

The 1989 Revolution through the eyes of an American composer

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Abstract: *The 1989 Revolution was an important moment in Romania's history. Today, through the testimonies of those who lived through December 89, we can understand the struggle that people fought to gain access to a better life, a life that they won for us, the people of today. The subject has been a source of inspiration for foreigners, including the American composer Aaron Garber, who, being married to a Romanian woman and learning about the life Romanians led at that time and the prohibitions they were under because of the communist regime, decided to compose a work on the 1989 event as it started in Timisoara. It is important to emphasize that the characters in this work include martyrs of the 1989 Revolution, namely sisters Mariana and Margareta Caceu. The names of the two sisters can be found at the Timisoara Revolution Memorial, an association that honors and keeps alive the memory of martyred heroes, offering the general public the truth about the events of December 1989.*

Key-words: *The 1989 revolution, martyred characters, American composer, historical reality in opera creation.*

1. Introduction

The revolution of 1989 is for the Romanian people, a historical moment full of emotional charge, due to the number of victims and the rebellion against the communist system. The revolution began in Timisoara, the city that had the courage to fight, regardless of the instigations or political games being played at the time. The lives of many young people were sacrificed, the awful testimonies of the people but also the sinister scenery, are just some of the images Romanians witnessed.

In 2019, through a beautiful collaboration of the Faculty of Music and Theater of Timisoara, in the repertoire of the opera class, an American opera entitled Revolution 1989 enters this time. The astonishment was all the greater, as the subject of this work was an important event in the history of the Romanian nation.

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The work captures the shortcomings and difficult moments Romania went through during that period. The details are well outlined and emphasized in the musical text of the work, and also supported by the orchestral melody, which manages to illustrate the events.

Throughout the process of studying and integrating the characters, many students and teachers asked themselves the question: "Why did an American compose an opera about the revolution, but we Romanians did not?" Perhaps because the episode was too painful for the generations that lived through those times. However, I believe that people are defined by their history. People's courage and desire for freedom are an example for today's generation. Our roots lie in the past.

This work was composed by an American who really empathized with our people, but at the heart of the creation are the stories of a Romanian.

I will bring to the readers' attention some of the testimonies of revolutionaries such as Ioan Savu. A story that conveys the patriotic spirit and courage to fight for freedom.

This work has never been dealt with in a conference before, which gives it a totally original stamp. I will discuss the emotional charge that I personally felt playing the role of Margareta Caceu, a martyr of the revolution, which we will discuss in the following, but also the relationship between the characters and the patriotic feeling.

What it meant from a psychological point of view, but also what it implied from a musical point of view, are two key aspects that I will address.

The opera is built on a historical narrative thread, many of the characters are real, others are fictional. The Timisoara Revolution Memorial Association presents to the general public a permanent exhibition dedicated to this historical event.

Among the names of the martyrs on the list inside the building, I found the names of the two sisters Mariana and Margareta Caceu, characters in the opera *Revolution 1989*. Their fate is tragic, just as in real life. In the opera, the two sisters are shot on the steps of the cathedral, their deaths suggesting the grief of families who have lost their loved ones.

2. Objectives

With this article I aim to bring to the public's attention several aspects about the importance of the Revolution of 1989.

First of all, to emphasize that a historical subject, experienced by the people, can have a colossal impact on the collective psyche, and the message conveyed through music manages to double this effect. As an example, I refer to the world premiere of the opera *Revolution 1989*, in December 2019, precisely on the stage of

the Timisoara Opera, when the audience interacted with the soloists and the choir in a special way. I confess that I have never before seen such a lively audience, living every moment, of course, many of those present living the 1989 Revolution and knowing its losses. When the anthem was sung, it was one of the rare moments when the stage was no longer demarcated from the audience, all those present in the opera house were performers.

Secondly, this musical work honors the memory of the martyrs of the Revolution. In addition to the basic subject that is known to the general public, this opera deals in particular with the lives of martyrs. As I analyzed this opera in my doctoral dissertation, I looked for details about the sisters Mariana and Margareta Caceu, characters in Aaron Garber's opera. During my research, I found information at the Timisoara Revolution Memorial, an association that keeps alive the memory of yesterday's heroes. Turns out the two sisters were shot to death. The body of one of the two disappeared in the cover-up.

In another vein, in addition to the two points of view, the creation can be the subject of scientific work, as there are many roles that can be analyzed. From a musical point of view, there are many other things that could be approached and interpreted.

