

## **The composer Gheorghe Dima and his lieder creation on Mihai Eminescu poetry**

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**Abstract:** *The end of the XIXth century and the first two decades of the XXth are influenced in Transylvania by the remarkable personality of the composer, conductor, singer, professor, piano player, translator of literary texts, organizer of Romanian musical life from Transylvania, Gheorghe Dima. In the lied creation, Gheorghe Dima has the power to raise suggestions, to stir certain representations, his originality being unquestionable. Optimistic by excellence, caring for truth and beauty, his creation reflects these attitudes, as the composer, in his work, filters through his own personality the entire range of experiences and knowledge gathered in his life. The peak of the lieder creation is achieved by Dima starting with the year 1896, when at short intervals writes four lieder on Mihai Eminescu poetry. After 1900 there followed two more.*

**Key-words:** *lied; vocal music; style; interpretation;*

### **1. Introduction**

The lieder creation emerged thanks to the composer's attraction towards a poetic text, which is enriched through music, musical language being a prolongation and a completion of the poetic language, the music-word merger representing a superior vision of the human thinking. The lied as genre of cultivated music appeared at the end of the XVIIIth century in the creations of the Viennese classicists, famous poets of that time, stimulating with their creations the creative fantasy of the composers. Although it appears in Classicism, it materialises and develops in Romanticism, at the beginning of the XIXth century, being considered the genre which characterises the most accurately the Romantic thinking and sensibility. Now the musical art goes towards poetry and literature, noticing at the same time the tendency and capacity of rendering the landscapes or stories by means of musical images, capable of a superior power of plastic suggestion, which will reach a higher level of understanding and highlighting the expressive resources of the text. The Romanian music, blending with the general tendencies of the time, reflects in a specific manner the main desires of the period. The composers, being at first tributary to the composing schools where they had trained, would distance themselves later on from them, moulding what we call today the Romanian school of composition, in lied asserting themselves Alexandru Flechtenmacher (+1898), Gheorghe Dima (+1925), Eduard Caudella (+1924), George Stephănescu (+1925), George Enescu (+1955), Sabin Dragoi (+1968), Tiberiu Brediceanu (+1968), Mihail Jora (+1971), Nicolae Bretan (+1968), Paul Constantinescu (+1963), Tudor Ciortea (+1982), Carmen Petra Basacopol, Pascal Bentoiu (+2016), Felicia Donceanu, Myriam Marbe (+1997), Tudor Jarda (+2007), Radu Paladi (+2013), Gheorghe Firca (+2016), Cornel Țăranu, Valentin Timaru, Adrian Pop and many others, almost all of them dearly calling for the Romanian poets' creations. The impact of the lyrics of the *unmatchable poet* upon the Romanian composers was exceptional, underlining a vigorous creative step of the national vocal genius. (cf. Cosma, 2000, 8) In the year dedicated to the 130<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the death of our national poet Mihai Eminescu we wish to express the appreciation and attention that Eminescu's poetry enjoyed in the creations of several composers from Transylvania.

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## 2. Objectives

The formation and the development of the abilities of students and master students in the specialisation Musical interpretation-Canto, in the stylistic-aesthetic research is desirable for a future career, which aims both practice and theory, and the projection, organising, unfolding and utilisation of the theoretic research in the artistic creation, by elaborating and using some theoretic-informative and practice-action instruments and by implementing a pattern of training for a future lieder concert as well, is essential.

## 3. Gheorghe Dima, short biography

The great musician, Gheorghe Dima, who influenced the end of the XIXth century and the first decades of the XXth, triggered the development of the cultivated Romanian music, generated a pluriform blossom of the local musical creation and culture. Born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1847 in Braşov, he studies first in his home town, then to Viena and Karlsruhe, where he attends the courses of the Polytechnic School. In parallel he takes canto lessons, first in Karlsruhe, later on in Viena, Gheorghe Dima having a beautiful bass voice. He decides to go to Graz where he learns harmony and counterpoint. In the 1873-1874 Opera season he is hired as soloist at the Klagenfurt Opera House. He returns home and becomes music teacher in Braşov. In 1878, unsatisfied with the level of professional training he enters the *Conservatorium der Musik* from Leipzig where he attends the classes of top professors of the time. He returns to his home town and shortly after he revives the cultural- musical life of the city. In 1881 he goes to Sibiu to fill the position of musical manager at the Romanian Musical Reunion. Both in Brasov and Sibiu he writes pieces for solo voice and accompaniment, but most of all choral, for the formations he conducted. In 1919 he is named organizer and manager at the Music and Dramatic Art Conservatoire from Cluj Napoca. Here he activates until the end of his life, so productive for the Romanian musical culture in general and for the Ardeal one in particular. He died June the 4th 1925, at the age of 78. (cf. Poslušnicu, 1928, 431)

## 4. The lieder creation on Mihai Eminescu's poetry

“Gheorghe Dima’s musical work is the unexhaustible spring, full of creative features of a people gifted by God, that through pains, tears and sufferings purifies all these soul torments with the song, sometimes gentle, sometimes brave, which starts from the heart and reaches the heart.” (Romitza, 1920) In Gheorghe Dima’s composing creation, the lied has a major importance, the specific means of expression he used have a rich content of ideas and feelings: the sound substance is thicker and diverse, the harmony more suggestive and more chromatic than his predecessors. They keep nevertheless the connection with the past not only by the accessibility of the vocal melodic lines, but also by reducing the entire expression to essence. “Dima is one of the early Romanticists who believed in the free unleashed human feelings, the sincere expression and the search of oneself in the sources of national artistic inspiration. His studies at Leipzig familiarized him with Schubert’s realism and sincerity, with crystal clear melody, without false adornments and with the Mendelssohn’s shape science, with Brahms’s intimate charm of songs and lieder, with Loewe’s dramatic ballads, with Schumann’s lyrical bursts sometimes passionate, sometimes melancholic, but also with Bach’s, Handel’s, Hayden’s polyphonic constructions. He took from them the polyphonic writing, the sense of proportions, the transparency of musical tessitura, the endeavor of modulations, the vocal and piano technical possibilities and adapted them to the specific national language.” (Voileanu-Nicoară, 1957, 132-133)

