

Reflections on the Ethnomusicological Activity Undertaken in Neamț County by Alexandru Zirra and Gavriil Galinescu

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Abstract: *Neamț County, a vast territory in Moldavia, with a rich history of events that still persist in the collective memory, has been a point of interest to researchers in various fields, including ethnomusicology. The folk songs from this county attracted the attention of ethnomusicologists whose field research translated into various compositions, studies, collections and specialized volumes. Like many areas of our country, the folk music repertoire from Neamț collected from the locals, is remarkable due to its undeniable beauty and vigour, as well as due to its independent forms of artistic expression. Heirs of this cultural legacy, Alexandru Zirra and Gavriil Galinescu dedicated part of their preoccupations to collecting and studying folklore, scouring for years the localities in Valea Bistriței, recording with the phonograph songs that they subsequently transcribed and harmonized.*

Keywords: *Neamț; folklore; ethnomusicology; Zirra; Galinescu;*

● Introduction

Ethnomusicology is the science that researches the folk, traditional oral music of different peoples. The foundations of this domain of research were laid by Belá Bartók (1881-1945) in 1913, who realised the first collections of folklore under the auspices of the Romanian Academy. The folk activity carried out by the Hungarian composer was followed by Constantin Brăiloiu (1893-1958) and George Breazu (1887-1961).²

In 1927, a phonogram archive service was established, the activity of which was coordinated by a committee composed of a president - Tiberiu Brediceanu (1877-1968) - and two members - D.G. Kiriac (1866-1928) and George Breazu, the result being: The Folklore Archive of the Society of Romanian Composers.

One year later, in 1928, Constantin Brăiloiu founded the Folklore Archive of the Society of Romanian Composers - today the Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore. An impressive number of folk songs from all regions of the country were recorded in the archives since the first years of operation.

The path opened by the mentioned ethnomusicologists was continued by Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968), Alexandru Voievidca (1862-1931), Ilarion Cocișiu (1910-1952), Constantin Gheorghe Prichici (1911-1977), Ioan R. Nicola (1913- 1981), Emilia Comișel (1913-2010), Vasile D. Nicolescu (1919-1982), Florin Bucescu (1936), Viorel Bârleanu (1944) and others.

Aware of the importance of collecting the folklore in order to capitalize and theorize on the creations of the Romanian people, there were many scholars who travelled far and wide the country so that these historical jewels would not be forgotten and thus turned to Moldova as well, respectively to Neamț County.

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² Comișel, Emilia. 1967. *Folclor muzical*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 12.

Between the 19th and 20th century, the collection campaigns in Neamț County first attracted the interest of writers. The list opens with the poet Vasile Alecsandri and continues with the descriptions of Ion Creangă, Calistrat Hogaș, G.T. Kirileanu etc.

The preoccupations of composers and folklorists on the Neamț folk music resulted in various compositions, collections and published studies that manage to argue convincingly that the folklore in this region of our country is rich and diverse, with a long history. Among them are the writings of Teodor T. Burada (1839-1923), Dimitrie Vulpian (1848-1982), Bazil Anastasescu (1851-1922), Gheorghe Ciobanu (1909-1995) and last but not least those belonging to Alexandru Zirra (1883-1946) and Gavriil Galinescu (1883-1960), ethnomusicologists who are the subject of this paper. They have all undertaken extensive research on many occasions, with the same common goal: the study of the musical folklore and its valorisation.

● **1. Alexandru Zirra (1883-1946)**

The composer and professor Alexandru Zirra, born in Roman, Neamț County, had an intense ethnomusicological activity materialized in field collections, in transcriptions of folk songs and their publication and in the formulation of views on folklore.

He graduated the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art in Iași and the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan. After completing his studies in Italy, he returned to the country and was employed as teacher of harmony at the Conservatory of Music in Iași; in 1912 he transferred to the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art in Bucharest. He also taught for a long time at the Conservatory of Music in Chernivtsi, an institution to whose establishment he also contributed.³

Zirra held management positions as director of the Iași Conservatory (1922-1924), of the Chernivtsi Conservatory (1924-1940), of the Romanian Opera in Bucharest (1941) and was a member of the Society of Romanian Composers and of the Philharmonic's Management Committee and of the Opera in Iași.

