

The Bretan Case: a Paradox between Value and Promotion

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Abstract: On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the passing of the Transylvanian musician Nicolae Bretan (1887-1968), known during the interwar period due to his complex field of activity (interpreter, director, conductor, composer), we consider it necessary to elaborate a study that is critical for several reasons. Starting with the dilemmatic comments existent in the current bibliography, we propose, on the one hand, to systematize the information regarding the reception of his personality in the context of the age in which he lived and worked, and on the other hand, to outline the premises that generated the appearance of controversial writings, but especially to question their effects on the deformed stylistic perception of the musician at national and international level. We consider that this is one of the ways in which the “phenomenon of Bretan's rebirth” can be objectively reevaluated, appreciating the existence and real contributions of a minor musician, who, although endowed with talent, could not be in the same compositional direction that included national models (George Enescu, Mihail Jora, Paul Constantinescu), are comparable to those in the universal space of the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: interwar creator, critical reception, epigonism, minor musician.

1. Introduction

In the perception of meanings of the dilemmatic figures of history, the delimitation of the reality-fiction ratio seems increasingly difficult for the contemporary critic. Preoccupied by the reconstitution of past personalities, the contemporary critic has the opportunity to uncover incomplete or shrouded myths, based on contradictory theories, which may generate other controversies while documenting a possible research.

1.1. Argument

In order to argue these ideas, we went through the essay *What is an Author?* from the volume *Language, Counter – Memory, Practice*, in which the researcher Michael Foucault construes the author's image, from the perspective of the literary critic of the past century's last decades: “If we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual effervescence of inventions, it is because in reality, we make the author work exactly in the opposite way”

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(Foucault, 1980, p. 308). By transposing Michael Foucault's opinion from the literary and musical point of view, we understand that the tendency to exaggerate certain features of a biographical or compositional nature was present in the monographic research of the second half of the 20th century, mitigating the image of a creator. The unfavorable consequences of such a phenomenon were not delayed and materialized in today's reception, deforming the figures of some artists, due to the subjective systematizations of historical, stylistic, cultural information and moreover, as a result of contradictions with dramatic significance in hierarchy values.

1.2. Scope

In the following research, we propose to re-evaluate the personality of the Transylvanian interwar musician Nicolae Bretan from a dual perspective: on one hand, the perception of the creator in the first half of the 20th century, where he manifested himself in a polyvalent way, and on the other hand, his reconsideration in contemporaneity. To this end, we shall emphasize the idea that the promotion of the composer in the present has positive but especially negative consequences, through overestimating the value of his stylistic music in an abusive advertising campaign, which determines the configuration of a distorted image of the artist subject to our attention.

2. Microportrait

The 50th anniversary of the passing of the musician Nicolae Bretan¹ is an opportunity to reflect on his personality with multiple preoccupations: lied, opera and oratorio interpreter, composer, conductor, director, poet, librettist and translator. From the standpoint of his singing activity,² he accomplished himself on the lyrical scenes of Bratislava, Oradea and Cluj, by playing multiple roles³

¹ Nicolae Bretan was born on March 25, 1887 (in Năsăud) and died on December 1, 1968 (in Cluj-Napoca). 'His musical studies began under the guidance of the composer Iacob Mureșianu (Solfège theory, harmony) in his hometown and continued at the Conservatory of Cluj (1906-1908) with Farkas Ödön (singing, composition) and Gyémánt (violin). He continued his studies at the *Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst* of Vienna (1908-1909) with Gustav Geiringer (canto) and Julius Meixner (declamation), as well as at the *Academy of Music* of Budapest (1909-1912) with Siklós Albert (theory), Szerémi Gusztáv (violin), Sik József (canto), Molnár Géza (music history). In parallel, he attended courses at the Faculty of Letters of Cluj and graduated in 1910 '(Cosma, 1989, p. 207).

² 'He debuted as a baritone (1913) on the stage of theatres in Bratislava (1913-1914) and Oradea (1914-1916), continuing his career as singer and stage director at the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj (1917-1922), first baritone (1922-1940), stage director (1922-1940, 1946-1948) and director (1944-1945) at the Romanian Opera of Cluj and stage director at the Hungarian State Theatre and the Hungarian Opera House (1940-1944)' (Cosma, 1989, p. 207).

