**DOCUMENTS FROM THE ARCHIVE OF THE “GEORGE ENESCU” NATIONAL MUSEUM. GEORGE ENESCU AND CLARA HASKIL**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to highlight some common aspects of the life and work of two great Romanian musicians: George Enescu and Clara Haskil. The documentary source includes press articles, postcards, posters and photographs that belonged to George Enescu and are preserved in the archives of the museum that bears his name.

**Keywords:** George Enescu, Clara Haskil, correspondence.

The “George Enescu” National Museum capitalizes on its heritage – unique within the museum landscape of our country – in various ways: through temporary exhibitions, publications, various projects etc., while always bringing to the fore the name of the most important Romanian musician of the last century. While researching the institution’s archive and the documents pertaining to George Enescu’s correspondence, our attention was drawn by some of them, as well as by posters, press articles and photographs that are significant in illustrating the connection that existed between two remarkable musicians: George Enescu and Clara Haskil.

Marked by genius and united by the same immense passion for music, George Enescu and Clara Haskil were outstanding personalities who gradually
established themselves not only in the history of Romanian music, but also in
the worldwide art of composition and performance. Based on the documents
found in the GENM Archive, we have gathered information about these artists
highlighting similar aspects of their lives: musical studies in the same major
cultural centres, concerts held together, common friends and even patrons.

**George Enescu and Clara Haskil**

The composer’s and pianist’s destinies intersected several times, with
the latter following in her master’s footsteps. Gifted with the same fabulous
musical memory and with the ease of learning an instrument (violin) without a
teacher, she studied in Vienna as well, then at the Paris Conservatory, while later
getting to know the same musical elite and having the same stage partners. It is
difficult to say to what extent the few concerts held with George Enescu over
time, the few pages of direct (or indirect) correspondence concerning the two, or
the memories of third parties who place them simultaneously on the same stage
are evidence of a close friendship, but what is certain is that without a
significant mutual admiration and respect, these personal and professional ties
between George Enescu and Clara Haskil would not have been maintained for
more than three decades.

**Haskil playing Enescu**

It is interesting to note that in 1911, Clara gave a recital in Bucharest
(recorded in the press by E. D. Fagure, in Adevărul, on February 23, 1911)
featuring the *Pavane* from George Enescu’s *Piano Suite Op. 10* (finalized and
awarded by the French magazine *Musica* in 1903, then published in 1904). This
would become one of the few works by Enescu that were included in the
pianist’s repertoire (along with *Sonata No. 3 for Piano and Violin Op. 25, “in
Romanian folk character”* and with *Sonata No. 3 for Solo Piano in D Major*),
given that Clara was not very keen on modern music (as confirmed by the confessions
of her collaborators and by the titles included in her concert repertoire). How
exactly she got in touch with the *Suite Op. 10* we do not know, but the fact that
Alfred Cortot, her piano teacher, was in the jury that awarded this work by
Enescu the First Prize may be a simple coincidence – or not.
Enescu, Haskil and the Royal House of Romania

Another “coincidence” would be the presence of both of them on the stage of the Romanian Athenaeum in 1909, a moment that marked Clara’s concert début in Romania. Both she (14 years old) and George Enescu (28 years old) played, in different concerts, under the baton of Dimitrie Dinicu, the founder of the Orchestra of the Romanian Ministry of Public Instruction: Haskil – in January, Enescu – in December. Moreover, it seems that cellist Dimitrie Dinicu presented Clara to Queen Elisabeth (Carmen Sylva – George Enescu’s protector). Apparently, the tradition continued, with the pianist being then introduced by George Enescu and his wife, Maruca, to the following sovereigns: Queen Marie and King Ferdinand¹.

Common patrons: The Princess de Polignac and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium

If George Enescu enjoyed a growing success in the French capital, managing to assert himself both as a composer and as a performer and conductor, the same cannot be said about Clara Haskil. For her, Paris was always a place she was repeatedly trying to conquer. It did not seem to be a favourable place for her, neither during her studies nor afterwards. The scoliosis and the inhuman treatments she underwent for a period of 4 years (1914-1918) at the sanatorium in Berk kept her away from the French capital, where, once recovered, she returned, burdened with difficulties. In 1919, she left for Switzerland. She lived for a long time with Uncle Avram, her protector. After the death of her uncle, who (despite his good intentions) had had a rather negative influence on the pianist’s psyche, Clara found herself almost alone. However, she enjoyed the friendship of people who remained loyal to her. Among them were at least two names that were also found in George Enescu’s entourage: Winaretta Singer, Princess de Polignac and Elisabeth, Queen of Belgium.

