

## Music and Poetry with George Enescu

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### Abstract

The paper reveals the productive interconnection of poetry and music. Romanian literature abounds in a great variety of poetry dedicated to music, to composers like Liszt, Enescu, Chopin. The connection between music and poetry is exemplified by Proust's famous *Vinteuil's sonata*, which was inspired by the music of Enescu. Another example of the kind is the poetry of a french poetess, Louis Bastien, who dedicated many verses to Enescu. Some of which – *Anniversaire* and *Le Salon* – are quoted at the end of the paper, along with an article from 1912 that appeared in the *Tribuna* journal which displays a letter of Enescu addressed to personalities of the philharmonic society from Arad.

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Music and poetry have belonged together from time immemorial. Harmonious and beautiful verses by poets have often urged composers to set words to music, thus making verses even more popular for the public. Quality music has also helped several poets to express better themselves. Accordingly, the myth of Orpheus has obtained new valences and interpretative values.

The excellent performing art of some brilliant artists or of some virtuous pianists, singers or violinists have left a lasting mark on the cultural history of Romanian people, considerably enhancing the number of creative works. Therefore, Romanian literature offers an important number of works dedicated to Mihail Păscaly, Matei Millo, Aristiza Romanescu, Elisa Circa, Alma de Dunca Schiau, Elena Theodorini, including several composers such as Ciprian Porumbescu or George Enescu. Among the endeavors that passed through our hands, we have poetries dedicated to Liszt – by Iancu Văcărescu and Mihail Zamfirescu in *Țara Românească* (The Romanian Country) and by Gh. Asachi and D. Gusti in the *Moldova* periodical written after his tour in 1846-1847. Then we have other poetry dedicated to Chopin, Wagner or to Sybelius and of

course to many others: an inventory still has not yet been made. However, it is worth to remember some of these. Let us look at a verse from a poem by Mihail Zamfirescu dedicated to Liszt and included in the volume entitled “Aurora” in 1858:

“Așa zeu al armoniei...când arpa se înstrună  
Torentu-i este lumea, căci coarda-i a mișcat,  
Învie abanosul sub mistica lui mână,  
Iar unda-i de magie puțini o-au explicat.”<sup>1</sup>

Alternatively, from the poetry “Vals Trist nr.2” dedicated to Sybelius by Vintilă Horia:

“Sybelius își tremură răscoala  
Pe coardele amurgului finez  
Și-n șiruri lungi și reci de do diez  
Dansa prin aer toată Kalevala.”<sup>2</sup>

When George Enescu turned 50 in 1931, a unique cultural moment occurred. Almost every newspaper dedicated prizes and deferential articles in which they celebrated the man, who “attains perfection in each domain that he manifests in.”<sup>1</sup>, while in the *Adevărul literar și artistic* (The Literary and Artistic Truth) it was written “George Enescu bestowed us to Europe, lifting us high towards the sun of the West”. Enescu was unanimously considered our greatest artist, Tudor Arghezi wrote on this occasion such words: “Vocalele să cânte și consoanele să urmeze la elzevire. Și să vie un vânt mare de foi în-quarto, în octavo, pergamentele, velinele, japonul și info de pene, ca o lume de ciori albe împărătești, amestecată cu ciocurile avântate din călimări în soare.”<sup>2</sup> In the same journal, George Călinescu also sketched a rather interesting portrait of the great pianist and violinist, writing: “The portrait of George Enescu represents itself the definition of music. His being of a perfect “venusity”, has manifested in his life always through the sound of the violin.” Cataloguing him as an “orphic beauty” the great critic

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<sup>1</sup> “Such a god of harmony...when he tunes his harp / the world becomes the torrent for its chord is moved / the ebony resurrects at his mystic touch / and few can explain his wave of magic.

<sup>2</sup> “Sybelius shakes his revolt / On the tunes of the Finnish twilight / And in long cold rows of C sharp / The entire Kalevala dances through the air.”

