

(NOTES)

***AT THE CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF WAGNER'S
BAYREUTH THEATRE⁹⁰***

Ph. D. Romeo GHIRCOIAȘIU

Musicologist and teacher **Romeo Ghircoiașiu** (1919-1995) was trained as a pianist with George Ciolac and Eliza Ciolan, in Cluj. After 1940 he studied legal sciences (with a doctorate in 1948, as assistant to Eugeniu Speranția at the "V. Babes" University), continued his musical studies at the "G. Dima" Conservatory of Music and obtained the first Ph.D. title in Romanian music history (1970), under the direction of Sigismund Toduță. Since 1949 he established himself gradually as professor of music history, Ph. D. supervisor and founder of a renowned school of musicology in Cluj. Author of over 150 musicology studies, articles and reviews, and participant in famous musicology congresses, Romeo Ghircoiașiu is remembered as author of two important volumes of Romanian Music History (1963, 1992) and as a profound exegete of Enescu (*Studii enesciene*, 1981).



For the year 1976, the anniversary of Wagner's Bayreuth Theatre was one of the most outstanding musical events in the world.

The performances on the "Green Hill", as the theatre has gone down in history, gave us the opportunity to witness the present state of the interpretation of Wagner's opera after 100 years of existence. This is the history of a theatre whose brilliant founder's vision imposed principles and conceptions that each epoch has assumed in its own way. The wax and wane of the popular audience reflected the progress of societies and ideas in an evolution. Throughout the years, the Festival knew both the excitement of the great days, and the struggles and torments through or against which the progress of art never ceased to assert itself. Renewal in the art of sounds, "the music of the future", man's social and spiritual progress, were all leading ideas in the human landscape of this hundred years. Philosophers or musicians, Hegelians or Socialists, naturalist or realist romantics, all found in Wagner's works the fundamental sources of their thinking.

Among them, in the 1960's, a young and unknown Hegelian from Romania, by the name of Titu I. Maiorescu, distinguished himself with the conference delivered at the "Filosofische Gesellschaft" in Berlin and at the "Cercle des Sociétés savantes" in Paris, entitled: *The Old French Tragedy and Wagner's Music*⁹¹. His views were breathing the air of the times while also having the boldness to encompass the future. In the young philosopher's

⁹⁰ Published in the "Muzica" journal, Issue No.2/1977.

⁹¹ „Der Gedanke”, Berlin, I, p. 250 and II, p. 112 subsq., cf. Tudor Vianu, *Studii de literatură română* (Studies of Romanian Literature), București, 1975, p. 167, 584, 604 subsq.

aesthetic system, beauty is a synthesis between the rational, ideal and logical moment represented, in music, through harmony, and the sensible, affective and emotional moment expressed through melody. According to his system, however schematic, the young philosopher considered that Wagner's art was dominated primarily by harmony, a field in which he was trying to justify the logical necessity of dissonances. While also mentioning the subsidiary character of the Wagnerian melody in the context of the musical discourse, the young philosopher was contesting its Beethovenian tradition that Wagner considered he was pursuing. Instead, the preponderance of the ideal and rational element to the detriment of the affective one, gives Wagner's opera, according to Titu Maiorescu, a true social role as „music of the future”⁹². In an immediately following generation, young George Enescu was admiring "with ecstasy and fanaticism", as he used to put it, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* or the *Tetralogy*. "Certain Wagnerian chromaticisms were already part of my vascular system" — he said himself toward the end of his life⁹³.

A century later, Wagner's art was equally young and open toward the philosophical and musical thinking of this historical space, as in its beginnings. We mention especially the aesthetic thinking of one of the musicians who signed the performances at the centennial: Pierre Boulez. He is one of the few contemporary conductors who combine interpretive thinking with the original creative process. His musical work joins Beethoven, Wagner, Berg or Bartók, with the significant moments of contemporary art.

Time becomes a new category that the eminent composer integrates in the analysis, in the light of the contemporary literary or musical philosophical experience. In Wagner's opera, observes Boulez, "temporal criteria had to be progressively transformed, themes gradually losing that clear definition characteristic of Beethoven, which had exercised such a strong influence on Wagner at first... The hierarchy established by the traditional language gave place to mutual exchanges and to a fluidity in the emergence of musical entities, necessitating formal relationships of a different kind"⁹⁴.

These new grammars of style noticeable today in moments of culmination of the 20th century, build the traditional elements of form, harmony, melody or rhythm, into more complex versions than before. Sometimes, Pierre Boulez notices, "the predominating harmony is created by the motionless proliferation of the same melodic material and", he continues "it would be hard to say which of these two functions is the more important, the one

⁹² Ibid., p. 585.

⁹³ Bernard Gavoty, *Entretiens avec Georges Enesco*, Paris, 1955, p. 57.

⁹⁴ Pierre Boulez, *Le temps re-cherché* in Programmhefte der Bayreuther Festspiele, 1976, Hg. W. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*", p. 11.

arising from the other and the latter non-existent without the former until the moment comes at which by sheer accumulation, the two are indistinguishable". Elsewhere, Boulez continues, "the melody becomes simply the top line of the harmony... each unimaginable without the other and indissolubly linked by the same single function, the articulation of the rhythm"⁹⁵.