Wife of Prince Edmond de Polignac – a French aristocrat, composer and patron of the arts – and heiress of the Singer Sewing Machine company, Winaretta Singer and her husband hosted an influential artistic salon in Paris, which became the centre of an effervescent cultural life that brought together, in the early 1900s, some of the most important representatives of the arts: Proust, Cocteau, Monet, Chabrier, d’Indy, Debussy, Fauré, Ravel, Stravinsky, Enescu and many others. Despite being a controversial personality she helped the career of many artists, and Clara Haskil’s in particular. Lacking a home of her own for a long time, Clara had become a constant presence in the Princess’s salons (sometimes referred to in her correspondence as aunt), who not only hosted her, but also helped her, motivated her, provided her with pianos for her studies, invited her to her various residences in Italy (Palazzo Contarini Polignac in Venice) or Switzerland, offering her a comfortable monthly rent to cover her various expenses, for years on end. Having no other profession than that of a pianist, Clara Haskil went through extremely difficult times, the only sources of income being her concerts – though not too many (at least in her youth). There were also other friends who supported her financially in difficult times, but the Princess de Polignac stood out for her perseverance and generosity.

Remaining in the same sphere of patronage, Clara Haskil remembers that in George Enescu’s house in Meudon, where she settled after the First World War, she met Elisabeth, Queen of Belgium. This episode is humorously described in one of the pianist’s letters – who, at that time, did not know who she is.
was talking to, behaving very naturally even when she was invited by Elisabeth in her car, to leave Enescu’s place together. She herself a violinist, a student and a good friend of the Maestro, who facilitated the Belgian première of the opera *Oedipus*, one of the few friends who was by the musician’s side during his last years and not only then, Elizabeth of Belgium was therefore also one of Clara Haskil’s protectors.

**Enescu-Haskil recitals**

Over time, the direct collaboration between Clara Haskil and George Enescu was materialized in several joint recitals and concerts, held in Switzerland and France. The first occasion on which their names appeared on the same poster was a concert featuring only works by Enescu. Along with a sonata for piano and violin, the *Quartet Op. 22, No. 1*, the program also included the *Suite Op. 10* by George Enescu, performed by Clara Haskil. The concert took place at the Lausanne Conservatory Hall on February 5, 1921 (the date of the first performance of Enescu’s Quartet). Then Enescu appeared before the public both as a pianist and as a violinist – playing the viola part of his quartet.

![Fig. 4. Press article: “Concert Enesco”, in *La tribune de Lausanne*, 08.02.1921 (GENM Archive)](image)

A musical chronicle published in *La Tribune de Lausanne* on February 8, 1921 mentions this concert and provides details on its programme and performers. Moreover, we find the author’s opinions about the qualities of the protagonists, along with various remarks on Enescu’s performed works. They were considered to belong to “an admirably gifted musician, a man who is a musician to his fingertips”, but also to be “of the highest technical difficulty”.

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The praises were generally addressed to the instrumentalists, and to George Enescu and Clara Haskil in particular.

Fig. 5. Poster of the Geneva recital, February 11, 1935 (GENM Archive)
1929 was the year of another Enescu-Haskil collaboration, this time playing together at Salle des Agriculteurs in Paris, during a Romanian musical evening organized by the Rothschild Foundation. On that occasion, the two performed the Sonata for Piano and Violin by the Romanian composer Marcel Mihalovici. A close friend of George Enescu, Mihalovici was awarded the “George Enescu” Composition Prize in 1919, 1921 and 1925, with the pieces: Nocturne for Piano, Sonata for Piano and Violin, Introduction et mouvement symphonique. In 1954, a year before his death, George Enescu gave him the final instructions to finalize the score of the Chamber Symphony Op. 33.

Returning to George Enescu and Clara Haskil, we mention a series of four recitals and concerts held in 1935, 1948 and 1952, performed together by the two already established artists. Although few in number and spread over three different decades of the 1900s, they have become true landmarks in the international musical life.

