

BEYOND REGIONALISMS AND NATIONALISMS: CORNEL ȚĂRANU*

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ABSTRACT

In a similar way to his composer colleagues, most of them from Bucharest, Țăranu consistently followed a European path, which at the same time has solid roots in the Transylvanian traditions and in Enescu's composition. In my text I will refer to the whole generation of the sixties, their mentors and the radical views of the young composer. Education by composers who began their careers in interwar Romania, Enescu's legacy and decisive steps towards the avant-garde are the main layers of Țăranu's compositions. It was important for me to integrate this clear voice into the choir of his contemporary Romanian composers, many of whom were good, solid friends.

Keywords: Mentors from the interwar period, Enescu's legacy, postwar avant-garde

I have repeatedly written texts on Romanian post-war music histories, of various sizes and for different purposes and audiences. It is true that my focus has been mainly on Bucharest-based composers (many of which were my own professors), and now, as I look back and try to make an inventory of my few lines on Cornel Țăranu, I realize that there are two reasons to do so. One subjective

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reason I explained within the bracket above; the other one, of a more objective nature, is more generally due to the histories of greater Romania, with a tendency to gather important information around the capital. As a matter of fact, here are the institutions of irradiating cross-country influence, of which the Romanian Academy and the Union of Composers and Musicologists are significant examples, with both having branches in Cluj.

In the research conducted during these past three postsocialist decades, in discussions and interviews with composers (and other colleagues, be they musicologists or performers), I have sometimes been under the impression of a kind of reticent distance between some musicians in Cluj and some in Bucharest: the former accused their southern colleagues of “Balkanisms” and the latter accused those in the North of arrogance. On the other hand, all my brief opportunities of encountering Cornel Țăranu in Bucharest or Cluj triggered my admiration for his generous personality, situated beyond geographical rivalries. In fact, just like most of his colleagues of the same generation, Țăranu consistently remained a European, with solid roots in Transylvanian or Enescian traditions that pigmented his originality with local nuances.

These coordinates of his creation I would like to peruse more attentively. I would start with the musician’s own crystal-clear statement: “My first professor was Marțian Negrea, followed by Sigismund Toduță, both people of outstanding value, and then I had a whole elite of Bucharest friends. I am not really only from Cluj, I am often in Bucharest too, and my friendship with some of the leading names in our contemporary art, such as Vieru, Olah, Niculescu, Stroe, Marbé, Dan Constantinescu and others, has meant a lot to me, and I would even say that we developed together and helped each other to a certain extent. This is something that doesn’t happen to today’s young generations any longer.”¹

The Generation of the sixties: mentors and radicalizations

Since his very start in composition, in full swing of socialist realism and of Soviet political documents rigorously and restrictively transported into Romanian musical life², the musician from Cluj drew near to his Bucharest colleagues who shared the same dreams. In a closed world, isolated from Western Europe, young

¹ Cornel Țăranu, in an interview with Marina Constantinescu (the programme *Nocturne / Nocturnals*, RTV 1, 2011), quoted by Ștefan Anghi, *Cornel Țăranu. Mărturisiri mozaicate, studii și eseuri / Cornel Țăranu. Patchwork Confessions, Studies and Essays*, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 18. We find a similar reference to composer friends in Bucharest in the same book (p. 24), a quote from another article, published in 2014 in *Ziarul financiar*.

² Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *Muzica românească între 1944 și 2000 / Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 2002.

people born in the 1930s, whose debuts took place after George Enescu's death, absorbed the novelties of world composition with extraordinary force, even though the extent to which they could penetrate through the iron curtain was rather feeble. In the fifties, the Composers' Union commissioned mass mobilizing all-accessible musics to its members, expecting topics emerging from social realities such as industrialization, village collectivization and electrification (etc.), or direct homages to the leaders of the day. A few young people educated in Bucharest and Cluj by professors of exemplary status, the creators of interwar modernity – Mihail Jora, Mihail Andricu or Sigismund Toduță – were, however, looking for something entirely different.

