

CONVERTING NATIONALISM INTO SOCIALISM THROUGH FOLK MUSIC IN STALINIST ROMANIA

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SUMMARY. When a political change occurs, either in democratic or under authoritarian circumstances, the institutional dimension is the first that manifests the control exerted by the new power. We know that the socialist realism was imposed by politicians but in the end, it was created by the composers. Either convinced or not by the communist beliefs, they were faced with providing content for a doctrine that had clear contours and sharp direction, but with technical dimensions impossible to pinpoint. My intention is to shed light not on the politically active composers (whose works explicitly conveyed the propaganda messages of the regime), but rather on those that were trying to find a middle ground between the requirements of the socialist realism canon and their own ideals and aesthetic preferences. One of the most common solutions used by these composers, and one of the most polyvalent, was the appeal to folklore. It conveniently satisfied both the nationalism and the artistic aspirations of the interwar school of composition as well as the requirements of the communist present.

Keywords: Nationalism, socialist realism, Stalinist Romania, Soviet model, Romanian Composers Union.

When a political change occurs, either in democratic or under authoritarian circumstances, the institutional dimension is the first that manifests the control exerted by the new power. Besides the institutional positions and the replacement of some of the personnel, besides all the gradual restructuring that the communists made of the musical field, what did really communism changed in music? How the socialist realist doctrine should have supposed to sound and what were the criteria to evaluate such a creation?

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Once the communists gained control of Romania in early 1948, they quickly set about implementing the Stalinist agenda of a centrally planned, state-owned economy and the complete reordering of intellectual and artistic life. The new Romanian political elite adopted without question the Soviet ideal of socialist realism as the way to bring artists into line with political ideology. We know that politicians imposed the socialist realism but, in the end, the composers created it. Either they were convinced or not by the communist beliefs, they were faced with providing content for a doctrine that had clear contours and sharp direction, but with technical dimensions impossible to pinpoint.

But since the present moment was in constant change, the artistic endeavors that were meant to assert the political objectives were soon exhausted. In this situation, many composers were able to maintain a semblance of “doctrinal purity” by following the folkloric path. There were not few of the Romanian musical creations of the 50s that had no direct Soviet glitter of propaganda-based “reality,” yet the authorities were not overly concerned by such works, as they would have fulfilled the important, though rather amorphous, ideal of “speaking to the masses.”

My intention is to shed light not on the politically active composers (whose works explicitly conveyed the propaganda messages of the regime), but rather on those that were trying to find a middle ground between the requirements of the socialist realism canon and their own ideals and aesthetic preferences. One of the most common solutions used by these composers, and also one of the most polyvalent, was the appeal to folklore. It conveniently satisfied both the nationalism and the artistic aspirations of the interwar school of composition as well as the requirements of the communist present.

By considering a selection of tense discussions between composers held especially around changing moments during the history of the 20th century Romania, I argue that music not only was used as an ideological tool, but also translated a national identity crisis that was triggered every time there was a political shock/change. The same crises reflected in other forms of art and literature. I focus my ideas not only on the historical changes, pressures and manipulations that occurred in the 1950s – a typical of contemporary criticism in Romania as well as in many other states – but also on more recent aspects that challenge the dominant scholarly narratives still indebted either to communist, and post-communist scholar conventions.

The narratives of musicology about music in the Soviet Marxist-Leninist years

“The only absolutely certain thing is the future, since the past is constantly changing” is a quote line that got my attention when reading a study about the Romanian musical writing of its past², appeared in 2007, the same year that Romania entered EU. Starting from his line I would like to continue an indirect dialogue with the author by taking over the opportunity of being a young scholar or a present-day musicologist that can walk around and among the various communistic demons and heroes and frame their epistemologies. I try to take further the challenge and see how the Romanian composers adapted the realities of the socialist realism ideology into their creation through folk music, and to see if the nationalist voice continued to exist in the communist internationalist years overt.

It has past 30 years since the fall of the communism in Romania and the writing of Romania’s music history during the communist regime is still tucking the surface. This is not to say that scholars and authors have refused to engage with the nation’s past. Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Doru Popovici, Octavian Lazăr Cosma, Speranța Rădulescu, and Anca Giurchescu, among others, have started investigations about the musical past, but the discussion deserve depth.³ Mainly, the music of the second half of the 20th century is still about the musical aesthetics of the generation from the 70s onward with its contemporary and experimental searches. Nothing about the music written under the Stalinist realities excepting its simplicity, diatonic and choral profile that paid the tribute for the regime. Besides the literature that cover but not exhaust the communist years, musicology still must catch up with its recent history although 30 years has passed since the communism has

² Crotty, Joel, “A Preliminary Investigation of Music, Socialist Realism, and the Romanian Experience, 1948–1959: (Re)reading, (Re)listening, and (Re)writing Music History for a Different Audience”, in *Journal of Musicological Research*, 2007, 26:2-3, 151-176.

³ Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian music between 1944-2000)*, București, Editura Muzicală, 2002; Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica nouă între modern și postmodern (The new music between modern and postmodern)*, București, Editura Muzicală, 2004; *Music in Dark Times. Europe East and West, 1930-1950*, edited by Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică București, 2016; Octavian Lazăr Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești (Romanian music universe)*, 1995; Speranța Rădulescu, *Peisaje muzicale in Romania secolului XX* (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 2002); Anca Giurchescu, “The National Festival ‘Song to Romania’: Manipulation of Symbols in the Political Discourse”, in *Symbols of Power: The Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. Claes Arvidsson and Lars Erik Blomquist (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1987).

left the building. This situation must have to do with the perception among musicologists that socialist realist music is "...ethically and aesthetically 'bad.'"⁴

In a politically charged environment, it is very likely that it is impossible for scholars to avoid falling under a politicized attitude. This occurs since most of the cultural goods that deal with folk music (from ethnomusicological field research to national music and the history of national music) and they do so because of their capacity to support a political discourse. It is more likely to happen especially if these products attract institutional backing and are published using public or government money. There are, of course, various degrees or nuances of this political charged attitude when talking about the national cultural goods, but what is perhaps most interesting is that these shades of systematic, analytical, or theoretical refinements can convince that research and scholarship are apolitical. This illusory outside stance is still claimed by many Romanian musicologists and ethnomusicologists who continue to think that by focusing on the mechanical elements of their discipline they can avoid politics.⁵

When post-communist Romanian musicology speaks about the music in communism, especially in the Stalinist years, it is most often seen through the lenses of value appreciation armed with a polemicist attitude. The propagandistic cantatas, the choral music is evaluated as simple and stereotypical. Which they are simple and following a stereotype, but what I am trying to say is when addressing the issue of resurrecting the blatantly propagandistic music forms a bygone era, is not just a methodological concern for musicologists outside Romania, but more for those who live and work in the country. The general observed attitude of musicologists since the revolution in 1989 is one that traces around the edges and that avoids the unpleasantness of discussing music that did not have a reliance on socialist realism as its *raison d'être*. If we think about the fact that not all the Romanian composers active in those years were inflamed ideologues, then we might consider looking more closely in their musical creation that was trapped between ideology pressure and subjective esthetical and technical options. The Cold War is long over, and new demons have at last been found to replace communism. It is surely time to set aside the romanticized rhetoric and examine this period as historians, not as polemicists.

⁴ Crotty, Joel 171-172.

⁵ Marian-Bălașa, Marin, "On the Political Contribution of Ethnomusicology: From Fascist Nationalism to Communist Ethnocentrism", in *Journal of Musicological Research*, 2007, 26:2-3, 193-213.

The Soviet model

Facing the administrative changes after the First World War when Romania received Transylvania, Bucovina, Bessarabia, and the southeast regions, establishing itself as the new Romanian modern national state, until after the Second World War when communism took power over Romania, the national identity was a constant subject in debates and in the making, music reflecting this process.

Nationalist music as its 19th century form was out of favor when communism took control over the music field. That was already happening with all the modernism of the first half of 20th century that ousted nationalism. Of course, modernists still maintained some of the symbolic value infused to folk music remained, especially its identification with the natural and collective, but the national community was not evoked anymore.⁶ Once the socialist realist ideology started to be applied to many horizons, contrasts appeared. It was to oppose modernism and avant-garde, attitudes accused of being “decadent”, “anti-human” and associated to bourgeois art dependent upon capitalist money. The ideology was promoting the art of the proletariat “humanistic” and “progressive”. For communists, the attitudes toward folk music had to contain something specifically *revolutionary* or *progressive* rather than merely national, so the slogan of bringing high culture closer to the masses would encourage the interest in folk music but only as representative for the proletariat with its healthy roots in the rural. That was the beginning of the peasant music and the proletarian song.

The mutual adjustment between nationalist and socialist mythologies was a complex process. When the practical application and development of the Soviet Marxist-Leninism acknowledged the realities of the nation states, the nationalism ideology was employed for socialist ends. And so, the rhetorical strategies of romantic nationalism were retained and forged to new purposes and that had resulted many times in self-defeating for the regime, if not distorted situations.

After 1945 and through the new cultural system imposed by Moscow the arts and literature in Romania became instruments of state politics, with characteristic coordinates. The soviet model was imposed and applied, being the only accepted model where state unions of artists, literates and composers were expected to realize vague slogans and principles in their work that an officially bureau approved, and the details of style and content were filled in.

⁶ Samson, Jim, “East-Central Europe: Nationalism or Modernism?”, in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism. History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, ed. Athena S. Leoussi, Steven Grosby, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 61.

Between 1945 and 1949, when communists took over the Romanian Composers Society and reorganized it under the Romanian Composers Union. It was a repressive period where those who were suspected to be opposed or reject the ideology were found and punished by exclusion, jail, or forced labor. Based on soviet model, ministries and other institutions created purge commissions designed to clean the system of elements associated with the bourgeoisie and the former elites.

