

## GHEORGHE UCENESCU – THE GREAT RELIGIOUS SINGER FROM SCHEII BRAȘOVULUI AND HIS CULTURAL LEGACY

PETRUȚA-MARIA COROIU <sup>1</sup>

**SUMMARY.** This paper pays homage to one of the most important religious singers and music teachers in Brașov, but it is also dedicated to his cultural legacy (little researched and less known at a national level). We hope this will become an essential contribution to the latest effort of emphasizing his personality and the manuscripts preserved in the archive of the Museum of the First Romanian School in Brașov.

**Keywords:** heritage, orthodoxy, music, pedagogy, manuscript

The complex cultural relationship between Ucenescu and Anton Pann requires special attention in order to render the magnitude of the influence the great musician had on Ucenescu (psalm book, folklore collection, music anthology, printed music sheets). In the period 1823-1825 Anton Pann was teacher of church music at the school for singers in Bucharest, then in 1828 and 1848 he was even “singer at Saint Nicholas Church in Scheii Brașovului”<sup>2</sup>; Anton Pann “founded a printing house for church music, editing the traditional church choir music repertoire”<sup>3</sup>, activity in which he initiated his apprentice from Brașov – who, subsequently, used the acquired knowledge to popularize his didactic work.

In 1851, Ucenescu took classes with Anton Pann, and a year later the great maestro sent to Schei the message that Ucenescu had received enough training to teach in Brașov. In 1852, Anton Pann completed “The Anthology of Church Music in two volumes” (including everything a singer needs), and his main didactic work (entitled “The theoretical and practical foundation of church music or a melodic grammar”) was taught at the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Transilvania University of Brașov, Interpretation and Music Pedagogy Department, Faculty of Music, B-dul Eroilor nr.29, 500036 Brașov, Romania, univ. prof. PhD habil., maniutpetruta@yahoo.com*

<sup>2</sup> Cosma, Viorel, *Muzicieni români, lexicon (Romanian musicians, a lexicon)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1970, p. 345.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, p. 345.

Seminary in Bucharest in 1845. Nine years later, Anton Pann was writing "The concise theoretical and practical music grammar" (1854). Ucenescu was familiar with all these books and used them successfully during the decades he taught in schools in Brașov: the period spent as a teacher at the Romanian Secondary School (currently the "Andrei Șaguna" National College) requires special musicological attention in a separate chapter.

In 1853, after he had just completed his apprenticeship with Anton Pann (with the mention "he studied the fundamentals of the art of religious music, he was diligent and well behaved"<sup>4</sup>), Ucenescu became a teacher of psalm music at the Secondary and Normal School in Brașov. He also gathered a rich collection of popular, patriotic and city songs, and he authored many didactic and patriotic songs (context in which he created his own version of the current Romanian national anthem - "Deșteaptă-te, române" [Wake Up, Romanian], and "Din sânul maicii mele" [From my mother's bosom]). In 1855 he signed an employment contract with the school and the church<sup>5</sup>, while in 1859 Ucenescu made suggestions to improve the activity of music teachers (such as parents' support for their children, choosing the best trained students to sing in the choir<sup>6</sup>, etc.)

In his 1875 report, Ucenescu highlighted the financial hardships he experienced occasionally, but also the fact that he was happy to offer knowledge to the children he taught, through music: "having reached perfection both in the art of religious music, and in church praxis, I return to my home happy and hopeful"<sup>7</sup>. The reports concerning his students' progress, the support he offered them in order to obtain jobs as singers, his continuing musical activity are landmarks in the documents preserved in *Scheii Brașovului*, edited following V. Nicolescu's monograph.

Over 500 songs (folklore creations or versions of songs in the existing repertoire) were transcribed and studied by Vasile Nicolescu in 1979 (manuscript 3497 at the Romanian Academy Library). Ucenescu's anthology entitled "Cântece de stea și colinde"<sup>8</sup> [Christmas Songs and Carols] was published in Brașov in 1856; his entire activity shows his love of children and creative youth. Ucenescu tried to adjust his too complicated songs, arranging them to help young people understand them so as to sing them during their studies.

---

<sup>4</sup> \*\*\*, *Acte, documente și scrisori din Scheii Brașovului* (Acts, documents and letters from *Scheii Brașovului*), coordinated by Prof. Ioan Oltean, Ed. Minerva, Bucharest, 1980, p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p. 238.

<sup>7</sup> \*\*\*, *Acte, documente și scrisori din Scheii Brașovului* (Acts, documents and letters from *Scheii Brașovului*), coordinated by Prof. Ioan Oltean, Ed. Minerva, Bucharest, 1980, p. 248.

<sup>8</sup> Cosma, Viorel, *Muzicienii români, lexicon* (Romanian musicians, a lexicon), Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1970, p. 433.

**E.g. 1**



**St. Nicholas Church (Scheii Brasovului)**

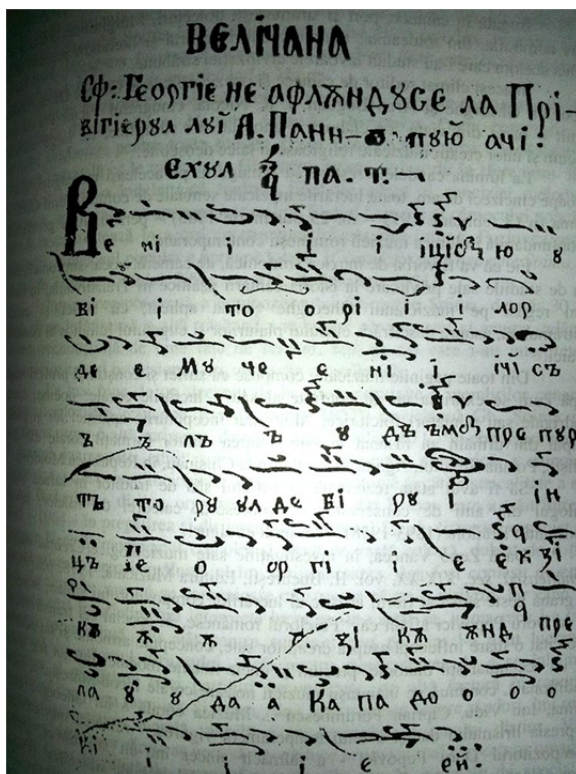
The analysis of the manuscripts in Scheii Brașovului represents the richest and most interesting part of the research we have initiated, because the manuscript collection includes several categories of compositions:

