

## Highlights of Romanian Pedagogy in Piano Performing regarding Professor Florica Musicescu's Prodigious Activity

Andreea BRATU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Model of Modern Romanian Pedagogy, Florica Musicescu crossed and built, at the same time, lasting Paths of the Romanian Piano Performing School, in the early decades of the XXth Century. A personality of vast musical and intellectual culture, vivid imagination, intelligence, self-sacrifice and vocation, worked with the Infallible expressed in sounds, differentially addressing her pedagogue Method, to the diverse personalities of her disciples, action that have led to outstanding results.*

**Keywords:** *Dinu Lipatti; Romanian Modern Piano Pedagogy; Piano Performing Method; Florica Musicescu's disciples;*

### 1. Introduction

*Vera-Florica Musicescu* (b. 8/21 of May 1887, Iassy, Romania- d. 19 of March 1969, Bucharest, Romania) emeritus Romanian pedagogue in the field of Piano Performance, founder of one of the Modern Direction of the emerging Romanian Interpretive Piano School of the first half of the Twentieth Century, is the famous teacher who guided, in Romania, the talent of the young legendary pianist *Dinu Lipatti* (1917-1950), and many generations of internationally and nationally renowned Romanian concert- pianists.

Daughter of the musicologist, folklore collector, teacher and choral conductor *Gavriil Musicescu* (1847-1903), from Iassy, Romania, was fortunate to have a very good musical education in her hometown, starting with the first piano lessons under *Aspasia Sion-Burada's* guidance, a Romanian lady student of the famous pedagogue *Theodor Leschetizky* (1830-1915), a well-known disciple of the most famous piano teacher of all time, *Carl Czerny* (1791-1857).

Although in the territory, Iassy being the historical capital of Moldova region (within the Kingdom of Romania), despite the local Conservatory was established as a professional music education establishment, at the age of 18 Florica Musicescu was sent by her family to study at *the Leipzig Conservatory* under the guidance of a remarkable piano pedagogue *Robert Teichmuller* (1863-1939), discipol of the composer and pianist *Carl Reinecke* (1824-1910). From the Leipzig registration form, we know that she studied between 1906 and 1911 (from 19 to 24 years old) in this European prestigious musical institution, having the music analysis courses under the guidance of the composer *Max Reger* (1873-1916).<sup>2</sup> An early and unexpected neuromuscular accident blocks her path to a solo career, but guides her steps towards the continuous study of the Pedagogical and Physiological principles, specific to piano playing, searching for natural and efficient as possible ways of training and instrumental expression, forming a series of high level concert- pianists throughout all her

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Arts, Ovidius University of Constanta, andreea.bratu@365.univ-ovidius.ro

<sup>2</sup> Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A., 23

long live teaching career.<sup>3</sup> A well-respected piano teacher and mentor, from 1921-1940, she was Professor and Head of the Piano Department of *the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art* in Bucharest, Romania and after the Education Reform, from 1950 until the end of her life, continued a prodigious pedagogical activity in the same institution, (renamed the “*Ciprian Porumbescu*“ *Conservatory*).

After the war, in 1946, his former student Dinu Lipatti made a warm recommendation of his beloved teacher at *the Swiss Conservatory in Laussane* to be invited to lead the Superior piano and Virtuosity classes and to sign a contract of employment.<sup>4</sup> But for undocumented reasons, this initiative was not materialized. Many years later, another very dear teacher and mentor of Lipatti, theorist and professor *Nadia Boulanger*, invited Miss Musicescu to give a one week intensive and well praised *Performing Piano Masterclass* at *the American School of Art in Fontainebleau*, in the Paris region, a famous cosmopolitan music institution of France.<sup>5</sup> In the last 10 years of her teaching career, she is invited to be part of the international juries of the most prestigious European piano competitions. Member of the piano jury at the *International Competition “George Enescu”*, 1958 edition, president of the jury in 1961, 1964 and 1967 (with the winner *Radu Lupu* and for the second place *Dan Grigore*), member of the jury of *the International Competition “Fr. Chopin”* from Warsaw (edition won by *Maurizio Pollini*), at *the International Competition “P. I. Tchaikovsky”* in Moscow in 1962 (the co-winners *Vladimir Ashkenazy* and *John Ogdon*), at *the Geneva Competitions, Bartok-Liszt* and *the International Competition “Robert Schumann”*.<sup>6</sup>

As *Marta Paladi* wrote in her book, the most documented work to date on the personality of Florica Musicescu “for Romanian art, the circumstance had happy consequences because losing a pianist, Romania won a Piano School“.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Issue & Objectives