In addition to his teaching career, Zirra also stood out as a composer. In a first stage he worked on folk songs and composed songs in folk style for voice and piano and choruses; in the second stage he wrote symphonic compositions and chamber music; in the third stage, the most important of his creations, he devoted himself entirely to the genre of opera. Among his works we mention⁴:

- operas: *O făclie de Paște [An Easter Torch]*, *Alexandru Lăpușneanu*, *Ion Potcoavă* and others;
- symphonies: *Țărăneasca [Peasant Symphony] I*, *Symphony no. 2 – Țărăneasca [Peasant Symphony]*, *Symphony no. 3 – Descriptivă [Descriptive]*, *Uvertura Română [Romanian Overture]* etc.;
- symphonic suites: *Tândală și Păcală*, *Țiganiii [The Gypsies]* and others;
- orchestra pieces: *Uvertura română [Romanian Overture]*, *Uvertura Țărăneasă [Peasant Overture]* and others;
- symphonic poems: *Cetatea Neamțului [Neamț Citadel]*, *Hanul Ancuței [Ancuta's Inn]* (in Neamț) etc.

He was awarded numerous honours, including: *Order of Labour 1st Class* (1911), *Order of Educational Labour 1st Class*, no. 1247 signed by King Carol I (1913), the *Order of Bene*

³ Prangati, Constantin. 1999. *Dicționarul oamenilor de seamă din județul Neamț*. Piatra Neamț: Editura Crigarux, p. 265.

⁴ Schmidt, Alexandru. 1967. *Alexandru Zirra. Viața în imagini*. București: Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din Republica Socialistă România, pp. 46-48.

Merenti of the Romanian Royal House, first class (1924), Graduation of merit (1935) of the Ministry, the Order of *Cultural Merit, first class*, no. 246 (1943), the Romanian Academy Award.

Throughout his career, Alexandru Zirra was preoccupied with folklore - a field whose virtues he harmoniously integrated in his creations. At that time, folk collections had gained momentum. Composers had begun to use the folk song more and more, either in direct form through processing or inspired by its melody and rhythm.

The specialized journals debated whether or not folklore was suitable for use in large musical forms. This debate led to an interesting and fruitful exposition of principles - in an open investigation by the *Muzica* journal - by Alexandru Zirra.

Alexandru Zirra had an intense ethnomusicological activity materialized in field collections, in transcriptions of folk songs and their publication and in the formulation of some points of view regarding folklore.

He is one of the founding members of the phonographic archives of the Ministry of Cults and Arts (1927) and of the Society of Romanian Composers (1928), to which he contributed ever since its foundation, by archiving 163 authentic folk songs from the areas of Moldova and Bukovina.

The Moldavian ethnomusicologist collaborated between 1928-1931 with George Breazul and Constantin Brăiloiu. Later, he carried out extensive folklore campaigns on his own, which resulted in a rich musical material recorded with a phonograph in several localities in Neamț County, Fundu Moldovei, Neagra Șarului, Broșteni, Bilca. The collected repertoire is a diverse one, comprising carols and songs of the star, wedding songs, funeral songs, mourning songs (laments), patron saint songs, soldier's song proper, conscription songs, working bee and spinning bee songs, pastoral songs, lullabies, dance pieces, vocal and instrumental doinas, instrumental pieces, vocal and fiddle romances, Ruthenian (Ukrainian) songs and Jewish melodies, etc.

The whole activity as an ethnomusicologist was undertaken with great interest, being of the opinion that: "we have our own folk song, original, rich in expressions, suitable to be used in any kind of compositions, with its own rhythm and special melodic inflections, which can receive new harmonies and which can render exceptional counterpoint lines different from those of Western art."⁵

Zirra was a contributing member of the "Izvoarașul" journal from Mehedinți. The director of the publication allowed Zirra to organize the journal as he pleased. Thus, the Neamț ethnomusicologist divided the publication into two distinct sections: literature and music. The musical part was further classified into eight other parts, the first with non-occasional songs, the second with compositions on national themes, the third with school songs and simple songs collected from the people, the fourth with doinas and songs harmonized by various composers, the fifth with patriotic songs and choruses, and the last three parts included national dances, choral pieces and religious songs. This whole approach was auspicious for the guild colleagues, because it offered them the possibility to publish all the authentic folklore material, which they collected from the Romanian villages.

Zirra himself published in the "Izvoarașul" journal numerous articles with a folkloric flavour, one of the most representative being *Folk Contributions to Western Music* (year III, no. 9-12, p. 1, 2) published in 1922, which is an apology for the benefit of capitalizing on folk creations in cultivated compositions. He also inserted in various studies that he published in the journal, the folk songs collected by Tiberiu Brediceanu and Augustin Bena.

⁵ Schmidt, Alexandru. 1967. *Alexandru Zirra. Viața în imagini*. București: Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din Republica Socialistă România, p. 5.

Zirra's musicological creation includes not only writings published in "Izvoarașul", but also other studies that have as their theme all of the Romanian folklore. One of the most complex is the study entitled *Critical Opinions on Romanian Music*, written in 1938, which remained nonetheless in manuscript format. It contains statements and examples that define the Romanian folk song, as well as mentions about Romanian folklore with information that was known at that moment. In the same study, Zirra also discussed the folk genres, classifying them according to the social backgrounds of origin (suburban and mountainous areas), and offered a new systematization of folklore.