For some years, the names of Tiberiu Olah, Anatol Vieru, Ștefan Niculescu, Myriam Marbé, Dan Constantinescu, Aurel Stroe, Cornel Țăranu made up a compact and united group, joined by a common interest in new music. Within this group of young composers solidarity prevailed that will not be found in any other generation of Romanian music. They all attended every performance of their colleagues' works, which were then discussed for hours on end. They participated in the Union's workshop sessions with a united point of view (where mainly Romanian music was presented, but from 1958 also some important works of musical modernism started to be heard, by Berg, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev). And they experimented with novel forms of serialism, by which the bureau of symphonic music would no longer be able just to count up the first 12 chromatic notes of the score. While it is true that the works of these younger composers were programmed only sporadically in their country's concert life, they were encouraged to strengthen their relationship with the doctrine of socialist realism, which had now become more 'liberal', after Stalin's death.

It should be noted that the composers grouped in this way did not represent an entire generation. Other composers of similar age preferred a different aesthetic line, a post-Enescu approach of moderating between old and new, and seeking an equilibrium between the international symphonic tradition (especially that of France) and the principles of Romanian traditional music. This latter group was valued more highly by the leadership of the Union of the time (i.e. Ion Dumitrescu) and included Pascal Bentoiu, Wilhelm Georg Berger, Nicolae Beloiu, Theodor Grigoriu and Dumitru Capoianu.

On the other hand, the group of 'radical modernists' will generate more followers than the latter group of 'moderates'¹ – be it because newly rising generations of the young are consistently attracted to experimentation or because they passed through the composition classes of Ștefan Niculescu, Aurel Stroe,

¹ I am using here the concepts applied by Hermann Danuser in *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. VII, in *Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*, Laaber Verlag, Laaber, 1984.

Tiberiu Olah, Anatol Vieru, Dan Constantinescu and Myriam Marbé, professors for many years at the Bucharest Conservatorium, or the class of Cornel Țăranu in Cluj.

In a portrait for the *Muzica* journal, Vasile Herman provides an accurate account of his colleague's double stylistic commitment: Toduță (an embodiment of the continuation of the great classical European music tradition in point of architecture and polyphony) and Enescu (the promoter of the lyrical trend in Romanian music after 1960), without neglecting the thorough study of contemporaneity or the particular, original colour of his works.¹ Even this duality of sources connects Cornel Țăranu to his above-mentioned Bucharest colleagues. In turn, they had the advantage of Mihail Jora's solid harmonic and polyphonic teaching of German inspiration, as well as of Mihail Andricu's opening towards the world of French music. According to his disciples' testimonies, these three mentors (Toduță, Jora, Andricu) expressed – to various extents and at various points in time – reservations with respect to young composers' avant-garde tendencies and their interest in radical newness in world composition. But they also provided a solid education of the musical écriture, with consistent attention given to rigorous detail, and encouraged their interdisciplinary, encyclopaedic cultural curiosity.

Cornel Țăranu actually explains in an interview his pedagogical goal at the time he was working with Sigismund Toduță: since in the maestro's class avant-garde music was not studied, his younger colleague carefully balanced the situation by encouraging his students' curiosity for new musics, thus offering them information from lesser explored areas: "they are my former students, now mature composers, such as Péter Szeghő or Adrian Pop. They took my harmony course, as did Liviu Glodeanu, Mihai Moldovan, Dan Voiculescu, Hans Peter Türk and Gabriel Irányi. [...] I was over 30 and I was bringing this new approach, as I had studied with Olivier Messiaen in Paris"².

Enescu's legacy

As regards George Enescu's influence, we need to give every concrete situation the benefit of the doubt. It is a well-known fact that George Enescu did not create a school of composition during his lifetime, either in the sense of direct professor-student transmission of information, as was the case in Vienna with Arnold Schoenberg, or in the wider sense of a community of ideas or aesthetic principles.³ After he migrated to Paris and gracefully, but firmly refused to

¹ Vasile Herman, *Cornel Țăranu, Médaillon*, in „Muzica” 2/1981, pp. 42-48.

² Interview with Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu, 2011, quoted by Anđi, *Mărturisiri mozaicate...*, ed. cit., p. 52.

³ Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *George Enescu, Posthumously Reviewed*, in „Studia Musicologica” 59/1–2, 2018, pp. 61-69.

collaborate with communist authorities in Bucharest, Enescu disappeared from the lists of the Composers' Union for a few years. His world fame made the communists change their minds, and after the composer's death he was slowly and irreversibly turned into a nationalist symbol, together with Mihai Eminescu in literature and Constantin Brâncuși in visual arts.