When Lenin assigned Stalin to develop the Party's policy regarding nationality, Stalin came out with "Marxism and the National Question" where he defined the nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people formed based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological character, manifested in a common culture".⁷

When young, ambitious, and most ardent socialist musical figure Matei Socor – author of the current then hymns "Zdrobite cătușe" (Crushed cuffs) and "Te slăvim, Românie" (We pray you, Romania) – took over the direction of the Composers Union in 1949, he presented a report. That report contained evaluations of the music from the interwar period considered too cosmopolitan and formalist, giving directives that composers should pay attention to folk music only if conferred a new content, "a socialist one where the melody should be the purpose itself". He was presenting the ideas discussed in *the February Resolution of the Communist Party Central Committee* held in 1948 where Zhdanov emphasized on folk tune melodicism.⁸ The general tendencies of official policy throughout the 30s and 40s in the Soviet Union exerted pressure on composers to work within the stylistic boundaries of Glinka and The Five. The urban proletariat rather than rural peasantry took the role of the cultural guardian when composers sought, one more time, to recycle the same folkloric tunes from the rural or at least what the 19th century representations indicated.

The new ideology was imposing in Romania through recommendations like "composers should catch those elements that contribute to the music's progress, and they should introduce the materialist dialect in their thinking of music"⁹. This idea appeared in 1948, in a newspaper material called "The two ideological positions in music" signed by the young and enthusiastic composer Alfred Mendelsohn who basically was drawing attention over what he called as "**democratic**" vs "**decadent**" music. The message of a work

⁷ Frolova-Walker, Marina, "National in Form, Socialist in Content: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics", in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Summer, 1998, Vol. 51, No. 2, 334.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mendelsohn, Alfred, „Cele două poziții ideologice în muzică” (The Two Ideological Positions in Music), in *Flacăra*, 4 ian. 1948, 158.

should be clear, mobilizing, stimulating and accessible. Composer Mihail Jora, who was by then the head of the Composers Society, questioned what might be a democratic music, saying that there are various music categories, from the folk song to the symphony, but the uninitiated public would not understand the latest, and therefore the working class could not own the right to criticize it. He firmly sustained that the creator should not climb down to the level of individual understanding, instead to raise the public understanding of the cultivated music.¹⁰ That was a confrontation of class perspectives that socialism intended to eliminate. Jora's way of seeing the process of cultivating the art music as a knowledge transfer from top down, from the elites to the masses, was contested by the socialist perspective of reversing the angle and giving power to the masses. The depiction of social life would affect the esthetics of the music as well since the socialism emphasized the realism of life that music should reflect through text music and based on easy to recognize and identify with, folk music tunes. Jora was not opposing to the process of educating the masses, but he demanded explanation over what a democratic music have to be since the modern musical techniques like impressionism, atonalism, and serialism were rejected and weren't representing the present-day life.

The first discussions held at the Union under the new direction of Matei Socor, sustained by the Party spotlighted the role of the musical creator under the new ideology and its necessary connection to the masses. In the pressured rush for making music for the proletariat based on folk music, some of the composers stated the obvious fact that the folk music is not made by the working class from the factories.¹¹ The first Romanian working class choir brochure was published in 1948. Others, like ethnomusicologists Harry Brauner, suggested that composers should join the field expeditions organized by the Institute of Folklore for a more accurate sense of the source. As a disciple and close colleague of more notorious ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu that left Romania after Enescu, Harry Brauner (of Jewish ethnicity) would endure a hard punishment of a fourteen-year incarceration. He was removed from the direction of the Institute of Folklore in 1950 and replaced with the nationalist Sabin Drăgoi.

The folk music as a base for musical creation had preoccupied the Romanian composers since the romantic nationalist movement beginning

¹⁰ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, *Universul muzicii românești. Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor din România (1920-1995) (The Universe of Romanian Music. Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania (1920-1995))*, Editura Muzicală, 1995, 158.

¹¹ „Problemele artei contemporane”, „Legătura dintre creator și mase” (The Problems of Contemporary Art, The Connection between the Creator and the Masses) discussed on the 6 and 13 June 1949 at the Union, in Octavian Lazăr Cosma, 1995, 181.

with the last decades of the 19th century and on to modernity, so it was a never-ending topic that got entangled with political ideologies. Once again, but under the new ideological agenda of socialism, composers debated over the same bond that glued the masses previously: the folk music. There were voices that minimized the importance of Enescu because of his “superficial contact with the masses and with the autochthonous rural ambiance because of a conscientious integration into the western musical tenancies”¹². From being the president of the former Composers Society, Enescu was suddenly without importance in the newly Composers Union. Such statements were made by the activist members and the main reason in finding ideological problems in his music was the fact that Enescu left Romania in 1946.

In the eyes of the political apparatus that imposed directives in the musical creation, the folk music was charged with the responsibility of opposing to what was considered formalist, cosmopolitan music, abstract, in fact atonal music. Once with the new ideological agenda of socialist realist music, composers approached folk music again and reactivated the same issues of source, authenticity but especially the manner of integrating it within. The musical procedures had to be realistic and progressive but antimodernist as opposing the bourgeoisie decadence.

