

## Conductor Gheorghe Stanciu, a Lifetime in the Service of Music

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**Abstract:** *An emblematic figure of the Romanian lyrical art, conductor Gheorghe Stanciu is known mostly for his vocation and professional rigour. Born to a family with musical interests, young Gheorghe Stanciu initiates himself in the musical art in his home town, Galați, continuing his training, after a severe entrance exam, at the Conservatory in Iași. He makes his debut as conductor at the Lyrical Theatre in Constanța, in 1976, where he begins an exceptional artistic career. The repertoire approached by the maestro includes over 60 titles of opera, operetta and ballet, symphonic or vocal-symphonic, being particularly appreciated for his interpretations from Puccini's and Verdi's operas. His international career includes long time collaborations in Italy, Great Britain, France, Ukraine, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, but, sporadically, also in other countries, along his life conducting in prestigious institutions of the kind and also in tours, with national and international opera companies. A different side of his professional life is represented by his management activity, for, between 1997-1998 he occupied the position of general manager in two institutions where he put his mark: The Musical Theatre Nae Leonard from Galați and The Opera of Constanța. He also sustains numerous Masterclasses and international classes, where he shapes whole generations of musicians. Through his vast and dedicated activity, Gheorghe Stanciu remains a true role model of artistic and pedagogic excellence.*

**Keywords:** *culture; conductor; manager; opera; ballet; orchestra;*

### Introduction

Gheorghe Stanciu (1950-2024) was the *conductor* who brought emotions on stage and the *man* who made history in stage music at Constanța. Being mostly characterised by discipline, but also by a humane outstanding generosity, remaining for those under his conducting wand, those who saw him through out his entire prestigious career or who simply met him, a distinct personality that cannot be forgotten. The present article wishes to underline maestro Stanciu's value and essential role in opera and ballet performances, in many vocal soloists' and instrumentalists' careers, who desiring to evolve professionally, fully benefited of his talent and devotion so characteristic to the maestro.

### 1. Artistic formation and early influences

Born on 3rd August 1950, in Galați, Gheorghe Stanciu comes from a family with musical tradition, where the father was a conductor of church choirs, of local choral high school ensembles, but also a mentor for vocal ensembles, and the mother was a choir singer. The parents' passion strongly influenced their two sons, the latter choosing, as we may obviously notice, careers in music. Gheorghe Stanciu played the cello and later chose to conduct and Constantin played the viola. His brother being today a remarkable concert soloist (viola), member of the famous Quartet *Voces* and university professor at the National University of Arts *George Enescu*. The maestro, remembering the high school years, filled with warm feelings would tell us how he used to wake up at four in the morning, carried the cello on his back to go and study.

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Gheorghe Stanciu graduated the Music High School from Galați, then he attended the Music Conservatory *George Enescu* in Iași, initially at the instrumental pedagogy, the cello discipline, later, in the third year of study (having also a medical problem at his right arm), having been at the same time attracted by the complexity and expressiveness of conducting even since high school, applies for the conducting-composition department. In 1976 he graduated with the highest grade the composition and orchestra conducting discipline, coordinated by the illustrious maestro Ion Baciuc.

The conductor Gheorghe Stanciu's formation was accomplished by participating at international training classes together with two of the greatest Romanian conductors: Erich Berger and Sergiu Celibidache, the former, in 1974, at the *Richard Wagner Opera Festival* in Beyruth, having the opportunity to analyse the evolution of other young conductors, participating in the contest, and the latter, by participating at three consecutive editions of the legendary maestro Sergiu Celibidache's classes, in München.

## 2. Professional career and repertoire

In 1976, he takes the exam to become the conductor of the Lyrical Theatre in Constanța, the future Constanța Opera House, for now the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet *Oleg Danovski*, making his debut conducting the orchestra with the opera *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi, soloists being Ilie Găntoiu, Niculina Cârstea and Octav Enigărescu, shortly after following the ballet *Don Quijote* by Léon Minkus, coreographer Mireille Savopol. Due to his remarkable artistic activity, regarding his impressive repertoire, as well as the number of representations, the maestro soon becomes a recognized authority in the field. "I trained myself as an opera conductor. It was a necessity for Constanța, where they would stage performances after performances. Conducting opera is a much more complex thing, more important: to keep under your baton the instrumentalists in the pit, the interpreters on the stage, to accurately follow the score and the direction, to transfer to the public the feeling of music, of the great classical music, that is the biggest challenge!"<sup>2</sup>.

The repertoire which he approached as a conductor included over 60 titles of opera, operetta, ballet as well as symphonic and vocal-symphonic works. The opera scores he conducted were signed by: Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, Georges Bizet, Giacomo Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, Pietro Mascagni, Paul Constantinescu, Sabin Drăgoi, Piotr Ilici Ceaikovski, N. A. Rimski-Korsakov, L. Minkus, Adolphe Adam, Léo Delibes a.s.o.