Alexandru Zirra also turned to the folklore of other peoples, highlighting an admiration for the Hungarian one he found in Romanian villages, as evidenced by some works he harmonized (for example, the piece for men's choir *Cimpoaiele* is inspired by a song collected by Béla Bartók).

Another son of the city of Neamț, who contributed to the folklore research in Neamț County, was the professor, the Byzantinologist, the musicologist and the composer Gavriil Galinescu.

● 2. Gavriil Galinescu (1883-1960)

Gavriil Galinescu is one of those Romanian musicians who dedicated part of his preoccupations to collecting and studying the musical folklore from this part of the country, even if he was not an ethnomusicologist like Constantin Brăiloiu and Tiberiu Brediceanu or Emilia Comișel.

Galinescu was born in Hangu, Neamț County, the exact date being uncertain: in the *Encyclopedia of Romania*, Lucian Predescu records the date of December 31, 1883; in *A Dictionary of Literature from Neamț County*, Constantin Tomșa notes the date of December 16, 1883, and in the *Lexicon of Romanian Musicians*, Viorel Cosma mentions the date of December 15, 1883.

In 1909 he graduated from the Faculty of Theology in Iași, studying in parallel at the Conservatory of Music and Declamation in Bucharest.

From 1930 to 1931 he attended the *Musikwissenschaft* in Vienna.

He obtained a scholarship through competition at the *Königliches Konservatorium der Musik* in Leipzig, being admitted to the class of the composer Max Reger (1873-1916).

In 1914 he returned to the country and was employed as a teacher at the Music School in Buzau, an activity interrupted due to the outbreak of World War I. He returned to his native village, where he founded the *Preparatory School* in the area. At the same time, he took over the chairs of vocal music at the *Alexandru cel Bun Gymnasium* in Iași and at the Iași National High School.

In 1930 he began his university career as a professor at the Conservatory of Chernivtsi, then continued at the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in Iași.

The didactic career was harmoniously intertwined with the compositional one, in Galinescu's creation being found choral works, stage music, adaptations of Moldovan songs, chamber music, symphonic and vocal-orchestral music, religious music (religious concerts entitled "hymns"). His main literary source remains the folk creation, as shown by the idyll for choir, tenor and orchestra, *Măriuța*, written in 1929 and the symphonic poem *Ceahlăul*. Among his choral creations with a folk flavour are: *10 Romanian folk choruses for four mixed voices* (fifteen notebooks); *Florica* - 20 mixed folk choirs; *10 folk choirs for four male voices* (four notebooks); *Three patriotic choirs for mixed choir*; *Doina* - collection of Romanian folk choirs

on three equal voices; Carols and New Year's songs; Choirs (1955), *Flori de munte* [Mountain Flowers] for Mixed Choir (1959), *Cântec de leagăn* [Cradle Song] (1959).⁶

In 1929 he became a member of the Society of Romanian Composers.

In addition to his compositional interests, Galinescu was also inspired by the Byzantine chant, some of his choral creations being of psaltic inspiration.

Galinescu's compositional activity was doubled by the publication in the press of the time of some studies and articles, and by the participation in various conferences on musical topics. One of his most important studies is the one entitled *Folk Songs from the Neamț Mountains* – comprised of two parts that contain songs collected by the author himself. Another study is *Music in Moldova* (1939) in which the author carried out extensive research in the literature and expressed a series of comments on the sources and realities of musical life in his homeland, such as: "in the mountains of Neamț there is an inexhaustible treasure of folk songs. Everyone knows how to sing, and if you try to collect them, you're convinced that you can't finish the task of collecting them all."⁷

He was awarded prizes, including the *Enescu Fund Prize* (1915) and the Second Prize at the *George Enescu National Composition Festival*, and received the Labour Medal of the Society of Romanian Composers (1957).

Gavriil Galinescu's name is mentioned in the specialized bibliography, as one of the most passionate collectors of George Breazul Phonogram Archive. Also, the ethnomusicologist from Neamț contributed to the founding of the Phonogram Archive established by Constantin Brăiloiu, an approach that offered him the opportunity to use the phonograph in his folklore campaigns.