The enormous bibliography on Enescu contains studies and volumes signed by composers such as Ștefan Niculescu, Pascal Bentoiu, Myriam Marbé, Adrian Rațiu, Cornel Țăranu¹ or Wilhelm Georg Berger, all of them examining the depths of Enescu's grammar and style. The attention drawn by Enescu's last opus, *The Chamber Symphony* (1954), whose modernity stands out in the Romanian music of that time, is also justified by all those young people's attitude as they were trying to lay the foundations of a Romanian musical avant-garde in the sixties. Enescu's music thus goes hand in hand with the interest in the Viennese School's dodecaphony, Pierre Boulez's and Karlheinz Stockhausen's serialism, in the music of Belá Bartók, Igor Stravinski, Paul Hindemith or Olivier Messiaen. Such names, however, were not favoured by that time's socialist realism, which considered them decadent and mystical; all the more welcome is the strategy to "cover" young modernists under Enescu's glory. Communist nationalism certainly favoured the discovery of the folk vein in some of Enescu's work, and any music claiming (more or less in the right) to be drawing on Enescu was welcome.

Stylistic continuities are not too many, actually, and it is a well-known fact that they are mostly due to Pascal Bentoiu and to Cornel Țăranu; the latter dedicated a significant amount of time to reconstituting and orchestrating a few scores sketched by George Enescu: *Caprice roumain for violin and orchestra* and *Strigoi* (The Ghosts), based on Eminescu's poem.

If we thumb through post-war Romanian musicology specialising in Enescu's creation, it seems that one of the techniques that definitely marked other composers who followed Enescu would be a way to integrate folklore in forms belonging to the Western European tradition and to allude "the Romanian folk character". This was exquisitely achieved in the *Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano* (1926). Due to the subtlety of the way in which some suggestions were taken over from Romanian oral traditions, that this kind of Enescu-derived relationship with folklore is radically different from the neoclassical typology of the fifties-sixties, in agreement with socialist realism, which at the time promoted folk inspiration aggressively. On the other hand, some musicians – theorists and performers – have not avoided exaggeration in the description and rendering of a "national specific character" in the *Sonata No. 3* by Enescu, to the detriment of the European context in which it was written.

¹ For example, Cornel Țăranu, *Enescu în conștiința prezentului*, Editura pentru literatură, Bucharest, 1969; *Enescu în lumina unei lucrări necunoscute: Strigoi*, in „Muzica”, I/1972; *Simfonia a V-a de Enescu*, in „Muzica”, IV/1973, pp. 20-24.

A type of writing that has truly created a school, heterophony, exquisitely theorised by Ștefan Niculescu, originates in archaic cultures and has been analysed in Enescu's creation, where, "although dissimulated in a more or less traditional texture, it sets in as a specific mode of organisation"¹. The idea of combining the modal melos or the parlando-rubato rhythm with polyphony has further generated multiple varieties of writing, mainly inspired by the oblique dimension of heterophony. The defining feature for Romanian music after 1960, heterophonic texture, is found in scores signed by composers such as Ștefan Niculescu, Anatol Vieru, Tiberiu Olah, Pascal Bentoiu, Theodor Grigoriu, Cornel Țăranu, Adrian Rațiu, Liviu Glodeanu, Mihai Moldovan, Violeta Dinescu, Doina Rotaru, Adrian Iorgulescu and Liviu Dănceanu. This problematic extends into researching the relationship between unison and multivocality. Various conceptions of such composers adapt heterophony to open form, to multidirectional discourse and improvisation, they include mathematical calculations or empirical aleatoricism, graphic suggestion etc.

The construction principle of Enescian melody is interesting for the followers through the way in which it evokes folklore without actually citing it. As monody, melody can become the main carrier of expression, and monodic insertions also come from Enescu's legacy, as declared by Cornel Țăranu, for instance, with respect to *Prolegomene II* for string orchestra and piano (written on Enescu's centenary in 1982).²

There was also a lot of debate around the adaptation of the parlando-rubato rhythmic system (associated to improvisational style) to the Western metric system. The flow of Enescu's music, the complex stratification of heterophonic lines and fluid rhythms, has been compared to the folk genre of the Romanian doina, which is characterised by contemplative lyricism. An important part of post-war Romanian music inherits this contemplative feature, which it seems to prefer to the incisiveness of the giusto or aksak rhythms (even though, in Belá Bartók's descent, these have not been neglected either). Many other Enescian stylistic elements can be found in the music of generations of composers who followed, from the variational procedure to minuteness in notation, in indications inscribed in the score, to embedding quotations from Enescu's musics in works dedicated to Enescu's memory. Here are just a few examples from compositions written by Țăranu: *Simfonia Brevis* (1960-1961), which paraphrases the theme in *Symphony No. 1* by Enescu; *Sonata for Flute* (1960), which evokes certain motive contours in Enescu's *Chamber Symphony*; the flute melodies in *Aulodica* (*Symphony No. 2*, 1975) remind of the melos in "Prelude in unison" in *Suite No. 1* by Enescu, and

