

Critical reception of late 19th century Iași-based music. Alexandru Flechtenmacher

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Abstract: In late 19th-century periodicals, music criticism captured only a few details on the composition techniques, the structural organization, the rhythmic-melodic or vocal and stage interpretation of various performances. The press shed light on these pieces only at an informative level, mentioning titles, composers, and interpreters and even omitting some details due to, on the one hand, the authorities' indifference to the musical phenomenon and, on the other hand, the editors' sheer ignorance of particular stylistic or musical language features. However, the attempts made by the personalities active in the cultural and artistic life were real and unrelenting, their results being guided by the desire to promote music with specific national traits. This study provides an analytical perspective on the current reception of that social-artistic context. Taking into account that new sources have favored a more detailed and profound investigation of the 19th-century critical phenomenon, our analysis supplements the information presented in the music history studies already published in Romania. Consequently, the first section of this paper approaches the extremely dynamic phenomenon represented by the creation of new journals / newspapers in the 19th century. It is our belief that starting from general journalism we can acquire a better understanding of the development of musical criticism. This research aimed to discover new dimensions of Iași-based music, placing special emphasis on the critical reception of the composer Alexandru Flechtenmacher. We have followed its reflection in the Romanian press, starting from the first accounts in this respect, and ending with the subsequent assessments formulated in 20th-century musicology. Although the texts that tackle musical issues are quite few and social aspects prevail in the commentators' list of interests, by combining the information provided by general literary/historical/social sources with the details included in specialized articles we can create a new perspective on late 19th-century Iași-based compositions.

Keywords: Romanian newspapers, 19th century, musical press, Iași, Alexandru Flechtenmacher.

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, the Romanian Principalities teemed with various critical, folk-based, didactic, and historical endeavors that aimed to provide guidelines for Romanian music and satisfy the aesthetic aspirations of audiences. They went hand in hand with the development of musical life and

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the composers' increasing openness to other compositional perspectives. The interest in theoretical musical issues becomes a certainty in the latter part of the 19th century, even if the term "musicology" may not be appropriate in this context because it is said to have a more recent origin in Romania. However, it is a fact that "the introduction to the first issue of *Doina* magazine mentions the word "musicologists", which means that the activities related to musical thinking were allotted scientific weight in the common acceptance of that age" (Breazul, 1973, p. 41).

The musicians who also explored the area of music theory in our country were not professionals, i.e. specialists; music critics did not see themselves as having a stable profession in this field. Musicians acted as teachers, orchestra/choir conductors, marching band leaders, writers, or connoisseurs asked to give private music lessons. In other words, musicological activities had not yet acquired the right to exist. The critics' work and passion for music are only evidenced and recorded in the publications of that period.

The information presented in this research draws, first of all, on new Romanian and foreign sources, i.e. several studies that focused on 19th-century cultural journalism. It is worth mentioning in this respect is the volume *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture: Literacy and the Development of National Identity* by Alex Drace-Francis, which was particularly useful by providing an up-to-date and outward perspective on Romanian journalism in its early stages. In addition, several other contemporary Romanian studies by historians and philologists, edited or available online were particularly useful: Marian Petcu (ed.) – *Istoria jurnalismului din România. Enciclopedie cronologică* [History of Journalism in Romania, Chronological Encyclopedia]; tiparituriromanesti.wordpress.com; *Istoria artelor frumoase (Arhitectura, Sculptură, Pictură, Musică, din toate timpurile și din toate țările, inclusiv România)* [History of Fine Arts (Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Music, from our ages and all the countries, including Rumania)] by N. E. Idieru, București, Gutenberg Printing House, 1898 –digitalized volume in the collection of the Bucharest Digital Library; *Dicționarul contemporanilor* [Dictionary of Contemporaries] - Dimitrie R. Rosetti, 1st edition, București, Editura Lito-Tipografiei "Populara", 1897 – digitalized in the collection of the Bucharest Digital Library).

These new sources favored a wider and more detailed analysis of the 19th-century critical phenomenon, supplementing the information presented in the music history studies already published in Romania. Consequently, the first section of this paper approaches the extremely dynamic phenomenon represented by the creation of new journals / newspapers in the 19th century. It is our belief that starting from general journalism we can acquire a better understanding of the development of musical criticism.

