

George Enescu as Conductor.

I. Preliminaries to an Enescian Poetics of Conducting

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ABSTRACT – This study aims to illustrate the circumstances in which performer George Enescu experienced his most fulfilling moments, as acknowledged both by himself and by those who admired him at the podium, whether in the audience or on stage under his direct guidance. In the first part of the study, I will resort to all of George Enescu’s identifiable statements about the art of conducting in general, as well as to the special significance it held for his musical training and career. Although these statements are numerous (and often brief), I believe that by grouping them according to specific thematic criteria, one can appropriately refer to a so-called “Enescian poetics of conducting”. In the second part of the study, I will further confirm this concept through various testimonies (musical chronicles, memoiristic evocations) of his contemporaries, and, additionally, I will integrate it into a historical overview of George Enescu’s rich conducting career.

Keywords: theory of musical interpretation, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, musical memory.

The future generations, who will certainly only be able to immerse themselves in the beauties of George Enescu’s magnificent body of work, may well envy his contemporaries who valued and honoured him as both an unsurpassed wizard of the bow and an unparalleled master of the baton and performance.¹

1. Introduction

The composer gained more recognition in the eyes of posterity. Inertia and prejudice, sluggishness and ruins of a strictly circumstantial nature – interposed during decades of

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¹ “Desigur că generațiile care vor veni și care se vor adăpa doar la frumusețile grandioasei opere componistice a lui George Enescu, vor avea de ce să invidieze pe contemporanii săi, care l-au prețuit și venerat și ca neîntrecut vrăjitor al arcușului și ca un fenomen al baghetei și interpretării.” Lazăr, “Cronica muzicală”, 4.

isolation of (post)communist Romania also with damaging editorial policies – could not stop the inevitable: slowly but surely, and at least on a symbolic level (from where it still awaits a complete critical edition and a greater presence in contemporary repertoires), Enescu’s work is carving out a distinct place for itself and is increasingly recognized for its significant relevance within the Western musical canon. On the other hand, the performer, the one who – more than the composer – captivated his contemporaries with dynamic displays in various and equally viable artistic roles; the one who often created a sensation by seamlessly transitioning from the violin to the keyboard or taking up the baton during the same concert; the one who, thus defying the modern trend toward specialization – which had also penetrated the arts as a seemingly inevitable aspect of progress –, travelled for half a century gracing concert halls, smaller salons and soirées across multiple continents, surrounded by an aura of almost unbelievable nobility, resembling a maestro descended from a gilded and long-gone era, when a single individual could still embody all forms of musical expression, the complete musician, the “prince of the ineffable”, as he was once called,² has faded into the mist of legend. He confessed multiple times to his strong reluctance regarding the imperfections of the recording techniques of his time. As a result, there are very few audio recordings available, and most of them come from his later years (when the increasing restrictions imposed by illness and old age negatively impacted his violin skills), so that posterity lacks a true understanding of his exceptional qualities as an instrumentalist. He was undoubtedly painfully aware of the fluctuating and sometimes inconsistent technical quality of his performances in his old age, which he would not have wanted immortalized (an aspect that should not be overly emphasized, just as his contemporaries did not focus on it in their praise; for them – as it should also be for us when listening to the last surviving recordings – his performances always seemed marked by a deeply personal tone, rooted in his great warmth and expressive depth).

The fact is, however, that the multifaceted, intense and immense career of performer George Enescu would be difficult to fully comprehend without the wealth of testimonies left by those who had the privilege of experiencing it firsthand. There is a vast amount of literature on the subject, often dispersed in various more or less obscure publications and therefore used in haphazard ways, depending on the skills and dedication of each researcher. Even when they offer only subtle nuances and enhancements of already known aspects, the information in these writings should be thoroughly explored, compiled, and organized, precisely because, when fuelled by their ample rumour, George Enescu’s artistic and personal portrait would pulsate more vividly, free from the risk of being reduced to the lifeless status of a petrified effigy.

² “*Arghezi îi zice drept și frumos: ‘Prințul de peste inefabil’*” [“Arghezi justly and gracefully calls him: ‘The Prince from beyond the ineffable’”]. [Teodoreanu] Velisar, “Enescu”, 504; republished in fragments in Crăciun and Codrea, *Gânduri închinare lui Enescu*, 80.

The present study aims to illustrate the circumstances in which performer George Enescu experienced his most fulfilling moments, as acknowledged both by himself and by those who admired him at the podium, whether in the audience or on stage under his direct guidance. To this end, we will occasionally include eloquent reflections of Enescu's contemporaries, spanning relatively ample spaces, because the strongest power of conviction can only come from the undiluted recollections of those who truly listened to him, witnessed his presence and knew him personally. To achieve the desired effect – namely, to instil in the reader a sense of envy towards those who lived around Enescu –, it is important to approach the reading with attention to two key warnings:

1) The quoted reflections are merely scattered and fragmentary pieces, as the articles from the press of the time (musical chronicles, concert and recital announcements, portraits and essays), written in various languages, as well as the intimate notes (diaries, letters, memoirs), represent a vast, difficult-to-quantify body of material, an overwhelming abundance of information whose inclusion between more organized covers has been attempted since the first flickers of the idolatrous science called “Enescology”, and which continues, as far as possible, to this day. It continues and, in fact, it risks remaining perpetually unfinished. For, regardless of how many tentacular avenues researchers explore, the truth remains that the musician's dissipation is disarming in its grandeur; any attempts to fully capture Enescu's essence are doomed to frustration.

2) This literature is of uneven value; while some analyses are detailed and credible, others veer towards clichéd tributes or overly rhetorical expressions. However, the generalization of the dithyrambic character remains constant, which inevitably impresses or can lead to either exhaustion or condescending reactions upon repeated readings. Nonetheless, the genuine enthusiasm for Enescu's talent is undeniable, reflecting an intrinsic desire to offer a humble tribute to his remarkable contributions to the world. However, given the scarcity and poor quality of the recordings, this literature should be regarded as the primary source of information about George Enescu's concert activity.

Such an indirect manner of resuscitation certainly presents a significant drawback, tending to focus less on the subject of its admiration than on what can only be the inevitably faint reflection of an irremediably faded reality. However, these things cannot be avoided, since understanding George Enescu's personality in its entirety can only be complete by evoking his immense interpretative talents. After all, even Enescu's compositional style – marked by a constant demand for the most precise detail and finely nuanced indications leading to a proliferation of calophilia in his scores – was deeply marked by his mastery as a violinist and pianist, as well as by his extensive experience with the most diverse and mysterious possibilities of the main instruments he played.³

³ There is also substantial evidence that, in informal settings, Enescu was able to skilfully handle other core instruments of the string family – such as the viola and cello –, as well as the organ, for which he once confessed

At the same time, the compositional capacity of his thinking significantly influenced his interpretative skills, giving him that unique power to perceive “from the inside” any music he approached, and connect with its spirit. Many chroniclers of the time spoke of the magic of the uncanny freshness that classical works acquired under Enescu’s fingers: the impression of a “secondary act”, of restitution of artistic vestiges of a distant time, was as if dissolved by Enescu’s performances; unlike most musicians specialized solely in the art of interpretation, the multi-instrumentalist composer George Enescu seemed not only to mechanically reproduce a memorized piece but even to recreate the music in real-time during his performances, so that many listeners would get the impression that the works he presented, no matter how familiar, had never been played by anyone else before.

2. “My baton is nothing but a freed bow”

More than the violin, which brought him worldwide fame, but also frustrated him with its monodic character, inherently limited in terms of possibilities of musical expression and repertoire; even more than the piano, the instrument of harmonic and polyphonic richness, self-taught and explored since childhood and always the ultimate refuge for his tumultuous musical nature, always eager to overflow unrestrained and overcome any limitations; George Enescu’s favourite instrument, in the depth of which his musical “bulimia” (a term he used⁴) felt the joy of supreme liberation, was the symphony orchestra. “The violin remained for him a unique voice – a marvellous tree, indeed, but isolated within the forest – while the orchestra symbolized the fusion of all voices in the same harmonious glory, a whole forest vibrating and singing together in a multitude of tones.”⁵ Having always found his ideal way of expression in polyphonic reverberation (a tendency he applied even in his works, where melodic contours are blurred and capriciously agglutinated like labyrinthine thickets, or like overflows into oceanic immensities), his type of musicality could only breathe freely by assuming the widest possible fields of expression. Having an orchestral apparatus at his disposal allowed Enescu to fulfil precisely this need in the field of interpretation as well, and many of his honest and straightforward statements reflect the immense satisfaction he felt at the

to having developed a consuming passion in his youth, even admitting that it risked overshadowing his attention to other musical pursuits.

⁴ “*Ma boulimie musicale [...] il m’en faut toujours davantage!*” Enescu, quoted in Gavoty, *Les Souvenirs de Georges Enesco / Amintirile lui George Enescu*, 166 (Fr) / 167 (Ro).