³ '*Iago* (*Othello*, Verdi); *Amonastro* (*Aida*, Verdi); *Mephisto* (Faust, Gounod), *Escamillo* (*Carmen*, Bizet); *Scarpia* (*Tosca* Puccini); *Telramund* (*Lohengrin*, Wagner); *Eugene Onegin*

from the Italian, French and German romantic repertoire. As a director, he staged works signed by different composers⁴ of national and universal lyrical creation at the Romanian Opera and the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj.

The literary talent and the full knowledge of the linguistic peculiarities of the Romanian, Hungarian and German cultures are qualities that made it easier for Nicolae Bretan to approach the miniature or scenic genres. He composed many lieder (220) based on the lyrics of representative poets from his native space (M. Eminescu, O. Goga, G. Coşbuc, T. Arghezi, V. Eftimiu) or of international ones (H. Heine, N. Lenau, Petőfi Sándor, Vörösmarty Mihály, Ady Endre) and six operas: [*Luceafărul*] *The Morning Star* (1921); [*Revolta lui Golem*] *The Golem's Revolt* (1924); [*Eroii de la Rovine*] *Heroes from Rovine* (1934); *Horia* (1937) *Arald* (1939); [*Stranie seară de Sedar*] *The Weird Evening of Sedar* (1952). He composed instrumental pieces for piano, violin, psalms, a requiem and less known works.

From the brief enumeration of the main directions of his musical activity, we notice the inclination of the artist Nicolae Bretan to the vocal field, his passion for the art of singing and his cultural opening reflected on several levels: interpretative, directorial and compositional.

3. Possible influences when choosing the compositional career

While trying to understand the motives of the baritone N. Bretan to embrace the compositional career, we found out surprising aspects; knowing that Professor Farkas Ödön initiated him in the mysteries of this field during his studies at the Conservatory of Cluj.

On the one hand, the lexicographer Viorel Cosma, in the preface of the lied scores, emphasized the idea that the artist was truly appreciated as an interpreter of opera roles, while on the other hand the musicologist Octavian Lazar Cosma, in his volume [*Hronicul muzicii româneşti*] *A Chronicle of Romanian Music* - in an enumeration of soloists who collaborated with the Orchestra of the Ministry of Public Education in Bucharest (1912-1913 season) - recalled the name of Nicolae Bretan and characterized him as 'not too bright' (Cosma Lazar, 1983, p. 142). In order to highlight the initial stylistic orientation of the creator, the same author mentioned in another publication a fragment from the correspondence of Nicolae Bretan with Gheorghe Dima dated February 16, 1907. From the same letter, we find out that the musician sent the score of the lied *Sara on the Hill* to his mentor of Cluj and wrote him that "... I did not send it to director Farkas from the Conservatory, because he cultivates the so-called Hungarian music (he is a hungarized Puccini), with which my

(Eugene Onegin, Tchaikovsky); *Nilakantha* (*Lakmé*, Delibes); *Figaro* (*The Barber of Seville*, Rossini)' (Cosma, 1989, p. 207).

⁴ 'Mozart, Gluck, Wagner, Verdi, Puccini, Smetana, Bizet, Leoncavallo, Mascagni, Delibes, Donizetti, Offenbach, Brediceanu, Drăgoi, Negrea' (Cosma, 1989, p. 207).

*German way of thinking has nothing in common. I would really like to go to Bucharest next year and become the pupil of Mr. Popovici*⁵” (Cosma Lazăr, 1996, p. 130).

What did we notice? Although he had a broad interpretative activity, appreciated and contested in the same manner, the passion for creation followed him since the beginning of his studies at the Conservatory (1906-1907) and contributed to a great deal of self-accomplishment in his compositional career, which evolved in parallel. Unfortunately, the musician did not deepen this field technically, taking conventional style and language models from the universal creation within the first half of the nineteenth century, which determined the partial recognition of his personality in the context of the interwar generation (Sabin Drăgoi, Mihail Jora, Marțian Negrea, Paul Constantinescu and George Enescu); this through a sporadic appearance of articles in various cultural daily newspapers.

4. Reception of the composer in the context of his time

An important source around the reception of the musician can be found in the volume [*Viața muzicală în Ardealul de după Unire*] *The Musical Life in Transylvania after the Great Union*, which quotes the following idea from an extract of [*Gazeta ilustrată*] *The Illustrated Gazette* (1936): “Here is the first Romanian opera on the lyrical stage of Cluj, [*Luceafărul*] *The Morning Star* of Eminescu!... A breath of deep religiousness pervades the creation of Mr. Nicolae Bretan. It is a pity that he limited himself to keeping the epic frame of Eminescu's [*Luceafărul*] *The Morning Star*, without elaborating a development, a culmination and a more plastic denouement of the action, without dramatizing enough Eminescu's conception” (Gherghel, 1936, pp. 6-7).

