



Towards a Genuine University Status: the National University of Music Bucharest between the Two World Wars (1918–1940)

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Neither of the stages of development of an institution such as the National University of Music Bucharest – at least with respect to the interwar period – can be understood without going back, even if only briefly, to the moment it was established, under the name of the Bucharest Conservatory of Music and Declamation - an event closely tied to the historical context and to the evolution of Romanian culture in the middle of the 19th century.

In 1859, Romania as a country had just appeared on the map of the world, as the direct result of the union between two Romanian territories, Moldavia and Wallachia. Young Romania was at the confluence of two cultures, Oriental and Occidental, the former being a consequence of the Ottoman domination exerted for a long time in the South-East of Europe and the latter emerging as a viable alternative, desired and shared by all. The first half of the century, culminating in the revolutions of 1848, had set the stage for a gradual embracing of Western values, and the path that Romanian history took represented a continuous consolidation of the new direction of development of the whole society: after the union, Prince Carol, of German origin,¹ becomes the young country's leader, gaining, in war, its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877, and turning it into a kingdom in 1881. Romania would thus start on a profound change, a lengthy process which would meet with such advantageous events as the annexation of Transylvania (the third province with a majority Romanian popula-

1 Full name: Karl Eitel Friedrich Zephyrimus Ludwig von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen.

tion) to Romania in 1918, or which would have to withstand the great trials of the turbulent 20th century – the two world wars or Communism taking power in our country.

To support the wish for emancipation and for compensating the delay in progress compared to Western societies, measures and concrete reforms were needed, so as to change mentalities, habits, to build coherent political, economic, and cultural structures, for “*progress, streaming in from Europe, takes [a willing] Romania by storm*”.² Among the institutions to be founded then, with the purpose of offering proper assistance to the new direction, was also the Conservatory of Music and Declamation,³ established on October 6, 1864, by the decree of Alexandru Ioan Cuza – the ruler of Romania at that time. The decision was in agreement with the country’s new musical landscape, which, over half a century, had escaped from Orient and its influence. The official music of the royal court, church music, all types of music undergo important changes – by as early as 1830 the Turkish mehterhane is a distant memory, the current of an increasingly Romanian sacred music is stronger and stronger, and popular music is open to repertoires imported from the West.

The founding of the Bucharest Conservatory of Music and Declamation is part of a larger set of similar initiatives in 19th century Europe. It aimed, right from the beginning, at becoming an artistic institution dedicated to the advancement of its students, musicians or actors, and to offering a high-level education.

The Conservatory’s history, at least from its beginnings and until after World War II, shows a positive pace of development, owing in a great measure to its leaders, who identified with the needs and artistic aspirations of their times. Alexandru Flechtenmacher, Eduard Wachmann, Dimitrie Popovici-Bayreuth are the most important leaders who, until the first decade of the 20th century, ensured that the Conservatory would progress and yield results, with a strategy focusing on specific fundamental directions. If at first they strove towards a balance between vocal and instrumental music, between sacred and secular music, which also considered the market requirement, they arrived, in time, at a diversification of specialization.

2 Ioana Pârvulescu, *În intimitatea secolului 19* [In the Intimacy of the 19th Century] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005), 66.

3 In time, the institution has been called in different ways. In between wars, its names were: Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. See Antigona Rădulescu, *Odiseea muzicală / Musical Odyssey 1864–2014* (Bucharest: Editura UNMB, 2014), 186–189.

To the departments of singing, violin, cello, double bass, piano, music theory and church choir others are soon added: Winds (from 1870), Orchestra (from 1873), History of Music (1883), Harp, Chamber Music, Choral Singing (towards the end of the 19th century).

Another orientation of the institutional policy was to attract new teachers, capable of forming well-trained musicians and actors who would come close to, and eventually match the European level of education. These were joined by highly-trained foreign musicians, graduates of renowned European conservatories. They were first asked to help in teaching certain specialisations which Romanian instructors hadn't the means to tutor, and to offer superior didactic models. Particular attention was given to the improvement of the curricula, disciplines were restructured and new subjects were introduced. Graduates were given the opportunity to continue their activity at the newly-founded Romanian concert or performing arts venues, such as the Romanian Philharmonic Society or the Romanian Opera. During Eduard Wachmann's⁴ management (1869–1903), the initiative is taken to publish yearbooks containing numerous statistics on teachers and students, admission requirements, school year structure, programs, artistic events. A radiography of the Conservatory's needs and organisational capacities, they offer even today the image of its dynamics, of conditions offered, and of the results of ambitious, hard work, not infrequently checked by obstacles, insufficient funding, and inadequate material resources.