3. Materials and methods

In order to publicize this work, I used several relevant materials, from scores, libretti, books, etc. but also journalistic methods of approach, such as conducting relevant interviews.

3.1. Margareta, martyr of the Revolution

As I have already mentioned in the above lines, the work *Revolution 1989*, manages to weave, in a totally original way, the fictional elements with the real ones. This time, however, we are going to discuss a martyr of the Revolution, namely Margareta Caceu, whose name can be found on the list on the premises of the Revolution Memorial in Timisoara. In the work, Margareta's interventions are always accompanied by Mariana's, the composer succeeding in creating a playful sound effect through the overlapping interventions of the soprano and mezzo-soprano voices or by complementing the two.

From a musical point of view, the role of Margareta is not very demanding for the performer, as the character contributes to the dialog along with the other participants in the scene. Margareta does not have arias or long musical moments

where she is vocally demanding. However, the performer must have a well-defined vocal technique, as the interventions are constructed in all three registers: low, medium and high.

Another important feature of the role is that the soloist has to be exact on the musical notes, because complementing Mariana's voice, the harmony has to be perfect to create the desired sound effect. The first appearance of the two sisters on stage is when the curtain opens, as they are celebrated on their birthday. The first detail we learn about the two girls is that they are twins turning sixteen, a fact mentioned by the characters present in the action. In reality, Mariana and Margareta Caceu, martyrs of the Timisoara Revolution, were aged 37 and 40 respectively at the time of their deaths. This is inscribed, as mentioned on the list of victims of 1989 in Timișoara, in the premises of the Revolution Memorial.

The image shows a musical score for two vocalists and piano accompaniment. The top system (measures 69-76) features two vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The first vocal line (Mariana) has lyrics: "Come, let's all sit down to eat. I have made your fa-vor-ite meal." The second vocal line (Margareta) has lyrics: "Ma-ma, your cab-bage rolls are". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *rit.*. The bottom system (measures 76-77) continues the vocal lines with lyrics: "al-ways the best!" and includes dynamic markings like *a tempo* and *mf*.

Fig. 1. Aaron Garber – *Revolution 1989*, ms 74-76

As we can notice from Figure 1, Margareta's first intervention in the opera is accompanied in duet by Mariana's voice. The nuance suggested by the composer is mezzo-forte, to emphasize in this way their astonishment: "Mamma, your cabbage rolls are always the best."

Aaron Garber emphasizes through these details, the shortcomings of those times. If today, having choice dishes on the table is a necessity, in communist times, for the vast majority of the community, it was not accessible. Thus, the first

introduction to Revolution 1989, takes place in the parental home, where the sisters' birthday is celebrated.

At first, the plot is upbeat, but as the story progresses, the two children, now more curious, a characteristic of their age, ask their father about the country's president. He tells them about Romania's plight in recent years, calling Nicolae Ceausescu a dictator.

In this scene, the sisters come to a realization, their first contact with the harsh reality of their lives. The questions are growing more and more, and the realization of reality is more and more surprising for them. Mihai, their brother, with his mother, enters the scene with their hands full of oranges to give them as a present to the twins. The composer again emphasizes, through the joy of the two sisters, the lack of staple foods on the Romanian table during the communist regime.

At the time of the premiere, the death of the two sisters had a strong impact especially for the audience present at that moment in the Romanian National Opera in Timisoara. The fact that the story was a true one and that many of those who attended had suffered loss among those close to them, made this moment a true masterpiece.

The eglogue created at that moment gave a very special connotation to the scene. Many people had tears in their eyes, others walked out unable to contain their emotions. All these details gave the impression of a Revolution alive in the souls of Romanians. The stage and the audience merged, and the feeling that swept over us was something very special.

The opera proved that historical truth could deliver a powerful message through the warm voices of the performers. The Revolution will certainly remain alive through this creation, which was meant to honor the bravery of Romania at that time.

I confess that this role has a very strong emotional charge. Different from other roles I've played over the years. From a psychological point of view you carry that pain, because you feel it, it really existed, and Margareta Caceu was somebody's daughter. Her body was stolen from the hospital morgue in Timisoara and burned at the crematorium in Bucharest. A profound story, reinforced by the musical text which emphasizes the missing very well. \

3.2. Interviewing real revolutionaries

Andra Barbul: On December 22, 1989, the people of Timisoara knelt and intoned the Lord's Prayer. What do you think this sign represented for the city's inhabitants? How important was this gesture of faith?

