

## 6. THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH CHORAL CREATION OF CLASSICAL-ROMANTIC INFLUENCE

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**Abstract:** *The liturgical singing of the Romanian Orthodox Church is monodic, of the Byzantine tradition. From the 19th century, under the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, multiple voices choral singing penetrates the Romanian worship establishments. The beginnings were timid, isolated, from private initiatives and sometimes encountering the hostility of conservative ecclesiastical traditionalism. After 1959, the introduction of choral singing in the United Romanian Principalities was to be facilitated by state legislation. Choral singing would be used predominantly for the office of the Holy Liturgy. In finding a choral style suitable for the orthodox liturgical ceremonial, three main stylistic directions were outlined, among which the classical-romantic influence created a generous and varied repertoire.*

**Key words:** *monody, polyphony, harmony, choral music, Byzantine, repertoire, style*

### 1. Introduction

The liturgical singing of the Christian Church is traditionally monodic. In the Latin Church, diatonism, the heptachordic modal system and the evolution of musical notation, facilitated - starting from the 9th century - the emergence of polyphonic singing, the basis for the subsequent development of all European music. In the Orthodox Churches (Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Russian) - registered in the sphere of the Byzantine musical-liturgical tradition - monodic singing was maintained for another thousand years.

### 2. Discussions

The reforms started by Tsar Peter the Great (1682-1725) included liturgical worship, a fact that facilitated the adoption of choral singing in the Russian Orthodox Church, from where it radiated to the neighboring Orthodox Christian countries. Around 1782, at the Neamț Monastery, in Moldova, the traditional monodic chants, sung by Moldovan monks, alternated with the harmonic chants of the group of Russian monks, performed “in the Slavonic language on books and notes, mostly printed in Kiev, in Russia”<sup>29</sup>. The presence in 1810 of Anton Pann - as a child, in the choir of the cathedral in Chisinau - attests to the practice of choral singing, according to the Russian model, in the churches on the right side of the Prut river, even before the incorporation of Bessarabia into tsarist Russia (1812).

A first initiative to lay the foundations of a church choir on the left of the Prut dates back to March 1808, when - during the Russian occupation - the provisional governor of Moldavia, Major General Kușnicov, asked Metropolitan Serapion of Kiev to send “the official of the dicastery, Ghetonopov, connoisseur of harmonic music, to establish a choir in Iasi”<sup>30</sup>.

In the Romanian Provinces, it seems that the first Romanian choir was

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<sup>29</sup> Teodor T. Burada, (1914), *Corurile bisericești de muzică vocală armonică în Moldova*, în *Opere*, vol I, (1974), , Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, București, p. 276

<sup>30</sup> Mihail Gr. Poslușnicu, *Istoria muzicii la români, de la Renaștere până'n epoca de consolidare a culturii artistice*, București, Editura Cartea Românească, [s.a.] – p. 208

founded in Banat, in 1840, in Lugoj<sup>31</sup>. In Transylvania - according to the testimony of Zeno Vancea - the first choir was founded in Cluj, in 1850<sup>32</sup>, while in Sibiu, the metropolitan choir was established around 1854 under the care of the hierarch Andrei Șaguna. Around the same year, choral music entered the Orthodox Church in Bukovina, at the initiative of Bishop Eugenie Hakmann (1834-1873), a philo-German and great lover of classical music<sup>33</sup>. And in Wallachia, the act of birth of the first choir is the establishment of the “Choir of the vocal troupe” in 1836 (named – from 1840 – “Choir of the army staff singers”), on the initiative of the Filorus ruler Alexandru Dimitrie Ghica (1834-1842). In Iasi, the first choir was established in 1844, from the seminarians from Socola, by Alexandru Petrino, later abolished by the order of Metropolitan Meletie Brandaburul (1844-1848).

In the Romanian Orthodox Church, choral singing was officially introduced after the Union of the Principalities (January 24, 1859), through the express involvement of ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza. Considering the Church among the most important institutions of society, he campaigned for its emancipation from the tutelage and Tsarigrad mentality that had enslaved it for centuries. Two laws played a fundamental role in the modernization of the national Church: “The law by which it is stopped to sing in any other language, in the Romanian church, than only in the national language”<sup>34</sup>, from February 15, 1863, and Decree No. 101 from January 18, 1865, which “ordered the replacement of the psaltic art with Western-type, harmonic music”<sup>35</sup>.

In finding a choral style suitable for the Orthodox liturgical ceremonial, three main stylistic trends were outlined: the church choral works of Russian influence, the choral-liturgical works of classical-romantic influence and the choral works that capitalizes on traditional psaltic melodies.