The drama is another standpoint in terms of which the brilliant musician considers the sound structure of the Wagnerian opera. He draws a certain connection between Wagner's opera and the ancient tragedy. "Leitmotifs, argues Boulez, do tell us clearly things that we need to know and the characters of the drama have not yet realized... they warn us about the elements of the situation, give us the clue and make us *intelligent* in comparison with the stage characters". In this principle of musical dramaturgy we can recognize the direct communication, the "confidence" between author and public, without the characters' knowledge, so typical of the ancient tragedy. If the heroes act according to forces that are unknown to them, the audience, in its turn, lives in a state of permanent alertness the vicissitudes of the drama that they understand through leitmotifs. Thus, according to Boulez, the musical level becomes an autonomous world, which is parallel with the dramatic world whose text becomes the main argument⁹⁶.

Besides time, *memory* plays an important role in Wagner's thinking through the way in which, in the course of the dramatic narrative, leitmotifs contain allusions to ideas and events. This method was also featured in the literary technique used by Marcel Proust who, as Boulez noticed, was one of Wagner's great admirers.⁹⁷

In *Oedipus*, George Enescu was no stranger to Wagner's constructivist techniques. The symbolist experience in *Pelléas* and the East-European typical sound structures triggered new dimensions into his thinking. However, the confidence between author and audience worked in his thinking, too, through the two close but parallel levels: the dramatic world borrowed from Sophocles' tragic texts and the musical world, whose leitmotifs, with their autonomous expression, inform the auditors of the deeds of heroes governed against their will by what they called "destiny". In fact, regarding the myth of Oedipus, Richard Wagner himself interpreted destiny as an expression of state and religion that through their force enslave the ancient man. Karl Marx, in his turn, wrote at the time that that Aristotle's philosophy

⁹⁵ Id.

⁹⁶ Ibid. P.7-8.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 7 and Pierre Boulez, *Par volonté et par hasard*, Entretiens avec Celestin Deliège, Paris, 1975, p. 66.

represented the protest of human thinking against mythology. This is the philosophical substratum of the ancient tragedy.⁹⁸

These few ideas, among so many others, have reminded us that we are bringing along to the *Centennial* a rich inheritance of the contemporary musical knowledge. It is an inheritance that "the music of the future", with its ample opening "for or against Wagner", encompasses.

The musical direction of the Tetralogy, signed by Pierre Boulez, was a living proof of his aesthetic views and, perhaps, of a few aspects of the maestro's interpretative vision, from Beethoven's symphonies to today. If in these works he restored the opera to its earlier clarity, which is sometimes forgotten by the current interpretive traditions, in the *Tetralogy* he doubled this structural clarity by including the dimensions of affection and passion, if we may adopt the vocabulary of the young Hegelians of yore. Hence, a great complexity of the beats – slowed down at times to the point of suspension of the movement – or dynamized at others up to the breathtaking heights of instrumental virtuosity. He recreated the fluidity of the sonorous discourse, so utterly deprived of the classical architectures we have often been slaves to.

Musical direction was well delivered by an orchestra matured in the great traditions of the theatre and working hard to follow the sometimes novel views of its leader. The singer's group brought a majestic musical presence on stage, enhanced by their attributes of genuine tragedians. Donald McIntyre (Wotan), Yvonne Minton (Fricka), Hans Zednik (Loge and Mime) an actor of infinite dramatism, Gwyneth Jones (Brünhilde), an unforgettable tragedian, René Kollo (Siegfried), Karl Ridderbusch (Hunding), dominated the stage with the composition of their roles and the often overwhelming virtuosity of their theatrical presence.

The stage direction created what musical direction deemed to be the dramatic world of the opera, unfolding its own life while expressing the musical world, a pretext of the latter in a never-ending feedback, a view that can well complement Boulez's thinking. It was signed by Patrice Chéreau, with sets by Richard Peduzzi.

The young French stage director's conception is itself positioned on levels that acknowledge the open character of Wagner's opera. Present on the 1848 barricades and friend of anarchists and kings (Bakunin and Ludwig II), Richard Wagner composed the tetralogy over a long period (1850-1876). Meanwhile, the road that he and the European society followed knew the meanders of a contradictory evolution. Knowing the future was a leading idea in the people's minds at that time, whether politicians, sociologists or artists. Stage

⁹⁸ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Leipzig 1888, vol. 4, p. 67.

direction itself adopted this attitude, setting it within the context of the *eternal human*. The characters of Valhalla represent the people of olden days and of all time. They have all the human attributes, despite the eras and times that sometimes suspend the flight, to paraphrase the lines of a Romantic poet. Thus, the stages of the "Ring" have presented us successively with the unreal image of the Valhalla castle and with the much more real ones of a bourgeois interior inhabited by Wotan and his wife Fricka. Likewise, the landscape of the Rhine, with its hydroelectric plant, hides the mythical gold in its depths, while outside the Rhinemaidens, like true "midinettes", are walking along the bridge. In the "Twilight", the gods shed the official garments of the legend and take up the human fashion, whether as a rumpled gray suit (Wotan or Hagen), or a tuxedo and black tie of the latest generations (Gunther or Siegfried). An entire people coming from the four corners of the world, a working people mourning their lost hero, surrounds Siegfried's coffin.

Despite this shocking conception, many scenes of the tetralogy were filled with outstanding moments of truth and pathos. Stage direction has created that poetry of the drama, reaching beyond the stage and conquering the audience. In fact, the Doric columns were repeated on stage in the architectures of Wotan's world. Despite a few eclectic elements (live horses, magic monsters, real fires, artificial fogs, stage decorations reduced to symbols), the stage director expressed his views in an efficient manner in which the patina of time would bring more unity and consistency to the overwhelming ensemble of the four operatic evenings.