On February 8, 1935, in Vevey, Switzerland, they performed the Sonata No. 1, Op. 78 by Johannes Brahms. Three days later, on February 11, 1935, in Geneva (Switzerland), George Enescu and Clara Haskil presented to the public, among others, works by Schumann (Sonata No. 2, Op. 121) and Enescu (Sonata No. 3, Op. 25, “in Romanian folk character”).

The events had a great echo in the press of the time. On February 13, 1935, the Messager from Montreux was noting: “the Friday recital held in front of a full and vibrant hall was a real delight. Brahms, Schumann, Beethoven in the encore were performed with that emotional perfection that creates life and beauty. As for the technical value of these two artists – which is transcendent –, the interesting and acrobatic Sonata in A minor by Enescu showed us the indisputable value of these two great and attractive Romanian virtuosos” (L. V. F.). Here is what Charles Koella wrote about the same event in the Lausanne Gazette, on February 12, 1935: “One of the most magnificent concerts of the season (...). No word could express the emotion that overwhelmed us listening to the Adagio from Schumann’s Sonata in D minor under the fingers of these two Romanians who are equal in genius, in the deep sense of music and in the unparalleled beauty of the performance.”

On June 5, 1935, a few months after these two concerts, Clara sent Enescu a postcard signed by her and her close friend, the Swiss composer and pianist E. R. Blanchet, in which she was wondering when they would play the Maestro’s sonata together again.

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Although this never happened again, fate brought the two Romanian musicians back together in 1948, when, on October 8, the same Swiss city of Vevey hosted a new recital of sonatas for violin and piano by Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, performed by the Enescu-Haskil duo. In the Lausanne Gazette of 12 October 1948, it was stated: “Never before has Romania given us such a great gift. For two hours, a large number of listeners – there were no more vacancies – had an exhilarating experience (...). The success of the two
artists reached its height when, in a fusion of two souls and two voices, they encored with the admirable Andante from Beethoven’s Ninth Sonata”⁵. The event was also described by Madeleine Lipatti, the wife of pianist Dinu Lipatti, who said: “with Enescu it was not only a musical collaboration, it was the same spring that gushed forth, the same breath that animated them, the same blood that gave life to music. I had a vision of the paradise then!”⁶.

The last concert of the two took place on June 19, 1952, in Strasbourg, France, where Clara Haskil performed L. van Beethoven’s Concerto No. 4, with George Enescu at the conductor’s desk. Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace of July 21, 1952 reports this fact under the title Symphonic Concert Conducted by Mr. George Enescu, whereas Carrefour – in its article entitled The Great Evenings in Strasbourg – speaks of the performance of the two artists in laudatory terms.⁷

Fig. 7. George Enescu and Clara Haskil after the 1952 concert (GENM Archive)

It was one of the significant concerts performed during the last years of the composer’s life, who was apparently tireless, particularly active musically, but having reached an advanced age – 71 years. Enjoying a late albeit well-
deserved appreciation, Clara Haskil (herself 57 years old) was engaged in many
gruelling concert events. Knowing a continually growing success, she
collaborated with great performers and conductors, performing both in Europe
and in America. A trivial accident that occurred on December 7, 1960, abruptly
ended a life and activity dedicated to music, leaving, like the great spirits, a
great emptiness behind.

We are therefore happy to bring back to the readers’ attention a few
common aspects from the biography of the two Romanian musicians. Each has
fulfilled their own destiny in the field of music, belonging among those whose
talent, luck and hard work have secured them the “best seats”. Hence, we
believe, also the chance of these collaborations, which although disparate, are
engraved in the history of music, recorded by critics and memorized by friends
or stage partners. The purpose of these lines was certainly not to exhaustively
discover the connections between George Enescu and Clara Haskil, but rather to
highlight the ones contained in and illustrated by the documents preserved in
the GENM Archive. Thus, we are paying a double homage – to the musician
whose name our institution proudly carries and to the famous pianist, while at
the same time revealing elements belonging to a unique museum heritage.

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Documents from the GENM Archive, Bucharest:
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Photos: Clara Haskil (postcard photo); George Enescu and Clara Haskil, Strasbourg, 1952.

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