2. The first writings about music in the Iași press

A general historical overview shows that the first Romanian newspapers were founded with the support of the last Russian occupation during the Russian-Turkish War: “But it was with Russia's support, and during the latter's occupation of the Principalities, that the first newspapers in Romanian were established. Both Golescu in Wallachia, and the Moldavian Gheorghe Asachi had established close links with the Russian occupying authorities” (Drace-Francis, 2006, p. 124). *Curierul românesc*¹ [*The Romanian Courier*] (Petcu, 2012, p. 16) was founded in April 1829, and *Albina Românească*² [The Romanian Bee] (Petcu, 2012, p. 16) in June of the same year. Both produced important literary supplements – Heliade added *Adaos literar*³ [Literary Addition] (Petcu, 2012, p. 16) in 1830 and 1831, and Asachi published the *Alăuta românească*⁴ [The Romanian Lute] or *Lira Românească* [The Romanian Lyre] - The Romanian Lyre] (Petcu, 2012, p. 22) in 1837 and 1838 - which effectively established the *belles-lettres* as a field distinct from the mainstream of official written news. From 9 Jan. 1850 to 24 Nov. 1858 *Gazeta de Moldavia* [The Moldavia Gazette] appears twice a week, continuing *Albina Românească*, where the new supplement is published – *Noua Albină română* [The New Romanian Bee].

¹ 1829, April 19. Bucharest. The first newspaper in Muntenia; its founder, editor and owner is Ion-Heliade Rădulescu.

² 1829, June, 1. Iași: *Albina Românească. Gazetă politico-literară* [The Romanian Bee. Political-literary gazette] starts to appear bi-weekly (1 June 1829 - 3 January 1835, 3 January 1837 - 2 January 1850). It is the first newspaper written in Romanian in Moldova, which, along with *Curierul românesc* [The Romanian Courier] (1829-1850), written by I. Heliade-Rădulescu in București, and *Gazeta de Transilvania* [The Transylvania Gazette] by George Barițiu, from Brasov, laid the foundations of the Romanian periodical press. Owner and editors: Gh. Asachi, V. Fabian-Bob, Gh. Saulescu, Iancu Codrescu. *Albina Românească* aims to publish political and interesting novelties from all around the world, bulletins from the theater of war, historical, literal, moral, philological collections, the first papers on useful discoveries...”

³ 1830, January 3, Bucharest. First press run of *Adaos literar la Curierul românesc* [Literary Addition to the Romanian Courier], published irregularly till 1832, edited by I. Rădulescu.

⁴ 1837, March, 14. Iași. First press run of *Alăuta Românească* [The Romanian Lute] as a literary supplement to *Albina românească*. Published irregularly till February 3, 1838, then bimonthly from 1 July to 1 Sept. 1838. Initiated by Gh. Asachi, and then edited by M. Kogălniceanu. In the eight issues edited by Gh. Asachi's, the supplement included poems and prose by C. Negruzzi, Gh. Asachi and C. Aristia, a feuilleton, and a fragment from the play *Zaira* by Voltaire. The magazine, i.e. the five issues edited by M. Kogălniceanu, marked an important moment in the evolution of the Romanian literary press, being transformed from an occasional and provincial publication into a modern magazine meant to inform readers about the European literary movement and to stimulate local literary creation based on the history and traditions of the nation in order to produce a national revival. In an article on Neofit Scriban's *Catechism*, M. Kogalniceanu proposes that the Cyrillic alphabet be replaced with the Latin one. A satirical reference to the Tsarist consul Karl von Kotzebue, made in the article *Filosofia visului* [Philosophy of Dreams], makes Prince Mihail Sturdza order the magazine's shutdown.

Kogălniceanu's and Vasile Alecsandri's collaborative efforts continued with *România literară* [Literary Romania] – Iași, 1855 – and *Steaua Dunării* [The Danube Star] – 1855-1860, also published in French as *L'Etoile du Danube*, 1856-1858⁵ (Drace-Francis, c. 2006, pp. 170-171).

After the administrative formalities of the Union of the Principalities under the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza⁶ were finalized and Carol of Hohenzollern was appointed the new ruler of the United Principalities, the number of publications began to increase substantially.

The most prestigious literary magazine that appeared on the public stage and proposed radical innovations in cultural theory and strategy was *Convorbiri literare* [Literary Conversations] – 1867-1944. Published monthly, the magazine was the organ of the *Junimea* group (founded in 1864), a heterogeneous gathering of intellectuals, boyars, politicians, lawyers, and members of the military with a conservative political agenda, grouped around the new University of Iași.

Another magazine, in opposition to *Convorbiri*, was *Contemporanul* [The Contemporary], founded in Iași in 1881 and run by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. Of course, the general context was a competition between the two publications: “It was in fact to be the socialist paper *Contemporanul* (1881-91) and particularly its chief theorist, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, which constituted *Convorbiri*'s main literary rivals” (Drace-Francis, 2006, p. 174).

The rising of the Romanian musical critique was mainly supported by the mentors of these general (political-cultural) periodicals, who understood the need that the readers be informed about musical life as well. After 1830, this was reflected by the great density of permanent columns on musical and theatrical works.

