

Short Story of Romanian New Music

In a context of globalization, while the plural “*musics*” is preferred to the singular form of the word “*music*”, where could one find and fit the Romanian *new music*? In order to ask this question, I’ll focus on some landmarks of Romanian music history.

Two main rivers crossed the Romanian music in 19th century: the traditional peasant music and the Byzantine sacred music of the Orthodox Church. Perceived in Western countries as the western part of the former Ottoman Empire, Romania developed rapidly in the first half of 20th century a musical tradition in connection with the Western standards, due especially to the charismatic personality of George Enescu, a huge musician and cultural *guru*, who founded musical institutions and influenced the art music output for a century.

One could define Romanian new music after Enescu as a *synergy between West and East*. The tension given by two contrasting temporalities – action *versus* stasis - is to be observed here, together with specific features like melodic fluency, hedonistic sonorities, taste for bizarre timbral mixtures and wacky changes of mood.

Mainstream of modernity

After the World War II one can witness in Romanian art music some sort of an anxiety of influence: a new generation of composers are reclaiming their ideas from Enescus prophetic last works. Some of them belong to the mainstream of modern music and try to derive from Enescu means to connect with the future: Pascal Bentoiu (*1927) focused on large scale forms in his 8 symphonies and 3 operas (his European breakthrough was the impressive opera on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*), Ștefan Niculescu (1927-2008), Ligeti’s close friend, launched the memetic idea of heterophony (in works like *Ison II, Fourth Symphony, Romanian Requiem*), Theodor Grigoriu (*1926) concentrated his monumental output on the concept of ethos (*Tristia, “Romanian Seasons” - 4 Violin Concertos, Liturgical Symphony*), Cornel Țăranu (*1934) enhanced chromatic ornamentations and harsh contrasts (*Guirlandes, Incantations*).

In the same mainstream belong also composers which were influenced by Bartok’s and Straviski’s works, which were forbidden by the Communist regime in early ’50s. Here one can name Tiberiu Olah (1928-2002), whom harmonic thinking and diatonically combinations are impressive (the cycle *Harmonies, Third Symphony*), Aurel Stroe (1932-2008), with clear-cut sonorities, freshness of design and an original mix of musics - from Indian rāgas to Paganini-like acrobatics (*Violin Concerto, Clarinet Concerto, opera-trilogy Orestia*), Anatol Vieru (1926-1998), Schnittke’s non-identical twin, who made from modal scales and rotational forms like chaconne a consistent compositional system (*7 symphonies, opera Jonah, Cello Concerto*) and Myriam Marbé (1931-1997), carrying on the twentieth-century tradition of improvisation and mixing it with an refined lyrical instrumental writing (*Ritual for the Thirst of the Earth, Trio Basso, Saxophone Concerto*).

Archetypal Minimalism and Gestural Music

In Enescu's music one can find also the source of an *atemporal* music. What's this? A music without a goal to fulfill, a self-sufficient linear stasis. Composers like Corneliu Dan Georgescu (*1938), Mihai Mitrea-Celarianu (1935-2005) and Octavian Nemescu (*1940) imagine a music which originates in minimalism and looks for basic pattern of music, called in a Jungian style - archetypes. In this respect, we can name this trend *archetypal minimalism* and even force a parallel to American composers like Cage, Feldman or Reich, because one can find auratic affinities between them all.

In the same generation of composers we find in '70es another type of music, the *gestural music*, based on vivid contrasts, colorful orchestral textures and well defined structures. Prolific composers like Liviu Glodeanu (1938-1978), Nicolae Brînduș (*1935), Mihai Moldovan (1937-1981), Costin Mioreanu (*1943) and Viorel Munteanu (*1944) are to be grouped in this alternative stream of Romanian new music.

***Espressivo* Music**

A new wave comes to the fore around 1980. Revisiting the sources of traditional music and under the influence of both French spectralism and American postmodernism, a new generation of composers brings a powerful expression into their music. Doina Rotaru's (*1951) lamento-melismatic melodic style, Adrian Iorgulescu's (*1951) timbral sensitivity, Calin Ioachimescu's (*1949) pure and serene spectral sounds, Adrian Pop's (*1951) double-sided idiom, vigorous and fancy-lyrical, Liviu Danceanu's (*1954) wifful and unpredictable music, Violeta Dinescu's (*1953) light and fluid textures can be seen as layers of the same artistic attitude: the need for an *espressivo* music, a feeling-oriented music.

Narrativism

After the fall of Ceausescu's communist regime, one can see the Romanian society absorbing very different influences. Music make no exception. In this respect, the young generation develop an uninhibited style in many directions: trendy radicalism mixes with conceptual totalism (music about other musics). Although very different in style and aesthetical options, the works of Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea (*1959), George Balint (*1961), Mihaela Vosganian (*1961), Dan Dediu (*1967), Irinel Anghel (*1969) show a unique feature: they just love to write *narrative music*, music in which it happens a lot of action. In this respect, narrativism is to be understand as a reaction of the young generation to the archetypal minimalism of the '70ies.

Now we come to the question from the beginning: where to fit the Romanian new music in the ocean of new musics? I will risk an answer. Certainly, in our intimate geography of moods, there is always a hip little place we call in Romania *râsu'-plânsu'* (*laughing cry* or *crying laugh*). It's something you could find very original or totally boring, but I think it's the front door to our music. Just try it.

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composer