A brilliant pedagogical career like Florica Musicescu's, in a Eastern-Europe country traversed by historical and political changes, not exactly favourable for growth and stability, affirms its valour, through the results obtained by her many and well prepared disciples. On the concert stages or as training teachers, these disciples, practiced or passed on to new generations of musicians, *the technical and artistically expressive instrumental principles of his teaching style and method*, unfortunately transmitted only through direct experience and verbal testimony (interview, conferences, colloquia, open lessons), in this regard Miss Musicescu, didn't published a theoretical material of her own. In addition to the articles published in Romanian music magazines, some interviews from the 60's, the testimonies of his colleagues from the Conservatory, of composer *Mihail Jora (1871-1971)*, and of musicologist *Theodor Bălan (1885-1972)*, with detailed presentations of working methods, today we have published in French and Romanian a book written by the concert pianist

<sup>3</sup>Among the concert- pianists or piano pedagogues *Florica Musicescu* trained, either in the official Class in the Conservatory or in private training, in chronological order, are: *Dinu Lipatti, Maria Fotino, Madeleine Lipatti, Corneliu Gheorghiu, Mîndru Katz, Radu Lupu, Dan Grigore, Julien Mustafă, Albert Gutmann, Lory Wallfish, Nicolae Licareț, Marta Paladi, Aurora Ienei, Sorin Enăchescu, Marietta Orlov, Paul Dan, Tamaș Veșmaș, Ovidiu Cucu, Viorica Zorzor, Ina Macarie, Oana Velcovici, Lucia Teodorescu* and many others.

<sup>4</sup> Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A., p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Bălan, Theodor. 1969. "Florica Musicescu". *Revista Muzica* no. 5, București, pp. 13-16

<sup>6</sup> Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A., p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A., p. 30.

*Corneliu Gheorghiu* (*About Piano Playing* published in Brussels, and in Romania in an edition translated and edited by *Oana Velcovici*), and the anthology of the pianist and professor *Marta Paladi*, an extensive research started in 1977 completed in 2011, with deep references to original documents from the State Archives, Private Archives, and many other important Institution from Romania and abroad. To these materials, was recently added *the Correspondence* in two volumes, translated into Romanian by *Dinu Lipatti with outstanding personalities of his time*, published under “*Casa Artelor*“ Cultural Center, coordinator *Alice Barb*, and some articles recently published by former disciples, in Romanian Online Musicology Journals.

With the help of these materials, and from my own experience, due to my piano training in the class of the piano teacher *Lucia Teodorescu*<sup>8</sup> at the *National College of Music “Dinu Lipatti” in Bucharest*, I will try to formulate a brief (but not exhaustive) presentation of its main features and directions. A wider exposure may be the subject of a volume, in the near future.

### 3. Material and Methods

The returning home in 1921, after the training period at the *Leipzig Conservatory*, puts the young lady musician in a difficult position: to build, on her own, an up to date. Pedagogical Method and a Modern Piano class at the *Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in Bucharest*. Her starting activity was a pioneer one, due to empiricism and lack of real local pedagogues, with experience and training in the most modern methods. In the same period, the second decade of the XXth Century, a generation of well-trained young musicians return in Romania, all illustrious fellow students, from Leipzig or Paris Conservatories: pianists and teachers *Constanța Erbiceanu*, *Aurelia Cionca*, *Muza Ghermani Ciomac*, *Cella Delavrancea* and many others.

From her German professor (Robert Teichmuller), Florica Musicescu brings to Romanian School the principles of the anatomical-physiological current, in which *Rudolf Maria Breithaupt's* theories (published in a book *Die naturliche Klaviertechnik 1905, 1908, 1912*), consolidated on the understanding of the mechanism and anatomical functioning of human movements. These are combined with the theses and studies of *Tetzel* and *Steinhausen* (published in a book as *E. Tetzel's Das Problem der modernen Klaviertechnik* in 1909, 1916 and *F. A. Steinhausen's Uber die Physiologischen Fehler und die Umgestaltung der Klaviertechnik* in 1907, 1929), on discoveries and applications derived from the study of acoustic laws. In a short time, through the fabulous experience of working with talented first class young students such as Lipatti, she also applies to some principles and application developments of an *early psychological school* based on notions investigated by *C.A. Martienssen*, and *K. Leimer* (published in a book as *C. A. Martienssen's Die individuelle Klaviertechnik auf der Grundlage des schopferischen Klangwillens* from 1930 and *K. Leimer's, Modernes Klavierspiel* from 1931).