One of the most ardent speakers at the discussions was composer Sabin Drăgoi. Already established as one of the composers that promoted the use of rural folk music intensively. He also had ethnomusicological contribution by publishing his masterpiece in 1925 – a collection of carols that brought him much appreciation; and was also rewarded with prizes for the Romanian opera *Năpasta* (1928) and the symphonic work *Divertissement rustique* (1928). He was already an antimodernist with sentimentalist, banal, populist-patriotic phrases he confessed in the carol collection: “Struck by an unbounded love for our People and its soul, so rich in manifestations, I have embarked on the systematic excavation of our musical treasure”.¹³ However, when communism was installed, Drăgoi adapted his public rhetoric with affirmations that ensured him stability in the system: “as our people is building reactors with its own forces, let us, composers, make a proper musical culture that should be **national in form and socialist in content**”.¹⁴ He received a position of teaching folklore at the Bucharest Conservatory and the management of the Folklore Institute.

¹² Vancea, Zeno, „Specificul național și muzica cultă românească” (The national specific and the cultivated Romanian music), in *Flacăra*, 2 July, 1949, 12.

¹³ Drăgoi, Sabin V., *303 colinde cu text și melodie* (303 Colinde/Carols with Text and Melody) (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc S.A., 1931).

¹⁴ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, 1995, 196.

The “national in form and socialist in content” is Stalin’s formula where the national and socialist are not two separate entities to be combined and reconciled rather the national is a necessary component of the socialist. According to the aesthetic of Socialist Realism, the content – the subject matter – must be progressive, but the form – the style of music employed – must keep clear of the supposedly progressive music and the declining bourgeoisie. The socialist idea over the nationalist one results in a situation where socialism complements nationalism, and not excluding from each other.

The Soviet model applied by Stalin in Russia pressured musicians to ensure that their music was not “national in content,” for that would be bourgeois nationalistic art, according to the code. Only the outward forms, the technical means of expression, might reflect the nationality but as a temporary concession until merging into a single mighty river of international Soviet culture, socialist in both form and content.¹⁵

The Soviet model was applied in Romania in a similar process with the one exerted in the Soviet Union. It was the Stalinist period and the way Romanian composers reacted to the socialist realist ideology was similar with other cultural and national communities affected by the ideology. Although this “socialist” cultural nationalism was engineered in Moscow and imposed from such a distance, it was never perceived as that far for what was already in work because much of the material used (the folk song) was recognizable as their own. The folk song was regarded as a national property. The independent attitude that resulted from Ceausescu’s relative break up from the Soviet Union had, consequently, a stronger nationalist rebirth.

The uncertainty on techniques

Although the new ideology states clearly how nationalism is integrated in socialism or the other way around, when speaking about folk music, composers faced the same ambiguities that previous discussions over the national music had been made. Various opinions were stated in the enquiry that the *Muzica* journal hosted back in 1920, regarding what is, what isn’t and what it’s supposed to be a Romanian national music.

30 years after the *Muzica* journal enquiry and a generation of modernist composers that used folk tunes, the folk music was once again under the spotlight put and with a lot of pressure on it. Both nationalism and socialism shaped the esthetics of the 20th century music through a series of resuscitated and reimaged ideas, one of the strongest being the usage of folk music.

¹⁵ Frolova-Walker, Marina, “National in form, socialist in content: Musical Nation-Building in Soviet Republics”, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, v. 51, no. 2, 1998, 334.

But what was the way of creating “socialist in content” music based on folk tunes? How to represent musically the new urban working class, because of industrialization, and the rural working class, as a consequence of collectivization? The Soviet model expected a socialist subject, a realist musical language bearing the imprint of its national origins and the breeding a hero drawn from contemporary soviet life.¹⁶

Once the Party established the new administrative team and a new direction at the Romanian Composers Union, a big conference was organized in the fall of 1949 where composers discussed the situation of music in the new ideologic frame. Once again, the folk music was the central point around which composers evaluated their work.

Based on the interest composers had towards folk music, Sabin Drăgoi tried to distinguish between “the ones that used folk music and even from the beginning of making Romanian music defended the folk music path, and the others that didn’t because they were educated in the western bourgeoisie mediums and some of them even negated the existence of an authentic Romanian folk music that could function as a base for a national music school”.¹⁷ He acknowledged the impact and attention that Béla Bartók had over Romanian folk music, but that idea was diminished rapidly by some composers that considered Bartók’s music too negative and formalist especially when harmonizing the folk tunes and that method had influenced the Romanian musical creation.”¹⁸ They were just taking over the idea stated in the Soviet Resolution where Bartók’s methods were found to be the worst case of formalism in using folk music.