The first musical journal to be published in Iași as a periodical was *Almanahul muzical* [The Musical Almanach] (Petcu, 2012, p. 91), a magazine that is still a landmark in the history of Romanian writings on music because of the thoroughness and the documented nature of its articles, signed, to a large extent, by Theodor T. Burada - a true savant of his time. First published in 1875 and edited till 1877, this publication gathered articles on the evolution and progress of music, medleys, traditional music, scores of folk songs and dances, translations from François Tourte, Achille Dien, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It promoted both local creations and musicological writings from the

⁵ “The first of these continued the promotion of Alecsandri's collections of Romanian folk poetry: significantly, all provinces were represented in an allusion to the cultural unity of the Romanian people – a more modern and more subtle political use to which literature was now being put. At the same time, political articles on the abolition of serfdom were a regular feature”.

⁶ The Union of the Romanian Principalities Moldova and Wallachia was initiated in 1859 and completed in 1861.

international specialized literature. In 1875, T.T. Burada provided a general perspective on how art was treated in Moldova at that time: “The arts have always been despised here, never encouraged, and this has probably been one of the greatest obstacles to progress and civilization. Humans are not abstract beings, they cannot be controlled as if they were robots, they have senses, and those senses form passions; the science of leading people on the path of progress is no different from the science of shaping their sensitivity, the foundation of human institutions lies in their public and private habits, and the beautiful arts are essentially moral because they make the human being who cultivates them better and happier”⁷ (Burada, 1875, p. 24).

His perspective is based on his unremitting activities of research, notation, and interpretation of everything that means music, from folk music to organology, from historiography to reviews, a dedicated man who became better and happier by cultivating music, as he confessed. He was an optimistic visionary who questioned the issue of the morality of the society in which he lived, saying that a leader of society must, first of all, know how to coordinate the sensitivity of the people, of the masses, because they are not robots!!!

On 10 September 1883, the bi-monthly magazine *Arta* appeared in Iași; from no. 9 of 10 January 1884 the publication’s header included the mention “theatrical and musical magazine” and from no. 14 of 25 March 1884 it started to focus only on the musical side (“musical magazine”). Unfortunately, on 15 September 1885, the magazine’s publication was interrupted, only to re-emerge after almost a decade on 1 January 1894, continuing until June 1896. The general coordinator and editor was Titus Cerne, an appreciated musician, author of numerous reviews and articles.

The *Arta* Iași magazine declared officially its support for Romanian music, a credo it translated into ample reviews, occasioned mainly by the performing of lyrical works by Eduard Caudella and Tudor Flondor. Materials that reflected the musical life of Iași were also allotted plenty of room, showing that, indeed, the publication encouraged local talents and initiatives. There were also insertions of information about musical events in other parts of the country and information on the evolution of our singers abroad. Another flourishing section encompassed theoretical studies. Gavriil Musicescu was one of the authors who wrote excellent articles for this section, and his study *Nationalism or folk songs*, generated a substantial discussion, spreading over several numbers, with G. Scheletti, about the integration and the characteristics of Romanian national music, with special focus on modal harmonization.

⁷ Our translation.

