Landmarks of Romanian Music from 1918 to 1945

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In the early twentieth century, Romanian music made a significant leap in the area of complex composition, achieving this progress in an extremely short period of time and with George Enescu as its principal proponent.

Composer, violinist, pianist and conductor George Enescu (1881, Liveni, Vîrnav, near Dorohoi – 1955, Paris) was famous as a violinist throughout Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, and from 1923, in the United States too. But his career as a violinist did not interrupt his career as a composer, a high point of which was 1931, the year when he completed the opera *Œdipe*, which he had worked on for thirty years and which had its premiere at the Paris Opera in 1936.

Enesco was a total musician, with rich and multiple gifts, as well as being an eminent violin teacher, whose pupils included Yehudi Menuhin. His aureole as a performer often meant that the deep originality of his compositions was overlooked. In his work, Enesco was inspired by the folk music of his native land, but his career as a composer reveals a progressive tendency toward a sublimated use of this folk music. After a period in which folk music played a mostly picturesque part, Enesco arrived at an original combination of inspiration that drew on the great classical and romantic traditions, on the one hand, and song deriving from folk sources, on the other. It is in the *Third Sonata for Piano and Violin "dans le caractère populaire roumain*" (1926) that Enesco's genius truly shines. Arriving at the method of composition "in the Romanian folk style", what Enesco adapted was no longer folk motifs, but other kinds of element: diatonic and chromatic modes, melodic and cadence cells, rhythmic structures, tempos, principles of acoustic organisation, manners of instrumental performance, specific timbres.

Nevertheless, in the same period, more than ever before, there was also a secondary level, at which numerous composers made significant achievements in symphonic, choral, chamber and ballet music. Without these composers, Romanian music would never have attained its present level of development, even if they did not forge for themselves an international career comparable to that of George Enescu. There are three names who stand out for their major achievements in orchestral, operatic and ballet music: Mihail Jora, Theodor Rogalski, and Paul Constantinescu. It should also be noted, however, that after the war they remained in Romania and continued to compose.

Composer, conductor and pianist **Mihail Jora** (1891, Roman – 1971, Bucharest) has gone down in the history of Romanian culture as the first musical director of Romanian Radio Broadcasting, a post he held from 1928 to 1933. He was a teacher and rector at the Conservatory. In 1920, he was one of the founding members of the Society of Romanian Composers, serving as the institution's vice-president from 1940 to 1948. Above all else, Mihail Jora's name is linked to the founding of the Romanian ballet. He was the first to combine choreography with music written by Romanian composers on national themes, drawing their rhythms from Romanian folk music. His interest in the creation of a specifically national ballet

steps came to fruition in his choreographic tableau *At the Market*, opus 10, and the ballet *Demoiselle Măriuța*, opus 19 (1940), whose descriptive music, with its consistent dose of humour, apparent in the orchestral harmonisation and colours that are in the spirit of the gypsy fiddler, lends Romanian ballet the originality without which it would be unable to cross the threshold of universality.

Composer, pianist and conductor **Theodor Rogalski** (1901, Bucharest – 1954, Zurich) was head conductor of the George Enescu Philharmonic in Bucharest and taught orchestration at the Bucharest Conservatory. He toured abroad as a conductor numerous times, as well as frequently performing in concerts as a pianist. He transcribed and adapted folk music. Theodor Rogalski wrote memorable works for chamber ensembles and musical theatre, but his great gift as an orchestrator is reflected in all his symphonic works, which stand out for their modern writing, their tonal diversity, and the clarity of their musical discourse, and which often masterfully combine lyricism and humour.

Composer, violinist and conductor **Paul Constantinescu** (1909, Ploiești – 1963, Bucharest) is the third major name from the inter-bellum period in Romanian music. Like the majority of Romanian composers from that period, he collected, transcribed and adapted folk music and ecclesiastical chants. His rich musical work, strongly rooted in Romanian folk melody and old Byzantine chants, which he integrated into his own style to create a remarkable amalgam, includes pieces in almost every genre. Paul Constantinescu's work is of exceptional importance to vocal symphonic music, particularly in his oratorio *The Passion and Resurrection of the Lord* (1946) and *Byzantine Christmas Oratorio* (1947) for solo voices, mixed choir and orchestra, both of which are unquestioned landmarks in the history of Romanian music.

At a tertiary level, we find composers who, although not brilliant, made significant contributions to the historical development of Romanian music in that period, particularly as teachers, promoters of musical culture, and musicians, and who are worthy of mention even in a lecture as brief as this.

Alfred Alessandrescu is an interesting figure, who had a long career as a chamber pianist and who for almost four decades conducted the orchestra of the Romanian Opera in Bucharest, at the same time serving as the deputy director and conductor of the Bucharest Philharmonic. He made a notable contribution to the period between the wars.

Composer and ethno-musicologist **Constantin Brăiloiu** (1893, Bucharest – 1958, Geneva) is worthy of note for his harnessing of Romanian folk music. In the inter-war period he held a number of positions that were highly important in the context of Romania's musical life. He founded and ran the Folk Music Archive of the Society of Romanian Composers, and he taught at the Bucharest Conservatory and Academy of Religious Music. He was later at the forefront of the international ethno-musicology movement. In 1944 he founded and subsequently headed the International Folk Music Archive in Geneva.

Ioan D. Chirescu (1899, Cernavodă – 1980, Bucharest) was a conductor and composer who mainly wrote choral music, and was a leading figure in the Romanian choral music movement, at the forefront of which was the Carmen Choir. In his work he draws on a number of archaic folk genres, harnessing the inflexions of folk melody.

Conductor and teacher **Gheorghe Dima** (1847, Brașov – 1925, Cluj) was one

of the most important promoters of musical life in Transylvania, introducing the madrigal genre to Romanian compositions for choirs.

And last but not least, we should mention **Dinu Lipatti** (1917, Bucharest – Geneva, 1950), one of the greatest pianists of the twentieth century, but also an interesting composer in his own right, who thrice won the George Enescu Prize for Composition and also the Silver Medal of the French Republic in 1937.

One of the richest and most diverse periods of Romanian music, the inter-bellum was a phase in which numerous masterpieces were created, masterpieces that have stood the test of time and are still part of the repertoire of Romanian orchestras, choirs, chamber ensembles and soloists, bringing to today's stage the musical charm of times past, with or without the folk music vein that was still a distinctive feature at the time.