Browsing the works conducted by Gheorghe Stanciu, one may notice the attention paid equally to the masterpieces of the universal music as well as to the compositions of the great Romanian composers. One may also observe that besides opera, maestro's favourite genre, he was interested in operetta, music-hall and symphony, to mention here scores signed by: Johann Strauss, Francis Lopez, Emmerich Kálmán, Friedrich Loewe, Carl Zeller, Gerd Joachim Natschinski a.s.o. and symphonies by: W. A. Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Franz Schubert, Serghei Prokofiev, P. I. Ceaikovski and Gabriel Fauré.

Since it was mentioned here the fact that G. Stanciu had a special feeling for opera, looking at his professional path one can observe a certain propensity towards G. Puccini's operas to which he manifested particular interest. His admiration for the Italian composer's style materialized in his particular concept of interpreting it. This truth being sustained not only by our countless conversations from our numerous rehearsals, him at the stand, me at the piano, but also by watching recordings available at the TNOB music library, and mostly by the fact

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<sup>2</sup> Aurelia, Lăpușan. 2016, December 01. „Portraits. People who made cultural history in Dobrogea on the life stage. Great artists of Constanța” (XIX). *Day of Constanța*. (no pages)

that he had been invited to conduct Puccini's operas both in the country and abroad so many times.



Fig. 1. Photograph taken with the Japanese soloist in the main part, after the performance with *Madama Butterfly* on 28th October 1993, staged at the Lyrical Theatre of Constanța.

One of the favourite operas from Puccini's creation was *Manon Lescaut*, which he so dearly wanted to conduct but never could. He loved the music of this opera, he had even studied it but it remained only a dream which never became true.

He paid special attention to casting, to singers and to talented instrumentalists, but mainly to those willing to evolve in their career, particularly requesting them. An example of mutual admiration is the collaboration with the soprano Veronica Diaconu, among others, in the part of Mimi from *La Bohème* by G. Puccini, when G. Stanciu made his debut. Many years after, remembering that event, the maestro recalled the satisfaction he had when collaborating with that singer.

The ballet repertoire includes the following titles: *The Nutcracker*, *The Swans*, *Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* by P. I. Tchaikovsky; *Scheherazade* by Rimski-Korsakov, *Don Quijote* by Léon Minkus, *Giselle* by A. Adam; *Coppelia* by Léo Delibes, *La fille mal gardée* by Ferdinand Hérold and Peter Ludwig Hertel a.s.o.

Referring to ballet the maestro stated the following: „I have conducted for all the great artists of the Romanian ballet. Ballet is conducted differently. One must know the coreography and learn it, know the constants of the rhythm. It is entirely different. In our country I was for a while the only ballet conductor”<sup>3</sup>.

In another interview Gheorghe Stanciu unfolds his idea: „With the ballet, everything is about perfectly synchronizing music and movement. I would spend the entire day till evening in the ballet hall, in order to understand, to learn. With the ballet one needs to have a constant rhythm, otherwise the entire coreography can be upset. It is difficult to conduct the ballet. There are very good conductors who cannot keep the rhythm constant. I have worked with all the great ballet soloist dancers. George Bodnariuc made his debut with me. I have worked with Elena Dacian, Ileana Iliescu. Extraordinary ballet dancers whom I had the immense chance to conduct and perform with. I enjoyed it every moment”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Aurelia, Lăpușan. 2016, December 01st. „Portraits. People who made cultural history in Dobrogea. On the life stage. Great artists of Constanța” (XIX). *Ziua de Constanța*. (no pages)

<sup>4</sup> Roxana, Artenie, Penciu. 2018, June 21st. „More known abroad than in Galați, maestro Gheorghe Stanciu: A country without culture is a dead country!” *Free Life*. 8736.



Fig. 2. Photograph, Gheorghe Stanciu next to ballet dancers Laurențiu Guinea, Rodica Uretu-Raicu, Ane Marie Vretoș, Isabela Aguletti, Valentin Ionescu, after a ballet gala.

Along his conducting activity, the maestro collaborated with artists famous in the country and abroad, under his baton with the orchestra and soloists of the Constanța Opera House, they have recorded three CDs, considered by the critics to be of reference: *Requiem* by G. Verdi, *Requiem* by Gabriel Fauré and the Oratorio *Paulus* by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.