With intelligence, intuition, perseverance and the desire to adapt to the individualized needs of each student (approach taken from *R. Teichmuller*), always focused on understanding the cause and not only the effect, the teacher easily builds a local piano school, capable of producing concert pianists of international stature. From this perspective, she is always kept informed, through the connections maintained with his former illustrious students, and which, once she reached his advanced studies abroad (*Dinu Lipatti*, in Paris in *Alfred Cortot's* class,

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<sup>8</sup> Disciple and former student in the late 50<sup>th</sup> - early 60<sup>th</sup> of Florica Musicescu Piano Class and of concert-pianist *Corneliu Gheorghiu's* Class at “*Ciprian Porumbescu Conservatory*” in Bucharest.

*Maria Fotino* in *Edwin Fischer's* class), was always provided with modern and interesting materials such as *La Musique et la Psicho- Physiologie* and *Le Toucher et le Mecanisme du Toucher* by Marie Jaell, or *Les Principes rationnels de la techniques pianistique* by Alfred Cortot, for example.<sup>9</sup>

Besides of the best quality didactic material, assimilated and read in original (in German, French), always up-to-date, the teacher rigorously attends all the stage appearances of the great European pianists in concerts with the Bucharest Philharmonic, and she has contact and permanent information exchanges, participating in international juries, to colleagues, illustrious pianists and famous European and American teachers. A great admirer of *Eugene d'Albert*, whom she listens to, live, while been a student in Leipzig, of *Arthur Rubinstein*, of *Edwin Fischer*, of *Wladimir Horowitz*, of *Emil Gilels*, of *Sviatoslav Richter*, of *Annie Fischer*, she encourages her students not to interrupt contact with the concert hall, being firmly convinced, that by direct listening of the great performers, of the audio contact to the sphere of musical knowledge from the greatest rendition available, of the expressive feeling flow without visceral effusions, meeting the balance and the right proportion in the interpretation-those qualities brought by them to a high level- a young student has always something to learn about from.

As for the repertoire she studied in her class, it was always a gradual and individualized one, with maxim care for comprehension and technical solution, specific to each student. Either it requires correcting a position of the hand to avoid muscle cramping,<sup>10</sup> or it encourages the complementary study of pieces that were not normally in the student's playback preferences (for a complete stylistic assimilation), the music proposed for practice and performing time, the exam and concert programs extended from the harpsichord masters (*Couperin, Rameau, Scarlatti*), traversing all the important keyboard coryphaeus of Baroque, Classicism and Romanticism and even more, proposing and encouraging the expansion of repertoires with contemporary pieces by *Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Prokofiev*.<sup>11</sup> During Lipatti's residence in Paris, Miss Musicescu encouraged him to update his orchestra Piano concerti portfolio with new and spectacular contemporary works; and helped him scheduling, stage performances with *I. Stravinsky's Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra* and *the Left Hand Concerto in D major by Maurice Ravel (in 1935 and 1938)*, during the Philharmonics of Bucharest, musical inter-wars seasons.<sup>12</sup>

Starting from *the natural principles of the anatomical-psychological schools*, of German and French descent, perfecting her Method in the interwar period, by constant work with his most important disciples (*Dinu Lipatti, Mîndru Katz, Corneliu Gheorghiu*), she will be soon able to conceive *her personalised modern psychological school* approach as *an understanding and conscient work process*: the pianist must always be aware of the brain commands (cerebral impulses), and to not keep his movements as a pure mechanical act (dictated by the involuntary movement of the hands). For this routine, very intense work sessions with a high level of concentration are preferred, in order to avoid the long and difficult time practice, which did not offer a superior performance and which, if it had not adhered to the auto-control principles, would have been destructive, in the long run

<sup>9</sup> Lipatti, Dinu. 2017. *Scrisori* (vol. I). București: Editura Grafoart, pp. 149-199.

<sup>10</sup> Teodorescu, Lucia. 2012. "Aspecte ale Metodei de Predare a profesoarei Florica Musicescu". Revista No. 14 Plus Minus, București. Retrieved May 3, 2022, from <http://www.no14plusminus.ro/2012/09/09/aspecte-ale-metodei-de-predare-a-profesoarei-florica-musicescu-1887-1969/>.

<sup>11</sup> "My dear teacher, you told me about Concert no. 3 by Prokofiev. A very good idea. Last night I thought of another combination [...] what if I'll study Stravinsky's Capriccio [...] how do you find the idea?". Dinu Lipatti to Florica Musicescu in a letter from October 1935. In Lipatti, Dinu. 2017. *Scrisori* (vol. I). București: Editura Grafoart, 164.

<sup>12</sup> Dinu Lipatti to Florica Musicescu in a letter from October 1935. In Lipatti, Dinu. 2017. *Scrisori* (vol. I). București: Editura Grafoart, p. 165.