The important step towards modernisation coincided with the beginning of the 20th century, with the appointment, in 1904, by the then minister of education Spiru Haret (himself an excellent organiser of modern Romanian education), of Dimitrie Popovici-Bayreuth at the head of the Conservatory (between 1904 and 1919)⁵. In his 15-year tenure, showing an undeterred will and determination, he would leave his mark on the systematization of the Conservatory's functioning and on its level of artistic quality. He would address the same issues his forbearers had faced, such as optimising the learning process, strengthening the discipline, extending the specialisation options by establishing new departments, finding, though, much better solutions. He gave particular attention to improving

4 Composer, conductor, pianist, teacher from a family of German descent, he studied in Vienna, Dresden, Munich, and Paris. He was also the founder and director of the Romanian Philharmonic Society.

5 The baritone was best known for his Wagnerian roles in international productions, many of them mounted on the Bayreuth stage – hence the adopted surname.

both working and learning conditions as well as the stock of material supplies, procuring instruments, scores and books.

New generations of teachers are selected following competitions, which test their value. Teachers from abroad continue to be invited. Gradually, another phase is reached, where Romanian teachers are no longer educated only at the great European conservatories (Paris, Vienna, Leipzig), but at the very institution they taught at in Bucharest and which in 1907 went by the name of the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art. One of director Popovici-Bayreuth's best initiatives is worth mentioning: the introduction, in addition to the already existing disciplines of harmony, counterpoint, and fugue, of a class of musical composition as an independent discipline. Italian composer and conductor Alfonso Castaldi was invited to teach the new subject. He was also entrusted with the Conservatory's orchestra. This turned out to be a decision with far-reaching consequences, as Castaldi thus formed the Romanian composers who would finalize, in the first half of the 20th century, the process of catching up to the European models in musical composition.

The regulations, regularly revised, ensured an improved quality of teaching and a coherent curricula strategy. The level of education is steadily increasing at Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art, and reflects benefits on the students, be they instrumentalists, singers or actors: in addition to the usual classes they are offered the chance to take part in the Conservatory's concerts and opera or theatrical performances, and their talent begins to attract the attention of the audience and music critics. Some of them would become successful artists in Romania or abroad, others would themselves become teachers at the institution, which formed and improved their skills. 45 years from its establishment, the institution registered a positive outcome, as press would be quick to notice:

a very busy school, the Bucharest Conservatory is a highly useful institution, seeing that music and theatre are closely tied to the advancement of a country's civilisation ...⁶

This stability, secured over a quarter of a century, ends with the beginning of World War I. The difficult situation Romania goes through, especially between 1916 and 1918, would impact the destinies of the members of the academic community. Furthermore, in the 1916–1917 school year the Con-

6 Mihail Mărgăritescu, quoted by Octavian Lazăr Cosma, *Universitatea Națională de Muzică din București la 140 de ani* [National University of Music Bucharest on its 140th Birthday], vol. 2 (Bucharest: UNMB Publishing House, 2008), 82.

servatory suspended its classes, because of the war. Foreign teachers removed, others are called to enlist in the army, some of them would fall prisoners, other would seek refuge and turn to safer places.

After the war, Romania's destiny changes – the country has a new king, Ferdinand I, and fulfils its dream of national unity by the union with Transylvania, on December 1, 1918. Bucharest is still the capital, now ablaze with the effervescence of modernisation, in line with the European atmosphere. It would develop at a dizzying speed, and new social and cultural structures come into being at a fast pace. The city turns into a cosmopolitan metropolis, which offers its inhabitants an exciting lifestyle, and signs of technological progress are everywhere to be seen. The interwar period is the time of an unprecedented flourishing of literature and the arts. Patriarchal values are eclipsed by the rush of the currents intersecting in artistic thought and production, even if, for some, they already proclaimed, in the third decade of the 20th century, “the global moral crisis”⁷. Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Eugen Ionescu are some of the young incisive writers of the time, the world is more and more familiar with the name of Constantin Brâncuși, pioneer of modernism in sculpture, and versatile George Enescu becomes an exemplar of Romanian music and its ambassador abroad.