French educated and young composer Achim Stoia accused the superficiality and the unreliable source when using folk music of “those who are superficial and take only the exterior elements, the exotic part, and others that are using the music of the urban peripheries (gypsy music)”. The propaganda of nationalist Romanian’s, typical of the interwar period, infused with nuances of anti-multiethnicity was present in the following years. Achim Stoia also mentioned that for an authentic compositional style based on folk music there should be no connections to other compositional techniques especially modernist ones: “some of the composers take a few folk tunes, they break them and spread them along some harmonies and a few rhythm changing measures and they present it like Romanian music, in fact making

¹⁶ Frolova-Walker, Marina, 1998, 363.

¹⁷ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, *Universul muzicii românești. Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor din România (1920-1995) (The Universe of Romanian Music. Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania (1920-1995))*, Ed. Muzicală, 1995, 196.

¹⁸ Ibid.

impressionist, polytonal or atonal music.”¹⁹ This firm position of Stoia assured him the direction of the Philharmonic in Iași beginning with 1950.

The romantic nostalgia for the melodicism reappeared and was sustained by another composer from Transylvania whose musical works were appreciated for using folk music. Marțian Negrea, condemned “the grotesque, the caricatural and the absurd manner of modernity to use melody”, and thanked for the relief he felt when the communist party stopped this anarchy in the musical field that otherwise would have grown to scary proportions”. “Thanks to the USSR Party’s intervention and the February resolution, we are today on the good path of going back to the truth, to reality, and we should be guided by the rich experience of the Great Russian classics in music like Glinka, Tchaikovsky or The Five”.²⁰ Glinka, Tchaikovsky and The Five were mythologized and presented as the only legitimate starting point for the future of Soviet music and since the soviet model was the only model, no wonder Negrea mentioned them. However, as much as he declared his sympathy for the soviet model, he was not spared of critics. Discussions were made around his opera *Păcat boieresc* (Boyar/aristocratic sin) that was well received when it premiered in 1933 but for a restage it had to be adjusted because “it didn’t satisfy the level of portraying the folk nor the balance between the national and universal musical style and had aspects incompatible with the realism in music”. Although he revised it and changed the title into *Marin, the fisherman* the critique wasn’t convinced that “the composer is still embracing wrongly the belief in a human than a national voice.”²¹

It was especially typical for Romanian folklorists with rural origins, but also for composers with strong nationalistic ideas, to eulogies the village and the peasant, and to disdain the urban lifestyle in its entirety. Excessive sentimentality and patriotism easily fell to extreme nationalism in the late 30s. Nevertheless, the communist agenda had a strong urbanization process started due to industrialization plans and the rural idyllicism was rapidly associated with the romantic bourgeoisie and rejected. Thus, we have the emphasis on the proletariat, like young composer Anatol Vieru stated that “our musical works should reflect the life’s conception of the working class”. On the same line of bringing the musical culture closer to the masses, he made an accusatory affirmation toward the old society of composers saying, “it was a closed clan which accepted only the musical savants or the high-class dilettante”.²²

¹⁹ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, 1995, 195-198.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, 1995, 255.

²² Ibid.

When the *Muzica* journal was resuscitated in 1950 after 25 years of absence,²³ the Soviet example was highly praised creating a strong echo of Moscow in Bucharest. One of Tikhon Khrennikov's speeches – the secretary of Russian Composers Union that presented the Resolution in February 1948, was appreciated as “An exposure of great significance for developing the musical creation” emphasizing it as a title in the *Flacăra* journal in 1950. It appeared also in the context of an event that triggered an offensive of the party through an ardent campaign in the press. Alfred Mendelsohn started it by formally inviting the specialists for an exchange of opinions around music. What happened was that a group of students from the Faculty of Music in Bucharest wrote a public letter where they complained about the very low level of the musical critique. It was addressed to one commentator in *Universul* journal, a member of the Union and the Party. The self-defensive reaction of the officials because there was not even a remote resemblance to a debate, contained aggressive and firm opinions that accused “the decadency of the bourgeoisie art as the result of the capitalist rotten system”. Even if composers created music using folk tunes, their purpose was questioned: “it remains to be seen what were the intensions of those composers that created in the past with folk music and if they weren't perhaps inspired by the bourgeois politicians from that epoch and they were playing in fact their game”.²⁴

With every moment of uncertainty, doubt or requests considering the practicality, the techniques and the value system of musical creation, the Party members defended aggressively the ideology. Gabriela Deleanu, a music history assistant teacher at the Music Conservatoire in Bucharest, but an obscure figure in the musical life, stated that “the problem of the correct understanding of reflecting in music the reality based on the Leninist theory was not made at the Union, nor in the press.”²⁵

²³ Seria I. Perioada antebelică: 1908 (oct.)-'10 (febr.), București; editor: Mihai Mărgăritescu; 1916 (ian.-iun.), București; editori: Mihai Mărgăritescu (ian.-febr.), Ion Nonna Ottescu, Maximilian Costin; Seria II: perioada interbelică: 1919 (nov.)-'22 (sept.), București; 1923 (ian. / febr.-mai / iun.), 1925 (ian.-sept. / oct.), Timișoara; editori: Maximilian Costin (până în febr. / mart. / 1920 și din ian. 1921; 1925), I.N. Ottescu (până în febr. / mart. 1920), G.N. Georgescu-Breazul (din ian. 1921; 1925); Seria III. Perioada postbelică: 1950 (aug.)-'89 (aug.) [3]; editori: Anatol Vieru, Zeno Vancea, Vasile Tomescu; Seria IV. Perioada postdecembristă, 1990 (ian.)-prezent; editori: Octavian Lazăr Cosma (1990-2010, ian. / mart.), Antígona Rădulescu (2010, apr. / iun.-2014, iul. / sept.), Irinel Anghel și Mihai Cosma (2014, oct. / dec.-2015, apr. / iun.), Irinel Anghel (2015, iul.-prezent).