⁵ “*Vioara rămânea pentru el o singură voce – un copac într-adevăr minunat, dar izolat în pădure –, pe când orchestra îi era contopirea în aceeași slavă de armonie a tuturor vocilor, era întreaga pădure ce freamătă și cântă cu un glas multiplu.*” Ciomac, “[Jubileul maestrului George Enescu.] G. Enescu – șef de orchestră”, 13.

podium, incomparable – as he was keen to emphasize – to those he had while handling the bow:

The violin holds me back, hinders me, the bow is stuck to the strings... My baton is nothing but a freed bow. Then, the repertoire I have as a violinist is so limited and uninspiring, while the orchestra offers a much richer selection.⁶

I love conducting. It is a pleasant game, even exhilarating at times. What a marvel it is to make music without first having to perform tedious scales that spoil the pleasure! [...] Oh! What a marvellous feeling, somewhat comparable, I imagine, to that of the tiny organist dominating such a powerful instrument! You are there, tiny, and you unleash storms...⁷

He also expressed his fascination with the unlimited resources of the symphonic organism, regarding it as one of civilization's most valuable achievements; for, – Enescu seems to suggest –, thinking through sound, facilitated by the extensive and complex composition of an orchestra, reveals the precious, inarticulate feelings hidden within the uncertain depths of the soul: “Its composition is so complete, you have an entire orchestra at your fingertips as a means of expressing everything that constitutes the beauty and fullness of life. As a conductor, I feel the same deep satisfaction; the orchestra is a cohesive unit that you can mould for the most perfect performance. The repertoire is vast. It's far too vast for a single human life.”⁸

This fascination largely comes from the unique connection that, of all possible forms of the interpretative act, conducting establishes with the condition of the creator himself. By transcending the confines of any physical instrument, the baton gives the composer-conductor the exhilarating illusion of direct communion with the spirit of music, which emanates as if by magic from the orchestra players who are united by a shared vision: “Applause doesn't impress me that much. But when the orchestra resonates with my vision, when the musicians understand me and connect with me, when even the most extreme instruments successfully convey my intentions through sound, in those moments

⁶ “Vioara mă reține, mă împiedică, arcușul e lipit de coarde... Bagheta mea nu-i decât arcușul eliberat. Apoi repertoriul ce-l am ca violonist e atât de redus și ingrat, pe când orchestra e mult mai bogată și ca repertoriu.” Enescu, quoted in A[roneanu], “Maestrul Enescu vorbește «Gazetei»”, 1; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviu din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 279.

⁷ “J'aime beaucoup diriger. C'est un jeu agréable, et même grisant à certaines heures: quelle merveille de faire de la musique sans être obligé d'accomplir auparavant des gammes fastidieuses qui gâtent le plaisir! [...] Oh! la merveilleuse impression, un peu comparable, j'imagine, à celle de l'organiste si petit qui domine un instrument si puissant! On est là, minuscule, et l'on déchaîne des tempêtes...” Enescu, quoted in Gavoty, *Les Souvenirs de Georges Enescu / Amintirile lui George Enescu*, 200, 202 (Fr) / 201, 203 (Ro).

⁸ “[C]ompoziția este atât de completă, ai la îndemână o orchestră întreagă ca mijloc de exprimare a tot ceea ce formează frumusețea și plenitudinea vieții. Ca dirijor am satisfacția tot atât de completă; orchestra e un tot pe care poți să-l modelezi pentru o cât mai perfectă interpretare. Repertoriul este vast. E mult prea vast pentru o viață de om.” Enescu, quoted in Șeicaru, “20 de minute cu George Enescu”, 2; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviu din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 349.

I experience a pleasant, profound sensation that is hard to describe. It's something to be felt."⁹

Enescu's subjective preference for the interpretative art in its conducting version is explained in a similar way – that is, as a consequence of its close relationship with composition, which Enescu deeply valued as the quintessential musical activity – at the end of an interview that specifically focused on his role as a conductor. When asked if being a composer aided or hindered his conducting, Enescu highlighted the essential connection between these two “facets” of his triple personality as a “composer-conductor-violinist” (a theme aptly reflected in the title of the interview), along with the clear hierarchy between these roles, which he often reiterated whenever the opportunity arose: “‘Is the fact that you are yourself a composer a help or a hindrance?’ ‘I have trained myself to separate my conducting from my composing personality. Fortunately there is scope for me to exercise both. They are in many ways closely related. [...] But if it came to a choice between those two personalities, I cannot help but say that I am a composer before all. I want to create’.”¹⁰

This interview, which significantly enhanced a press campaign that announced, accompanied, and promoted what is regarded as the most prestigious event in George Enescu's conducting career – his debut with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, where he became a favoured guest conductor for three consecutive years (1937-1939) –, also provides valuable insights into the principles that guided Enescu in his approach to conducting. A true Enescian “poetics of conducting” can be derived from the confrontation of these principles with other occasional comments of the musician on the subject, and especially (as will be seen at the end of these notes) from finding relevant fundamental insights in numerous testimonies of Enescu's contemporaries.

3. “Preparation for life as a conductor” in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna

Thus, the “childhood musical experiences” – from the crucial seven years during which the child prodigy, and later the studious teenager Enescu, received his education in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna – are affectionately recounted at the beginning of the interview

⁹ “Aplauzele nu mă încălzesc atât. În schimb însă, când orchestra e pătrunsă de ideea pe care o urmăresc, când [muzicienii] mă pricep, când se identifică cu mine, când instrumentele cele mai extreme reușesc să traducă în sunete intențiunile mele, în momentele acelea simt o senzație plăcută, intensă, ceva ce nu se poate descrie. Ceva ce trebuie simțit.” Enescu, quoted in [Faust-Mohr] Reporter, “O oră la maestrul George Enescu. Marele compozitor și muzicant George Enescu povestește unui redactor al nostru câteva întâmplări din bogata sa carieră artistică”, 1; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 69.

¹⁰ Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, “Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality. Romanian Composer-Conductor-Violinist Discusses the Second of His Three Roles”, 11; reproduced in facsimile in Popa and Sârbu, *Documente din Arhiva M. N. G. E. Articole de presă despre George Enescu, vol. VIII: 1934-1937*, 228.

(and with “respectful gratitude”, as the interviewer notes), revealing more details than any other accounts recorded until then. The musician recounts at length his early and continuous immersion in the performance traditions of the Classics, facilitated by his teacher, Joseph Hellmesberger Jr., who not only welcomed him to the student orchestra (where he played in the first stand of the first violins, often under Johannes Brahms’s baton), but also took him weekly to symphony concerts conducted by Joseph Hellmesberger Sr. based on interpretation instructions passed down from the source (Joseph Sr.’s father, Georg Sr., had been a close friend of Beethoven), as well as to performances and rehearsals at the Imperial Opera, where the young apprentice had his special place “behind the kettle-drums”¹¹. He therefore had the privilege of being in the thick of things and, according to his confessions, he felt the most profound impact when he was directly exposed to the Wagnerian magic that was being spread at that time, shortly after Wagner’s death, by conductor Hans Richter, who was also a great connoisseur of the direct source of the music he performed. Moreover, the teacher welcomed his favourite student into his home, where Johannes Brahms was a regular guest – it was there that the first performance of the *Clarinet Quintet*, Op. 115 took place, in young Enescu’s presence, who thus marked his first meeting with the idol of his youth.¹² These chamber music sessions were held at the house of J. Hellmesberger Jr., creating a near-daily tradition of celebrating the string quartets of the Austrian-German Classics and Romantics, which were performed based on instructions passed down through generations by older musicians, in whose memory the living presence of the revered maestros still resonated.

By the time these cultural landmarks were recalled in the American interview, they had certainly already gained, in the mind of most people, an aura of intangible prestige, elevating them to the status of legend. For Enescu, however, they remained permanently active, having shaped his early years with the power of living and lived realities. He proposed their extensive recollection precisely to illustrate what “my preparation for life as a conductor” truly involved: not specialized lessons or masterclasses designed for the systematic mastery of this profession, but rather launching his musical mind, from a formative stage, into the vastness of “great music” (as he often referred to it), that is, at the heart of the symphony orchestra, an environment he was introduced to early on and in which he thrived, until that space became as familiar to him as amniotic fluid. He had previously expressed this same idea more succinctly in another

¹¹ “My teacher always took me to his [father’s] concerts in the Hof-Kapelle. I heard all the classic symphonies there. [...] I used to go to the opera rehearsals also. I had a seat behind the kettle-drums, and heard all the Wagner operas that way.” Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, “Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...”.

¹² “I lived in my teacher’s house, and attended each rehearsal, as well as all performances of the quartets and other chamber music of Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Schumann, and Schubert. I listened to the first performance of the Brahms clarinet quintet in the Hellmesberger living-room. Brahms himself was there. It was my first meeting with him.” Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, “Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...”.

interview over two decades before (which indicates that he had always viewed his conducting skills as a result of his Viennese training): “The son of the Conservatory’s director, whose house I was staying at, would often take me with him to the Opera, where he often conducted, and it was from that experience that I gained my first insights into conducting.”¹³

4. *Tempo* and nuances, the large line and details

Among all these concepts (discussed in the American interview in more detail than in any other of Enescu’s interventions), the key idea appears to be the belief that the act of interpretation (conducting included) must approach the composer’s creative intent with as much discipline as possible. As an essential condition in this respect, Enescu emphasizes above all the performer’s strict fidelity to how the composer balanced the ebb and flow of musical time; in short, to *tempo*. In the light of this guiding principle, Enescu shares his almost obsessive concern for peppering his scores with tempo (and dynamic) indications that are as detailed and precise as possible, being dissatisfied with the already established terms and expressions, and therefore using an entire arsenal of terminological subtleties, of “*quelques nuances peu usitées*” (as noted in a list at the beginning of his opera *Oedipus*), or tempo fluctuations “*à peine perceptibles*”. All these are intended to guide performers step by step in aligning their interpretations with the composer’s intentions. Enescu’s almost suffocating scrupulosity in this regard is legendary, and he brings it into discussion here with his typical modesty *à l’envers*, that is, by subtly implying the obvious fact that it requires a level of conformity at least equal to that expected when interpreting the scores of revered classical masters (although the latter are not nearly as generous with such indications): “I can’t help it if other conductors change my works, but I won’t change the works of the classical masters. I mark the effects I want very carefully, indicating everything, even to metronome marks every few bars if the tempo is to be changed. I have made up new words to describe the sound I want.”¹⁴

The musician strongly believes that the art of musical interpretation lacks true authenticity if it does not embrace an appropriate speed for the temporal progression of music, which is closely dependent on the pursuit (or, if the score lacks detailed instructions, at least on the well-informed intuition) of the composer’s intention. In this regard, George Enescu expressed himself more than once with the confidence of someone who considered himself (and was perceived by his contemporaries as) a privileged heir:

¹³ “Fiul directorului Conservatorului, la care ședeam în gazdă, mă lua cu el la Operă, unde dirija deseori, și, din vremea aceea, am câpătat primele noțiuni de dirijor.” Enescu, quoted in Horia, “[Interviul zilei.] Maestrul Enescu ne povestește cariera și ne vorbește de debandada de la Operă”, 1; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 98.