A closer insight of the score of this work, through the analysis of a fragment from the debut of the *Epilogue*, reveals that music has a romantic expression. It is a feature conferred first by the pastoral sonorous introduction (paragraphs 44-45), which highlights the romantic intonations of chordophone discreetly accompanied by a harp. It follows the thematic idea (paragraphs 45→47), deduced from the content of the introductory musical material, with the distinction of melodic construction and writing, which reminds of the sound of a hymn. The theme is profiled as an initial diatonic exposition, evolving in the sequential treatment of discourse, suggesting the image of incarnation of the Morning Star. We notice the traditional orchestration, known from the scores of German romantic composers (Carl Maria von Weber and Ferdinand von Hiller), with the gradual accumulation of sonority in the timbral plane until reaching its peak.

⁵ Extract from the correspondence of Nicolae Bretan with Gh. Dima, from the archives of the Chivulescu family, Brasov.

TABLOUL III (EPILOGUL)

III-es BILD (DAS NACHSPIEL)

(Scena la fel ca în Tabloul I. Numai înfățișarea Luceafărului este vizibilă încă de la ridicarea cortinei. El are iarăși aripi îngerești.)

(Die Bühne wie im Iten Bild. Nur ist die Gestalt des Abendsterns schon sofort nach dem Aufgehen des Vorhanges sichtbar, er hat wieder große Engelflügel.)

44 Adagio
Vno solo

p

45 Andante religioso

p

ritenuto

This system shows the first two staves of a musical score. The upper staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the final two measures, which are marked 'ritenuto'. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

Larghetto

pp

This system continues the piece with a tempo marking of 'Larghetto' and a dynamic marking of '*pp*'. The upper staff features a melodic line with a slur, while the lower staff consists of a steady accompaniment of chords.

46

mf

This system begins with a measure number '46' in a box. The dynamic marking is '*mf*'. The upper staff has a melodic line with a slur, and the lower staff continues with a chordal accompaniment.

cresc. poco a

This system features a dynamic marking of '*cresc. poco a*'. The upper staff has a melodic line with a slur, and the lower staff has a chordal accompaniment.

ritenuto

poco

This system is marked 'ritenuto' and '*poco*'. The upper staff has a melodic line with a slur, and the lower staff has a chordal accompaniment.

47 (Aci devine vizibil Luceafărul-Om.)
(Hier wird der Abendstern-Mensch sichtbar.)
Largo

CORTINA!
VORHANG!

f

Luceafărul
Der Abendstern

(tresare brusc: a zărit pe îndrăgostiți împreună.)
(fährt plötzlich zusammen; er hat die Liebenden bemerkt.)

p tranquillo

Ce-ți pu - să ți - e, chip de lut, De
Was geht's dich an, du Erd - ge - schöpf, Bin

ff

p tranquillo

Fig. 1 Nicolae Bretan, *Luceafărul* [The Morning Star], Epilogue, 44 → 47⁸

Horia, another show recorded in the periodical *Muzică și Poezie* [Music and Poetry] (1937) by Victoria Dragoș Ursu, was perceived as an “evocation of a lyrical episode of the peasants’ revolution with a music inspired by Transylvanian folklore”⁶ (Ursu-Dragoș, 1937, p. 32). Surprisingly, in *Gazeta ilustrată* [The Illustrated Gazette] (1939), we find out about the same score and specialized critical comments. “...From a musical point of view, the opera *Horia* should be subject to thorough review. The orchestral part should be

⁶ In the same publication, we find another positive comment regarding the same creation just a few months later: “The Peasant Rebellion of 1784 – the love idyl of *Horia*’s daughter and the betrayal of Huțu, were happily transposed into the dramatic music of the five paintings richly inspired from folklore. Themes of *Awaken thee, Romanian* were used as leitmotifs”. (Miletineanu, 1937, p. 30).

completely altered and deepened, in order to emphasize the scenic situations more seriously, as well as to ensure a more dramatic characterization of the melodramatic conflicts. That does not mean that we wish too bold innovations of harmony and counterpoint. The fragments of the various national hymns should be organically merged with the other musical motifs, so that their appearance does not leave the impression that they are mere intercalations” (Gherghel, 1939, p. 102).