²⁴ Deleanu, Gabriela, „O expunere de mare însemnătate pentru dezvoltarea creației muzicale” (*An exhibition of great significance for the development of musical creation*) in *Flacăra*, 10 iunie 1950, 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

The ardent discussions were not concerning those genres that easily reflected the new realities due to their text support such as choral music and cantatas. The problems were found in the symphonic genres, even if based on folk tunes. Therefore, the requirements “national in form and socialist in content” was no simple to obtain, and there was no method by which a composer could achieve success, for each of the national or social aspects was double-edged. Too much of the national element could be criticized as bourgeois nationalism, too much realism was bourgeois naturalism, and too much symphonic development was bourgeois formalism.

The musical works that were much appreciated in 1950 were Alfred Mendelsohn ***Symphony no. 3*** “The reconstruction”, ***The Second Rhapsody*** of Marțian Negrea or *Cantata for Stalin* of D. Alexandrescu. Aesthetically, the ‘50s witnessed the existence of a very thin line between the content of the socialist realism and the folk inspired nationalism.²⁶ Therefore, some composers managed to escape from the request of doctrinal purity by continuing a folkloristic path. Examples include some composers whose intentions were not to express the socialist propaganda in their works but were nonetheless tolerated by the regime because of the large addressability of their music.

Martian Negrea’s orchestral suite *In muntii Apuseni (In the Apuseni Mountains)* had no direct Soviet addressing of propaganda-based “reality,” yet the authorities would not have been unduly concerned by such tonal essays, as they would have fulfilled the important though rather amorphous ideal of “speaking to the masses”. Other composers from Socor’s inner circle, such as Hilda Jerea and Al. Mendelsohn, rallied around the ideological banner and wrote songs for massed performance, presumably by some of those 3,500 choirs it was claimed had been established by 1951. Many of the composers and librettists probably sincerely believed that their songs were helping to sustain the proletarian revolution.

The mighty solemn display

In 1951, when the Union organized the Romanian Musical Week, inviting also musical personalities from the other communist countries, opinions on concerts reflected both the assimilation of the ideology that composers gradually accomplished and what constituted a successful result of the “national in form, socialist in content”. The oratory *Tudor Vladimirescu* composed by Gheorghe Dumitrescu was very well received at the Atheneum, appreciated for its lyrical and heroic, epic, and dramatic content, on a historical subject and containing strong folk elements. The same profile a musical work would have been successful in the nationalist frame.

²⁶ Crotty, Joel, 2007, 151-176.

The Romanian Musical Week was an occasion for reinforcing the beliefs of the Party, more than to reflect the musical creations that were conform to what was conceptualized in the formula “national in form, socialist in content”. When speaking about choral music in a report of the Week’s choral program, I.D. Chirescu states that “the proletarian culture do not annihilate the national culture”.²⁷

Contradictions were a feature of those years. The program of the “Week” was supposed to be a proof of the ideological intentions already assumed: “While the decadent music of the West is rotting, loosing every trace of melody and human sense of beauty, transforming to a medium of stupidity and bait for war, The Romanian Musical Week will be the manifestation of a free people that builds a happy life, will show, having the soviet example, that music can progress only when is inspired by the life and peoples aspirations”.²⁸ The program offered a variety of genres, most of the works being designed for the proletariat and most of the symphonic being programmatic music, 30 times more than in the interwar period, as observed by A. Mendelsohn and stated in a plenary.

At the same time some of the works were highly appreciated, other were accused of not fitting the desired profile. The Communist party was wanting to see more of the sharpening of the class struggle than of the idyllic rural scenery some works depicted, like Zeno Vancea in *O zi de vară într-o gospodărie colectivă* (*A summer day in a collective household*) where “he was letting too much of the old school to be seen”²⁹. Theodor Rogalsky was stigmatized for caricaturizing the folklore up to the grotesque. Andricu for leaving the impression in some symphonic pages that he is treating purely formal the themes without any connection to the reality of life. Paul Constantinescu was found guilty of having too many recitatives in the opera *O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Stormy Night*), “negating music than making one”, and Mihail Jora, the former head of the composers until communism, was the most blamed and pitted of the old generation of composers. For his “formalist manifestations with obvious atonal elements” Jora was excluded from the musical life for a few years. Not only the composers had to operate important stylistic changes, also the *Muzica* journal was accused of not having exposed those Romanian composers that still maintained the cosmopolitan and formalist styles of Messiaen or Stravinsky. Socor’s observations upon the musical creation of the 1950s points the attention on the fact that all those Romanian composers who were active in the early days of communism were

²⁷ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, 1995, 224.

