

Creative personality between favoritism and obstruction

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Abstract: *This paper proposes the description of an interesting theme that brings to the fore the independence of the creator and the development of creation during a totalitarian regime. The work focuses on works of art during the totalitarian regimes of the Stalinist era and in the following years. Over time, the situation of creators in Eastern Europe oscillated between the grace and disgrace of the system, placing the entire lives of composers in an uncertain situation that called into question the survival of the aesthetic conception, creation or even the creator.*

Key-words: *Composers; Creations in totalitarian regimes.*

1. Introduction

The Creator of all times has always been in the attention of leaders due to the power of influence he can exert on society. Shaping creative personality sometimes enjoyed favors, and sometimes obstructions from the management. In the case of totality regimes, interventions on the fate of works were more obvious and contributed substantially to the popularity of a creator's work. Many composers suffered during the communist regimes of the Stalinist era and in the years that followed a series of attacks, their situation oscillating between the grace and disgrace of the regime, in an atmosphere in which their very survival was called into question. The music between political and apolitical proposes a kind of neutrality that is difficult to apply and respect. At a close look, in many cases the statement of the musicologist Valentina Sandu-Dediu can be verified, who considers that: *regardless of the era or the statements of the composers, there is no apolitical music*². It seems that we cannot ignore politics and ideology. Creator affiliation to a particular type of social organization directly or indirectly influence their professional results, even if it takes into account a certain liberty of creation away from ideological constraints. To the same extent we can speak of an opposite attitude, in which the creator to stand against the regime through open or masked attitudes, consciously expressed directly or indirectly or unconsciously.

2. The correlation between art and politics

The problem of the correlation between music and politics presents an interesting approach that can offer some justifications in observing the path of some creators to try to capture the success or failure of an author, beyond the strictly artistic elements of his creation. In the modern period, especially after the Second World War, the influence of political regimes on cultural life is being felt more and more concretely. In this regard, the example set by the Soviet Union was for countries in Eastern Europe, a model followed by willing or unwilling. According to the opinion of the leadership, the art forms become instruments in the hands of the leaders through which it can shape the spirit of the people. Art now had to serve the people in accepting new orders, the *new man*. The message of the work of art must be clear, easy to understand, mobilizing, tonic, accessible to the masses in accordance with the doctrine

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² Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2014. *Octave Paralele*. București:Editura Humanitas, p.162.

of socialist realism. In opposition to the music of the masses, however, was modernism, the avant-garde, attitudes considered by the authorities as decadent, anti-human, diversionist. Thus is born a harsh opposition between a bourgeois art subordinated to capitalism, which mirrors the “decay of decadence” and a proletarian art which is considered „*humanistic and progressive*.”³.

3. Dodecaphonic, Serial, Chromatic

The steep delimitation will separate in two categories the creations of all the authors, both the external ones and, especially, the internal ones. Labeling works of art became a real hunt, trying to divide creators into these two distinct groups, the analysis sometimes penetrating even the creation of an author in order to identify works or parts of works that could be contrary to the official direction. Following such an approach, certain creators are carefully analyzed, denigrated, incriminated, then censored and even banned if they do not agree to make certain compromises. On the other hand, the agreements and acceptance of the directions imposed by the party will make some composers enter the graces of the leaders and experience a *rapid rise*⁴. Decision making was influenced, in addition to artistic considerations, by other factors that were not directly related to the creation, such as: the author's origin, his attitude towards the communist regime or his approach to Western influences. Due to these discrepancies, those living abroad were also removed from the lists of the Union of Composers, including *George Enescu*⁵, one of the most important Romanian composers of all time.

Composers trying to approach innovative lines were attracted to the new trends defined by dodecaphonic music and serialism, used in Western European music. Because of this, not only these writing techniques were banned by the Union of Composers, but also chromatic music that could be associated with dodecaphonic music. To some extent, these young composers adopt an attitude of *opposition aesthetic*⁶, preferring to promote new ideas from the West close to writing serial techniques discussed various aspects, looking for solutions that avoid simplistic analyzes of censorship embodied the dodecaphonic technique. Towards the end of the 1950s, *serialism was the representative music of the West, the “official” music*⁷, and the approach of such elements describes an attitude of escape from the rules proposed by the socialist regime.