Between the two wars, the Conservatory would again stabilise, welcoming these new values in well-defined setting. This stability is to a great extent owing to composer and conductor Ion Nonna Otescu, its director from 1919. Graduate of the institution he was now leading and strongly supported from his student years by his teacher Alfonso Castaldi, graduate also of the Paris Conservatory, Otescu regenerated the way the establishment was organised. The confidence in his powers is great from the very start:

*With Mr Nonna Otescu, the eminent musician, in charge of this institution, a new atmosphere of rejuvenation and recreation has started to replace the outmoded, rigid system of the past.*⁸

The strategy of the first decade after Otescu's appointment aimed at raising the standards as to both teaching and artistic performance. The Royal Academy wanted to provide its students with a multilateral education, and specialisations cater to the different needs of the future teachers, instrumentalists, singers and actors. New disciplines are constantly in-

7 Nicolae Iorga, quoted by Ioana Pârvulescu, *Întoarcere în Bucureștiul interbelic [A Return to the Interwar Bucharest]* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 48–49.

8 Cosma, *Universitatea Națională de Muzică din București la 140 de ani*, 194.

troduced in the curricula, just as one same class can be taught by several teachers.

The Conservatory's collaborations with the Romanian Philharmonic Society and the Romanian Opera continue. Concerts and opera performances given by its artists, students and teachers alike, are often perceived as important events in Romania's artistic life. The Conservatory itself is part of Bucharest's musical life, and the close connections with the other cultural institutions point to the existence of common artistic goals. These partnerships also extend to the newly-founded institutions, the Romanian Radio⁹, created in 1926, for example. In December 1920, George Enescu, together with other Romanian musicians, established the Romanian Composers' Society. Among them composers were teachers or future teachers at the Bucharest Conservatory: Constantin Brăiloiu, Alfred Alessandrescu, Ion Nonna Otescu, Mihail Jora, D.G. Kiriac, Dimitrie Cuclin, Constantin Nottara, Mihail Andricu, Theodor Rogalski. Numerous generations of musicians, composers and musicologists would from then on further the relation between the two institutions through common projects, a common concert policy, the desire to disseminate and promote Romanian music and to support the Romanian community of musicians.

In 1931, under Ferdinand I, the Conservatory is renamed the Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. As its rector, Ion Nonna Otescu thinks big: in his clear and modern vision, the Academy would become a true "university citadel". The regulation testifies to its being officially authorized to function as a higher education institution: the Royal Academy is a "*higher education establishment, a state-funded institution under the authority of the Ministry of Public Instruction,*" "*autonomous and having the same level of culture as all higher education institutions, in accordance to the Academic Autonomy Law.*" Its aim is to deliver "*artistic, professional and pedagogic education in music and dramatic art.*"¹⁰ In addition to attesting to the high level the institution had reached, the regulation also states how it is organised and functions. The various specialisations are mentioned - Normal-Pedagogic, Music Theory, Vocal, Instrumental and Drama, taught at the following departments: Harmony - Counterpoint, Music Theory - Solfège, Aesthetics, Counterpoint - Fugue and Musical Forms, History of Music, Encyclopaedia and Pedagogy, Choir and Church Music Composition, Opera, Singing, Drama-Comedy, History of Dramatic Literature, Pia-

9 The institution was first called The Society of Radiotelephonic Broadcasting.

10 See minutes no. 1 from September 20, 1931, Archives of the UNMB.

no, Harp, Violin, Cello. The number of years required to complete the studies varied with the specialisation – a maximum of eight years, a minimum of three years plus a preparatory year. The teachers' board decided on the disciplines, practical work, analytical programs, the organisation of exams, admission requirements. Only those in possession of a baccalaureate diploma could obtain, upon the completion of their studies, a graduation diploma, which was conferred in the name of the King and signed by the minister of Public Instruction and by the rector. The special title of "laureate" was bestowed upon the graduates who had obtained a *magna cum laude* in their main disciplines and *very good* in their secondary disciplines. There was an entrance examination. The professor application requirements specified, in the case of Romanian candidates, a mandatory certificate of qualification – namely, a diploma awarded by the Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art or diplomas issued by equivalent Romanian or foreign conservatories, as well senior experience in the targeted specialization of at least 10 years.

Failing local teachers, foreign teachers were hired, their 5-year contract being renewed as appropriate. Wages were still an issue, as they were still paid as established by the normative acts of 1927, when the Conservatory wasn't yet ranked among the higher education institutions.