¹⁴ Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, “Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...”.

I saw him rehearsing with the [Bucharest] Philharmonic Orchestra. He spares neither effort nor technical expertise, and the guidance he offers is often infused with unique memories from the time when conductor Hellmesberger kept him by his side on the podium. It is impressive how he meticulously respects the written notation of the pieces he conducts, paying attention to even the smallest details and closely following the original text. [...] I once heard him say during a moment when he stopped the orchestra: “Gentlemen, I do not mean to flatter myself, but today I am the sole possessor of some musical legacies...”¹⁵

[In Enescu’s case,] his approach to interpretation differs from what is often referred to as the modernist style, which can be impressive and often pretentious; Enescu’s art is more deeply rooted in musical traditions and shows humility in the presence of Great Music, which adds even more to the uniqueness of a man who has a direct musical lineage to Beethoven and Brahms.¹⁶

The period of his Viennese studies, as it was integrated in George Enescu’s biographical journey (that is, applying the richness of an entire musical tradition that had reached the point of a superlative yet crepuscular efflorescence, to the data of a musical temperament overflowing with precociousness and conscientiousness), allowed him to develop an exceptional understanding of the Classical-Romantic repertoire, and to assimilate it from the source, through direct perception of what he recognised as vitally important – namely, the “traditional *tempi* of Beethoven’s, Schubert’s and Brahms’s symphonies”, passed down through generations, and ultimately reaching him through J. Hellmesberger Sr., the father of his teacher. “All these childhood musical experiences set the original *tempi* in my head, so I never could forget them. I have heard those pieces played in so many different kinds of *tempi* since then that I think it would be truly original to play them as they were intended to be played. Mozart wanted to rush *tempi*; Beethoven did not. Their music must be played as they wished. Changing the rhythm alters the equilibrium, and spoils the balance.”¹⁷

On the other hand, if, in terms of assuming the tempo, that is, the spiritual flow that animates the temporal progression of music, Enescu postulates the ultimate rigour, the treatment of the very materiality of the acoustic substance can allow, in Enescu’s understanding, more flexible interpretations; the unique quality of the sound is shaped by the correlation between dynamic contrasts and timbral characteristics, and sometimes, to

¹⁵ “*L-am văzut repetând cu Orchestra Filarmonică [din București]. Nu-și precupețește nici oboseala, nici cunoștințele tehnice și deseori îndrumările pe care le dă sunt străbătute de amintirile unice de pe vremea când dirijorul Hellmesberger îl păstra alături de pupitru, lângă el. Este impresionant cum respectă notația scrisă a lucrării pe care o execută în cele mai infime indicații, după linia care duce spre textul original. [...] L-am auzit o dată spunând în timpul când oprise orchestra: ‘Domnilor, nu că mă cred, dar azi sunt unicul posesor al unor legate muzicale...’” Archip, “Când George Enescu vorbește...”, 5; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 373.*

¹⁶ “[La Enescu,] baza interpretării e diferită de ceea ce se numește maniera modernistă, care e epatantă și adesea snoabă; arta enesciană e mai legată de tradițiile muzicii, e mai smerită în fața Marii Muzici și, de altfel, asta adaugă și mai mult la singularitatea unui om care descinde muzical în fir direct de la Beethoven și Brahms.” Vieru, “Arta dirijorală a lui George Enescu”, 2.

¹⁷ Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, “Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...”.

function in optimal conditions (and thus align ideally to the composer's intent), this correlation requires performers to intervene or even modify the musical text:

With nuance, it is different. It is sometimes necessary for a conductor to secure this by making some change in the score. Perhaps he decides to double certain instruments. I consider it permissible to use two flutes instead of one when the composer's intention was obviously to have the flute predominate. But I do not consider it permissible to substitute a clarinet for the flute. For instance, in one place in the finale of the *Eroica*, the woodwinds have the melody over a trumpet accompaniment. It is all marked *forte*. The trumpets must play piano, and the woodwind choir must be augmented, if that place is to sound.¹⁸

However, all these remain, after all, punctual details that cannot determine the viability of an interpretation simply through their quantitative accumulation, for "in conducting, the details are not the important thing"; rather, the conductor's primary concern is to acquire and convey, as a breath of life, the vision of the whole, to relentlessly pursue what Enescu refers to as "the true proportion, the large line" of the musical work.¹⁹ This ability – of grasping each sonic moment within the vital logic of a global flow and resisting the temptation to overly indulge in details at the expense of the overarching narrative – is the main criterion that Enescu uses to differentiate at one point good conductors from mediocre ones: "The ideal conductor is [...] the one who masters the score perfectly in his mind. After establishing the inner structure, the conductor of an orchestra achieves something that stands on its own. All the details and nuances then align with the fundamental idea of the work. Mediocre conductors will always present a work with humps and misplaced sentimentality."²⁰

5. "His miraculous memory"

5.1. *Astonishments and anecdotes. And a correction*

"The perfect mastery of the score in his mind", "the inner structure" of the musical work – mentioned here by Enescu as essential conditions for the conductor to grasp the "fundamental idea of the work" – are other ways of describing memory: the laborious endeavour to fully assume the music ultimately reflects the powerful exercise of this mental capacity. And George Enescu, as is well known, was an unrivalled champion of this gymnastics of memorization. His performances were so astounding that they often

¹⁸ Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, "Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...".

¹⁹ "But in conducting, the details are not the important thing. It is the true proportion, the large line, which must be there". Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, "Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...".

²⁰ "*Dirijorul ideal este [...] acela care stăpânește perfect în minte partitura. După clădirea interioară, șeful unei orchestre obține ceva de sine stătător. Toate detaliile, toate nuanțele sunt, atunci, în concordanță cu ideea fundamentală a operei. Dirijorii mediocri vor prezenta o lucrare întotdeauna cu gheburi și sentimentalisme de prost gust.*" Enescu, quoted in A[roneanu], "Maestrul Enescu vorbește 'Gazetei'", 2.

seemed incredible; many enthusiastic reactions recorded in his contemporaries' evocations aimed to highlight Enescu's exceptional mnemonic abilities, expressing a shared sense of astonishment and admiration, as if witnessing a supernatural and inexplicable phenomenon. When conducting, Enescu's memory stood out for its remarkable availability to both the Classical-Romantic canon, with which it had become nearly intertwined since his studies in Vienna, and modern scores, which he was able to assimilate with voracious speed when given the opportunity.

As an orchestra leader, I challenge any foreign conductor – such as: Colonne, Lamoureux, Richter, Weingartner, Nikisch, Steinbach – to demonstrate the bravery exemplified by our great Maestro Enescu, and conduct from memory, without any trace of a general score [...] in front of him. I cannot praise *his miraculous memory* enough, I repeat it, and I will repeat it on every occasion. I can understand that conducting classical compositions that one has heard and studied during years of study abroad is impressive, but our Maestro also conducts modern compositions, which are much more complex and require the utmost concentration.²¹

Given his miraculous memory, it is not surprising that he can recall the great symphonic works by heart. However, what truly sets him apart is his ability to conduct a modern, unfamiliar and swirling composition that, for some reason, appears in the programme, after just a single glance at the score, indicating all the entries and correcting any mistake, which is truly exceptional. It is said that in a town in Transylvania, a local composer once brought him a work of his own music to seek his opinion, and that he was both amazed and delighted when the Maestro played it from memory that evening.²²

The Transylvanian composer mentioned here is most likely Paul Richter, a Saxon from Braşov, whose *Suite No. 2 for Orchestra in F major, Carpatica*, op. 85, Enescu specifically wanted to conduct in world premiere (on November 12, 1923, during his first concert at the Braşov Philharmonic Society²³), after having studied and memorized the score in record time. Additionally, two local musicians who participated in the rehearsals confirmed Enescu's familiarity with the score and described how the rehearsals went:

²¹ “Ca şef de orchestră, desfid pe oricare capelmaistru din străinătate – ca: Colonne, Lamoureux, Richter, Weingartner, Nikisch, Steinbach – să facă bravura ce o face marele nostru Maestru Enescu, de-a dirija pe dinafară, fără nicio zare de partițiune generală [...] înaintea sa. Nu pot admira îndeustul, o repet, și-am s-o repet la fiecare ocaziune, miraculoasa lui memorie. Înțeleg să conduci compozițiunile clasice pe care le-ai auzit și studiat în anii de studiu în străinătate, dar Maestrul nostru o face și cu compozițiunile moderne, care sunt cu mult mai complicate și unde atențiunea trebuie să fie ațintită în gradul cel mai mare.” Caudella, “Al 3-lea concert simfonic”, 1; republished in Caudella, *Cronici din trecut*, 101.

²² “Având în vedere memoria sa miraculoasă, nu e de mirare că cunoaște pe dinafară marile creațiuni simfonice; dar că, aruncând o singură privire pe o compoziție modernă, necunoscută și zăpăcită, care dintr-un motiv oarecare figurează pe program, o dirijează pe urmă tot pe de rost, indicând toate intrările, corectând orice greșeală, este în adevăr un caz unic. Se zice că într-un oraș din Ardeal i-a adus odată un compozitor localnic o lucrare a sa spre a-i cere părerea și mare i-a fost mirarea și fericirea când Maestrul i-a cântat-o seara pe dinafară.” Cosma, “George Enescu”, 447.