- a. Compositions for the most important religious holidays
- b. Compositions for Sundays over the year
- c. Occasional compositions

Professor Ioan Olteanu offered us access to around 60 manuscripts, which we intend to exploit by transcribing and analysing them in the musical context in Scheii Brașovului, taking into consideration the presence of musicians who were active at that time (from Ciprian Porumbescu to Gheorghe Dima). We will examine the extent to which these manuscripts are original compositions created by Ucenescu or “amendments”, “arrangements” of folk songs from that period, that he used to transcribe and note (in his own style) for students. Rarely mentioned in the documents of the epoch, Ucenescu continued to edit brochures containing patriotic, church and “folk” (i.e. “well known”) songs, meant to popularize good quality music through documents that he struggled on his own to edit and publish.

Ucenescu's historical context was very productive in Braşov: the first Romanian elementary school in Braşov was created through the efforts of Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna and of Ioan Popazu, Protopope of Braşov. In 1860 Romanians were grateful to the authorities in Transylvania for accepting the use of the Romanian language in school, and a decade later (1870) Metropolitan Şaguna gave advice for choosing the teachers. In 1872, the Protopope Ioan Barac organized the school on Tocile Street, where Gheorghe Ucenescu, among others, started his activity as singer. The Association of Romanian Women in Braşov suggested improvements in the way the school boarding house was organized, which demonstrates the involvement of the entire community in supporting the musical activity of students in Braşov. Thus, these are the premises of an important contextualization, considering that we had access to the information available in Braşov (the Saint Nicholas Church manuscript collection, the documents at Mureşenilor House Museum, the county library, the university and media library).

E.g. 2



Ghe. Ucenescu - Manuscript

Ucenescu died on 25 January 1896, in Brașov, in a context in which his art was no longer understood, and religious vocal music stopped being taught in schools in Brașov: the musical art under western influence had occupied the entire school. Gheorghe Dima was one of the critics of church vocal music (“sloppy and distorted”), but he had only high praise for Ucenescu: “I have never heard a church singer like Ucenescu”<sup>9</sup>.

After several decades of teaching, Ucenescu witnessed “church music being excluded from school”, and the extension of choral practice (harmonic, tonal); this is why he only continued his activity in the church, carrying on the “religious vocal music with a long tradition in our church”, in a world that no longer understood such realities.

In the manuscript collection in Scheii Brașovului there are hundreds of documents reviewed by Gheorghe Ucenescu; some of them, in the opinion of Professor Ioan Oltean, are compositions belonging to Ucenescu, which have not yet been transcribed and studied. On numerous occasions, Professor Ioan Oltean, who has been managing and researching the manuscript collections in Scheii Brașovului for over four decades, drew attention to the effort of emphasizing Gheorghe Ucenescu’s personality (he is buried in the cemetery of Saint Nicholas Church in Scheii Brașovului): his life and work remained quite obscure during his life, but also at present. Singer in the Church on Tocile Street (in Schei), but also at Saint Nicholas Church, as well as teacher when schools were reorganized, Ucenescu was continuously involved in the cultural life of Brașov for almost half a century (1853-1896).

His discretion, modesty and unconditional commitment to the values of the Romanian church and school placed Gheorghe Ucenescu in the shadow of other great personalities who marked the history of the city in various stages of his development. The important role Saint Nicholas Church in Scheii Brașovului had in the history of Romanians is also visible in the effort “to create, maintain and promote the first traditional schools in this consecrated centre of Romanian culture”<sup>10</sup>, and Ucenescu’s connection with it is unquestionable.

We believe that a review of Viorel Cosma’s opinion in the Dictionary of Romanian Musicians (1970) is needed, as the author considers Ucenescu only as a folklorist, the latter’s true value being recognized in the preface of Vasile Nicolescu’s book: “singer at Saint Nicholas Church in Scheii Brașovului”<sup>11</sup>, but also a teacher.

---

<sup>9</sup> Nicolescu, Vasile D., *Manuscrisul Ucenescu. Cânturi (Ucenescu Manuscripts. Songs)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, p. 5.

To conclude, we believe that the collection of manuscripts belonging to Ucenescu, available in Scheii Brașovului, which has not been studied yet, requires special musicological attention. We intend to conduct extensive research with the aim of producing a new biography of the musician who gave so much to the music life of Brașov, a book well overdue more than 30 years after Vasile Nicolescu's book was published in 1979.

*Translated by Raluca Sinu*

## REFERENCES

- \*\*\*, *Acte, documente și scrisori din Scheii Brașovului (Acts, documents and letters from Scheii Brașovului)*, coordinated by Prof. Ioan Oltean, Ed. Minerva, Bucharest, 1980
- Cosma, Viorel, *Muzicieni români, lexicon (Romanian musicians, a lexicon)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1970.
- Nicolescu, Vasile D., *Manuscrisul Ucenescu. Cânturi (Ucenescu Manuscripts. Songs)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 1979.