Famous figure in Romanian music from the first half of the 20th century, George Enescu was dedicated to the Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art even if he didn't actually teach there. His engagements in Romania and abroad, as well as his own personal projects as composer and performer prevented him from a sustained teaching career. He nevertheless enthusiastically took part in the Academy's activities, just as he did everything in his power to support and encourage the evolution of many talented students. Enescu fought for the Academy's accession to the status of a university-level higher education institution and lent a hand with the organizing and smooth running of competitions, recitals, exams, prizes, permanent position appointments. He performed with teachers and students in recitals in Romania and abroad. Some of George Enescu's artistic collaborations with Romanian musicians from the Academy are illustrated by posters or programmes held in the Archives of the National University of Music Bucharest and which show him together with such musicians as Dinu Lipatti, Lola Bobescu, Muza Ghermani-Ciomac, Alfred Alessandrescu. The Academy recognized his merits by naming him, in 1931, Honorary Rector.

The collaborative efforts of many professors would result in the coagulation of a significant Romanian school, whose students would in their turn become renowned musicians. Here are some examples.

Constantin Brăiloiu was invited in 1922 by Ion Nonna Otescu to teach at the History of Music and Aesthetics Department. He had graduated in Bucharest and continued to improve his musical skills in Switzerland and France. His exceptional contribution in the field of ethnomusicology is well-known. He founded the Folklore Archives of the Romanian Composers' Society in 1928 and later established (with Eugène Pittard) and led (between 1944 and 1958) *Les Archives internationales de musique populaire in Geneva*.

Composer Mihail Jora was one of the notable musicians to teach at the Harmony, Counterpoint and Composition Department between the two wars, becoming, in 1941, Rector of the Conservatory. Jora also worked with important cultural institutions such as the Romanian Radio, the Bucharest Philharmonic, or the Romanian Composers' Society. Member of the Romanian Academy, he authoritatively influenced the generation of Romanian composers in the middle of the 20th century. His own aesthetic vision went hand in hand with the exigencies of the Conservatory: high professional standards, modern thinking, morality.

Next to her contemporaries from the first half of the 20th century, Florica Musicescu was a prolific piano teacher. Having first enrolled at the Bucharest Conservatory, she continued her studies at the Leipzig Conservatory and took piano classes in Paris. Upon her return in Romania, she is hired, on the recommendation of George Enescu, as a substitute teacher at the Piano Department of the Bucharest Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. From 1924, when she was transferred to a permanent position and was appointed Chair of the Piano Department, she was an authoritative pedagogue who formed a constellation of Romanian pianists: Dinu Lipatti, Maria Fotino, Lorry Wallfisch, Corneliu Gheorghiu, Mîndru Katz, Albert Guttman.

Dinu Lipatti was perhaps the most illustrious product of Romanian interwar pedagogy. Enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music from October 1928, he studied piano with Florica Musicescu, harmony and composition with Mihail Jora. Clearly an outstanding performer even as a student, he later improved his skills abroad. His composition teacher in Paris, Nadia Boulanger, recalled that

*he was already an accomplished pianist, formed by that remarkable Miss Florica Musicescu, whom he worshipped, and a true composer, armed by Mihail Jora with sound knowledge of this art.*¹¹

In 1931, Constantin Silvestri is admitted at the Royal Academy of Music, concomitantly following two specialisations, piano and music theory. His artistic individuality immediately caught the attention of his teachers. Later, between 1948 and 1959, Silvestri, composer, pianist, conductor of the greatest Romanian orchestras and of many internationally acclaimed ensembles, would also become one of the Conservatory's dedicated teachers, succeeding in establishing a scientific method in teaching.

Ionel Perlea taught orchestral conducting from 1938, while also being conductor of the Romanian Opera Orchestra and of the Radio Orchestra. After World War II, he had an international career, leading many of the world's important ensembles. Like Alfonso Castaldi before them, Ionel Perlea, Constantin Silvestri, and George Georgescu¹² were both exceptional teachers and great conductors.

World War II would brutally interrupt the stability acquired in the interwar period, after only two decades of development and build-up. A sombre destiny would await Romania, and the Conservatory, too, would have to withstand these trials that history subjected the entire Romanian society to.

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11 Dragoș Tănăsescu and Grigore Bărgăuanu, Dinu Lipatti (Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 2000), 45.

12 Conductor and director of the Romanian Philharmonic Orchestra (1920–44, 1953–64).