However, the clearest perception of the musician is evidenced by the documented statements of the researcher Octavian Lazar Cosma in the volume *Universul muzicii românești* [*The Universe of Romanian Music*]. According to this source, the artist⁷ is mentioned in different stages of his life, in the absence of observations related to the compositional activity.

We remember that the musician Nicolae Bretan imposed himself at that time and was recognized as a creator. He was a member of the Union and most of his works were sung: [*Luceafărul*] *The Morning Star*⁸ (1921), [*Revolta lui Golem*] *The Golem's Revolt*⁹ (1924), [*Eroii de la Rovine*] *Heroes from Rovine*¹⁰ (1934) *Horia*¹¹ (1937). Moreover, his scenic works were commented on in different cultural periodicals. Although he was not integrated in the context of the compositional peak of the interwar period, which is evident from the sporadic records of creative activity, the image of a composer dedicated to the lyrical theatre did not go unnoticed and, as we can see from the documents of the time, he was appreciated or criticized for his capacity of constructing diverse librettes and melodies as inspirational sources.

⁷ In an item of the lists kept in ‘File 434/1949 (State Archives, Bucharest, Archive of the Union of Composers’), we find the name of Nicolae Bretan in ‘Rubric 4, the category of inactive or unknown composers’ (Cosma Lazăr, 1995, p. 186). ‘The Commission, gathered on May 27, 1950, rejected the request of Nicolae Bretan to become a member of the Union recently created on the structure of the *Societatea Compozitorilor Români*’ [Society of Romanian Composers] (Cosma, O. L., 1995, p. 209). ‘Rejected in the spring of 1954’ (Cosma, O. L., 1995, p. 261) and readmitted in autumn, when he was granted a 700 Lei retirement from the Musical Fund of the Union’ (Cosma, O. L., 1995, p. 275). ‘His membership was reconfirmed in 1958’ (Cosma, 1995, p. 324). ‘At the 1968 General Assembly a moment of silence was held for the musicians that passed away’ (Cosma, 1995, p. 395), among whom the name of Nicolae Bretan is recorded.

⁸ Opera in one act, with *Prologue*, 3 scenes and *Epilogue*, libretto by Nicolae Bretan, lyrics by Mihai Eminescu, premiere in Cluj on February 2, 1921, *Opera Română* [Romanian Opera], conductor Jean Bobescu.

⁹ Musical drama in one act, libretto by Nicolae Bretan after the drama [*Golem vrea să fie om*] *The Golem Wants to Be a Man*, Illés Kaczér, premiere in Cluj on December 23, 1924, Hungarian Theatre, conductor Nicolae Bretan.

¹⁰ Opera in an act, libretto by Nicolae Bretan after [*Scrisoarea a III-a*] *Letter III* of Eminescu, premiere in Cluj on January 24, 1935, [Opera română] Romanian Opera conductor, N. Brody.

¹¹ Opera in 3 acts and seven scenes, libretto adapted by Bretan after the play of Ghiță Pop, premiere in Cluj on January 24, 1937, [Opera Română] Romanian Opera, conductor Max Săveanu.

5. Promotion campaign of the composer Nicolae Bretan. Strategies and achievements

After the artist's death in 1968, his daughter, Judit Bretan¹² married the American diplomat Harry Le Bovit and has undertaken numerous actions to promote the image of the musician in our country and abroad. Since 1973, she has organized vocal miniature recitals in different centers: Braşov, Târgu Mureş, Cluj, Dej, Bucharest. In 1974, the show [*Stranie seară de Sedar*] *The Weird Evening of Sedar*¹³ was played for the first time in America. In 1980, the opera *Horia*¹⁴ was included in the repertoire of the lyrical theatre of Bucharest, while in 1982 the show *Arald*¹⁵ was premiered in Iaşi. Lied recitals dedicated exclusively to Bretan's music became more and more frequent in Romania and various cities in America: Cleveland, Ohio; Houston, New York, Washington. Gradually, his music was discovered by many performers who constantly promoted him: Dan Iordăcescu, Eugenia Moldoveanu, Valentin Teodorian, Gheorghe Crăsnaru, Ludovic Konya etc. Judit Le Bovit also worked on the publication of score books and, since 1993, with the support of the cultural foundation that she initiated in 1977 (the *Nicolae Bretan Music Foundation*), she contributed to the editions of the [*Festivalul Concurs Nicolae Bretan*] *Festival Contest Nicolae Bretan* within the framework of the Music Academy *G. Dima*. We also recall the radio broadcasts in the country (Cluj, Bucharest) and especially abroad, thanks to the involvement of Fred Calland¹⁶, producer of classical music programs (1970-1989) at the *National Public Radio* of the United States of America.

