characteristic coming out of the piano Suite: under the umbrella of the titles suggesting western classical music forms there are to be found suggestions of typical Romanian tunes or Romanian characteristic sound effects.

#### 4.2. Few preliminary considerations on *Voix de la steppe*

Even though Enescu didn't include it among the greatest achievements of the Suite one may consider though *Voix de la steppe* among the representative ones. As a matter of fact the composer recognized and described the last one, *Carillon nocturne*, as the best one of the Suite. This is a proof he really found his way until the last one which is the masterwork among the pieces of this beautiful Suite

Resembling more to a miniature form it has been sometime compared to the epic expressive dimensions of a Chopinian Ballade. Placed at the beginning of the Suite as the second piece, *Voix de la steppe* shows Enescu's focus on expressing some of his intense feelings of longing his country. All the specific poetical meanings have been caught in the borders of a western classical form and a metaphoric programme.

In the summer of 1913, while in Paris, Enescu worked on the first two pieces *Melodie*, dated with 1<sup>st</sup> of June and *Voix de la steppe*, dated with 13<sup>th</sup> of July. Among them the second one presents a more significant number of appealing aspects which recommends it as being more specific to composer's searches and aim at that time.

Even Enescu didn't really consider, *Voix de la steppe* may be reckoned as one of the most interesting and most attractive pieces of the whole suite. Even though its composer really valued only the last three pieces.

Any pianist, pedagogue or musician willing to explore *Voix de la steppe* may undoubtedly find a number of aspects which may always recommend it as a wonderful piece to be studied. A piano pedagogue may find a great interest mostly in aspects like: 1. The poetical thread and its title as a metaphor of the constant homesick of Enescu's feeling when far away from his country 2. The piano art involved with the programmatic suggestion meaning a diversity of fine piano dynamic layers so difficult to achieve therefore an important school of piano mastery 3. The polyphonic layers and the harmonic movement work as great educative aim.

Written in a flowing improvisatory manner its inwardness shows a sensitive musical translation of very powerful feelings. It requires a good control of a number of the highest aspects of performing art involved in a relative simple comprehending level.

## 6. Conclusion

As primary conclusions we finally stress out that through all points shown above *Voix de la Steppe* reflects few pedagogical targets: both basic and finest emotions put together, a fine educative aesthetic and in the top of them a piano art less virtuoso but

more of refinement demand which finally needs fine performing skills.

*Voix de la Steppe* certainly worth a better attention of the piano pedagogy at least from the points of view stressed above. The musical text splendidly mirrors them and there is more to be revealed to a further closer look.

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