²⁸ „Săptămâna muzicii românești” in *Scântea*, 19 September 1951, 2.

²⁹ Socor, Matei, „Problemele actuale ale muzicii românești” (The actual problems of the Romanian music) in Octavian Lazăr Cosma, 1995, 223-224.

not rabid ideologues. Some of them, yes, but since the problems he found in music were that many, it indicates that music was more diverse than just propagandistic and stereotype.

These musical problems were stated by the official in charge, Matei Socor, in a plenary session discussions during the Romanian Music Week and groomed what he will present in 1952 as the “musical constitution” of composers in the form of a *Resolution*, based on the soviet model from 1948. Discussions around writing down this resolution split the composers in two sides: Matei Socor followers and the ones that embraced Ion Dumitrescus less condemning tone. Discussions resumed the same problem of how to use the folk music and questioned the suitable techniques for its harmonisation. The problem was that folk music was modal and the accepted frame was the tonal-functional system where the folk tunes were not that easy to catch in unless simplify their melodic and rhythmic contour.³⁰

The pressure of creating music based on folk tunes was bigger that in the romantic nationalist period. This time it was not just a duty, an inner desire to create a common reflecting mirror of the community it became an imperative, an extrinsic factor where composer had to adjust, not to negate it. That is why composers that still maintained modernist style in their composition techniques were a problem for the institutional system.

As I mentioned earlier, composer M. Jora was the main figure when it came to point the formalist and decadent style combined with the resistance of not accepting the new esthetical terms of the socialist realist music. An important figure with authority second to Enescu until communism came, Jora was old and pride enough to ignore the pressure and retire from the scenery of a more and more restrictive musical context. That was not the case of composer, teacher, musicologist and secretary of the Union, Zeno Vancea who was found guilty of maintaining a modernist atonal style that he embraced during his studies at Viena. Being also an active musical critique, he was accused of spreading confusion in his articles regarding the use of the folk music. Although Zeno Vancea proved with musical examples that folk tunes exist in his works in order to defend himself from Socor’s accusations, he came the second day with a changed attitude saying that “after a severe examination of conscience, I concluded that my articles contain confusions and I am sorry for forgetting the responsibility that I have as a secretary at the Union and for contradicting the phrase debated in the resolution, but except one work from my youth, everything I composed is based on folk music”.³¹ This mind change can also be seen as a “self-critique”,

³⁰ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, 1995, 226.

³¹ Ibid.

a process of self-incrimination quite frequent in the repressive Stalinist years. If Zeno Vancea composed rhapsodies and symphonic dances in the interwar years, beginning with his relocation from Timișoara to Bucharest that occurred in 1949 he began his career in the Socialist Realism music providing works like the symphonic suite „*O zi de vară într-o gospodărie agricolă colectivă*” (A summer day in a collective household) (1951), „*Odă în amintirea celor căzuți pentru libertate*” (Ode in memory of those who fell for freedom) (1956) or cantata „*Cântecul păcii*” (The Song of Peace) (1961). To those composers that embraced rapidly the new ideology, the changes in their music were certainly due to political circumstances not of their choosing, and most of them enjoyed a degree of privilege unknown to most citizens with official and public respect and a comfortable and secure life.

But still, the climate was tensioned. Another composer who had to defend itself from negative criticism was Mihail Andricu, composers, and vice-president of the Union: “I rise against accusations that I would be a defender of cosmopolitanism. All my efforts as a composer proves that I had been always preoccupied for returning to a Romanian music based on folk song or in a folkish character but in any case, oriented towards a national fond”.³² Andricu had a position at the Union that gave him confidence to confront Socors vehemence and to question the legitimacy of the Bureau that had decisive power at the Union: “why cannot listen western music? I have the impression that is strongly critiqued/rejected without even being known. I would like to find who knows Messianen’s music”.³³

The musical program of the Romanian Music Week included a work of Max Eisikovits that was found too impressionist and that made him defend himself as saying that he is sorry to have send an outdated work to that event and appreciated as exaggerated a judgement based only on that work and not considering the rest of his work.

In this anxious climate of suspicion and accusations of formalism or not enough interest in connecting to the masses directed especially to those composers from the older generation, the discussions over what the resolution should contain split the debate in two teams. Composer Ion Dumitrescu tried to see things from a different angle saying that “we bring so easily accusations of formalism, impressionism, atonalism, mysticism, we put definitive and irrevocable verdicts, we attack all the unclear problems without clarifying them...the resolution should bring us closer, not take us apart.”³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, 1995, 228.