What followed? Although the results of the advertising campaign materialized immediately, with an ascending evolution of over two decades, the

¹² Judit Bretan, daughter of Nicolae Bretan (Cluj, 1923 - Washington, 2018), was an actress in the period 1938-1947 and played different roles in Cluj, Bucharest, Budapest etc. Following her marriage to US diplomat Harry Le Bovit, she moved to Washington, U.S.A., in 1949, where she worked as a foreign language teacher, being recognized for her modern methods of teaching Latin.

¹³ A mystery in one act based on texts - in Hungarian - from a *Haggadah* for voice, organ (piano) and violin, [*Stranie seară de Sedar*] *the Weird Party of Sedar* (1952) was premiered on September 8, 1974 at the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, in Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A.

¹⁴ Conductor of the show: Cornel Trăilescu, directed by: George Teodorescu, scenography: Hristofenia Cazacu; *Horia's* role interpreted by: George Crăsnaru and Nicolae Florei.

¹⁵ Show in one act (1939), libretto by Bretan after [*Strigoii*] *The Strigas* of M. Eminescu; premiere in the [*Opera Română*] *Romanian Opera* of Iaşi, conductor Corneliu Calistru.

¹⁶ Fred Calland (1924-1999) was a filmmaker, producer and director of the Classical Music Department of the *National Public Radio*. In 1970 he joined the N.P.R. team. His personal collection has often served as the main source for recorded music programs. He hosted many live events, including first auditions of musical shows. In 1989, Calland withdrew from the N.P.R. team and became the main producer. After that, he worked as an occasional commentator at N.P.R. and continued to be involved for many years in the realization of his program *World of Opera* on WETA-FM.

relationship between promotion and reception was gradually contoured. We have discovered two stages, depending on the degree of impact of Bretan's music on the interpretative field, moreover, in relation to the reception of his opposites from the perspective of general-cultural or specialized criticism.

6. Relationship amid promotion and reception between 1969-1995. Positive consequences

In the volume [*Istoria muzicii românești*] *A History of Romanian Music* of 1969, Petre Brâncuși ascertained observations regarding the works of composers from the first half of the 20th century (Sabin Drăgoi [*Năpasta*] *The Calamity*, Marțian Negrea [*Marin Pescarul*] *Marin The Fisher*, Alexandru Zirra, Alexandru Lăpușneanu, Paul Constantinescu, [*O noapte furtunoasă*] *A Stormy Night*), compared to Nicolae Bretan's scenic works ([*Luceafărul*] *The Morning Star*, [*Eroii de la Rovine*] *Heroes of Rovine*, *Horia*), mentioned 'for information purposes' (Brâncuși, 1969, p. 192).

A few years later, the frequency of recitals lied dedicated to lieder created by the composer provokes the options of some critics who, in the chronicles published in various cultural newspapers, add substantial stylistic comments about gender approach. For example, the lied recital by the baritone Dionisie Konya and the pianist Ferdinand Weiss, which took place in the concert hall of Bucharest Conservatory in 1973, was referred to by the authors of two articles that appeared in different publications: Grigore Constantinescu¹⁷, 'Nicolae Bretan', in [*Contemporanul*] *The Contemporary* and Alfred Hofmann, 'Nicolae Bretan's Concert', in [*România liberă*] *Free Romania*. This is how Hofmann characterized the vocal miniature in Bretan's view: "It is a romance pervaded by a certain nobility of feeling... There are sometimes dramatic accents ([*Ș-acele dulci păreri de rău*] *Those Sweet Remorses*, [*Rugăciune după război*] *Prayer after War*). We may also observe the evolution towards a more advanced subtlety in the musical monologue ([*Gazel*] *Ghazal* on verses by Coșbuc), while the twinning with the expressiveness of Romanian folk songs gives a remarkable force to those pages ([*Pe dealul Feleacului*] *On Feleac Hill*)" (Hofmann, 1973, p. 2).