¹ Ștefan Niculescu, Eterofonia, in „Studii de muzicologie” Vol. 5, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1969, pp. 63-77. One is bound to notice that the author's interest in heterophony is also stimulated by Pierre Boulez's considerations on heterofony in *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, Gonthier, Paris, 1963.

² See Ruxandra Arzoiu, A Dialogue with the Composer Cornel Țăranu, in „Muzica” 2/1994, pp. 153-156.

similarities with Enescu's *Dixtuor* can be found in the same symphony; two 2005 works are programmatically dedicated to Enescu (50 years after his death): *Rimembranza* for orchestra (in memoriam) and *Simfonia da requiem*, for mixed choir and orchestra.¹

Finally, it is interesting to look at the assimilations of aspects of Enescian language, visible in many of his successors' scores, to establish continuities in a possible Romanian school of composition. But even more significant, given its present-day relevance, is the idea of synthesis: just as the *Sonata No. 3* for piano and violin, "in the Romanian folk character", demonstrated possibilities of fusion of violin microtonal pitches with piano tempering, of the free rhythm with the metric one, of oral culture-based improvisation with scholarly European art construction², some post-war Romanian composers tried in similar ways to graft a certain Romanian tone onto Western avant-garde trends.

The fusion between dodecaphony and the "folkloric" was proven not to be impossible either, as shown by Cornel Țăranu in *Sonata Ostinato* for piano (1961). The series underlying the sonata is divided into three melodic sections, which might be considered modal formulae³, and, even though the music's content is characterized by a pronounced Webernian character, in places the harmonization suggests heterophonic aspects, unisons, rhythmical structures inspired from traditional musics. Later, "the deepening of Enescu's mythical thinking and demonism, which appears in later compositions, inspired Țăranu, directing him towards archaic themes, as far as developing new musical images inspired by Oedipus's myth."⁴ Symbolic threads and the exemplary power of myth prove to be significant to Țăranu's musical thinking in his chamber opera *Oreste-Oedipe* (1999-2001), an extension of Enescu's *Oedipe* (1921-1931) and close to Aurel Stroe's *Orestias* (1973-1988). The novelty appears in the idea of the fusion between the two ancient figures, at "the encounter between two fundamental myths meant to explain themselves and each other through the significance of former times' meanings, for new visions of modern musical performance"⁵.

Even though it claims to be a stylistic prolongation of Enescu's work, Cornel Țăranu's music manifests a certain asperity of expression as a defining

¹ See Ștefan Anghi, *Varietatea evocării ethosului enescian în compozițiile lui Cornel Țăranu* / The Variety of Evoking Enescu's Ethos in Cornel Țăranu's composition, in *Cornel Țăranu. Mărturisiri mozaicate...*, pp. 59-77.

² See Ștefan Niculescu, *George Enescu și a III-a sa Sonată pentru pian și vioară* / George Enescu and His Sonata No. 3 for Piano and Violin, in „Simpozion Enescu 1981”, edit. by Michaela Roșu, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1984, pp. 142-145.

³ See Dora Cojocaru, *A Field of Large Expressive Force. Folklore as Inspiration Source in Romanian Contemporary Music*, în „World New Music Magazine”, 9/1999, p. 54.

⁴ Ștefan Anghi, *Varietatea evocării ethosului enescian în compozițiile lui Cornel Țăranu*, p. 60.

⁵ Ștefan Anghi, *Opera de cameră Oreste & Oedipe de Cornel Țăranu* / The Chamber Opera *Oreste & Oedipe* by Cornel Țăranu, in *Mărturisiri mozaicate...*, p. 152.