The story of dodecaphonic music as an element of opposition begins somewhere after the 1920s when the concept of new music is associated with the second Viennese school, represented by the creations of Arnold Schonberg and his disciples, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. Their creations were labeled by the Nazis as *a threat*⁸, music of this type being banned. This fact acquired a symbolic value of resistance and thus determined many anti-fascist composers to adhere to this music. Later, after the division of Europe, serial music retained its opposition status, becoming a form of decadent music in communist regimes. But, beyond the geographical area or the type of regime in power, dodecaphonic music has retained its quality of “manifest” music, attitude contrary and opposition.

Depending on the political regime in which it develops, however, dodecaphonic music becomes either left (favoring communist attitudes) being against the system if it is in Western Europe, or right (protesting against communism by adopting Western techniques) when the composer is in an eastern country. In both situations, therefore, the young composers who

³ Idem p.163.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Idem p.164.

⁶ Idem p.165.

⁷ Idem p.166.

⁸ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2004. *Muzica nouă între modern și postmodern*. București:Editura Muzicală, p. 89.

approached the serial music did so in the form of a protest⁹, thereby asserting an opposition against the leadership.

Starting from here, some authors approached a new direction in avant-garde music, outlining new types of musical expression based on their own sound organization systems. Especially since, after the 1970s, even Western Europe would largely give up serial practice¹⁰. The aesthetic value of dissonance, which in the meantime acquires a political significance, was gradually changed, the western culture gradually leaving the attention paid to dissonance, slipping towards the *emancipation of consonance*.¹¹ This attitude has also been addressed in the eastern part of Europe. Thus, music returns to the listener, marking, after the 1970s, the new postmodern trends.¹²

The history, ideology and aesthetics of new music have similarities in several Eastern European countries. That is why a look at a particular issue can provide an overview of the situation in other areas with the same political orientation. In the communist countries of Eastern Europe, the idea of the musical avant-garde is thus emerging as an attitude of opposition to the authorities, thus different from the official direction of socialist realism¹³. In a first phase, the diatonic - versus - chromatic opposition will mark both the musical creations and the musicological writings grouping the creations in *positive* and *negative*¹⁴, the diatonic universe being represented by creations of folk inspiration or easy tonal intonations.

4. Diatonic

Russia's influence and artistic directions imposed by the Soviet Union spread easily over other communist countries that share the same political regime.¹⁵ The direction imposed by the socialist regime is achieved through the Creative Unions in two ways: either by censoring the opposite elements, or by stimulating, financially supporting the *appropriate* works. In addition to the general considerations regarding the work itself, the aesthetic attitude or the artistic means, there will be other evaluations outside the work of art, which took into account the origin of the author, social status, political beliefs and relationship with the system.

Music imposed by official ideology promotes mass songs that glorify the Communist Party and its leaders.¹⁶ Commissions are set up to lead creative unions, which set out certain criteria that any creation must have in order to meet the requirements of the guidelines for progressive music. Any work must respect the ideological line of the party. The music must be simple, understandable to all, and the writing techniques adopted before 1944 must be forgotten.¹⁷ Any attitudes other than the line drawn by socialist realism mirrored by the simplistic melodies of mass songs are blamed. Opposition to Western music (being appreciated as an expression of decadence) means, first of all, the critique of dodecaphony, considering atonalism as a formalism that denies melody, nature, soul, which opts for arbitrary, mechanical and cacophonous sounds.¹⁸ Instead, diatonic, tonal harmonies with simple, easy-to-understand shapes that express a mobilizing character will be preferred¹⁹.

The censors of the administration had in mind the implementation of the official ideology in which the accepted works followed some well-defined directions of socialist

⁹ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2014. *Octave paralele*, p.168.

¹⁰ Idem p.166.

¹¹ Idem p.168.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2017. *În căutarea consonanțelor*. București:Editura Humanitas, p.130.

¹⁴ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2014. *Octave paralele*, p. 167.

¹⁵ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2017. *În căutarea consonanțelor*, p.130.

¹⁶ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2004. *Muzica nouă între modern și postmodern*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2002. *Muzica Românească între 1944-2000*. București: Editura Muzicală, p. 17.