<sup>1</sup> *Neamul Românesc*, (The Romanian People), nr 188/1931.

<sup>2</sup> “The vowels should sing and the consonants should follow them till the elzevir. And great winds should come of in-quarto leaves, on octavo, of parchment, vellum and feathers, as a world of white imperial grackles stirred with beaks launched from ink-pots into the sun”

actually defined the essential quality of his musical presence, grasped later by another poet, Vasile Nicolescu in the following way:

“Ce mâini în stare fură  
durerea s-o prefacă  
în sunet tainic de cleștar  
și rănile să tacă?  
Pe strune cântătoare  
Enescu strânge ca-ntr-un vis  
Adâncul țării necuprins  
și dorul ei în veci nestins!”<sup>3</sup>

In the same year 1931 a French poetess, Louis Bastien also dedicated verses of warm greetings to him and sent two of these creations for publishing at the *Roumanie Nouvelle* journal. The first is entitled “Anniversaire” and it blends love and admiration towards the great artist of music, with love and admiration towards his native country and the great beauty that his music evokes. The title of the other is “Le Salon” and it records the sentiment of elevation and plentitude that she feels when catching sight of a bust of the composer and violinist, a musician gifted by providence with enormous qualities, which actually place him on the same level as Mozart. We shall quote the two poems, as they are unknown to the present day Romanian public.

Lastly, we must say one thing. The admiration of the French poetess, who came to Romania through the French Alliance, is also mirrored in the fact that she dedicates her first volume of poetry to her master, George Enescu. The title of the volume is *Le Prince Noir*, and it appeared at the Oficiul de Librărie (Library Office) publishing house in Bucharest, printed at the I. Copuzeanu printing house on Izvor Street 97, with a preface by Léon Thénevin, French writer who held a leading position at the French Alliance in Bucharest. This alliance was in charge of the complete system of education and cultural mission of all French teachers who came to Romania through this system of collaboration. The publication of this book in Romania stands for a productive intellectual collaboration. The volume was commented on in July 13 in the “Rampa” publication under the title “Francezii noștrii” (Our Frenchmen).

Finally, yet importantly we should also mention that a great discussion took place in our press during 1924-1934 on the Proust-Enescu relation. Accordingly an epistle by Proust the “Vinteuil sonata”

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<sup>3</sup> “What hands were able / pain to pretend / in secret sound of crystal / and the wounds be still? / On singing chords / Enescu links like in a dream / The abyssal depth of a country / and its never-quenching homesickness.”

from the *Du côté de chez Swann*, was written on the impression of a Cesar Frank sonata interpreted by George Enescu, – the connection between music and poetry perfectly functioning here as well.

In the volume “Le Prince Noir”, an allusion is made to the memories that the city on the Dâmbovița left in the poetess, the language of music being a kind of religions language (“langage des Dieux), the last verse of this poetry indubitably hinting to the art of Eminescu:

“Cultive ton jardin” ta belle âme d’artiste,  
Aux rêves compliqués, aux élans pleins d’ardeur  
Ne compte plus jamais que sur toi-même, existe  
Pour la contemplation de ta propre splendeur.

(*À Manyà*)

### **The Philharmonic Society In Arad And George Enescu**

*Arad, 13 January, 1912 [The Tribune Journal]*

The Romanian public in Arad is also familiar with the great progress that the society of music has experienced from the symphonic concerts that became highly sought after and appreciated, concerts where amateurs and experts of Romanian musical society never failed to be present. Permeated by profound sentiments of art and interested in the last echoes in the world of music that could put into the spotlight also the names of some Romanian composers – the members of the philharmonic society, namely Mr. Josif Wagner and Mr. Zelner the Director of the local military orchestra thought of adorning the repertoire with one of the shiny pearls of the Romanian compositions; the “Romanian Pastoral” by the great maestro, George Enescu.

