When one of the “greats” publishes a book, their heavy steps sink deep, furrowing the ground they tread upon, leaving enduring traces to stand as models not only for the young but also, over time, for the generations to come. The book written by Mrs. Elena Maria Șorban – researcher and professor of music history at the “Gheorghe Dima” National Academy of Music in Cluj-Napoca – reinforces this conviction through the sharpness and breadth of its insight, its rigorously organized and comprehensive structure and, ultimately, the thoroughness of its research. All these are written in a temperate language – a welcome outreach of the hand, a generous invitation on a journey that exudes propaedeutic echoes, discernible in the choice of current and easily accessible online references, as well as in a restrained scientific enthusiasm which, rather than intimidating, brings ideas together in an appropriate cadence, with genuine care for the reader.

The preface by musicologist Oleg Garaz provides an enthusiastic and concise appreciation of the importance of the book: the literary translations of the librettos, the original analytical concept that brings to the fore the librettist and the libretto, that is, the importance of the word (just as the composer himself must have done), the rigorous structuring of the chapters, pursuing unfailingly, with each analysed piece, the following path: A1. Textul (Despre scriitor și textul original) [The text (About the writer and the original text)], A2. Traducerea in limba română [The Romanian translation] and B. Muzica (Despre compozitor și lucrarea sa; Note analitice și subiective și Ecouri contemporane) [The music (About the composer and his work; Analytical and subjective notes and Contemporary echoes)]. The organization of the chapters provides a clean and clear separation of the introductory material derived from the specialized literature (A1. Textul – Despre scriitor și textul original [The text – About the writer and the original text]; B1. Muzica – Despre compozitor și lucrarea sa [The music – About the composer and his work]) from the author’s analytical contribution and original interpretations (A2. Traducerea in limba română [The Romanian translation], B2. Note analitice și subiective [Analytical and subjective notes] and B3. Ecouri contemporane [Contemporary echoes]). However, beyond this schematic structuring, subtle associations emerge from each analysed work, with each presentation revealing a distinct, remote universe unravalled by relevant bibliographic resources, from where thoughts, analogies, allusions, enticing ideas, or even rhetorical questions arise, while the reader becomes an assistant, a witness observing a specialist who brings to attention interpretations of the historical past, the present, or the present in relation to the past. In all this labyrinth of ideas, the book captures the perspective of the contemporary researcher, whose value judgements have been consistently filtered and refined into true landmarks of critical thought.

Although the title of the book, Muzică din cuvânt. De la Bach la Beethoven [Music from Word. From Bach to Beethoven], intimidates by the vast horizon it encompasses, the lens through which the theme is explored preserves the author’s own views – always systematic and documented, with clear-cut boundaries, which the author presents in her own foreword (Precizări despre conținut și redactare [Clarifications on the content and structure]). The six pages (pp. 13-18) also stand for a code of ethics, a guideline that should be familiar to all musicologists. The overt transparency of the research shows that the author first performed the literary and musical analyses, and only then confronted them with the specialized references – a highly relevant aspect for the originality of the book, implying both unexpected convergences in the ideas discovered and in the writings of others, and a conscious departure from the opinions formulated in other research works.

The analysis proper dwells on six referential works belonging to the researched periods (from Bach to Beethoven), exposed in turn, with the focus being on an increasingly rare occupation in the age of globalization (when everyone speaks foreign languages, though not quite fluently) – the profession of the translator of artistic texts, which requires maintaining a strenuous balance between the original meaning and the metrical structure of the lyrics, to provide audiences with the option of listening to these masterpieces in the Romanian language. The author reveals the refining stages of the translation work: “traducere brută, prosodică, cizelare poetică, adaptare la morfologia muzicală” (“raw, prosodic translation, poetic refinement, adaptation to the musical morphology”) (p. 13). Even the different, archaising accentuation of the words becomes relevant for the preservation of the metrical structure of the lyrics, since the music should unfold unhindered in the Romanian language as well, maintaining the concordance between the tonic accents (of the word) and the metrical ones (of the music). The desire to translate the lyrics of vocal music is deeply rooted in the history of musical life in Romania, when Baroque and Classical masterpieces were presented to the public in Romanian, Hungarian or, as the case may have been, in German. Thus, the book includes the entire librettos of the six analysed works, translated into Romanian: The Easter Oratorio and St. Matthew Passion by Johann Sebastian Bach, the vocal chamber cycle Nine German Arias by Georg Friedrich Handel, the song The Violet by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the oratorios The Creation by Joseph Haydn and Christ on the Mount of Olives by Ludwig van Beethoven.
The diversity of the selected musical genres and forms creates a mosaic-like picture of the time, in which the composer’s option for certain literary texts was a quest and a remarkable story in itself. Along with Bach’s masterpieces and Haydn’s and Beethoven’s oratorios, we also discover chamber genres, with their small universe: the vocal chamber cycle *Nine German Arias* by Handel, vacillating between the gallant and sensitive style, intertwined with the synaesthetic expression of Barthold Heinrich Brockes’ poems, or Mozart’s *The Violin*, where Mozart meets Goethe in the same candid tone, inspired by nature.