Concerning his manner of conducting, the concert programmed for Verdi's *Requiem* is eloquent, as the author of the article from *Litoral magazin* pointed out: Gheorghe Stanciu was the nerve of the entire *Requiem*. Knowing the score, mastering the orchestra, the choir, the entire stage are characteristic features. In each move the conductor made one could feel his will, his view of the score, of how Verdi's music should to be received, lived, recovered. It was divine!"<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. 1. International dimension

Gheorghe Stanciu unfolded an intense activity internationally as well, organizing and participating to countless tours in several countries: Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova, Ireland, Great Britain, the Czech Republic, among others, numerous posters and press articles presenting the maestro accompanied by interpreters of the highest rank of theatres like: Scala, Torino, Basel, Viena, Bolshoi Theatre, Constanța, Chișinău, Tel Aviv. The artistic stand and high professionalism of conductor Gheorghe Stanciu is highlighted by the collaboration with the State Academic Theatre, Opera and Ballet from Odessa, as mentioned in the *Znamia Komunizma* newspaper on 7th December 1988<sup>6</sup>.

In 2001 he was invited at the Vatican to conduct a grand concert *Messa di Gloria* by Giacomo Puccini. It is a huge honor for any foreign conductor to conduct in Italy works of Italian composers.

A landmark moment in the maestro's biography is Rome, where he conducted the premiere of *La serva padrona* by G. B. Pergolesi, four productions of *Tosca* by G. Puccini and the ballet *The Nutcracker* by P. I. Tchaikovsky, performed by a team from the renowned *Bolshoi Theater* in Moscow.

In 2003, he conducted the extraordinary Christmas concert at the *Ostrava Opera House* (Czech Republic). The *Maria Bieșu* (Chișinău) and *Golden Crown* (Odessa) opera festivals had him as a guest of honor.

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<sup>5</sup> Aurelia, Lăpușan. 1994, May 25th. „A thought for the Requiem”. *Litoral magazin*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. I. Iliușin. 1988, December 7th. „The Friendship tours.” (no pages).

In collaboration with the prestigious *Ellen Kent* opera company, he participated, for over seven years, in successful tours in Great Britain and Ireland, conducting performances including: *Nabucco*, *Aida*, *Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *Masquerade bal* by G. Verdi, *Carmen* by G. Bizet, *Madama Butterfly* (over 80), *La Boheme*, *Tosca* and *Turandot* by G. Puccini. He also had various contracts in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Spain, including 300 performances of the opera *La Boheme*, 350 of *Carmen*, over a thousand performances in total. These tours gave him the opportunity to collaborate with performers and orchestras of the highest level, including *Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, The Royal Opera, London, The Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Bolshoi Theatre* etc.

*Le Journal du Dimanche*, referring to the 1999 New Year's Concert, stated: „So, when the Regional Conservatory of Clermont-Ferrand invited Maestro Gheorghe Stanciu, the Romanian conductor of the Galați and Constanța Operas, for the New Year's concert on Friday evening, no doubt crossed the minds of the audience. Everyone knew they would hear something beautiful, something powerful. Everyone knew they would be faced with emotion. Everyone knew that the year would begin on a summit of talent. ... A moment suspended in time. Sublime”<sup>7</sup>.

In 2003, he was the guest of honor at the *Montserrat Caballé* Conservatory in Madrid, where he gave a conducting Masterclass.

### 3. Managerial and pedagogical activity

Between 1997–1998 Gheorghe Stanciu occupied the position of General Manager of the *Nae Leonard* Music Theatre in Galați and afterwards, by exam, that of Manager-Director of Constanța Opera House, being the one who made tremendous efforts to sustain the theatre which achieved authentic progress, to emphasize its development also by changing its name from the Lyrical Theatre into the Opera House. An image of the remarkable level is the 25th edition of the *International Opera and Ballet Festival* organized in Constanța, under the leadership of director and conductor Gheorghe Stanciu, which debuted in an impressive way with the premiere of *Aida*, this production remaining a landmark in the national landscape: „The 1999 *Aida* in Constanța will remain unforgettable..., becoming one of the most meritorious shows that can be seen in our country. A managerial success, a great staging and a reference interpretative version”, wrote Mihai Cosma in the article *Constanța Jubilee Edition*, published in the *In the Country* section<sup>8</sup>.

„Opera lovers have long acknowledged the consistently high artistic standards of the Constanța Opera's performances. The constant collaboration with valuable soloists, conductors, directors and scenographers has brought elements of novelty and variety to the performances, bringing notes of event to each evening. This year ended with two tours in Italy, but also the foreshadowing of a surprising program for the year 2000. (...) on February 23 we will be present at the Verdi Hall in Milan with a program consisting of the *Piano Concerto* by Johannes Brahms, and *Symphony* No. 8 by Antonio Dvořák. On March 8th, in the same hall, we will perform the *Piano Concerto* by Camille Saint-Saëns, and *Symphony* No. 3 *Eroica* by L. van Beethoven, with the great pianist Aldo Ciccolini as soloist. This summer we will give 15 performances of *Traviata*, in which we will finally be able to bring out the entire team: choir, ballet, orchestra, soloists. In July, a tour with *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, *Traviata* is announced, and for

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<sup>7</sup> Unknown author. 1999, Janvier 10.1999. *La Montagne*. „«L'An nouveau» sous l'étoile du talent.” p.6. „Alors, lorsque le Conservatoire national de région de Clermont-Ferrand a invité le maestro Gheorghe Stanciu, chef d'orchestre roumain des Opéras de Galați et Constanța, pour son concert de l'An nouveau, vendredi soir, le doute ne s'est pas emparé des esprits du public. Tous savaient qu'ils allaient entendre du beau, du fort. Tous savaient qu'ils allaient se retrouver face à l'émotion. Tous savaient que l'année commencerait sur les cimes du talent. . Un instant suspendu dans le temps. Sublime.”