¹⁸ Idem p. 18.

¹⁹ Idem p. 20.

realism that could be musically outlined by²⁰: *simpleness* - motivating the accessibility of the masses to the great culture; *decorative* - expressed as an excess of ornamentation, artificial beauty; *eclecticism* - which outlines creations with heterogeneous influences, a mixture of artistic styles based on the influences of well-known works; *folklorism* - the exaggeration of the folkloric element close to the masses with modest origins and precarious culture; hymns - dedicated to the leadership (in which the leaders of the regime were glorified). It is almost self-evident that such attitudes cannot be avant-garde, that they will not open new paths, but that they represent the resumption of well-known ways in which the public finds itself comfortably, especially those with few cultural concerns, the great mass of working people. The ideological offensive is sometimes felt through party initiatives that intensify the relations of intellectuals with the working people through documentary visits of composers in factories or various communities, cultural internships in villages and leading amateur music groups. Thus will appear a consistent patriotic musical literature, mostly choral, which becomes mandatory for all creative sites. These choirs are grouped into categories such as: pioneer children's choirs, workers' choirs, or peasant choirs.²¹

However, the musical landscape has developed quite diverse, with composers approaching multiple forms of expression in which sometimes the shift to easy means of artistic expression is made with some allusion to irony. In Dmitri Shostakovich's works, for example, the expression of irony is done through a mixture of parody, satire and grotesque.²² This example is eloquent enough to indicate the situation of the creator in the totalitarian regime. Although a prominent figure in Soviet music in the first half of the twentieth century, his creation proposes in the last symphonies a writing of intense chromaticism, up to dodecaphony.²³ For this reason, his disciples, who admired him unreservedly at first, will distance themselves from him, even criticizing the compositional style, especially the moral attitude of the composer.²⁴

5. Conclusions

Broadly speaking, the creators of that period approached one of two possible directions, some embracing the official position and contributing to the development of an official culture of propaganda, others retreating to defend aesthetic standards through sacrifices and compromises, thus helping to preserve the truth and of authentic values.

An interesting grouping of the attitude of the creators during the totalitarian regimes is proposed by the literary critic Eugen Simion, considering especially the literary creators, but which, by extension, can offer an image on any type of creator.²⁵ There are two clear categories and two forms of transition from one side to the other. On the one hand, we have the denial of the system, which involves stopping any collaboration with the system, which can go as far as giving up the artistic vocation (for those who remained in the country, this action could lead to severe condemnation; for the others who left, it meant the beginning of exile in which refuge in the West represented the assumption of a new identity, an isolation from the country but also the possibility of artistic survival, but not easy). On the other hand, there is the *acceptance* that brings various advantages to those who assumed the collaboration with the management regime. This meant the implementation through art of the ideological directions proposed by the party. But even this approach does not offer enough comfort to the creators, because the problem that now arises is the insecurity, the instability of the hard-won

²⁰ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2014. *Octave paralele*, p.163.

²¹ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2002. *Muzica Românească între 1944-2000*, p. 26.

²² Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2014. *Octave paralele*, p. 180.

²³ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2017. *În căutarea consonanțelor*, p. 131.

²⁴ Idem, p. 131.

²⁵ Valentina Sandu-Dediu. 2002. *Muzica Românească între 1944-2000*, p. 31.

position, there is always the risk of being denied, denigrated, dismissed and condemned to the slightest suspicion of deviation from the ideological rules. Between these opposite positions we have two intermediate situations that presuppose in a way an assumption of a middle way. This situation is achieved on the one hand by establishing a compromise of various forms through which many artists and their art managed to survive, at the cost of giving up aesthetic beliefs. On the other hand, we have a dissent movement that involves detachment from the official ideology and establishing opposition by challenging the directions established by the imprint of socialist realism. Because of this, some authors are forced to flee and settle abroad.

In those years marked by the official ideology of socialist realism, there were several directions of musical writing that indicate either, a music of regression in which are found the stylistic formalisms of past periods of history, either a music of moderate modernism that has various hypostases such as folk-oriented neoclassicism, or a radical, avant-garde music that takes over the dodecaphonic technique and is situated in the position of an abstract musical thinking²⁶.

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²⁶ Idem, p. 28.