²³ See Catrina, “Enescu și Paul Richter. Pe marginea primei audiții a Suitei *Carpatica*”, 106-109; republished in Catrina, *Studii și documente de muzică românească* 2, 51-56; and in Catrina, *Muzica și muzicienii Cetății*, 146-152.

After Paul Richter conducted his own composition during the rehearsal, George Enescu took over the baton and, without needing a score and without saying much, guided us so miraculously to the end that we hardly had time to breathe. Paul Richter's composition was a tremendous success at the concert!²⁴

Enescu first heard the work under Richter's direction and took the score with him to the "Coroana" Hotel. [...] During the first rehearsal with the orchestra, Enescu did not have the score with him as he had left it at the hotel. Despite this, he began conducting from memory, which would have been nothing special, for conducting from memory is often a mere mystification for the audience, as the orchestra can manage even so. Here, however, he not only gave all the entries but also indicated when a phrase needed to be carefully repeated by naming the letters F or G two bars in advance. Every few bars, he would pause to ask Richter whether a flat note or a natural note should be played in the accompaniment, believing that the score contained a flat note while in the instrumental part there was a natural. Richter would shrug in response, but Enescu insisted it was better to play a flat note. Eventually, the score proved Enescu right. This situation may sound anecdotal and its significance slightly exaggerated, but his creative force deserves greater recognition, and in this case it proved exceptional.²⁵

After all, many exceptional conductors have the remarkable ability to memorize music in detail; performing from memory has become a tradition on the concert stage, influencing successful musical interpretation in general. However, when we consider the time and effort required to memorize a piece without relying on the score, the agility of Enescu's memory stands out as truly exceptional. Additionally, it reveals itself as an incredibly impressive phenomenon, especially regarding its durability and its capacity to preserve intact – for years or even decades, seemingly without any time limit – the echoes of all the music it has ever encountered. Thus, from a long list of examples shared by Enescu's colleagues and close friends, one notable episode is his reunion with Paul Richter, as recalled by one of the most reliable witnesses (the pianist Ionel Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who was violinist Enescu's faithful accompanist during many tours across the provincial towns of Romania):

²⁴ "După ce Paul Richter și-a dirijat propria-i compoziție, evident, la repetiție, a preluat apoi bagheta George Enescu care, fără să aibă nevoie de partitură și fără să spună multe cuvinte, ne-a condus atât de miraculos, până la final, încât n-am avut timp, aproape, nici să respirăm. În concert, compoziția lui Paul Richter a înregistrat un succes răsunător!". Francisk Kraus, quoted in Catrina, "Enescu și Paul Richter. Pe marginea primei audiții a Suitei Carpatice", 107; Catrina, *Studii și documente de muzică românească* 2, 54; Catrina, *Muzica și muzicienii Cetății*, 150.

²⁵ "Enescu a ascultat mai întâi lucrarea sub conducerea lui Richter și a luat partitura cu sine la Hotelul 'Coroana'. [...] La prima repetiție cu orchestra, Enescu nu avea la îndemână partitura, ea rămăsese undeva la hotel. Cu toate acestea, începu să dirijeze pe de rost, ceea ce nu ar fi fost nimic deosebit, căci dirijatul pe dinafară este adesea numai o simplă mistificare pentru public, orchestra mergând și așa. Aici însă nu numai că au fost date toate intrările, ci, când o frază trebuia să fie repetată cu atenție, Enescu numea litera F sau G, cu două măsuri înainte. La câte o măsură se oprea și întreba pe Richter dacă în acompaniament trebuia cântat un bemol sau un becar, căci el credea că în partitură era bemol, pe când în partitura instrumentală era un becar. Richter dădea din umeri, pe când Enescu era de părere că ar fi mai bine să se cânte bemol. Partitura îi dădu mai târziu dreptate lui Enescu. Sună anecdotic și este ușor supraestimat în valoarea sa, dar forța-i creatoare merită să fie relevată mai pregnant, iar în acest caz s-a dovedit excepțională." Walter Schlandt, quoted in Catrina, *Studii și documente de muzică românească* 2, 49.

We were in Braşov on one of our tours, the day after the first concert, and we were having dinner at a restaurant [...]. It was there that Enescu received a visit from a local musician, a German whose name I don't recall. He was the conductor of a choir from Braşov and also a composer. During their conversation, he said to Enescu:

– Do you happen to remember, Maestro, that 10 years ago you did me the honour of conducting one of my symphonic compositions, played by the local amateur orchestra here in Braşov? I was amazed that after reading the score and studying it briefly, you conducted it from memory. From your comments to the members of the orchestra during rehearsal, I realized that you knew my work better than I did.

– I remember very well, Enescu replied. The strings began with this motif (and Enescu whistled it from the beginning to the end). Then the flute intervened with this episodic figure (another short whistle). Then the development was like this... (And after analyzing a good portion of the work:) However, I wonder if I could conduct it today without seeing it again?

You can imagine the composer's astonishment. He kept exclaiming in disbelief: *Nach zehn Jahren!* (After ten years!).²⁶

Another piece of evidence often cited to illustrate the remarkable nature of Enescu's memory comes from none other than Béla Bartók, who shared a recollection with an acquaintance from Lugoj – József Willer (1884-1972), a political activist, teacher and conductor of the local Hungarian choir. Years later, Willer recalled that in November 1923, during a concert visit in Romania, Bartók told him about a train journey he had taken the previous year together with George Enescu, to Bucharest, where the Romanian confrere was scheduled to conduct his *Two Pictures*, Op. 10. Bartók handed him the score right then, on the train – it was the first time Enescu had ever seen it; on the spot, in Bartók's presence, he began reading it from cover to cover, then apologized for needing to go through it once more, to make sure he had retained all the details. After a second reading, Enescu returned the score, and the following day at rehearsal, he conducted the piece from memory, leaving Bartók completely speechless. Here is the memorable text recorded by Willer, reproduced from the only sources that provide its full version (its first edition and only one of its many reprints):

²⁶ “Eram la Braşov, într-unul din turee, a doua zi după primul concert, și luam masa la un restaurant [...]. [Enescu] a primit aci vizita unui muzician din localitate, un german al cărui nume l-am uitat. Era conducătorul unui cor braşovean și compozitor. Din vorbă în vorbă, el i-a spus lui Enescu:

— Vă mai amintiți, poate, maestre, că acum 10 ani mi-ați făcut onoarea de a dirija aici, la Braşov, o compoziție simfonică a mea, cântată de orchestra locală de amatori? Nu-mi venea să cred când, după ce ați citit partitura și ați studiat-o foarte scurt timp, ați dirijat-o pe de rost. Din observațiile Dvoastră pe care le făceați membrilor orchestrei la repetiție, mi-am dat seama că îmi cunoașteți opera mai bine decât mine.

— Îmi amintesc foarte bine, a răspuns Enescu. Începeau coardele cu motivul acesta (și Enescu îl fluiera de la un cap la altul). Apoi intervenea flautul cu figura asta episodică (iar un scurt fluierat). Pe urmă dezvoltai în felul următor... (Și după ce a analizat o bună parte din lucrare:) Totuși mă întreb dacă aș mai putea-o dirija astăzi fără să o mai văd o dată?

Vă închipuiți uimirea compozitorului. Nu înceta să exclame iarăși și iarăși: *Nach zehn Jahren!* (După zece ani!).” Dobrogeanu-Gherea, “Complice cu Enescu”, 22-23; republished in Dobrogeanu-Gherea, *Amintiri*, 63; and in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, 66.

In November 1923, when Béla Bartók honoured my home in Lugoj with a one-week stay on the occasion of his artistic tour in Romania, each day was unforgettable, as he played the piano brilliantly for groups of friends. [...] I mentioned to him that the Maestro [Enescu] had performed in Lugoj again in 1921, playing Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* from memory, which was quite rare. Béla Bartók smiled and shared the following about Enescu:

"It would be difficult for me to say something new about Enescu's memory; if it hadn't happened to me, I wouldn't believe it or share it with others. But since it is a personal experience, I can honestly tell you about the fantastic surprise I owe to the great Romanian maestro.

Last year, on my way to Bucharest, I was delighted to see Enescu waiting for me on the platform of the border station; he had come to greet me and accompany me to the capital. Since Enescu excelled as a conductor, instrumentalist, and composer, he was selected to conduct the concert featuring my orchestral composition, *Two Pictures*. He immediately took the score, placed it on his lap, and immersed himself in it. From his expression, silent hissing, humming and whistling, I could tell that he had grasped the most intricate harmonic interweavings and nuances of the orchestration at a glance. He apologized for needing to review the score once more to remember even the smallest details. Go ahead, my friend – I thought to myself – but you could pour molten wax on me, and I still wouldn't believe you would remember any of that music!