A closer approach to the romance score [*Lasă-ți lumea ta uitată*] *Leave your World Forgotten* (1921) reveals the sensual nostalgic content of Eminescu's lyrics, through a melody built with due attention to the discrete

¹⁷ "It is an ambiance of the romanticism of always, more necessary for the vitality of singing than stylized searches, from which the simple, convincing melody emerges naturally. As a keeper of the Romanian singing tradition, which differs in many of its elements from the line of lieder, Nicolae Bretan leaves to voice the liberty of soaring in elegant volutes and stopping shortly on declamatory pauses, intimately connecting the vocal chamber piece to the best romance as gender". (Constantinescu, 1973, p. 6).

emphasis of all expressive vocal resources, in correspondence with the suggestive pianistic accompaniment.

Lasă-ți lumea ta uitată Lass' die Welt uns ganz vergessen Forget your world

MIHAI EMINESCU

Cantabile

mf

P

p

La-să-ți lu - mea, lu - mea ta ui -
Lass' die Welt, die Welt uns ganz ver -
Ah, for - get your world, for - get your

ta - să : Mi te dă, te dă cu to - țul
ges - sen, Gib dein Le - ben, gib es mir zum
world, love, Give your - self com - plete - ly now ta

mi - e De fi-ai da, fi-ai da vi - a - ta
 Lohn; Gähst du mir's auf e - wig un - ge -
 me. If you were to give to me your

ossia

toa - tă, Ni - me-n lu - me, ni - me nu ne
 mes - sen, Weiss die Welt, die Welt ja nichts da -
 whole life, Then no one in this whole world would

ști - e La - să-ți lu - mea, lu - mea ta ui -
 von. Lass' die Welt, die Welt uns ganz ver -
 know. Ah, for - get your world, far - get your

Fig. 2 Nicolae Bretan, *Lasă-ți lumea ta uitată* [Leave your World Forgotten], mm. 1-13

Another relevant source that reveals the inclination of musicologists¹⁸ to the comment on Nicolae Bretan's compositions is the magazine *Muzica* [Music]. For example, in the article *Opera română „Horia” de Nicolae Bretan* [Horia, A Romanian Opera by Nicolae Bretan], which appeared in 1980, on the occasion

¹⁸ Romeo Ghircoiașu, *Viața și creația lui Nicolae Bretan* [Life and Work of Nicolae Bretan], in: *Muzica* [Music Journal] no. 6, București, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din R.P.R., 1987, pp. 16-18; Viorel Cosma, Casiu Barbu, *Concrete dedicate lui Nicolae Bretan* [Concerts dedicated to the creation of Nicolae Bretan], in: *Muzica* [Music Journal] no. 6, București, Editura Uniunii Compozitorilor R. S. R., 1987, pp. 19-20.

of the premiere at the Opera Română [Romanian Opera] in Bucharest, Viorel Cosma noticed the ‘simplicity of the music’ (Cosma, 1980, p. 29) and the accessible character of the score by resorting to doina intonations or ‘traditional romance’ (Cosma, 1980, p. 29).

7. Relationship amid promotion and reception during 1996-2013. Negative Consequences

After the 1990s, the attention of Romanian interpreters or critics was drawn by the figure of the Swiss pianist Hartmut Gagelmann, whose involvement in the promotion of the composer recommended him as the ideal musician¹⁹. In order to develop an extensive research, Hartmut Gagelmann traveled to the United States, Hungary, Great Britain and Romania, engaging with with teachers, performers and directors, who collaborated directly or indirectly with the musician Nicolae Bretan, but especially with his daughter Judit. That was a favorable context for the author Hartmut Gagelmann, who completed in 1998 the first variation of the monograph research dedicated to the author: *Nicolae Bretan seine Lieder, seine Oper, seine Leben*²⁰. It is surprising that Octavian Lazăr Cosma published a harsh review of this volume in the *Muzica* [Magazine Music] (Cosma, 1996, pp. 123-139) back in 1996, before the text appeared in Romanian. We can deduce that during the documentation stages, Gagelmann left the manuscript at the [Uniunea Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor] Union of Composers and Musicologists, giving to the researcher Octavian Lazăr Cosma the opportunity to read it. Once reading, the musicologist signaled the exaggerations made by the author (stylistic deformed classifications of Nicolae Bretan's compositional personality) and, moreover, the historical errors and controversies of musical-analytical nature, related to the comments on the vocal creation. For example, overtaken by the pathetic effusion of the controversial remarks on the stylistic cataloging of Nicolae Bretan and George Enescu, Gagelmann said: ‘Bretan remained a Romanian composer, while Enescu became French according to the way he writes’ (Cosma Lazăr, 1996, p. 226). It is shocking that, a few years later, the research

¹⁹ ‘As pianist répétiteur and conductor of the Municipal Theatre of Sankt Gallen, he was involved in the realization of the opera shows *Golem*, in the season 1990-1991. He was a jury member in the Nicolae Bretan Vocal Interpretation Competition in Cluj (1993-1994) and a specialized consultant for the staging of the operas *Golem* and *Luceafărul* [*The Morning Star*], interpreted by students of the Academy *Gheorghe Dima* of Cluj and soloists of the Opera Houses of Cluj and Bucharest, at the *Franz Liszt* Academy of Music of Budapest in 1993 and at the National Opera of Bucharest in 1995’ (Gagelmann, 2005, p. 285).