Transylvanian feature, which is not found in Enescu – “a kind of genial precursor of all subsequent tendencies in our music, especially in the nostalgic oneiric area [...]. He is one of the first oneirics, *avant-la-lettre*”¹. Detachment from that nostalgic zone can sometimes mean writing “more optimistic, ironical, even grotesque musics,” in order to diversify an expressive range which otherwise becomes very boring, all our Mioritza-like *parlando-rubato* pieces”². Transylvanian space actually determines an affective communion between certain composers (Liviu Glodeanu, Mihai Moldovan, Cornel Țăranu), metaphorically defined by Anatol Vieru as “tenderness hidden under ruggedness”³.

A Romanian composer in the choir of European avant-garde

For Cornel Țăranu, impulses coming from the Western avant-garde have been equally important. In the years of Romania’s opening towards the West, right after Nicolae Ceaușescu’s coming to power, the sixties generation could finally become acquainted with European musics and festivals. Many of Țăranu’s generation colleagues shared impressions about the impact this freedom of movement (which, unfortunately, did not last long) had on their composition ideas. They finally saw their interest in new music validated, even though this was regarded with a certain suspicion by their maestros at home and with a total lack of trust by the Composers’ Union. Once in Paris, in 1966, Țăranu visited Nadia Boulanger’s class, which interested him to a lesser extent (given its traditionalism) than Olivier Messiaen’s. “I took great musical and professional advantage of my contact with Messiaen, as from my contact with Paris musical life, concerts, the friends I made there.”⁴ He goes on to confess that he could write no music in Paris, as he was completely absorbed by the musical life, permeable to all information and suggestions assaulting him from all directions. I think that Romanian musicology has a lot to investigate in point of the ways in which Messiaen’s sometimes decisive influence was felt in Romanian composition. Successive generations in Romanian Conservatoires, for instance, studied harmonic *écriture* invented by Messiaen through limited transposition modes for decades.

Another experience – a decisive one for the composers in Țăranu’s generation – is that of the international new music classes in Darmstadt. The Cluj composer talks about his experience there, declaring his preference mostly for Italian colleagues, and less for Stockhausen. This festival in Darmstadt, in

¹ See Oleg Garaz, *De vorbă cu compozitorul Cornel Țăranu / A Dialogue with Composer Cornel Țăranu*, in „Muzica” 2/ 1998, p. 91.

² Garaz, p. 94.

³ Anatol Vieru, *A Portrait of Mihai Moldovan*, in „Muzica” 4/ 1987, pp. 17-19.

⁴ Cornel Țăranu, quoted by Anghi, in *Mărturisiri mozaicate...*, p. 31.

conjunction with the Warsaw Autumn, had already launched carriers of young people coming from Eastern Europe, such as Krzysztof Penderecki, György Ligeti (who had already emigrated from Hungary), György Kurtág a.s.o. For Polish and Hungarian people, international mobility had been possible as early as the fifties, which resulted in their insertion in the avant-garde composition circuits. Romanians had access to Darmstadt (and, generally, Western music centers) after the mid sixties, when the conjuncture had not favoured a real launching into the mainstream. However, the fact that in Paris a Romanian musical diaspora was gathering shape had a positive effect: the (then) prestigious Salabert Publishing House accepts to take over scores by ten composers of Romanian origin (some of which had long lived abroad): Costin Cazaban, Marius Constant, Alexandru Hrisanide, Costin Mioreanu, Mihai Mitrea-Celarianu, Ștefan Niculescu, Tiberiu Olah, Aurel Stroe, Cornel Țăranu and Anatol Vieru.

Cornel Țăranu interiorized his preferences and affinities, he drew away from them, and knew how to configure his poignant, original profile in the decades to come. The education he had received through contact with the inter-war Romanian maestros, up to Enescu's legacy, and the decisive steps towards post-war composition avant-garde – all these are rediscovered by researchers of Țăranu's work in well-layered strata. His personal language is centred on fragmented melodicity, chromatic modal scales, melismatic insertions from archaic folklore and ostinato harmonic ranges. Serialism, controlled improvisation, fusion music and postmodernism, as well as the sensitiveness of the control of human voice are not missing from his stylistic choices. For me, it was important to integrate this distinct voice in the choir of his contemporary Romanian composers, of which many were good solid friends.

In my turn, I have never dared count myself among Cornel Țăranu's Bucharest friends. But the luminous joy that every encounter with him, his stories and his ironical spirit, the natural turn of his jokes with many underlying meanings, always give me, keeps coming back like a leitmotif whenever I open Ștefan Angi's book, from which I quoted in the text above, with the following dedication by the composer, in which those who know him will recognize his unmistakable style: "For Valentina. Valentine's day must be everyday."

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