In Florica Musicescu's opinion, three stages of assimilation are engaging the pianist in a superior state of understanding and performance:

- information process ("you thought");
- reproduction process ("you prepared")
- piano-specific processes ("you activated")<sup>13</sup>

*The information process* refers to the way of approaching the musical text (score). Emphasis is placed on detail, each notation of the composer being noticed and investigated, editions are confronted from a perspective that anticipates the contemporary pedagogue profile, the composer's style is studied, both through auditory contact and through a parallel study of biographic elements, several works by the same composer or composers of the same period and musical style. She insisted on the correct but fast assimilation of the graphic text in order to reach a stage of finding the possibilities of *a matched to detail rendition*, with the help of repetitive execution, in order to be noticed in the piano playing of the musical piece, the finest musical meanings, messages, everything that music hides in its deepest semantic layers.<sup>14</sup> Professor F. Musicescu always emphasized the importance of studying the text in the smallest detail, both in the preliminary phases and in the stages of assimilation the musical interpretation. "The musical text contains, virtually, like a seed, the whole process of sound and the expressive development of the musical piece; the more faithfully we read the instructions given by the author, the more they will awaken in us ideas, images, emotions that will be transmitted further to the listener"<sup>15</sup>

In *the process of reproduction*, the teacher identifies the need of understanding of many as possible layers of a musical text's meaning. For a better understanding of the text, much emphasis is placed on an additional body of knowledge. She considered that reading related knowledge of Music, Arts, was fertile ground for a good transfer of artistic images between teacher and student, such kind of knowledge making it much more accessible to be explained and to be understood all messages that could be extracted from the text at the meta-semantic level. "The detachment of the meaning of what is found in the intentions of the music creator, a space where the personal contribution that is necessary. The general culture of the one who wants to be trained, his musical culture, his intelligence, all are helpful, because with these tools will be forming the personal imprint of each of us".<sup>16</sup> In order to train the artistic creative imagination of the student, the formation of artistic images, the tireless teacher used all possible mental, emotional and constructive connections, to always keep awake the student's interest or to probe the musical meanings, in a conscious way, directed to analysis of the deepest feelings or to the process of deep thinking. These modalities came on *an interdisciplinary approach* of the most varied directions: using either elements of the ordinary daily activity, (for the younger ones), or extracted from literature, art, philosophy, or visual images (for the older ones, in terms of age and training). "I don't want goodwill, I want pure will; don't casually say conventional things! Be simple and express yourself!"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A private note of the teacher, preserved in the archive of the musicologist Viorel Cozma. Apud. Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A, p. 88.

<sup>14</sup> Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A, p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Apud. Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Apud. Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Florica Musicescu's words, document from Păstorel Teodoreanu Family Archive apud. Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A, p. 93.

The idea of experiencing music was very present in the teacher's themes. Apart from assimilating the rhythms, the harmonic-melodic context, the rhetoric of the text, the chaining of the articulations specific to the musical phrasing, it had to be performed naturally, like the specific utterance of a linguistic language. "You don't have to play the piano just right, you have to feel the musical piece's style. Sound language should be a language in which one person expresses himself and another understands it. The rhythm must live in you, so you should impose it. Playing the piano means speaking, and man does not speak mechanically but through thoughts. Do not repeat mechanically, but with the insistence that any thought leads you, to a conclusion."<sup>18</sup>

*The process of action, or forging the piano performing craft*, was based in her vision, on a slow construction of a solid piano technique, including elements of phrasing, nuance, articulation, and sense of rhythm and musical form, not just keeping the stereotype of motor movements. From this perspective, the ease of traversing the keyboard in all passages and conquering all the existing 'terrain difficulties', the pedagogue Fl. Musicescu saw it as a practice that provides that means by which the instrumentalist makes himself understood, and never an end in itself.<sup>19</sup>

Obtaining a form of control over the handling of the most efficient instrument, or more briefly, the instrumental technique, as a secondary function of asserting the expression of the artist is a modern approach to pedagogy in the early twentieth century. Along with other great pioneers in the Romanian piano school, such as *Constanța Erbiceanu* and *Cella Delavrancea*, F. Musicescu builds the capacity of artistic expression of her disciples by making them overcoming mechanistic mentalities, derived from displaying a dry, expository virtuosity, through a more mentally and emotionally oriented approach - displaying by consequence a superior level of musical rendition- action that always concluded with the perspective that one should embrace first of all, the deep meanings of the music, even in the most difficult instrumental passages. "I campaigned for what the contemporary school calls the concept of technique understood as an eminently artistic function. We know the words of Ferruccio Busoni, who said that there are two kinds of virtuosity: reaching the higher level and overcoming it. I have always been impressed by the virtuosity only insofar as it can be overcome. Never as an end in itself. To know how to master, to overcome the greatest technical difficulties, so that the diction of the musical language appears as unobstructed as possible, to be able to express as truthfully as possible what the composer thought, this is the great performing Art!"<sup>20</sup>