There were composers like Keppler that accused the abuse happened to Jora for excluding him. On the other part, Hilda Jerea, the secretary at the Union and responsible for the trials made upon musical works, basically in charge of the committee that selected and rejected the musical works, counteracted Keppler's statement by saying that while some of the composers renounced of the formalist influences, others still make music for themselves and not for the masses. The committee that approved works and had decisive power on the inclusion and exclusion of members, had problems based on the same ideological criteria that creation had. The debates were spirited with every situation of excluding active members that created in a cosmopolitan style.

Because of the nuances over the music aroused by this resolution and of the technical uncertainties triggered by the profile of a desired socialist realist music, Matei Socor decided to obtain the validation of the resolution. That was more shaking the conceptual ideas of the ideology than solving the problems of not conforming to it, by creating a voting poll based on positive or negative response. The resolution was voted unanimously and would represent in the next years "an application of the general marxist-leninist principles, as the soviet model with its rich experience and highest music and musicology is."³⁵ Socor maintained his ferocious attitude while he was in charge of the Union, spreading all over the idea that "music is an ideological tribune even if most of the actual composers are still indulging in an isolationist attitude towards the masses"³⁶

In the end, Socor's *Resolution* did not give clear practical guidelines for Socialist Realist compositions like neither did the Soviet Resolution. It was left to critics and composers to arrive at an understanding of what Socialist Realism meant for music, a debate that lasted between 1948/49 and 1954, once with the fall of Socor from the Composers Union. This long debate was not an open to everyone, it was held among the composers that were apparently divided between the modernists and the socialists. There were also the contributions of few critics who were known to be close to the bureaucracy and the press, critics that sometimes were contested (student's letter example) but nevertheless critics that were given correspondingly greater weight if they were on the same page with the ideology in power.

Even if the 50s change had been described as a rebirth of the music from the decadent modernism to a new socialist consciousness, those years and that period in general is usually viewed through a narrative where the individual composers are regarded either as hypocritical opportunists or tragic victims. Moral judgements are a feature of each epoch with its own

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Socor Matei, in *Muzica*, 1/1953, 5.

narrative that is facing the opposite system of values, either is nationalism defending its uniqueness by opposing to an imperialistic power, or its socialism with its class struggle opposing to a nationalistic bourgeoisie. For a post-communist and democratic narrative, this moral judgement is still a feature easily observed in the musicology that seem to trace around the edges and avoid discussing the music that did not have a reliance on socialist realism. For some of them there was just a trap between ideology pressure and subjective esthetical and technical options.

Recent musicology rejects the narratives of modernism's demise in the Soviet Union and criticize the popular romanticized account which tells us about a tragedy of courageous, pioneering artist who were broken on the wheel of Stalinism, to face a lifetime of humiliation by composing music beneath their dignity.³⁷

Affirmations like "music is an ideological tribune even if most of the actual composers are still indulging in an isolationist attitude towards the masses"³⁸, is considered by the post-communist Romanian musicology as coming from an ideologically infused source. But when previous nationalistic voices affirmed the same belief that music is a medium for raising national awareness, the narrative is not opposed to the ideological charge. The music as a medium for spreading the national feeling among the community using the folk song and the music as a tribune for addressing to the masses the socialist message is saying that music and ideology were in a close relationship in the 20th century.

The end of the Stalinist period in Romanian culture meant only the closure of a violent and aggressive stage of ideological pressure. After a meticulous report over the financial administration of the Composers Union budget³⁹, Socor was found to be responsible for the big loses although there were others directly involved in that situation. This event happened in the same year with Stalin's death and opened new ways for changes, one of them being the replacement of Socor with Ion Dumitrescu in 1954. In the following decades, the communist structure was consolidated even if throughout the following moments of liberalization alternated with those of clenches.

Beyond reflecting the restrictions and limitations that Stalinist agenda had on music and musical life, the light put again on folk music as representative for the proletariat reflects a renaissance of the romantic nineteenth century

³⁷ Frolova-Walker, Marina, "From modernism to socialist realism in four years: Mayakovsky and Asafiev" in *Muzikologija* 2003(3), 199-217.

³⁸ Socor, Matei, in *Muzica*, 1/1953, 5.

³⁹ *Raportul de expertiză privind gestiunea anilor 1950-51 la Uniunea compozitorilor din R.P.R.* (Survey report over the management of 1950-51 at the Composers Union of R.P.R.), survey over the bookkeeping where financial injuries over 3 million lei were found.

nationalism within a socialist state. A combination that may seem strange to those who have learned to assign Marxism and nationalism to distinct and irreconcilable categories. Traditional culture represented the central stake for the ideological discourse promoted by the communist regime beginning with 1948. With this kind of attention, folk music was inserted into a large process of political instrumentality. As Marina Frolova-Walker explains in her studies in socialism and Russian music, “socialist realism” was never worked out as a coherent theory, although enormous efforts were expended in attempting to create the illusion of one. Rather, it amounted only to a range of slogans with obscure gray valleys between them.⁴⁰ As far as the Romanian music and the requirements of fitting and reflecting the new ideology imposed from Moscow, we could say that the Soviet Marxism-Leninism employed national ideology but only for socialist ends.

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