After the presentation of the librettist, the history of the text’s development and the full translation of the libretto, the second section of the analysis (B.) dwells on the musical aspect. Here, the author focuses on some brief and relevant data about the composer and the creative context, presenting us with a rich and diverse world, with countless details related to the musical life of the time, local customs (the result of a work of untriring historical and topical research), religious and secular traditions, etc., meant to reveal social and cultural mechanisms that were much different from those of today, and which have long since disappeared. We are also presented with opportune critical clarifications concerning the Romanian specialized literature, whose rhetoric is still infused with proletcultist echoes, such as those related to the great J. S. Bach, presented euphemistically during the communist period, a period of “desacralization of meanings”, in an attempt to mask the deeply religious life of the Cantor of Leipzig (pp. 85-86). Bach’s works offer the opportunity to correct the contorted interpretations of his music in the Romanian space: the firm criticism towards “the humanist Bach” (Ioana Stefanescu) or towards the “Earthly Orpheus” (Ovidiu Varga) is inappropriate in the face of the normality of the composer’s era, in which Christian theology was the regulator of the political, cultural, social and, ultimately, everyday life. Christian symbols, musical numerology, sensible rhetorical elements, musical “recycling” techniques (parodies), subtle interpretations of the text and specific practices of the time are accurately analysed in appropriate terminology, exposing, clarifying and highlighting confusions that still exist in the Romanian specialized literature.

A special place is assigned to the reception of these works in the Romanian geographical space. The author’s propensity for the Romanian (especially Transylvanian) culture generates a series of edifying annotations and comparisons, suggestive connections, meant to correlate the Western landmarks with the Romanian space. Thus, alongside the emblem of German literature – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe –, the author mentions his contemporary Romanian counterpart, Ienăchiță Vâcărescu, in whose 18th-century love poems we discover the same naive and sentimental literary style (pp. 112-113). Bach’s importance for the Romanian musical culture is emphasized by the echoes of the Passion music genre that pervade Romanian music (Paul Constantinescu, with his Byzantine oratorios, and Hans-Peter Türk, who belongs to the contemporary Transylvanian Saxon community). Regarding to reception of Haydn’s *The Creation* in communist Romania, the author also evokes conductor Erich Bergel’s clandestine intention of making a tour of the Transylvania churches with this masterpiece with a long history in the region; his successful attempt, albeit followed by reprisals, preserves the tragic-comic accents of the investigation carried out by the vigilant employees of the *Securitate*. The heroic Beethovenian image of Christ on the Mount of Olives inspires the author with the same metaphor as the one used in the painting *Yalta* by our contemporary Parisian painter Victor Cupșa, originally from Dej (Cluj/Romania). The documented mentions related to the Romanian premières and actors of the musical life complete the general picture of the Romanian musical life.

A special subchapter entitled *Ecouri contemporane* [Contemporary echoes] presents the author’s interest not only in the already consumed past but also in the present and in the way the works of the past are artistically shaped in the contemporary consciousness and includes adaptations and interpretations of the six analysed pieces, produced in the last decades. A generous space is dedicated to the great Bach (pp. 84-96). The author probes the reception of Bach’s music as reflected in the contemporary dramatic arts (artistic films and documentaries, various stage productions, ballets), through analyses that manage to decode value messages in the cryptic symbolism of the contemporary arts (comments on: Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*; choreographer John Neumeier’s ballet; the “semi-staged ‘ritualization’” imagined by director Peter Sellars; the film directed by Ramón Gieling; Romeo Castellucci’s stage production). The analysis of Haydn’s *The Creation* gives rise to refined comments related to comparative performances: Leonard Bernstein or Trevor Pinnock. There are also remarks on the reception of composers such as Mozart, for instance, in contemporary entertainment music, based on the performance of *Das Veilchen* by singer Nina Hagen in-a hybrid, provocative style (punkademics), which shows the author’s lack of prejudice in treating the so-called light music with equal analytical attention (pp. 118-119).

The soundness of the musical analysis relies, on the one hand, on interpretations of the landmarks of the time (musical rhetoric and the affective properties of keys), as formulated then; on the other hand, each analysis is in touch with the present, through references to the contemporary reception of the selected pieces. At the end of the book, in support of the scientific foundation, we are presented with the translation of two highly relevant sections from prominent treatises of the Baroque and Classical periods: *The affective properties of keys in Mattheson* (pp. 173-177), and *in Schubart* (pp. 179-182). The *Glossary* at the end of the volume (pp. 189-200) completes the terminological panoply specific to the periods under consideration. The book also reflects the author’s strong belief that the virtuosity and technical mastery of the instrumentalists and singers must necessarily be oriented.
towards expressiveness, towards evoking emotion in the audience – a necessary and inescapable goal of musical art (from both then and now). Thus, the translations from Mattheson’s and Schubart’s texts are placed at the disposal of performers as an orientation guide on the old meanings of the keys, being available to any performer who wishes to grasp the meaning of the music ranging “from Bach to Beethoven.”

We are thus faced with a substantial book, whose reading confirms a solid approach based on the author’s close exploration of the texts as a translator, a comprehensive book through the periods addressed and the variety of information involved, an exemplary one through its methodical structure, surprising through its power of synthesis, and original through its sensible and accurate analytical observations. We are looking forward to the sequel!

*Translated from Romanian by Marcella Magda*