Reaching this desideratum, she saw the development of the piano-specific technique as a set of special reflexes that are acquired through the artist's work, so that the instrument becomes, following the fusion with the world of music, an organic part of any interpret. For this, they had to be polished to meet the finest, most accurate requirements of the expression, in all its nuances. The mental process insists on always being in advance, before the factual one (manual), because the first one prepares the next one. Enormous stake in the interdependence between the artistic image formed in the inner hearing of the pianist and the sound result of the instrument, materialized on the keyboard. Muscle tone, body relaxation had to be well directed, constantly maintained. The point of support should not be outside the keyboard but above it, nothing should get stuck at the levers, on the transmission circuit from the shoulder, through the arm to the account, forearm, palm and fingertips. This muscular tone, always

<sup>18</sup> Florica Musicescu's words, Paladi, Marta. 2012. *O Istorie a Pedagogiei pianistice în România secolului XX, Florica Musicescu, întemeietor de Școală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică R. A, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Gheorghiu, Corneliu. 2015. *Despre Pianistică*. București: Editura Grafoart, UNMB, p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> Apud. Bălan, Theodor. 1969. "Florica Musicescu". *Revista Muzica* no. 5, București: Editura Muzicală, pp. 13-16.

capable of immediate response. The freedom of the whole body was mainly cultivated. Adequate tone could only be achieved through maximum concentration so that no movement was subconsciously performed. Body mobility, lateral movement of the arms always in adjustment for the right angle of impact of the flaps, led always to superior safety and control in musical rendition. Cultivation of hearing for the fair and fine coordination of movements was much encouraged. "The cultivation of hearing is necessary especially for pianists, who due to the fact that they have the sounds already formed in the instrument, do not request it, unless they want to. The Priority of Inner Hearing is the first condition that leads to the cultivation of a high quality sound colourful, with a variety of timbres as the great performers have it."<sup>21</sup>

*The continuity of the musical discourse* was another aspect of the teacher's preoccupations, even during musical breaks music that must 'sound' in the inner hearing, because the musical flow is an uninterrupted process.

*The accuracy of the piano playing* was seen as a great quality and the attribute of a great virtuoso performer. Not incidentally, all the great pianists formed by Miss Musicescu were very good studio recordings performers, taking into account, that until the middle of the Twentieth Century, the possibilities of editing / mixing/ mastering recordings, were extremely limited. The legendary recordings of *Dinu Lipatti*, prove a high professionalism and a vivid testimony of *the accuracy in live execution* that is obtained only by training in a fierce discipline mode, individual practice time.

*Training children with special qualities*, as was the case of Lipatti, Florica Musicescu said in an interview, about the real concern to direct the child capabilities, his assimilation forces in a fair way, because the teaching approach is a complex one and requires a lot of passion and patience. "At the age of three, Lipatti was a child prodigy; he could easily form a superiority complex. Together with Maestro Mihail Jora, I sought to remove this danger"<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

Florica Musicescu was *an excellent pedagogue of Modern Piano School*, and could have taught with pedagogical recognition in any place, musical institution or country. Her activity with the students, all the transmitted teachings, started not from an exclusive theoretical knowing, but from *vocation*, combining *the craft of an experimental profession* with a *mentoring attitude of her disciples* throughout all her life.

From a didactic point of view, Florica Musicescu was *a teacher of updated information*, with *grit and personality* and had a marvelous ability to search, combine and to gain her own Method, and through her activity, to establish a truly Piano School for the XXth Century Romanian Pianists.

*The ability to transmit musical and cultural knowledge* was commensurate with the talent to which she chose, the repertoires of young pianists, always a student to be familiar with musical styles, from pre-classical to contemporary composers.

One of the most vigorous pillars of our Romanian Piano Performing School, *Florica Musicescu is the model of a well understood Pedagogy approach, that worth to be followed by the future generations.*

<sup>21</sup> Apud. Bălan, Theodor. 1969. "Florica Musicescu". Revista Muzica no. 5, București, pp. 13-16.

<sup>22</sup> Georgescu, Smaranda. 1964-65. "Florica Musicescu, Interviu". Viața studentă Journal, no. 7, București, pp. 8-9.

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