After a second reading, he returned the score to me, which I then brought to the rehearsal the following day. The score archivist took the score and placed it on the conductor's stand. Enescu quickly climbed up to the stand, and his first action was to put the score in the drawer. I must say, I was absolutely astonished. And when the Maestro conducted the *Two Pictures* from memory, not missing a single detail, skillfully highlighting all the intentions I had conveyed in the note values, and so well, I was left with nothing to add. I had rarely been so impressed in my entire life. I did not say much to him, but from my long and silent handshake, that remarkable man sensed that I had placed him in my heart forever, and from that moment on, I became one of his admirers.²⁷

²⁷ "În noiembrie 1923, când Béla Bartók, cu ocazia turneului artistic făcut în România, a cinstit și căminul meu din Lugoj cu un popas de o săptămână, fiecare zi a devenit de neuitat prin faptul că, în cercuri de prieteni, a cântat la pian în chip minunat. [...] I-am povestit că maestrul [Enescu] a fost din nou în Lugoj în 1921, executând pe dinafară și Sonata Kreutzer a lui Beethoven, fapt ce nu-și prea găsește precedent. Béla Bartók zâmbea și a povestit următoarele despre Enescu:

"Mi-ar fi greu să povestesc ceva nou despre memoria lui Enescu; dacă nu mi s-ar fi întâmplat chiar mie, nici n-aș crede-o și nici n-aș mai spune altora. Dar fiind vorba de o experiență proprie, vă pot relata cu toată autenticitatea fantastică surpriză pe care i-o datorez marelui maestru român.

Anul trecut, fiind în drum spre București, pe peronul gării de la frontieră îl zăresc – cu bucurie ușor de înțeles – pe Enescu, care venise în întâmpinarea mea, spre a mă însoți în capitală. Deoarece Enescu era mare atât ca dirijor, cât și ca instrumentist și compozitor, el a fost ales să dirijeze concertul în care a fost prezentată lucrarea mea pentru orchestră intitulată Două tablouri, pe care el imediat a pus-o pe genunchi, aprofundându-se în studierea ei. Din mimica, săsăiturile, fredonările și fluieratul lui încet mi-am dat seama că de la prima privire a absorbit în sine cele mai complicate țesături armonice și nuanțe în orchestrație. Și-a cerut scuze că trebuie să răsfioască încă o dată partitura, ca să-i rămână în minte cele mai mici amănunte. N-ai decât să răsfioești, amice – îmi ziceam –, dar să mă picuri cu ceară dacă aș putea crede că din muzica aceasta îți va rămâne prea mult în minte!

După al doilea răsfoit, mi-a restituit partitura, pe care a doua zi am adus-o eu însumi la repetiție. Arhivarul partiturilor a preluat lucrarea așezând-o pe pupitrul dirijorului. Repede, Enescu s-a urcat la pupitrul și primul său gest a fost să pună partitura în sertarul pupitrului. Pot zice că, de mirare, am rămas cu gura căscată... Dar când maestrul a dirijat pe dinafară cele Două tablouri, neuitând nimic, nici cel mai mic amănunt, reliefând în mod atât de plastic toate intențiile realizate și incluse de mine în valorile de note, atât de bine, încât eu însumi n-am mai găsit nimic de adăugat, am fost atât de impresionat cum rar mi s-a întâmplat. Nu i-am spus multe, dar din îndehungata și muta mea strângere de mână, ființa aceasta aleasă a putut simți că am închis-o pentru totdeauna în inimă,

The episode is indeed spectacular in itself, and the prestige of the individual who experienced it and shared the story gives it a unique aura, which explains the numerous re-editions that have circulated a somewhat misleading version of the account, quoting it as if Bartók himself were the sole and direct author of the story – in other words, omitting the name of the person who in reality only recorded the precious memory of a long-past meeting with Bartók.²⁸ Attention has already been drawn²⁹ to the somewhat ironic fact that, while attempting to record one of the most memorable evocations about Enescu's memory, Willer's own memory played tricks on him. For, of all Bartók's visits to Romania or other known occasions when Enescu performed Bartók's works, the only visit to which Willer's text could be somewhat related remains the Hungarian musician's first trip to Bucharest, which occurred in October 1924 (contrary to Willer's claim of it being in 1922). Only then could it be assumed that Enescu had his first encounter with Bartók's work (*Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano*), just as it is also plausible that he performed it from memory, accompanied by its composer, during the concert held in honour of the guest, on October 20th. It was perhaps after that event that Bartók spoke admiringly about Enescu's memory, and as the years passed, his laudatory words likely took on unimaginable proportions in old Willer's mind, influenced by the increasing number of impressive evocations of George Enescu's musical memory.

This rectifying hypothesis is supported by another reference to the 1924 meeting between Enescu and Bartók, made immediately after the mention of another notable episode highlighting Enescu's remarkable memory. And since that episode appears to have occurred under conditions strikingly similar to those described by Willer (and since all is part of a substantial homage article written during George Enescu's lifetime, being therefore a more reliable account by its greater proximity in time to the events recalled, as well as by the integrity of its author, Ana Voileanu-Nicoară, a teacher and pianist from Cluj), the twisting, if not occasionally even fictional³⁰ nature of Willer's recollections becomes clear:

aliniindu-mă în rândurile admiratorilor lui.” Willer, “Amintiri despre George Enescu”, 48-49; republished in Cosma, *George Enescu. Concertul de adio*, 100-101.

²⁸ The bibliographical sources that contain the words attributed by Willer to Bartók, quoted in full, presented as if Bartók himself had published them, are (in chronological order): ***, “Prietenia a doi mari muzicieni. Béla Bartók despre George Enescu”, 2; ***, “Bartók Béla despre George Enescu”, 6; Haralamb, “«Omăgiu marelui nostru Enescu!» În ajunul celui de-al II-lea Concurs și Festival internațional «George Enescu»”, 2; Crăciun and Codrea, *Gânduri închinat lui Enescu*, 57-58; Bartók, “Une rencontre inoubliable”, 129; Rădulescu and Sava, *Șase decenii pe estrada Ateneului. Amintiri în colocviu, vol. I: Idealurile lui George Enescu*, 34-36; Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, 146; Cophignon, *George Enescu*, 22; Lupu, “Some Possible Explanations for Enescu's Fabulous Musical Memory”, 33; Bebeșelea, *Musica ricercata sau 11 povestiri muzicale surprinzătoare*, 244, 246.

²⁹ See Pinter, “Enescu în presa budapestană”, 82-83; and Malcolm, *George Enescu. Viața și muzica*, 174-175.

³⁰ As László warns, *Béla Bartók și lumea noastră*, 85.

There is no doubt that you are looking at a phenomenal person. Particularly concerning his memory, the evidence is absolutely astounding. We know the case when, during a journey between two European capitals, Enescu memorized a huge work simply by reading it. Upon arriving at the destination, he conducted it without needing a score. Additionally, the renowned Hungarian musician Bartók recounted an experience in Bucharest when Enescu wanted to review one of Bartók's recently published sonatas. The following day, Enescu performed it for Bartók as the latter had never heard it before or since. We also know how, after 20 years, during a conversation with a musician, he remembered a rather mediocre work that the latter had performed in Iași during the war, and began humming the main motifs from that work.³¹

Another credible testimony reveals that Enescu's first encounter with Bartók's music (as a conductor) occurred only in the twilight phase of his career, most probably in 1950. It is yet another striking manifestation of the power of absorption and adaptive brilliance that Enescu's musical mind unquestionably demonstrated; in other words, of its ability to begin the memorization process spontaneously while almost instantly adjusting to the specifics of a new musical material (even if that music somewhat contradicted its own creative aesthetics):

He conducted concerts with the Boyd Neel Orchestra – I remember in particular we asked him to direct the Bartók *Music for strings, percussion and celesta*. It was the first time he had ever conducted Bartók, he said, and he found it rather modern. That is, when he finally got the score, because the one sent to him did not arrive; which meant that he saw the score for the first time when he mounted the podium to take the first amazing rehearsal. He took it all rather slowly but the result was phenomenal, adventurous and sonorous.³²

³¹ "Fără îndoială, ai în față un ins fenomenal. În special în privința memoriei sale există probe care uluiesc cu desăvârșire. Cunoaștem cazul când într-o călătorie între două capitale europene, Enescu a memorat prin simplă citire o uriașă lucrare pe care, ajuns la destinație, a dirijat-o fără partitură. Mai știm din mărturia marelui muzician maghiar Bartók cum odată, fiind dânsul la București, Enescu a dorit să-i cunoască o Sonată de curând apărută, și în ziua următoare i-a executat-o așa cum n-a mai auzit-o nici înainte, nici de atunci încoace. Mai știm cum după un răstimp de 20 de ani și-a amintit în conversația cu un muzician de o lucrare destul de mediocră pe care acesta o executase la Iași în timpul războiului, și a început a fredona motivele principale." Voileanu-Nicoară, "George Enescu", 61. Béla Bartók visited Bucharest in October 1924, at the invitation of the Romanian Composers' Society, then a newly established organization under the honorary presidency of George Enescu. A note from the register of minutes of the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania (the successor of the interwar Society), quoted by Octavian Lazăr Cosma in the history of the institution, shows that "George Enescu, as a violinist, having returned to Romania three days earlier from a tour, had studied his part in record time" ("*George Enescu, în postură de violonist, reîntors în țară cu trei zile înainte dintr-un turneu, studiase partida pe care o cânta într-un timp record*"). The author of the volume reinforced the information by adding: "It is known that the Romanian musician learned the violin part on the train, during the Brașov-Bucharest route" ("*Se știe, partida viorii a fost învățată de către muzicianul român în tren, pe ruta Brașov-București*"). Cosma, *Universul muzicii românești*, 30. As we can see, the statement is formulated as if referring to a well-known fact, but in reality, nowhere else (apart from Ana Voileanu-Nicoară's article) is this information communicated so explicitly.

³² Amis, "Master Classes at Bryanston", 42; republished in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, 213-214.