Ioan Savu: Yes, as you can see from the photos and filmed images, perhaps 150,000 people, in the Opera Square, in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral, in the adjacent streets, in the parking lot of Modex, or in the Opera Balcony, where we were then, kneeling, facing the Cathedral, we said from the depths of our beings the prayer "Our Father" and we cried out from the deepest depths of our being: "There is God!", as a revelation, a rediscovery, a hope, a normality that lay hidden within us and burst forth into naturalness and life, breaking all the trappings of all kinds of obstacles. God, what an uplifting moment! I would like to say, though, that in the days leading up to it, they were singing: "He's coming again, he's coming again, for the Lord is coming again." Yes, then it was magnificent! It was then for the first time, in those dramatic days, when such a crowd of people, in one voice, discovered and cried out from ourselves and from the hopes of a nation on its knees for 45 years, tormented and oppressed, "the joy of understanding", then we realized that only God was with us, always, even when we seemed to be alone in the face of all the repressive forces of the communist state, isolated from the country and the world!

I understood that we were not alone, and I also understood what the path is now. I should say that back then, in Timisoara, in the days of the Revolution, not even pick pocketers stole. There was then, in almost all of us, a huge potential for change, and a huge desire!

3.3. Collaboration with the military music of the 18th ISR *Decebal* Brigade from Timisoara

During the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, "Deșteaptă-te române" was chanted by demonstrators despite the ban imposed by the communist regime. We can say that the people established this patriotic song, which since 1990 has been declared the country's national anthem. In the Constitution, in article 12, paragraph 3, this is stipulated: "The national anthem of Romania is "Deșteaptă-te române". The poem "Un răsunet" by Andrei Mureșanu, published during the Revolution of 1848, was put into verse in a few days, having been sung for the first time in Râmnicu Vâlcea on July 29, the date on which we still celebrate the national anthem day, the poem became an anthem under the name "Deșteaptă-te române", being performed on every occasion when a conflict arose in Romania, we mention The War of Independence, the First and the Second World War. Immediately after the establishment of the communist dictatorship, on December 30, 1941, when King Mihai I was forced to abdicate.

Starting from December 1989, the lyrics of this anthem that followed throughout history, representing the courage and strength of the Romanian people, is interpreted in different forms, instrumental or vocal, in the context of the events that require this.

Because this subject of the Revolution of 1989 can be correlated with many subjects and with many disciplines, among which I demonstrated that music also fits, I dedicated this subchapter to my collaboration with the Military Music of the 18th ISR Decebal Brigade. Because since the Revolution, our anthem is *Deșteaptă-te române*, and the Romanian army interprets it on every important occasion. I mention this because I have collaborated many times with these talented young people, and when I sing the anthem with them, it seems to me the most patriotic thing and the greatest tribute to those who died in 1989.

4. Results and Discussions

As I have studied other subjects over the years, always being interested in music and "something else", I believe that through this work we can educate the new generation. The event of the Revolution in 1989 is studied in history and is one of the subjects in the compulsory baccalaureate. It is shown that through art, through music, the message reaches the public much more easily.

5. Conclusions

Many things have been said about the 1989 Revolution, but the reality belongs to the people. Timisoara began a struggle, a struggle for a better life and hope for tomorrow.

I chose this subject because I wanted to shed light on the past of the Romanian people. Through this research I want to inspire other students my age to get closer to what once was, the history of this country.

Revolution 1989, of course, depicts communist Romania through the eyes of an American. Although things have been rendered differently from the reality of that time, we can appreciate the work of a foreigner to understand in as much detail as possible the experiences of Romanians at that time.

One thing is certain, and that is that every participant at the time of the Revolution, whether they were there 34 years ago, or whether they transposed themselves and tried to imagine the burden, understood one thing, and that is that Romanians resisted for days in the streets of the cities, fighting the system, in order

to provide a better life for future generations. Today, we can still thank many of those who fought for freedom, as we were lucky enough to be born relatively close to the event. We also carry in our hearts all those who paid with their lives for their bereaved families and we promise to pass on these values.

Music has shown once again that it can bring to the surface feelings and memories that no other discipline can. History remains a certainty, but music, through the sound of the orchestra and the voices of the performers, manages to bring to light the spirit of the moment of that time.

6. Acknowledgements

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