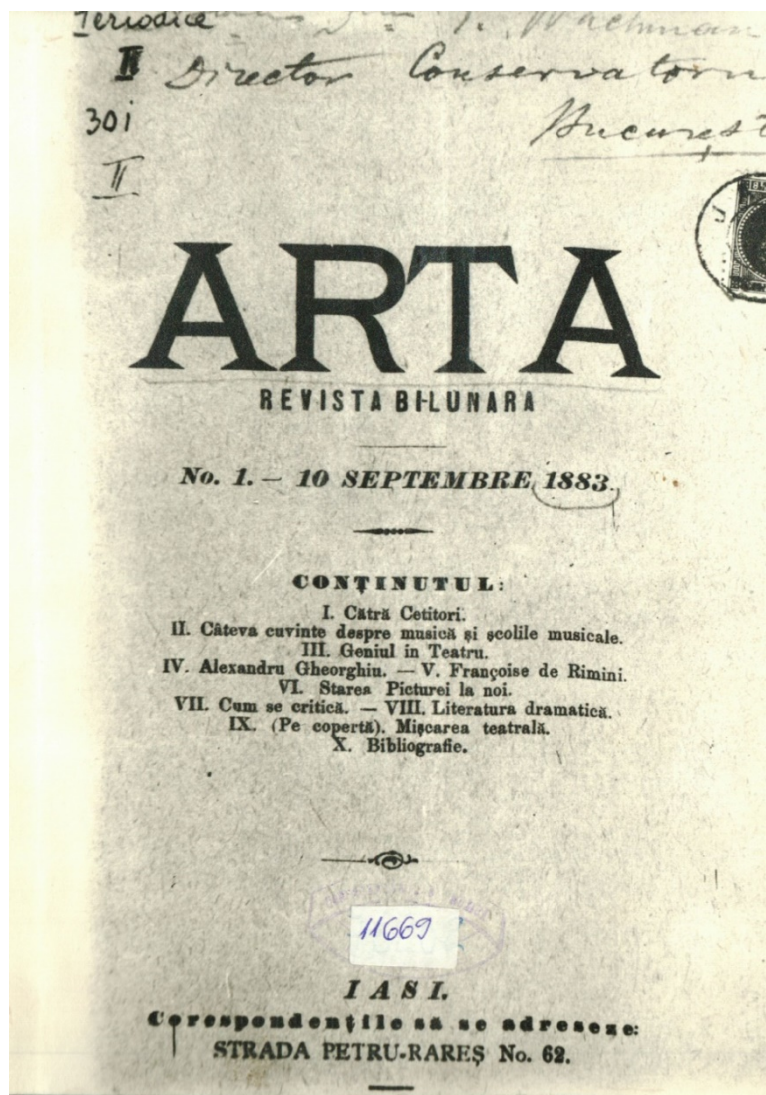


Fig. 1 Cerne, T. (1883). *Arta. Revista Musicală*, Year I, No. 1

3. Critical reception of the late 19th-century Iași-based music. Alexandru Flechtenmacher

3.1. Music, Society and the Press

This research aims to discover new dimensions of the works of Iasi composers, from a chronological point of view, from the first journalistic accounts to current musicology. Thus, we attempt to evaluate their reception in the press, their degree of accessibility as well as the way in which they were viewed by the public / critic. At a general glance, the articles dealing with the

value of musical performances are quite few, most writings being based on background elements, such as the human and material resources used, management deficiencies, staging details or repertoires.

As early as 1851, musicians and music critics were aware of the value of folk music sources, as shown by *Gazeta de Moldova* (28 November 1851): “In Moldova, in a time of foreign influences, national music as well as other legacies from our ancestors have fled to the countryside, where one can still listen to the melodious *doina* and *hora*, which, in the absence of deeds, preserve a patriotic feeling among a people accustomed with the oriental customs introduced by the authorities; the Fanar rulers formed our taste for Turkish music. [...] Today, in the land of Orpheus, harmony produces miracles, and the resulting history is most of all due to the Italian opera, which, through the distinguished composition of its body, reforms favorably the taste of the public and brings the most exquisite pleasures to society” (Boțocan, Pascu, 1997, p. 373).

This quote is highly relevant because it sketches a picture of mid-nineteenth century music, in which several influences were intertwined. The differences between these components are immense. There was no proper understanding of peasant music yet. Oriental music had an impact too, and its manifestations influenced urban folklore and early art music compositions. This stage finished by the end of the 19th century. As far as Italian opera is concerned, we agree that it “reformed favorably the taste of the public” of that age and became a landmark in the stage compositions that would follow.

A few years later, in 1883, musical criticism starts to be interested in the audience as well, focusing mainly on its mentality; more precisely, journalists talked about the recipients’ expectations from Romanian music, which seemed to reveal their poor education, and their superficial access to universal music. Titus Cerne criticizes Iași audiences in a very sarcastic manner, emphasizing that they are more interested in foreign works and performers than in the productions of native musicians: “The audience of Iași have shown once again what they have proven many times, i.e. they are great admirers of music, and that is why they remarked themselves by their absence. In fact, two varieties of musical performances have caught the interest of our audiences: the concerts given by foreigners and the theatrical performances of works such as *La Veuve de Malabar*, *Un lycée de Jeunes filles*, etc. But the events recently announces do not fit any of the situations mentioned above; why should the audience participate? [...] Moreover, from the few who do go to concerts or to musical events to listen to music, when a performance of *classical music* is publicized, there are some who say ‘I’m not going to listen to it because I do not understand it’ ” (Cerne, 1883, p. 81). Pragmatism and the lack of musical culture still had a say, even if not for everyone, but a large part of the Iași society judged the recital or concert to be incomprehensible.

Theatrical genres and opera enjoyed better audiences. Thus, in the press of 1894, in a brief review of opera groups who attempted to integrate Romanian versions into their repertory, Titus Cerne makes a series of synthetic observations: “In Romania, opera companies appeared at the beginning of the century and, naturally, taking into account that there were people who loved the country and the language of the land, it was not long until the first attempts to make operas in Romanian were made. Thus in 1838 we saw in Iași a translated *Norma* staged by the students of the Philharmonic Conservatory. Later on, this also happened at the national theater, where several performances were given. Although if analyzed rigorously, with the exception of *Baba Hîrca*, they were nothing else but vaudevilles, they were still the first attempts to write music for the theater based on a Romanian text. The closer we get to our own time, the easier it is to find more serious attempts at this; in '75 were staged the first translated French operettas, and later on some comic works such as *Olteanca* or *Fata răzeșului* by E. Caudella; in the '80s, a lyrical society was formed in Iași with the final goal of forming a Romanian opera, and even if the results were almost non-existent, this does not mean that attempts have not been made” (Cerne, 1894, p. 50).