After receiving a letter from Titu Maiorescu, on the 27th of May 1895, together with a volume of Mihai Eminescu's poems, who was asking him to write music on those Eminescu's poetic masterpieces that inspired hidden emotions, in 1896 there appear the lieder *Dorința (The Wish)*, *De ce nu-mi vii?(Why don't you come to me?)*, *Și dacă ramuri bat în geam (And if branches knock on my window)*, *Somnoroase păsărele (Sleepy little birds)*, and at the beginning of the XX-th century, *Peste vârfuri (Over the tree tops)* and *Se bate miezul nopții (The clock strikes midnight)*. All the lieder had been translated afterwards in German by Gheorghe and Maria Dima. With these lieder the composer proves, through an admirable melodic intervention, highly inspired, full of subtle lyricism, that he has the capacity and experience necessary to remarkably interpret Eminescu's poems, *De ce nu-mi vii?* and *Somnoroase păsărele* being considered by the musicologist Viorel Cosma "the most accomplished pieces of Gheorghe Dima's entire creation and undoubtedly the finest translations of Eminescu's poems from the Romanian classical lyricism." (Cosma, 2000, 178)

## **5. The stylistic-interpretative characteristics of the analyses lieder**

Gheorghe Dima's lieder on Mihai Eminescu's lyrics, which relevantly illustrate the value of his entire musical creation, are characterized by a balanced melody, in a perfect harmony with the vocal writing and the poetic sense, of preference for the Romantic spirit, of abundant indications of rhythm and dynamics, of sensibility for the semantics of each word and the augmentation of its significances through extremely suggestive musical images. The themes depicted in his lieder belong to the profoundly romantic universe, those on Mihai Eminescu's lyrics being considered by the musicologists the first works to affirm the the vocal genre in the Romanian musical literature: "His songs belong to the category of the most beautiful lieder in the Romanian musical literature, projecting a romantic poetic universe where the emotions are strong, caught in diverse situations, sometimes contrasting ones, in clear, penetrating sounds, that dominate accessible phrases unfolding freely." (Cosma, 1986, 312. The composer does not use melodic and rhythmic formulae borrowed straight from folklore, but suggests the atmosphere of the Romanian art through blending all the elements of popular expression, in a synthesis of great original art. (Voileanu-Nicoară, 1957, 133) The smooth melodic line, that avoids difficult intonations, expressive, easy for the soloist to execute, tries first of all to illustrate as well as possible the senses of the poetic text, so as to achieve a perfect harmony between the two languages. We point out once again that Gheorghe Dima had a previous training in the art of singing: "The accessibility of the vocal tissue, which proves once more the experience of lied singer of Gheorghe Dima, the melodic invention, a fantasy augmented by shape balance and rules, the plastic images, the lyricism expressed in warm sounding strokes, but also the moments of dramatic tensions highlighted by harmonic turns and dynamic suggestive changes, the expressiveness of the piano accompaniment are obvious features of the miniature vocal creation." (Mihuț, 2006, 132-133)

The lieder, having a stanza construction, use a melodic discourse in the general middle voice register, contributing thus to the lieder accessibility, and if sometimes the melody pitch is placed towards sharp or flat (thing which forces the interpreter to possess accurate knowledge of vocal technique), the purpose is to underline the words with significant meaning. We witness combinations of binary and ternary measures or associations of some vocal melodic binary and ternary lines in accompaniment, the harmony being tonal, more seldom modal, the melodic language variety being rendered through the multitude of tonalities it crosses. The composer uses a whole range of melodic formulae, dynamic combinations and agogic ones, which he clearly indicates in the score, with the purpose of closely following the meanings of the poetic text.

The interpretative analysis of Gheorghe Dima's lieder supposes, last but not least, the idea of unbreakable unity between the vocal soloist melodic line and the harmonic one of the accompanying piano player, "unity which implies along much musical knowledge, good taste and respect towards the artistic values". (Naie, 1996, 35) A true interpretation is only the one which blends not just two texts, musical and literary, but most of all the two opinions regarding the interpretative means. In what the interpreter is concerned, he must be able to affirm the two ways of expressing: word and music, by interpreting as suggestively as possible, considering that the expressive features of music emphasizes the poetic text, amplifying it.

## 6. Conclusions

This analysis tries to lead to a better understanding of the vocal soloist part concerning the lied interpretation as well as acquiring some basic musical concepts, this decoding representing a possible pattern of training. It is compulsory that lyrical artists should be aware of their own vocal and dramatic resources, all these aspects being underlined by musical and interpretative analysis of the compositions considered for research.

Thanks to composers like Gheorghe Dima, Ioan Scărlătescu, Stan Golestan, Dimitrie Cuclin, Eminescu's poetry becomes known abroad since the end of the XIX-th century and the beginning of the XX-th, through German, Hungarian, English, French and Spanish lyrics. Gheorghe Dima's lieder, that look for the identity between the text accents and music accents, different in content and unitary as musical expression, represent masterpieces of the entire Romanian musical literature of the XIX-th century, being models of undoubted value, the composer being together with Eduard Caudella, George Stephănescu, Tudor Flondor and D.G. Kiriac, part of the generation who consolidated the Romanian lied.

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