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Issue 1 (37) January-March 2019

Music, Nationalism and
Political Power (1)

Florinela POPA

Music, Nationalism and Political Power (1)

Deeply marked and marred by the clichés of Communist ideology, Romanian musicology of the past 30 years didn't find it easy to reinvent itself. In addition to inertia and the resistance to paradigm shift, the process was also slowed down by the quasi-impossibility to distance itself from an important amount of bibliographical sources of the 20th century, politicized in various degrees.

The growing interest in debating from fresh angles subjects which had for decades been taboo, in looking at and recalibrating the history of Romanian music from a contemporary perspective – often with the acute need to rewrite it – represents a dominant characteristic of the past years. I would like to mention the considerable impact of two dedicated international grand-scale projects, coordinated by Valentina Sandu-Dediu in the fall of 2014, *Music in Dark Times: Europe East and West, 1930-1950* at New Europe College Bucharest, and by Nicolae Gheorghită in 2018, *The Musics of Power: Music and Musicians in Totalitarian Regimes in 20th Century Europe*, at New Europe College and the National University of Music Bucharest.

Musicology Today aimed to cover both events (see issues 27, 28, 35, 36), while issues 1 and 2/2019 – focusing on the deformed reception of music from a nationalist perspective and as influenced by the various political ideologies, on the complex interactions between music and power during certain totalitarian regimes – in their turn replicate a part of the works presented during *The Musics of Power* symposium of October 18-19th, 2018 (in this issue by Anna Dalos, Florinela Popa, Laura Vasiliu).

Issue 1/2019 opens with the text of the excellent conference held at UNMB by Jim Samson on November 22nd, 2018 in the frame of the same project *The Musics of Power*. Starting from the premise that “some of the music

composed by Chopin in 1830 (his Op. 6 and Op. 7 mazurkas) represents the first canonical repertory of European nationalism”, the author debunks a series of myths fabricated by Romantic nationalism, such as the alleged rural source of Frédéric Chopin’s mazurkas. Looking at how the composer was perceived through the lens of several national traditions, Samson illustrates with convincing examples the way Chopin was exploited in the construction of not only a “national” Polish music, but of one Russian (the “Slavic composer” Chopin), French (seen as the link between the harpsichordists of the end of the 18th century and the *fin-de-siècle* pianist-composers Fauré, Debussy and Ravel) and even English and German as well.

Aspects concerning such politicized reception are also caught by the paper that I sign, in which I examine the distortion of the writing on Sergei Prokofiev in 20th-century Romania under the influence of the different local political regimes and their varying positions towards Moscow.

The next two papers shift the emphasis on the relation between musical creation and political power. Laura Vasiliu addresses the case of composer Pascal Bentoiu who, despite all obstacles encountered during the darkest period of Romanian Communism because of his so-called “unhealthy origin”, built himself a solid career as a composer and musicologist, avoiding, with dignity, compromise.

In her turn, Anna Dalos presents the work of the first group of Neo-avant-garde Hungarian composers, founded in 1970 as the New Music Studio. If in other countries of the Eastern Bloc the avant-garde was viewed with hostility or even banned, Dalos’ article reveals the more tolerant, albeit cautious attitude, of the Budapest political regime – at least with regard to this phenomenon.

Issue 1/2019 returns, at the end, to the problematization of constructing a national identity through music. Alexandru Ioniță’s review of *Construcția unei identități românești în muzica bisericească* [Constructing a Romanian Identity in Church Music] by Costin Moisil brings to the fore an endeavour part of the larger context of rewriting the history of Romanian music in the 21st century.

English version by Maria Monica Bojin

Jim SAMSON
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Hearing the Nations in Chopin*

Keywords: nationalism, pedagogy, canon, reception

1. AGENDAS

Among the many Chopin celebrations of 1960 (his 150th anniversary), one passed virtually unnoticed. On March 12th, the Academy of Athens honoured the occasion with a lecture followed by a concert. Interestingly, the concert included several of the songs. It was not the first time they had been given in Athens. Forty years earlier, in 1920, a group of them had been performed by the soprano Spéranza Calo. One of those in the audience at that earlier concert was Manolis Kalomiris, then aged 37, and acknowledged as the leading composer of the so-called Greek national school. And before the Academy concert in 1960, it was Kalomiris who delivered a lecture on Chopin. It has particular interest, I think, because it presents a moment of continuity with ideas of romantic nationalism that were by then largely outmoded in Europe. We might even view it as a kind of end point in a story of musical nationalism that began, at least symbolically, with Chopin himself. Now Kalomiris was in his late seventies in 1960. He was the senior figure in Greek music, even if his moment had in a sense already passed. So, I suppose he was the obvious choice to deliver the lecture. Its title might have been my title today. It has been translated as “The National Vibration in Chopin’s Music” (Kalomiris 1961).

* Paper presented on November 22nd, 2018 at the National University of Music Bucharest, in the context of the project titled *The Musics of Power: Music and Musicians in Totalitarian Regimes in 20th Century Europe* (May 15th – December 15th, 2018). The conference was supported by the Doctoral School of the National University of Music Bucharest (Fondul de Dezvoltare Instituțională: CNFIS-FDI-2018-0365).