The situation of concert criticism was as objective as possible, both as far as the faults of the participating society and the interpretation was concerned, using, all along, an accessible language. Titus Cerne’s article, sprinkled with some sociological spice, is a testimony in this respect: “In the evening of January 18th, in the hall of Sidoli Circle, a concert given by Mrs. Valeria X. Xanu, Ms. Aspazia Sion, T.T. Burada, E. Mezzetti, S. Dragomir and the Metropolitan Choir conducted by Mr. G. Muzicescu, in honor and to the benefit of Mr. C.F. Gros, former director of the Music Conservatory of Iasi. [...]

Moving on from these ideas, let us see the musical part, which actually interests us the most. Mrs. V. Nanu was, of course, the magnet of this concert; she had not been heard by our audiences for a long time, and this time she sang no less than six pieces. She performed all of them well, but she was most noticeable in the cavatina *Linda* by Donizetti. One of the songs sung by Mrs. Nanu was *În grădină* [In the garden] with G. Musicescu’s viola accompaniment, which honors our *Art* [journal], because this piece was brought to light here by *Art*. [...] Leaving aside the merits of this beautiful piece (referring to *Somnoroase păsărele* [Sleepy Birds] by Flondor), I found it very proper, because, indeed, sleepy were the birds after having listened to 19 pieces and swayed, at the end, by a *Berceuse* (with silencer) and a *Souvenir de Moscou*” (Cerne, 1895, pp. 20-21).

In the late 19th century, musical criticism began to be increasingly harsh with the salon music of that time, which was thought to be lacking in originality and compositional value and producing creations that were flooding

publishing houses: “The third category of Romanian musical productions which, for lack of suitable term, I called *new formation* music, includes the numerous musical prints that appear daily on the displays of music editors and shops; they are true *mixtum compositum*⁸, i.e. mostly hybrid works, and therefore – apart from some good exceptions⁹ – are of a very poor musical quality. So, rather than a healthy and visionary genre, they represent the degrading state of our musical activities” (Idieru, 1898, pp. 444-445).

Indeed, the works written during that period have a dose of mannerism that recalls Romanian folk music. In time, this limitation of compositional horizon will be severely criticized. Interwar musicologists who studied these first creations in order to discover the stages in the configuration of a proper Romanian style, did not understand this stage of accumulations, of tentative efforts that may be said to characterize these 19th-century miniatures: “What they did not bypass, they ‘carved’ – the term is theirs – and deformed to fit the pattern of Western diatonism (major or minor). They did this as far as tone was concerned. In what regards rhythm, they subjugated almost the entire rhythmic freedom of the folk song and closed in *carrure* and bars out of whose tyranny the new music is struggling to escape. As it was not the folk song, but the composition resulting from its “artistic” processing that was the main point of interest, it is obvious that the collection, the rigorous critical study and the efforts to bring to light the folk song, being seen as secondary and only auxiliary activities, disappeared, little by little, from the preoccupations of the composers in question and was eventually abandoned” (Breazu, 1941, pp. 365-366).

20th-century musicology, especially George Breazu, debates in a passionate the attraction exerted on amateur composers, who had no theoretical foundation, by the field of expression of the folk melody, which, back then, was a fashion, a model to follow in order to pursue the ideal of creating a specific music language, a national school according to the Western model: “The first to be attracted by the beauty of the folk song were, obviously, the musicians who aspired to become composers. Those who showed the greatest interest in the folk song were not performers, practitioners, theorists, or musicographers. They were composers, creative artists, attracted not so much by the aesthetic value of the folk melody, not by the song for the song’s sake, but by the fact that their inability to produce melodic innovations was easy to mask by borrowing melodic parts or even entire songs from the folk music repertoire. The songs were not used as a source of melodic inspiration and the soulful musical atmosphere, in which such characteristic melodic motifs could have been used in order to create polyphony and develop themes, was totally ignored. Having been pulled out of their natural psychological environment, in

⁸ Latin term – transl. *mixed musical compositions*.

⁹ Reference to *Baba Hîrca* by Flechtenmacher.

their entirety or partially, the songs were seriously deformed and re-patched in these so-called compositions. Thus, the richness of melodic and rhythmic elements in the songs and dances of the people, being absolutely necessary for the manifestation of their creative will, much of the treasure of the songs known to them, was reinterpreted and mercilessly exploited only to feed, revive, support and justify the compositional aspirations of this group of amateur musicians. The misfortunes of the folk song were aggrieved by the fact that this activity was encouraged by everyone, being considered, then as today, as a national necessity, since these composers have always aspired, openly or not, to lay the foundations of *Romanian* music, that is a national music school similar to the Italian, German, or French one – *Romanian cultivated music*.” (Breazu, 1941, pp. 362-363)

3.2. Articles about Alexandru Flechtenmacher

The portraits of 19th-century personalities included in general dictionaries encompassed only short, objective, paragraphs that provided only few details and sometimes even omissions as far as the historical truth was concerned. The earliest account of Iași composers in lexicographic articles (left unmentioned by musicologist Viorel Cosma in his lexicon) is the work of historian Dimitrie R. Rosetti – *Dicționarul contemporanilor* [Dictionary of Contemporaries], published in 1897, in which we find some names of interest, including Alexandru Flechtenmacher, Eduard Caudella and Gavriil Musicescu.