5.2. “I do not conduct from memory to impress the audience”

But beyond the “sensationalist” account of such acts of mental bravery and also beyond the mere outpouring of superlative eulogies, Enescu’s memory – particularly in the context of conducting – was also recognized for its rather strictly “utilitarian” purpose. Many commentators have correctly understood that for Enescu (as for any honest conductor), developing the ability to conduct from memory was not a sought-after skill to be displayed for impressing an audience. Instead, it emerged almost inevitably as a natural outcome in the pursuit of the fundamental goal that any conducting act aims at – to closely align with the composer’s intent while internalizing and recreating it in a deeply personal way,³³ which is the only thing that grants a conductor that characteristic authority – a blend of confidence and detachment – necessary to be able to impose the breath of a single unifying will on the orchestra and then “kidnap” it, thus transfigured, in the

³³ “As an orchestra conductor, the Maestro brings to his interpretations of symphonies or great operas not only his extensive knowledge but also all the confidence that nuances require and his phenomenal musical memory gives him. For a great musician, conducting a concert or an opera from memory is not a matter of great virtuosity, as the audience often believes, but precisely that sureness of execution of all the musical moments, that is, the *means* of achieving perfection, rather than a measure of the quality of one’s memory” [*“Ca dirijor de orchestră, Maestrul aduce în interpretarea simfoniilor sau a marilor opere, pe lângă o cultură desăvârșită, toată siguranța pe care o reclamă nuanțările și pe care i-o dă fenomenala sa memorie muzicală. A conduce pe dinafară un concert sau o operă nu constituie pentru un muzicant mare o virtuositate, așa cum o consideră de multe ori publicul, ci tocmai acea siguranță de execuție a tuturor momentelor muzicale, adică mijlocul de a ajunge perfecțiunea, și nu scopul de a dovedi calitatea memoriei sale”*] (Brassey, “Maestrul George Enescu”, 56-57; republished in Cosma, *George Enescu. Primele micro-monografii (1915-1950)*, 86-87). “Dirijând toate simfoniile de Beethoven și Brahms fără partitură, maestrul George Enescu dă impresia celor care-l ascultă că muzica se află în el și de acolo se revarsă în orchestră după legile naturale ale fluxului” [“When conducting all of Beethoven’s and Brahms’s symphonies without a score, Maestro George Enescu gives listeners the impression that the music is deeply embedded within him, flowing into the orchestra according to the natural laws of flow”]. See Melidon, “[Cronica muzicală.] Concertele George Enescu”, 12. “Multă lume admiră la Enescu, care dirijează fără partitură, excepționala sa memorie. Pun, cum spune francezul, căruța înaintea cailor. Iau mijlocul drept scop. Majoritatea dirijorilor pe care îi cunoaștem au un balast, sunt ancorați de partitură și avântul lor coboară, la fiecare câteva tacte, pe note. Eliberată de această legătură materială, conducerea maestrului Enescu devine muzică adevărată, capătă marea perspectivă a culmilor severe ale artei și elanul său e continuu, fără dibuiri și relaxări” [“Many people admire Enescu for his exceptional memory, as he conducts without a score. As the French say, they put the cart before the horse. They take the means as the end. Most conductors that we know carry a sandbag; they are anchored to the score, and their momentum wanes every few beats, on the notes. Freed from this material bond, Maestro Enescu’s conducting becomes true music, gaining the grand perspective that reflects the severe peaks of art, and his drive remains continuous, showing neither hesitation nor relaxation”]. See Tudor, “[Cronica muzicală.] Filarmonica. Concertul Enescu-Ciomac”, 2. “El dirija totdeauna pe dinafară, dar nu pentru a demonstra publicului stăpânirea totală a partiturii, ci pentru a se putea identifica cu compozitorul însuși” [“He always conducted from memory, not to showcase his complete mastery of the score, but to connect with the composer himself”] see Alessandrescu, “Înălțătorea pildă a artei lui Enescu”, 3; republished in Cosma, *George Enescu. Concertul de adio*, 107.

interpretative act as in an act of communion.³⁴ At a certain moment, right in the aftermath of the First World War, when George Enescu's conducting career had just gone through its first heroic phase characterized by extensive work in his homeland and a remarkable expansion of his repertoire, and when he had garnered widespread admiration, leading many to write about him in a consistently positive light, a fellow chronicler dared to introduce a note of discord, questioning the role of memory in assessing the value of a musical performance. Insisting on the fact that, in the art of interpretation, memory should be regarded as a "naive or strictly secondary element", and that "excessively admiring a virtuoso's or conductor's memory is a mistake and an offense to the artistic work", the chronicler invokes as a strong argument a few famous observations made by Felix Weingartner in the same vein:

[C]onducting from memory [...] makes a great impression on the audience, but I do not place too high a value on it. [...] the audience is there to enjoy the work, not to admire the memory of the conductor. [...] doing without score [...] is all a purely personal matter, however, that has nothing to do with the perfection of the performance. [...] Conducting from memory, however, that makes a parade of virtuosity is also inartistic, since it diverts attention from the work to the conductor. Now and then we see a conductor put a score on the stand although he conducts from memory, his object being not to attract too much attention – a proceeding that I think commendable. [...] A good performance from the score has value; a bad one done from memory has none.³⁵

³⁴ "George Enescu (...), ca și Hans von Bülow, inițiatorul acestui obicei, conduce pe dinafară, lux ce nu și-l pot permite decât rarii privilegiați cu desăvârșire stăpâni pe memoria lor – calitate prețioasă pe care Enescu o are dezvoltată în mod prodigios. Un adevărat șef de orchestră e un «virtuoz al orchestrei», adică un 'artist care cântă din orchestră'; a dirija pe dinafară e a avea – instrument unic – întreaga orchestră sub stăpânire: ochiul, acel agent credincios al baghetei, în loc de a urmări partițiunea, comandă neconținut falangei, sugestionându-i astfel viața notelor" ["George Enescu (...), like Hans von Bülow, the pioneer of this practice, conducts from memory, a luxury reserved only for the privileged few who have perfected their memory – a precious quality that Enescu possesses in abundance. A true orchestra leader is a «virtuoso of the orchestra», an «artist who performs within the orchestra»; conducting from memory is having – a sole instrument – the entire orchestra under control: the eye, that faithful agent of the baton, instead of following the score, constantly commands the phalanx, thus suggesting the life of the notes to it"], in: Mărgăritescu, "[Cronica muzicală.] Sala Ateneului – Concert simfonic dirijat de George Enescu", 215; republished in Mărgăritescu, *Viața muzicală. Cronici*, 115. "Faptul că George Enescu dirijează pe dinafară și că a suprimat pupitrul și partitura nu este o simplă vanitate de virtuoz, ci simbolul însuși al concepției sale de dirijor care interpretează compozițiile creându-le, din memorie, prin sunetele aparatului orchestral. Contactul acesta nemijlocit între dirijor și instrumentiști este posibil numai grație memoriei prodigioase și energiei covârșitoare a maestrului Enescu" ["The fact that George Enescu conducts from memory and has eliminated the music stand and the score is not a mere vanity of a virtuoso, but the very symbol of his conception as a conductor who interprets compositions by creating them, from memory, through the sounds of the orchestral apparatus. This direct connection between the conductor and the instrumentalists is only made possible by Maestro Enescu's prodigious memory and overwhelming energy."], Artemie, "[Cronica muzicală.], in: Concert simfonic extraordinar dirijat de George Enescu", 1. "Enescu dirijează todeauna pe dinafară, așa că legătura între dirigent și orchestră devine încă mai strânsă" ["Enescu always conducts from memory, so the connection between the conductor and the orchestra becomes even stronger"], in: Pan, "[Concerte.] Palatul Ateneului – Concert simfonic dirijat de maestrul George Enescu", 2.

³⁵ "A dirija pe dinafară impune peste seamă de mult publicului. Eu nu acord prea multă valoare acestui lucru. [...] punctul esențial este ca publicul să fie impresionat de opera muzicală, iar nu să admire memoria

These observations are relevant to our current discussion, as many of their fundamental ideas can be found in George Enescu's own interventions on the subject, expressed in a different or even similar way. He pointed out that he uses memorization as a "tool", simply to make his work on the podium more efficient; that for mainly pragmatic reasons he prefers to avoid, as far as possible, the uncomfortable motion of constantly flipping through the score, and to focus instead all his energy on maintaining direct and continuous contact with the orchestra players in front of him.

I do not conduct without a score to impress the audience, but simply to be free in my movements. To avoid having to turn the pages. When I conduct the orchestra, I have more important things to focus on. My goal is to "extract" as much as possible of the author's intentions for the listeners and from the performers.³⁶

– Do you get better results conducting with or without score?

– I feel freer when I memorize, but I like to have the score there. No conductor can actually read a score at that speed anyway (*graphically pantomiming the rapid page-turning necessary*). It is not possible to read details, only groups, which give some indication. Of course, when I have a piece of modern music, which I have not had time to memorize perfectly, I must follow the page much more closely.³⁷

Moreover, testimonies from two contemporaries who interacted significantly with conductor George Enescu reveal that memorizing scores down to the last detail was a self-imposed requirement and even a necessity for him, as only an infallible mastery of the text of the musical works would allow him to be in control, facilitating the full confidence and expression of his artistic capabilities, making him the undisputed authority among the musicians in the orchestra and enabling him to assert his leadership in a legitimate and constructive manner, through perfect mnemonic assimilation.

In 1915, I returned from Paris to Romania and made my debut with George Enescu. [...] He was conducting a concert featuring Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust* at the Romanian Athenaeum. At one point, Romulus Vrăbiescu became confused; perhaps he had forgotten the text. [...] Then, in a moment of panic, Maestro George Enescu stepped in to prompt him with the text. He had memorized it perfectly despite hearing it

dirigentului. [...] A dirija pe dinafară nu este decât o trebuință cu totul personală care nu influențează întru nimic desăvârșirea interpretării. Dirijarea pe dinafară este o speculație de virtuozitate, în parte neartistică, din punctul de vedere că sustrage atenția publicului de la opera ce se execută la persoana dirigentului. Unii șefi de orchestră pun partitura dinainte pe pupitru, cu toate că dirijează din memorie, numai pentru a nu se pune în evidență prea mult pe ei înșiși, un mijloc pe care îl găsec foarte lăudabil. O bună dirijare după partitură are mare valoare. O dirijare pe dinafară, însă prost predată, nu are nicio valoare.", in: Costin, "[Cronica muzicală.] Al 7-lea concert simfonic", 2. Weingartner, *On Conducting*, 42-43.