### 3. Results

The classical-romantic trend, of western influence, was manifested both in the Romanian provinces within the borders of the Habsburg Empire (Transylvania, Banat and Northern Bukovina) and in the United Principalities. The classical-romantic influence, in the Romanian liturgical choral music, penetrated the German channel, outlining two schools, which evolved independently, depending on the territorial-administrative space in which they manifested: one in the Romanian territories integrated into the Habsburg Empire (Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina), with Romanian representatives, who studied in Vienna, and another, in the Romanian Principalities, whose representatives were of German origin. In the first case, Bukovina composers grouped in around the church music department of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Chernivtsi. They studied at the Konservatorium fur Musik und Darstellende Kunst, Vienna. The first Orthodox choral liturgy written by a Romanian is considered to be the “Missa Romena”, for choir and organ, by the composer Carol Miculli, composed in 1864.

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<sup>31</sup> Zeno Vancea, *Cântarea corală bisericească la români. Studiu critic*, Timișoara, Editura Mentor, 1938, p. 15

<sup>32</sup> Idem, p.16

<sup>33</sup> Liviu Rusu, *Muzica în Bucovina*, în Petre Nițulescu, *Muzica românească de azi*, București, 1939, p. 809

<sup>34</sup> Mihail. Gr. Poslușnicu, (1928), *Istoria Musicei la români*, Editura Cartea Românească, p.16, București

<sup>35</sup> Nicu Moldoveanu, *Afirmarea muzicii românești în vremea domniei lui Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859–1866)*, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, nr. 4-6, București, 1991 (CIX), p. 124

In 1869, the priest Isidor Vorobchievici (1836-1903) published in Vienna “Hymns of the Holy Liturgy” for male choir for 4 voices, in the Cyrillic alphabet, followed by a vast choral-liturgical creation. The Viennese filiation of his church music is due to his studies at the Academy of Music in Vienna (1868–1869), where he studied Greco-Oriental music and choral conducting with Benedikt Randhartinger, a former disciple of Salieri and friend of Franz Schubert. Appointed professor of the church choral music department in the Orthodox Theological Institute in Chernivtsi, founded the Romanian school of choral composition in Bukovina. Among his disciples, the following stood out: Ciprian Porumbescu (1853-1883) – four liturgies and various liturgical and canonical songs, mostly for male choir; Eusebie Mandicevschi (1857-1929), who composed 12 liturgies; Gheorghe Mandicevschi (1870-1907) and other composers from Bukovina. In Transylvania and Banat, the works of Gheorghe Dima (1847-1925), Augustin Bena (1880-1962), Francisc Hubic (1883-1947) and Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968) remained representative.

Beyond the Carpathians, the classical-romantic style, in the liturgical repertoire, was initiated by Ioan Andrei Wachmann (1807-1863) and Eduard Wachmann (1836-1908), Alexandru Flechtenmacher (1823-1898) and continued by George Ștephănescu (1843-1925), Ioan Bunescu (1852–1928), Ioan G. Mugar (1853-1889), George Brătianu (1847-1905), Ioan Costescu (1860-1935), Ioan Runcu-Popescu (1901-1975) and others.

Regarding the means of treatment used (less or more intensely chromatic harmony, the appeal to imitative polyphonic writing and even fugato, or choral-type homophonic), the liturgical chants belonging to the above composers belong to the sphere of the German neo-romantic school of composition, while that the cantability and lyricism of the songs refer rather to the Italian opera, from where the strong influence of the stage music on the melodicity of the Western choral-liturgical creation emerges. This is due to the fact that most of the authors of this type of choral repertoire were active in opera houses and even composed stage music. This is the case of Ioan Andrei and Eduard Wachmann, Alexandru Flechtenmacher, George Ștephănescu, Ciprian Porumbescu and Gheorghe Dima.

The tempo indications, the terms of expression used, the specification of the mode of attack of the sounds, the progressive dynamics of long and short duration, the appeal to agogic terms, the use of closed and open crowns, the passing modulations and the approach of sudden modulations in order to obtain stirring sound effects justify the statement above. Eusebiu Mandicevschi and Gheorghe Dima approach intensely chromatic harmony, which is natural if we take into account the fact that the former was a disciple of Johann Brahms.

The classical-romantic current, and in particular the composers from the Romanian provinces incorporated in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, trained at the German school, owe the approach to the choral fugue in the treatment of some chants from the Byzantine liturgy. For example, the song Let our mouths be filled, from the Solemn Liturgy by the composer Sabin Drăgoi, is structured tristrophically (ABA), with a broad choral fugue as its central section. The motet form is often found in the ecclesiastical choral works of the mentioned composers, especially Eusebiu Mandicevschi, Gheorghe Dima, Augustin Bena.

#### 4. Conclusions

Although this compositional trend generated a generous, rich, diverse choral-liturgical repertoire, the Romanian Orthodox Church neglected it, because it proved to be alien to its spiritual feeling and ethos. However, it is a shame that such a varied and extensive Romanian liturgical choral repertoire, inspired by the Western musical language, is forgotten! Of course, it is not necessary to be sung during liturgical services, but it can be used in sacred music concerts, so as not to be lost. Our Orthodox choral repertoire with Western-style musical discourse is part of the history of Romanian choral-liturgical singing.

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