²⁰ *Nicolae Bretan Seine Lieder, seine Oper, seine Leben*, Tipoholding, Verlag, Klausenberg, Cluj, 1998, 309 pages.

in question was published first as a volume in English²¹ and later on in Romanian²².

The demonstrative publicity actions of the composer's music in America did not remain unanswered, concluding with the appearance of some writing, the pathetic content of which is simply surprising. For example, Irving Lowens, critic of the publication *Washington Star* and author of prestigious books²³, concluded in 1983 the preface of the score *Lieduri pe versurile poezilor Heinrich Heine, Nikolaus Lenau, Reiner Maria Rilke* [Lieders on the Verses of the Poets Heinrich Heine, Nikolaus Lenau and Reiner Maria Rilke]²⁴ with the following statement: 'If God had given me the talent and skill to compose lieder, I would wish to compose Bretan's lieder' (Lowens, 1983, p. XI).

It is obvious that the fabulous enterprise of promoting the musician at theoretical (recordings, articles, a monographic volume) or practical level (organizing recitals, author concerts, setting up performances in the country and abroad, publishing scores in prestigious publishing houses) would have never had the expected impact without the considerable financial support offered by Judit Bretan le Bovit. A peak moment was reached in 1994 when the well-known company *Nimbus Records*, was granted exclusivity rights for the distribution of Bretan's creation worldwide. Scenic creation, sacred music, and some lieder have been brought back to public attention since 1995. Nowadays, we would say that it is a gratifying decision, which would be worth applying to composers that are significant for the history of interwar Romanian music but did not have the chance to benefit from a similar advertising campaign. We would like to remind just the name of Mihail Jora, the creator of modern Romanian ballet and lied, who would really amaze foreign audiences due to his concrete innovations of language and sound expression.

In the Romanian specialized press, the perception of the musician remains within objective parameters, which can be proved through an extract from the chronicle *Evenimentele muzicale ale miezului de stagiune* [Musical Events of Middle Season] (2009) by Dumitru Avakian: 'At Bucharest Opera, *Golem* and *Arald*, two lyrical works in an act, signed by Nicolae Bretan from Cluj [...] have excelled in a striking simplism at compositional level, which could hardly be compensated at scenic level in the directorial vision of Anda Tăbăcaru' (Avakian, 2009, p. 1).

²¹ Hartmut Gagelmann, *Nicolae Bretan: His Life His Music*, editat de Nicolae Bretan Music Foundation, 2000, 309 pages.

²² *Nicolae Bretan: his Lieder – his Works – his Life/* Hartmut Gagelmann, translated by Petru Forna, revised by Pavel Pușcaș. Cluj-Napoca: Teognost Publishers, 2005.

²³ Irving Lowens (1916-1983), *Lectures on the History and Art of Music* (New York, 1968), *Music in America and American Music: Two Views of the Scene*, (Brooklyn, NY, 1978).

²⁴ *Editio Musica*, Budapest, 1983.