³⁶ "[E]u nu dirizez pe dinafară ca să arăt publicului ce memorie am, ci pur și simplu ca să fiu liber în mișcările mele. Să nu stau mereu să întorc paginile. Când conduc orchestra, am altceva mai bun de făcut. Trebuie să caut să 'scot' pentru auditori și de la executanți cât mai mult din intențiile autorului." Enescu, quoted in Menestrel, "De vorbă cu Enescu. Mișcarea muzicală la noi, 3; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 125.

³⁷ Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, "Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...".

only a few times. I would understand if he knew the original text, but for him to memorize our simulacrum of translation? This was truly remarkable.

– How did you come up with the idea of memorizing the text? I asked him.

– I wouldn't be able to conduct if I didn't know everything, both the score and the text, he replied. If I don't know everything, I become anxious. You cannot go on stage without the certainty that a trapdoor won't open, tearing you to pieces and sending you crashing into the void. Is that a lesson? Maybe it is! But that's how I work. I cannot overlook anything, not a single detail, no matter how insignificant, if it is part of the integrity of the work, it cannot be disregarded.³⁸

Upon receiving the baton from Enescu's hand, I faced the challenge of passing a very difficult exam. [...] After a rehearsal, Enescu took me aside and said:

– It's good that you try to avoid relying on the score from the start. Only this way can you comprehend the whole, master it and infuse it with your own personality. Once you've familiarized yourself with the score, everything else will fall into place. Instrumentalists must trust that the conductor understands perfectly the value and purpose of every detail within the orchestra. Only then will they appreciate that your presence at the podium is more than just a formality...³⁹

5.3. "There is no secret"

At one point, George Enescu agreed to offer, somewhat in passing, an explanation for the remarkable development of his musical memory; he invoked again the fundamentally compositional nature of his musical mind, describing it as a spontaneous and playful urge to deconstruct the internal mechanisms of any piece, only to rebuild it in his own way:

– Maestro, everyone is amazed at your phenomenal memory and would like to know the key to this secret.

³⁸ "De la Paris am revenit în țară în 1915 și am debutat cu George Enescu. [...] Dirija un concert cu Damnațiunea lui Faust de Berlioz la Ateneul Român. La un moment dat Romulus Vrăbiescu s-a încurcat, poate nu a mai știut textul. [...] Atunci, în clipa de panică, maestrul George Enescu i-a suflat textul. El nu auzise acest text decât de câteva ori și-l reținuse întocmai. Înțeleg să fi știut textul original, dar simulacrul nostru de traducere să-l memoreze? Lucrul acesta a fost cu adevărat uluitor.

– Cum de v-a venit ideea să memorați textul? l-am întrebat.

– Eu nu aș putea dirija dacă nu cunosc totul, și partitura, și textul, mi-a răspuns dânsul. Dacă nu știu totul, sunt neliniștit. Pe scenă nu poți urca fără certitudinea că nu se va deschide vreo trapă care să te desființeze, prăbușindu-te în gol. Este o lecție? Poate este și o lecție! Eu, însă, așa lucrez. Nu pot neglija nimic, niciun detaliu cât ar fi de neînsemnat, dacă face parte din integritatea operei, nu poate fi nesocotit." Edgar Istratty, quoted in Potopin, "Convorbiri cu oameni despre oameni: Edgar Istratty despre George Enescu", 4; republished in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, 102.

³⁹ "Primind bagheta din mâna lui Enescu, se punea problema să trec un examen extrem de greu. [...] După o repetiție, Enescu m-a luat cu el și mi-a spus:
– E bine că încerci de la început să eviți partitura. Numai așa poți fi în măsură să cuprinzi ansamblul, să-l stăpânești și să-i imprimi propria ta personalitate. După ce-ai aprofundat partitura, restul vine de la sine. Instrumentiștii trebuie să fie convingși că dirijorul cunoaște la perfecție valoarea și rostul fiecărui detaliu din orchestră. Atunci își dau seama că prezența ta la pupitrul nu e doar formală..." in: Bobescu, *La pupitrul operei. Amintiri*, 93-94.

– There’s no secret. As a composer, I have a talent for dismantling the doll... I do the same with other people’s works. I take them apart and reconstruct them in my mind. Then, things unfold naturally.⁴⁰

It is modesty that most probably made Enescu “dismiss” the subject by using a somewhat misleading lapidary expression, which leaves the impression that achieving a level of musical memory expertise akin to his own – a difficult, if not impossible standard to attain – would depend solely on nurturing the compositional impulse. In another, better-known intervention, the musician provided a different explanation, emphasizing that total emotional involvement in the musical paths taken is crucial for triggering memorization. He thus postulated yet another phenomenon that would “unfold naturally”, suggesting that any moving and impressive musical experience inevitably awakens a desire to cherish it through the gesture of definitive protection, leading one to embrace it within the expansive realm of memory:

I have been teased enough about my memory! One day, someone whose name I can’t recall (which certainly proves that I have less memory than I’m often credited with), wrote that if I were stranded on a desert island with a pen, ink, and staff paper, I would be able to remember and rewrite much of the Classical and Romantic music. While I won’t disagree, I want to emphasize that this isn’t surprising. When I truly love something, it remains engraved in my heart for the rest of my life.⁴¹

⁴⁰ “— *Maestre, toată lumea este uimită de fenomenala d-voastră memorie și ar dori să cunoască cheia acestei taine. — Nu e nicio taină. Cum sunt compozitor, am deprinderea să desfac păpușa... Așa fac și cu operele altora. Le desfac și le construiesc în minte. Apoi lucrurile merg de la sine.*” Enescu, quoted in Menestrel, “De vorbă cu Enescu. Mișcarea muzicală la noi”, 3; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 125.

⁴¹ “*M’a-t-on assez taquiné au sujet de ma mémoire ! Un jour, quel-qu’un dont j’ai oublié le nom (ce qui montre bien que j’ai moins de mémoire qu’on ne m’en prête) a écrit que, si je me trouvais tout seul sur une île déserte, avec une plume, de l’encre et du papier réglé, je serais capable de retrouver et de récrire une bonne partie de la musique classique et romantique. Mon Dieu, je ne dis pas non – mais j’ajoute qu’il n’y a là rien de bien étonnant. Quand j’aime quelque chose, c’est gravé dans mon cœur pour toute ma vie.*” Enescu, quoted in Gavoty, *Les Souvenirs de Georges Enesco / Amintirile lui George Enescu*, 106 (Fr) / 107 (Ro). This late comment likely came from an earlier reaction by Enescu to the intriguing hypothesis whose proponent he himself could not remember at the time of Gavoty’s recollection, but about whom two Romanian collaborators provide similar insights: “*Un prieten al meu (D[omnul] G[eorge] Manoliu) mi-a povestit că, asistând la Paris la un curs al unui profesor de la Schola Cantorum, l-a auzit spunând: ‘Ce dezastru ar fi pentru cultura umană dacă opera lui Beethoven s-ar pierde în urma cine știe cărui cataclism!... Dar’ – a adăugat el după o clipă de gândire – ‘dezastrul ar fi reparabil, cu condiția ca George Enescu să fi rămas în viață: mulțumită memoriei lui, am putea reface toată opera lui Beethoven’. Prietenul meu a povestit cele ce preced lui Enescu, care a exclamat: ‘Ce exagerare! Nici gând să știi tot Beethoven pe de rost! Dar să vedem, într-adevăr, ce aș putea reface în caz de dezastru. Simfoniile? Bineînțeles. Nu numai un muzician, orice om civilizată trebuie să cunoască perfect simfoniile de Beethoven. Cuatorurile? Le știi bine, toate. Sonatele de pian și vioară trebuie să le știi ca violonist ce sunt...’ ‘Și astfel’, îmi spunea prietenul meu, ‘Enescu a trebuit să recunoască, până la sfârșit, că știe pe de rost cea mai mare parte, și cea mai reprezentativă, din opera lui Beethoven.’” [“A friend of mine (Mr. G[eorge] Manoliu) shared an interesting experience he had had while attending a course in Paris, taught by a professor from the Schola Cantorum, who once remarked: ‘What a disaster it would be for human culture if Beethoven’s works were lost in some cataclysm!... But’ – he added after a moment’s reflection – ‘the disaster could be repaired if George Enescu were still alive: thanks to his memory, we could recreate all of Beethoven’s work’.*

Of course, in reality, things were not as simple as they might seem from Enescu's words. The two skills mentioned here as driving forces behind his remarkable musical memory – engaging in creative musical thinking and experiencing music at intense emotional levels – are not extraordinary in themselves, and they alone could not have fully explained the countless fabulous performances of Enescu's musical memory. What is remarkable about George Enescu is the development of these skills to a very high level of expertise as a result of an unusual musical education that began at a very early age and was characterized by consistency and complexity – qualities that are often difficult to find in other educational paths. In addition to certain innate personal talents and inclinations (whose contribution should not be overlooked), we must also consider the pivotal period the child prodigy spent in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, for only the unique conditions of that time and place can truly explain what seemed like an impenetrable “mystery” to Enescu's contemporaries, and which, for Enescu himself, came naturally and did not demand too much attention.