Flechtenmacher’s biographical description is more substantial, probably due to his age (75) at the time when the dictionary was written, but also to his importance in the history of Romanian music until 1897. However, there are some omissions and incorrect data: he is mentioned only as a teacher at the Bucharest Conservatory, even if he had also been the director of this institution between 1864 and 1869, and the long period in which he was the conductor of the Bucharest National Theater Orchestra (1869-1863; 1867-1880) is not mentioned at all.

Names such as Pietro or Enrico Mezzetti are not featured in the pages of this historical source, and from the Burada family only Teodor T. Burada is mentioned, as a journalist. His entry cites only some ethnographic titles, even though during this period the musician also worked as violinist both in the country and abroad, and as a violin and music theory professor at the Iași Conservatory (Cosma, V., 1989, p. 235).

Despite these shortcomings, the above-mentioned bibliographic resource is a pioneering work in lexicographical historiography, as *Dicționarul contemporanilor* [Dictionary of Contemporaries] refers only to the personalities active during the last decade of the 19th century.

Going through the articles referring to the musicians based in Iași, we find that Alexandru Flechtenmacher was the most comprehended and the most commented upon out of them.

But what is Flechtenmacher to us, 21st-century people? Flechtenmacher is the personality who started the genre that we know today as the *operetta*, starting from the vaudeville, from scenes based on the alternation between theater and music, from topics that were taboo in his society and had an impressive impact on audiences, which shows that they were accessible, and easy to be literarily and musically assimilated by the 19th-century Iași public.

We believe that this genre was so popular because it played the role of a “critical mirror to society” (Cosma, O.L., 1975, p. 288) and in Romania anything critical, especially with tragic-comic undertones, draws attention like a magnet. A premise also confirmed today, a century and a half later.

Flechtenmacher’s name is not linked only to the operetta genre, and this is less known today. He was also the first Romanian solo instrument player, as recorded in *Albina Românească*, no. 5: “The year 1842 marks another artistic event in the history of Iași music: the appearance of the first Romanian concert player, the young violinist Alexandru Flechtenmacher (28 December), followed by Carol Miculi (1845) and the sons of Mr. Burada, Gheorghe Teodor, Mihai and Constantin, defied the prejudice of that time by stepping on the concert stage” (Pascu; Boțocan, 1997, pp. 54-55).

Flechtenmacher was a true paragon for the musical society that had begun to form in Iași. When Franz Liszt visited Iași in 1847, Gheorghe Asachi wrote in *Albina românească*, no. 5 of January 16, 1847: “He played an overture by A. Flechtenmacher and was called for an encore. Towards the end, Liszt made some brilliant improvisations on the Moldavian *hora* and overture” (Burada, 1974, p. 310).

The fame and appreciation enjoyed by Alexandru Flechtenmacher are also highlighted by the distinguished line-ups of the concerts he signed, which included boyars and intellectuals from Iași, who participated for noble, “philanthropic” purposes: “An aristocratic ensemble of Moldavian amateur artists (besides the artist Matei Millo, the singers Maria Cantacuzino, Grigorie and Neculai Cantacuzino, Costache Negruți (!), and in the choir Catinca Mavrocordat, Alex. Mavrocordat, Elena Cantacuzino, Calimah, Rosetti, Russo and Ioan Cantacuzino) presented, on 3 February and 9 March 1848, the comedy with songs *Peatra din casă* (!) [The stone in the house] by V. Alexandri (!) on the music signed by Al. Flechtenmacher and *Nunta Țărăneasă* [Peasant Wedding] in which the duet Didița Mavrocordat and Alex Mavrocordat excelled (Poslușnicu, 1928, p. 154).

It is worth noting that the “poet Vasile Alecsandri” and Costache Neguzzi¹⁰ were active participants in these stage performances, probably also as actors, and not only as the authors of most the texts, or supporters and managers of the theater movement in Iași.

The premiere of the vaudeville *Baba Hîrca* (December 1848), based on the libretto of Matei Millo, a matchless artist of the Romanian theater, drew the attention of the Moldavian press (*Albina românească*, No. 102): “On the 26th of the same month the national [theatre] company played the first Romanian operetta written by Matei Millo, *Baba Hîrca*, a national witchcraft opera in two acts and three scenes, whose original music was composed by A. Flechtenmacher based on true Romanian musical motifs” (Burada, 1922, p. 33).