The culminating point in the subjective reception of the musician is offered by Judit Bretan in the volume *Uraganul. O viață pentru Nicolae Bretan. Mărturie în fragmente* [Hurricane. A life for Nicolae Bretan. Testimony in fragments] (2013). Apart from the content of the letters she interprets in a speculative manner, the author launches the idea that the *silence on the composer* can be explained by the fact that he belongs to the dark period of the communist regime, as well as by his marriage to Nora Osvát, a Hungarian Jew, whose family was decimated in Auschwitz. The sensitive interethnic Hungarian-German-Jewish ties and the musician's resistance to integrating into the conspiracy of mediocrity of a dictatorship are the premises of a controversial discourse with pathetic nuances. For what purpose? The uninformed reader, visibly touched by the disturbing story, might conclude that Bretan was one of those important creators, who died unknown, unjustly blamed in postwar Romania, although he composed remarkable music. However, the careful lecturer shall certainly remark the lack of concrete documents that justify the idea that the personality of the artist was annihilated by the maneuvers of communist ideology. The natural questions are: What were the drastic decisions that the authorities adopted against him? What important scores were not interpreted? We should understand one more aspect: the pressure that Judit exerted in countless moments on the performers to interpret or record Bretan's music. For instance, we reproduce below a fragment that reveals the profoundly subjective reaction of the author, when conductor Cristian Mandeal refused to record a work in 1995. "The fees received by Mandeal at the Universities of Indiana and Rutgers – three thousand dollars, which were a fortune in Romania conditions, i.e. the earnings of a good conductor for many years, were transferred to my account, because he had no right as a Romanian citizen to hold a currency account abroad and we agreed to meet a few months later in Romania to record *Horia*... The recording never took place." (Bretan, 2013, p. 323) Another idea that comes out of the volume is that Judit le Bovit, a professional actress with a remarkable literary culture, but not trained in music, was often in a position to manage the engagements of certain performers in Bretan's repertoire. Preoccupied to get categorical answers at all costs, regarding the organization of artistic events dedicated to her father's memory, and especially flattered by the laudatory remarks made by important names of the world of singing, she did not retaliate in exaggerated moments, which is unacceptable for a professional. "During a two-hour conversation that I had at the New York Metropolitan Museum on October 31, 2000, Angela Gheorghiu explained that Bretan was incomparably better and greater than Enescu... Enescu is inferior precisely in the most important point: concision. The proportion is: Bretan says in 4-5 minutes what Enescu says in 45 minutes" (Bretan, 2013, p. 367).

From the provided examples, we noticed that the relationship between promotion and reception in the case of the composer Nicolae Bretan presented a differentiated fulfillment. Thus, in the first stage (1969-1995), we retain the objective views of some scholars, highlighting the importance of the creator in a balanced manner, with positive impact on his image and reputation. In the second stage (1997-2013), the demonstrative publication of volumes at national and international level, subjectively conceived, by the deliberate deformation of historical, stylistic and musical landmarks, led to negative consequences manifested in a distorted reception of its personality.

8. Critical reception in the present. Conclusions

From the systematized scrutiny of the bibliography that we construed in correlation with the particular observations regarding the musician's scores submitted to our attention, we found surprising that *the silence on Bretan* can be contextually perceived with the tense socio-political and family environment. The true reason for his partial recognition is related to the dubious quality of his performances, a fact that is related to genre creations in the nineteenth century and the cultivation of vocal miniature in the sense of *romance* and not of *lied*.

As for the genre of opera, we noticed obvious similarities of sonority, timbralism conception and drama character construction with German romantic composers: Carl Maria von Weber, Ferdinand von Hiller and Heinrich Marschner.

In his approach to romance, the composer takes over the modalities to construct melodies and the types of romantic accompaniment used by Franz Schubert and Felix Mendelssohn, which he simplifies, giving them a differentiated expressivity (delicate, lyrical, dramatic and pathetic). In that way, he follows the natural path of many Romanian creators that cultivated that genre, such as: Gheorghe Scheletti, Iacob Mureșianu, Gheorghe Dima and Tiberiu Brediceanu.

We have noticed that from a stylistic point of view, Nicolae Bretan cannot be put in the context of his generation, i.e. of the composers that have clearly contributed to the development of the genres under discussion. We are confronted with the phenomenon of epigonism²⁵, which is a characteristic of minor creators that take over, without innovation, expression and language modalities from major composers belonging to a chronologically exhausted style. We consider that the affiliation to the 'minor' creator category does not undermine the value of Nicolae Bretan's personality, because the musician is currently perceived, especially through his contributions in the interpretative field.

²⁵ *Epigon* – name used for minor artists that mimic the means of expression specific to a great creator (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/epigon>).

In this sense, we noticed a gap in the manner of building the reception from a theoretical and practical perspective. Although the publication of articles in the press of that time and the comments in specialized journals led to the gradual recognition of the composer, in the interpretative plane, we should point out that the phenomenon of Bretan's rebirth was caused by the multitude of manifestations devoted to him.

Although the sonority of his vocal works is remarkable due to their obvious simplicity and not because of the deliberate simplicity of music, Bretan remains an artist appreciated by performers for the charm of his songs. The talented minor composer is a musician of high cultural value, whose simple creation has a clear effect on melomans and the capacity to stand the passage of time, beyond any exaggeration.

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