Thus, the fact that at the Vienna Conservatory he studied the violin, piano, and composition allowed him to develop a deep understanding of the sound phenomenon from an early age; in other words, it enabled him to approach any piece from two perspectives simultaneously (and not alternatively): first, from the performer's (and listener's) perspective, he took an inductive path, which involves gradually navigating through a sequence of seemingly unrelated moments in a piece, so that by identifying and distilling deep structures, the performer can eventually organize and weave together all the details into a cohesive whole; and second, from the composer's perspective, he took a deductive path, initially driven by a unifying idea and the sense of an overarching form, by the ineffable thread of an internal logic that dictates only in a second (and longer) stage the detailed specification (or reconstruction) of the diachronic progression.

My friend relayed this comment to Enescu, who exclaimed: ‘What an exaggeration! There's no way I know all of Beethoven by heart! But let's see, really, what I could restore in the event of such a disaster. The symphonies? Of course. Not only a musician, but every civilised person should be perfectly familiar with Beethoven's symphonies. The quartets? I know them all quite well. As a violinist, I must also be familiar with the piano and violin sonatas...’ ‘And so’, my friend concluded, ‘Enescu had to admit, eventually, that he knew by heart the largest and most representative parts of Beethoven's works’]. See Dobrogeanu-Gherea, “Complice cu Enescu”, 23; republished in Dobrogeanu-Gherea, *Amintiri*, 63-64; and in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, 66. “*Vincent d'Indy a spus cândva, referindu-se la memoria prodigioasă a Maestrului: 'Dacă, printr-o absurdă și catastrofală întâmplare, opera scrisă de Beethoven ar fi distrusă, indiferent prin ce, indiferent cum, nu cunosc decât un singur om, dintre toți câți trăim azi, care ar putea să o refacă din memorie în întregime, și acesta este George Enescu'. Întrebându-l pe Enescu dacă era într-adevăr așa, mi-a răspuns cu un gest de modestie: 'Nu totul... ci doar simfoniile, cvartetele, triourile, Fidelio, Misa...'.* Cu alte cuvinte, aproape totul” [“Referring to the Maestro's prodigious memory, Vincent d'Indy once said: ‘If, by some unfortunate chance, Beethoven's collective works were destroyed, by whatever means, in whatever way, I know of only one man, of all those alive today, who could reconstruct it entirely from memory, and that is George Enescu’. Asking Enescu if this was true, he replied with a gesture of modesty: ‘Not everything... only the symphonies, the quartets, the trios, *Fidelio*, the *Mass*...’. In other words, almost everything.”], in: Alexandru Rădulescu, quoted in Rădulescu and Sava, *Șase decenii pe estrada Ateneului. Amintiri în colocviu, vol. I: Idealurile lui George Enescu*, 34.

Additionally, and equally important, it became clear that his early academic training included very little practical engagement with works that had a specific educational focus, often characterized by limited artistic value; instead, it was quickly overshadowed and completely replaced by his immersion in a repertoire of the highest quality. To understand and encompass the vast and complex expanses of “great music”, his musical mind, then at an appropriate age for the formation of skills and automatisms, was put early on in the situation of engaging – spontaneously and at a maximum level of efficiency – in the essential ordering task of musical memory: recognizing the connections between non-sequential sound units that are spaced apart, and then correlating and grouping them into hierarchical ensembles, according to rules that are understood over time and intuitively (rather than delivered in advance, before experiencing them in practice).

At the same time, since from the earliest stage of his training in Vienna he nurtured the habit of playing or listening intensively to the most complex and extensive musical works using scores (which sharpened his inner hearing), Enescu’s musical memory met the essential conditions needed for its rapid take-off to higher levels of evolution: it accumulated a vast repository of well-organized sound images, enabling it to anticipate and integrate new information into coherent structures (which also influenced how it nuanced similar previously stored information). His mental musical repository was continuously enriched and refined through a process known as overlearning, which involves deeply and consciously practising familiar structures and their consolidation through insistent repetitions, enhancing the ability to use basic mnemonic strategies according to increasingly diverse and refined criteria – the association of non-sequential elements into hierarchically branched ensembles and sub-ensembles.⁴²

In George Enescu’s case, this process of overlearning, that is, of shaping memory, which lasts almost a lifetime for most musicians, seems to have been completed almost entirely during the much earlier stage of his Viennese studies. For it was precisely the absence of its explicit manifestation in adulthood that fascinated many observers of Enescu’s demonstrations of mnemonic prowess, who described the experience as witnessing a superhuman “mystery” that seemed impossible to explain rationally. In truth, George Enescu’s extraordinary musical memory was the almost inevitable consequence of an education conducted under remarkably special conditions, characterized by exceptional quality and breadth, about which it is probably no exaggeration to say that no other child prodigy in the known history of European music has ever benefited from.

⁴² In these paragraphs, I have summarized the pertinent arguments presented in Lupu, “Some Possible Explanations for Enescu’s Fabulous Musical Memory”, 33-37, where the particular case of Enescu’s memory is interpreted through the lens of the theoretical instruments provided by research in psychology, neurology and musical cognition.

6. “The conductor must lead with his whole personality”

Finally, to return to the main topic of these notes, it is important to underline that a significant aspect of Enescu’s “poetics of conducting” is his emphasis on (and, according to several contemporaries, his consistent practice of) intuitive and somewhat restrained gestures, showing little concern for displaying a photogenic style. The fulfilment of the artistic act – Enescu seems to suggest – does not require the prior polishing of any technical system of gestural procedures; for, more than relying on elegant or spectacular visual cues, the conductor communicates in ways that are more difficult to systemize, through ineffable vibrations whose effectiveness depends on his inner state of being. Enescu aims to transcend the strictly specialized aspects of the craft, delving into the realm of the quicksands of the soul, in which the conductor’s psychological insight must harmonize with his own and the instrumentalists’ ability to “seize” – or at least invoke – the right moment, when all individual intentions align toward a favourable spiritual outcome:

There are conductors – such as Leopold Stokowski, the director of the Philadelphia Philharmonic, or George Georgescu in our country – who naturally possess a pleasing stature and a slenderness that is visually appealing. They exert a direct influence on the orchestra. However, my viewpoint is quite bold. I believe that the conductor should remain still while transmitting the waves and fluids from the heat of the score to the musicians. A young critic from Paris once remarked that I am completely devoid of gestures at the orchestra podium. In saying this, he actually gave me the highest praise.⁴³

Fussy movements are not necessary. The conductor must lead with his whole personality. His movements should be sensed, rather than seen. There is an inexplicable inner radiation which communicates itself to the men. Some days I make a tremendous effort, and nothing happens; others, everything is right, as if some reserve power[s] were released. It is the man, or the surrounding atmosphere? Whatever it is, hostility kills it instantly. But with musicians who are – how shall I say? – entgegenkommend – meet me half-way – very much can be done. But it takes long work together to reach the ideal...⁴⁴

To all the conducting principles mentioned so far – such as adopting an appropriate tempo that captures the details of each moment in the flow of the “large line”, which should be prioritized; the importance of deeply understanding the scores through

⁴³ “*Sunt dirijori – ca Leopold Stokowski, directorul Filarmonicii din Philadelphia, ori George Georgescu la noi – care au de la natură o statură prielnică, o zveltețe plăcută ochiului. Aceștia exercită o acțiune directă asupra orchestrei. Punctul meu de vedere este însă cam îndrăzneț. Cred că șeful de orchestră trebuie să stea nemișcat dar să transmită muzicanților unde, fluiduri din focul partiturii. Un tânăr critic parizian a remarcat odată că, la pupitrul orchestrei, sunt lipsit cu desăvârșire de gesticulații. Prin aceasta, însă, el îmi aducea cel mai mare elogiu.*” Enescu, quoted in Grindea, “Un ceas cu George Enescu. Între artă și politică. Geneza operei *Oedip. Tânăra școală românească*”, 2; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 298.

⁴⁴ Enescu, quoted in Kaufmann, “Enesco: One Facet of a Triple Personality...”.

memorization to minimize distractions and allow for a focused connection not with the music stand, but with the orchestra players themselves; and the avoidance of extravagant gestures – Enescu also succinctly added the prior knowledge of one or more instruments as a valuable (if not necessary) condition for developing conducting skills: “Good orchestra conductors are outstanding performers: violinists, cellists, pianists, in other words, those who possess the skill to interpret, or better said, to externalize.”⁴⁵ Ultimately, all these fundamental ideas suggest that the art created through their harmonious collaboration remains a somewhat esoteric goal, which integrates the exigencies of a broad perspective with those of a finely detailed immersion; only a select few truly manage to access it:

– What are your thoughts on the art of conducting?

– It’s very challenging. I have seen world-renowned maestros who still lacked self-confidence. Conducting requires a strong presence of mind, a thorough understanding of orchestration, psychological insight, and experience playing some of the main instruments... Therefore, we should be careful not to be too demanding.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ “Șefii de orchestră buni sunt executanții de seamă: violoniștii, celiștii, pianiștii, cu un cuvânt, cei ce au deprinderea să interpreteze, mai bine zis, să exteriorizeze.” Enescu, quoted in Menestrel, “De vorbă cu Enescu. Mișcarea muzicală la noi”, 9; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu în presa românească (1898-1946)*, 125.

⁴⁶ “— Ce credeți despre arta de a mânui bagheta?

— E foarte dificilă. Am văzut maeștri cu renume universal cari nu atinseseră nici măcar siguranța. Se cere prezență de spirit, cunoașterea perfectă a orchestrației, să fie un bun psiholog și să fi cântat din instrumentele principale [sic!]... Deci să nu fim nici noi prea exigenți.”. Cleante, “[Anchetele Rampei.] Psihologia creației artistice. Cum o definește maestrul G. Enescu”, 2; republished in Manolache, *George Enescu. Interviuuri din presa românească (1898-1946)*, 106.

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