In this respect, Mr. Josif Wagner has directly addressed the maestro in Paris, requesting his assent and the text of the Pastoral.

Mr. George Enescu answered Mr. Wagner deeply touched by that undoubted sympathy, being grateful to the society for its great interest not only towards his works but also towards himself. He was pleased to write in the letter a short history of a couple of his compositions as well as his biography.

We consider it important – not only for the amateurs and for professionals, but for the entire Romanian public – to present one of the most beautiful and most glorious figures of the Romanian artistic society, who has incontestably manifested to the whole society.

We display thus the whole contents of the letter of Enescu, the great maestro, addressed to Mr. Wagner:

*My Dear Sir,*

Firstly, I would like to thank you for considering to include one of my works in the program of your concerts. The “Romanian Pastoral” is actually one of the pieces of my youth: I wrote it when I was sixteen and it was performed in the following year at one of the concerts in Köln<sup>1</sup> In February 1898, where it was welcomed by both, the press and public. That was also my debut as a composer.<sup>1</sup> It has been sung ever since: “Suite d’orchestre” overall in Cologne in 1904, then in Mahler-New-York, Nood-Londres, etc.; “Symphonie en mitmayeur” was sung in Köln – 1906, then in Monte Carlo, in the London Philharmonic, then in Amsterdam, Damrosch-New-York, Fiedler Boston, etc, then the “Two Romanian Rhapsodies” were sung almost everywhere with me as conductor. They were adopted by Wood-London, by Mengellberg-Amterdam and Kühnwald-Philharmonie-Berlin.

I have then a great number of works of chamber music as: “two sonatas for piano and violin”, “Quator for piano and chords”, “Quator for chord-instruments”, a “Dixtuor for ten wind instruments”, my best opera “Deux suites” for piano, “variations” for two pianos and other melodies...

This year on March 2, I will sing for the first time in Budapest Hungary, as a violinist with Casals in “Dopple concert by Brahms”.

My biography?...

I was born on August 19 in 1881 at Dorohoiu in Moldova (Romania). I started playing the violin when I was 4, at 5 I already played the piano and at 7 I started at the Vienna conservatory. There I studied violin with Bachrich and Hellmesberger and compositions with Robert Fuchs.

I left this conservatory at 11 by obtaining “Gesellschaftsmedaille”.

At 13, I entered the Paris conservatory having for my composition studies teachers like Massenet, Sedalgue, Faure; for piano I had Marsick.

I left the Paris conservatory when I was 18 with first prize for violin, as being a foreigner, I could not compete for the prize of honor. However, my work had been sung at that time in the class, and at the conservatory.

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<sup>1</sup> Enescu uses “Colonia”, for *f*. (Note from the translator)

<sup>1</sup> (It is known that George Enescu was firstly appreciated as a violinist. N.R.)

Since then I have been living in Paris during winter and I usually spend some of my summer time at the court of Queen Elisabeth of Romania, with the great Carmen Sylva.

Having basically German education background, living in Paris, a city that I cherish from my heart, and being Romanian by birth, I consider myself essentially an *international*, and I am artistically fond of my natal country and of the uncountable folkloric treasures that it has.

Now, my dear sir, I thank you Mr. Zellner once again for your entire orchestra and concert committee. Once arrived at Budapest, I shall announce you.

Until then, please consider my thoughts of loyalty.

*George Enescu, Paris – January 1912*

We believe that we transmit the desire of the entire collective of Romanian music lovers, by asking the local Philharmonic Committee to take advantage of his arrival to Hungary and arrange a concert of the great violinist.

We trust we shall have the support of the Romanian public and we consider that such an artistic festival could be one of the most successful at Arad.

## ANNIVERSAIRE

Il est un petit coin de la terre moldave  
Qui doit sentir en lui son âme tressaillir  
D'une maternité augustement suave  
Et d'un allier plaisir.