Being a devotee of the authentic folklore from his native places, Gavriil Galinescu researched for many years the villages on the Bistrița Valley, recording with the phonograph songs performed by old men and women, which he transcribed or harmonized. He went mainly in the Hangului area, where he collected many folk creations, belonging to all genres: doinas, cradle songs, dance pieces, wedding and funeral songs, all of which have a special originality and artistic beauty. The entire collected repertoire, which totals a number of 1000 pieces, was inserted in the collections⁸:

- *Cântece din comuna Buhalnița (Songs from Buhalnița commune);*
- *Cântece populare culese de Gavriil Galinescu din comuna Hangu-Fârtigi (Folk songs collected by Gavriil Galinescu from Hangu-Fârtigi commune);*
- *Cântece populare din comuna Buhalnița, satul Izvor (Folk songs from Buhalnița commune, Izvor village);*
- *Cântece populare culese de Gavriil Galinescu din comuna Hangu satul Bobeni (Folk songs collected by Gavriil Galinescu from Hangu commune, Bobeni village);*
- *Cântece de pe Valea Bistriței, comuna Hangu (Songs from Bistrița Valley, Hangu commune);*
- *Cântece populare culese din comuna Potoci (Folk songs collected from Potoci commune);*
- *Cântece populare culese de Gavriil Galinescu din comuna Hangu, satul Andia (Folk songs collected by Gavriil Galinescu from Hangu commune, Andia village);*
- *Cântece populare culese de Gavriil Galinescu din comuna Buhalnița, satul Secu (Folk songs collected by Gavriil Galinescu from Buhalnița commune, Secu village).*

⁶ Prangati, Constantin. 1999. *Dicționarul oamenilor de seamă din județul Neamț*. Piatra Neamț: Editura Crigarux, p. 87.

⁷ Grigorică, George. 2003. *Folclorul muzical românesc și nemțean, în viziunea lui Gavriil Galinescu*. Revista *Țara Hanguului* (anul 8, nr. 26), p. 12.

⁸ Vasile, Vasile. 2008. *Gavriil Galinescu reprezentant de seamă al muzicii românești*. Piatra Neamț: Editura Nona, p. 67.

The Moldovan researcher remained somewhat anonymous, one of the reasons being that he failed to publish any of the collections listed above, which remain in manuscript form throughout the country - at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, at the Library of the Romanian Academy, at the State Archives and at the History Museum in Piatra-Neamț - and some are in the personal libraries of some relatives.

In his travels as an ethnomusicologist, Galinescu met dozens of informants of old folk songs who greeted the musician with great warmth and love and solicitude. They did not wait long to be encouraged to sing, proving that they possessed a rich repertoire as well as many other valuable information regarding some folk customs, stories or events related to those songs.

In his approach, the Neamț musician noticed valuable features of the Romanian folk song in general, as well as of the Neamț one in particular. Here are some of them:

- the homophonic and monodic character - in the sense of the traditional interpretation of folk songs on one voice, rather individually, than in a group;
- abundant and particular ornamentation of the songs of many Romanian folk songs;
- the authenticity of the peasant song, as opposed to the fiddle song, which represents in Galinescu's conception - an alteration of the original creation;
- some interferences between the Romanian folklore areas and even some similarities with the folklore of other peoples from South-Eastern Europe;
- some influences of the Orthodox church music on some folklore genres such as: songs of the star and even some carols.

Some of the rich folklore material collected with care and effort by the Neamț collector in his lifelong activity were published in 2019, when the university professor Dr. Vasile Vasile, capitalized on some of Gavriil Galinescu's collections that he extracted from the Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Bucharest, and published them in the volume *Gavriil Galinescu - folk songs from Moldova*.

Conclusions

Ancient land of history and culture, the Neamț area is the keeper of some invaluable treasures of art, the fruit of the sensibility of the people who lived there in the past and their descendants who inhabit it today.

Among the cultural personalities who played a significant role in the ethnomusicological life of the county were Alexandru Zirra and Gavriil Galinescu. The two ethnomusicologists are ranked amid those researchers who sought to discover the interferences of the folk song and endeavoured every time they were given the chance to highlight the valuable features of the Romanian folk song, especially the Neamț one. These features include authenticity, rich ornamentation and also the predominantly monodic character, in the sense of the traditional interpretation of songs in one voice, preferably individually than in groups. They also tried to show the role of the folk song as a source of inspiration for the Romanian cultivated creation, as well as the important contribution of some musicians and folklorists.

Due to their stylistic peculiarities and their aesthetic value, the folk collections belonging to the two ethnomusicologists constitute evidence of a strong and refined spirituality.

If we consider the fact that a person's life is not evaluated by the years lived, but with what they produced in life, we may say that Alexandru Zirra and Gavriil Galinescu produced much, very much, unexpectedly much, both culturally and ethnomusicologically. It is the duty of the descendants not to forget the folklore treasure they collected from the Neamț region, the true treasure of our national culture, into which ethnomusicologists and informants put so much heart and soul.

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