An issue that suscitated a host of debates was the operetta’s subject, namely the gypsies’ presence in society and the way in which they expressed themselves freely, without any prejudice (*Albina românească*, no. 8, 1849): “...Who does not know that one of the gypsies’ favorite occupations is the art of fortune-telling, highly praised by those who are in love or desperate. It is from this gypsy feature that Mr. Millo, Director of the National Theater, drew inspiration for the play <Hîrca>, staged to a great success. The play is remarkable not so much for its plot, but for its picturesque scenes that imitate nature, for its national, and even gypsy, costumes. The fact that *Baba Hîrca* is played by the Author himself was a *non plus ultra* for this piece, both by the naturalness of his character and by his magical, very rapid, transformation from a character into another. [...] The music arranged by D. Flechtenmacher was national and well chosen, there were nice decorations, and in the costumes we would have liked that a more esthetic type be preserved...” (Burada, 1922, p. 33-35).

This fragment is undoubtedly a collection page, having a local flavor colored by many Romanian archaisms. From this “conglomerate”, it is not easy to distinguish how the music was received (“the music arranged by D. Flechtenmacher was national and well chosen”), but let us not forget that this happened in 1849, when the first articles that were more elaborate than informative notices started to appear.

Baba Hîrca generated a true trend, stimulating the publication of several reviews in most of the newspapers of that time.

In an 1861 article, Nicolae Filimon is keen to appreciate the music of the operetta, because it has unusual traits which could and should be valued by other Romanian composers as well: “The music of this operetta is simple and very beautiful. Its author drew inspiration only from the pains and joys of the Romanian people. This music has very beautiful arias, which, besides the many

¹⁰ Constantin Negruzzi, politician and writer, as well as director of the theater, supporter of progress and liberal ideas.

beauties they encompass, have the additional merit of being treated in a theatrical manner. And it would not be bad for the Romanian composers who wish to transform our music into dramatic music to study these arias from the viewpoint of their aesthetics, because they are the first Romanian tunes which can be very useful in the creation of Romanian drama music” (Filimon, 1957, p. 341).

In the opinion of this pioneer of Romanian musical journalism, the main merit of the operetta’s melodies was the way in which they had been theatrically processed, the fact that they were endowed with theatrical plasticity and the power to communicate by music.

The popularity enjoyed by the operetta *Baba Hîrca* survived in time, and proof in this respect is Titus Cerne’s report from 1894: “It has become a tradition to stage, on New Year’s Eve, the operetta *Baba Hîrca*. [...] A national Moldavian operetta, as its authors, Matei Millo for the text and Alexandru Flechtenmacher for the music, title it, was staged for the first time on 26 Decembre 1848 in Iași, and it was not long before it became truly popular. Leaving aside whether its musical or literary merits are true or not, the mere fact that it is liked by all the classes of society and that it is the first Romanian operetta¹¹ makes it interesting for all of us (Cerne, 1894, No. 2, pp. 23-24).

Why was it so interesting? Cerne does not emphasize the piece’s musical or theatrical attributes, mentioning only that it was popular in the society of Iași, and that it was is the first Romanian operetta, which made it catch people’s attention and become interesting. Its qualitative essence was its very popularity, its impact on the public.

Teodor T. Burada bears testimony to the perennial nature of *Baba Hîrca*, 70 years after its premiere, in 1922: “The representation of the operetta *Baba Hîrca*, a play in two acts by M. Millo, was a great success, and it may justly be called the first Romanian operetta. The staging was done with the utmost care so that it matched the topic of the work. [...] The music by Al. Flechtenmacher, the kapellmaister of the Moldavian Theater orchestra, is truly charming and Romanian indeed. From the many national plays performed on the stage of the National Theater, none impressed the audience more than this operetta, both by its originality and by the beauty of its true national songs, so it will always remain the first attempt to create a Romanian operetta. This play has been staged until today and listened to with great joy by audiences coming from all over the country to see it (Burada, 1922, p. 35).

Becoming a permanent item in the repertoires of cultural institutions, the staging of the operetta *Baba Hîrca* represented a transition to a new stage in Romanian composition. The appreciation of the Iași musicologists George Pascu and Melania Boțocan reinforces the reception of this work across the ages: “Staged for years at the National Theater in Iași, especially during the

¹¹ Operetta with the meaning of diminutive opera, not at all in the modern sense (original note).

Christmas and Easter holidays, the operetta *Baba Hîrca* has kept awake in the conscience of the people from Iași not only the figure of Flechtenmacher, but also the stylistic ambiance of a music from a distant age, as if it were a perpetual impulse for the continuation, on new coordinates, of a culture whose foundation had been laid since the first half of the 19th century” (Pascu; Boțocan, 1997, p. 59).

The negative criticisms of Romanian interwar musicology was later reviewed from an objective historical perspective: “The very harsh objections to the music of this operetta as well as to many other compositions from the age in which our national creation began to crystallize must be expressed with a certain restraint, since the artistic level of many works was negatively influenced by the poor development of our music, and by the limited interpretative possibilities of the performers, who featured in double roles, both as actors and lyrical soloists” (Cosma, 1975, p. 305).