D'avoir su enfanter sur la pente ancestrale  
Le prodige charment plein de vitalité  
Qui fait boire nos cœurs, par sa veine géniale  
A même la beauté.

Quand j'entends s'égrener les notes savourer ses  
Je tends coupe vide à l'amphore d'Hébé  
Ou je vois s'échapper en des lenteurs pieuses  
Les pleurs de Niobé.

Tu chantes de l'amour la teinte élégiaque  
Tu exaltes l'espoir aux lointains rayonnants  
Ou chantes de la nuit le charme aphrodisiaque  
Ou les maux lancinants.

Tu élèves mon être aux plus parfaites cimes  
D'altitude rêveuse ou dort la volupté  
Ou la plonges au sein d'insondables abîmes  
D'amour et de clarté.

Tu sèmes sous mes pas la manne floconneuse  
Lorsque par un accord propre à me torturer  
Sous une dissonance amère et douloureuse  
Tu m'as bien fait pleurer.

Si l'archet s'abandonne en plaintes musicales  
Il répand dans mes nerfs de lentes pâmoisons  
On dirait les clairons de charnelles fringales  
Savourant des poisons.

Comment ne pas sentir sous un choc sans défense  
La volonté se perdre et l'aile s'engluer  
Lorsqu'on voit sur la bouche à la tristesse immense  
Le chagrin sinuer.

Comment ne pas se perdre au chant de la sirène  
Comment ne pas l'orner de palmes de pavots,  
O Vagabond royal, comme un second Priène  
Qui portes tout sur toi.

Tu empoignes ma fièvre à l'endroit névralgique  
Désespérant l'essor de l'espoir moribond  
Quand sur les froids rochers d'une pente tragique  
Tu t'élances d'un bond.

Mais quand tu as flambé dans un cri pathétique  
En proie au dur braiser de ton martyr ardent,  
J'éprouve au fond des sens l'hypnose sympathique  
De ton apaisement.

Je crois entendre alors un bienfaisant silence  
Gravir à lents efforts les degrés de mon cœur  
Comme après cela combais je sens le calme immense  
D'une douce candeur.

Si je ferme les yeux je vois la route blanche  
Dérouler au soleil son ruban d'or, tandis  
Que sous mon front, amoureuse avalanche  
Ruisselle un paradis

C'est d'avoir partagé l'agape généreuse,  
Et les pulsations d'un orchestre enchanté  
Que je porte à jamais l'odeur miraculeuse  
De la suavité.

Aussi que ce parfum aujourd'hui se répande  
En flots reconnaissants et légers sur ton cœur  
Daigne accepter du mien la jubilaire offrande  
D'un cri admirateur.

Que désormais la vague épargne ta voilure  
Que dans un calme frais tu sentes tressaillir  
Le germe précieux que les forces futures  
Vont faire épanouir.

Qu'un bienfaisant destin éclaire ton génie  
Que, faisant graviter ton vol harmonieux  
Dans la limpide ampleur de l'opale infinie  
Il l'approche de Dieu.

Que ta vie appareille à l'azur ineffable  
Dans un adagio d'ample sérénité  
Que longuement la flamme au prix inestimable  
Monte à l'éternité.



## LE SALON

*Sur un buste de Georges Enesco*

Humble comme toujours, mais certain de la palme  
Dans un coin bien discret tu te tiens à l'écart  
L'esprit visiblement plongé dans le bleu calme  
Des sources de Mozart.

Ton regard de Méduse accueille avec finesse  
L'avenir s'avançant chargé d'aménité  
Mais tu n'as pas reçu de pale déesse  
Sa froide fixité.

Car ton front éclaire d'une aurore biblique  
Reflète la candeur d'un monde pardonné  
Visité par le Ciel comme dans le Cantique  
Calme, rasséréné.

Moi, seule, confinée en ma tendresse ardente  
Préparant en secret des remèdes futurs,  
Je songe à voir ton âme altière et patiente  
"Qu'il est bon d'être né de la race des purs"!