<sup>8</sup> Mihai, Cosma, 1999. „Constanța Jubilee Edition.” *Music world news*. (no pages)

August a series of concerts again at *La Scala*. Between August 15th and September 5th, 12 performances of *La Traviata* are scheduled in Brussels.”Conductor Gheorghe Stanciu offered the Opera team the chance for international recognition, this is the title of the article signed by Magdalena Vlădilă for the *Telegraf* magazine<sup>9</sup>.

In general, when we refer to effective management, we refer to communication, establishing effective strategies for the institution, encouraging collaborators to achieve excellence and, last but not least, making the right decisions. In the artistic environment, something else is needed: to be a role model, to be someone you want to follow, who knows how to attract good people and keep them close, because building a successful ensemble is based on forming strong and lasting teams, and maestro Gheorghe Stanciu has responded to all the requirements with flying colors.

He held conducting Masterclasses for artists from Europe, Asia and the USA, thus laying the foundations of a real conducting school around his musical vision. Quite often he told us and it was clear that he enjoyed highlighting moments from the joint efforts to decode scores in rehearsals with young Japanese or Korean conductors, admiring the young students, who, after eight hours of in-depth study with the maestro, continued to study until four in the morning. He always told young artists that nothing can be achieved without effort, but also about the fact that this profession requires a lot of work.

### 3. 1. Public recognition

Conductor and manager Gheorghe Stanciu was highly appreciated nationally and internationally.

Since 2000 he has become citizen of honor for the city of Clermont-Ferrand in France and permanent conductor of the Conservatories from the same town.

At the 20th edition of the International Opera Festival, in 1994, he was awarded the loyalty award by the newspaper *Cuget Liber*, and in 2001, for his exceptional activity, he was named *Man of the Year*. *Tomis* magazine catalogued the opera *Madama Butterfly*, under his baton, "the best opera of 2002". In 1997, at the 23rd edition of the Festival, he was awarded a diploma for the impressive musical achievement of the premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* by V. Bellini. The *Nae Leonard* Cultural Foundation awarded Maestro Gheorghe Stanciu the excellence award for activity in artistic management. For the extraordinary concert with Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*, performed by Maestro Stanciu, the Municipality of Galați and the Local Council award the *Nae Leonard* Musical Theatre the Galați Municipality Award. „Through the current position gained in the 23 years of uninterrupted activity on the operatic scene in Constanța and through his professionalism and dedication, Mr. Gheorghe Stanciu is currently ranked as the number one conductor - in the country - of his generation (40-50 years old)”, wrote Bebe Draia in the article *Gheorghe Stanciu in a double role: chief conductor of the Constanța Opera and general director of the "Nicolae Leonard" theater in Galați* in the newspaper *Telegraf*<sup>10</sup>.

Gheorghe Stanciu was awarded the excellence award at the *National Opera Gala*, 2015 edition, Bucharest, for his artistic activity.

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<sup>9</sup> Vlădilă, Magdalena. January 28th. 2000. „Conductor Gheorghe Stanciu offered the Opera team the chance for international recognition”. *Telegraf*. 22. p.19.

<sup>10</sup> Draia, Bebe. September 20-21. 1997. „Gheorghe Stanciu in a dual role: chief conductor of the Constanța Opera and general director of the „Nicolae Leonard” theater in Galați.” *Telegraf*. 219. p.13.

#### 4. Conclusions

The conductor is the one who leads the destiny of the musical performance to the applause of the audience. Maestro Gheorghe Stanciu is a living example of the complete artist, who has always put the musical act at the service of beauty and art. With an impressive career and a lasting influence on generations of artists, he remains a shining figure of the Romanian and international music scene. Playful always smiled at friends and enemies, remaining faithful only to his great passion: Music. A person who gave the impression of a calm, quiet nature, but who was actually an introverted one, who consumed himself a lot, conductor Gheorghe Stanciu passes away, in our opinion far too early, on Thursday, February 29th, 2024. His disappearance leaves a huge void in the Romanian musical world and beyond, but his disciples and those who knew him are still left with the memory of an artistic personality who marked the time and space in which he carried out his activity.

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