Although many articles were written about *Baba Hîrca*, the perception of Flechtenmacher’s compositional creation in his own time was rather limited. It is certain that in 1861 Nicolae Filimon considered him one of the first musicians to have stylized the Romanian folk music treasure: “Filimon sees Flechtenmacher as the founder of national music, the first composer who used the folk music treasures in cultivated compositions. It is not surprising that his music, especially *Baba Hîrca*, is given as an example to the composers who wanted to cultivate the dramatic genre and intended to be useful to the people by producing a music impregnated with folk resonances. Filimon did not hesitate to compare Flechtenmacher to Ion Wachmann in the chronicle *Prăpăstiele Bucureștilor* [Teachings of Bucharest]: “Romanians found in their compatriot Flechtenmacher the national composer who, feeling as a Romanian, could compose authentic Romanian music” (Cosma, 1976, p. 216).

The same Nicholas Filimon reinforces the above-mentioned assertions with some short pseudo-musical remarks about the exuberance and the national spirit characterizing Flechtenmacher’s composition, referring to other works of the composer (*Țăranul român* [Romanian Peasant], 1, No. 8, 1861, December 31) as well: “The music in *Cârlanilor* [Yearlings] is composed by Mr. Flechtenmacher in the unique style he had the chance to create in Romania in the simple, sweet, and very national style that has the merit of going straight to the heart of the Romanian and awaken in him the most suave and enjoyable feelings” (Cosma, 1976, p. 215).

In the same manner, in 1862, he wrote about the music of *Coana Chirița* (*Țăranul român*, Bucharest, 1, No. 15, 1862, February 18): “The music of this play is written by Alexandru Flechtenmacher, the famous composer of the orchestra (music) from *Hîrca* and the first to set the basis of a Romanian music. It is graceful, spirited and lacks pedantry, which makes it enjoyable to the Romanian people” (Cosma, 1976, p. 215).

Very resonant was the opera *Fata de la Cozia* [Cozia Girl], composed in 1870¹², which, at the time, was considered to be a landmark in the shaping of the opera genre. In this regard, the 1885 press (*Familia* [The Family] newspaper, 21, No 23, 9/21, 1885, Oradea Mare) reports: “Among the pieces performed, a novelty was *Să tremure dușmanii* [May the enemies tremble] from Flechtenmacher’s work *Fata de la Cozia* [Cozia Girl], unfinished due to the death of his only son. The misfortune that deprived a parent of his one and only consolation also deprived the Romanian music of the only monument it could have had until today. For, judging by the fragments left, scattered here and there, where the misfortune spread them, *Fata de la Cozia* [Cozia Girl], the first Romanian opera, was a real masterpiece and the aria sung by Mr. Herescu, a bass of colossal power, did nothing but prove its value and deepen our regret that we do not own the whole work” (Roșca, 1987, pp. 60-61).

The later impact, in the 20th-century musicology, is contradictory; discussing whether the lyrical drama *Fata de la Cozia* [Cozia Girl] by Al. Flechtenmacher was completed or not, Octavian Lazar Cosma said: “After a long accumulation in the theatrical musical style, Alexandru Flechtenmacher realizes his dream, composing around 1880 the lyrical drama *Fata de la Cozia* [Cozia Girl], in three acts, based on a libretto signed by Eugeniu Carada, having as a source of inspiration D. Bolintineanu’s ballad with the same name. [...] Called in some biographical articles ‘the first creator of Romanian dramatic music’, it is said that this work was finished, but the musicologist George Breazul claims the opposite (Cosma, 1976, p. 511).

Unfortunately, the truth cannot be found because the manuscript stored in the composer’s house in Mătău (Cîmpulung-Muscel)¹³ was destroyed by a fire.

4. Conclusions

We believe that the questions raised by this research are open-ended, because late 19th-century music criticism captured only a few details on the composition techniques, the structural organization, the rhythmic-melodic or vocal and stage interpretation of various performances. The press shed light on these pieces only at an informative level, mentioning titles, composers, and interpreters and even omitting some details due to, on the one hand, the authorities’ indifference to the musical phenomenon and, on the other hand, the editors’ sheer ignorance of particular stylistic or musical language features.

However, the attempts made by the personalities active in the cultural and artistic life were real and unrelenting, their results being guided by the desire to promote music with specific national traits.

¹² Unfinished due to the major emotional impact caused by the death of the composer’s only son.

¹³ Details on the arias *Să tremure dușmanii*, *Trâmbița răsună* and *Balada Fetei de la Cozia* may be found in: Cosma, 1976, pp. 512-514.

This research aimed to discover new dimensions of Iași-based music, placing special emphasis on the critical reception of the composer Alexandru Flechtenmacher. We have followed its reflection in the Romanian press, starting from the first accounts in this respect, and ending with the subsequent assessments formulated in 20th-century musicology. Although the texts that tackle musical issues are quite few and social aspects prevail in the commentators' list of interests, by combining the information provided by general literary/historical/social sources with the details included in specialized articles we can create a new perspective on late 19th-century Iași-based compositions.

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