

## Sabin Pautza beyond borders and time<sup>1</sup>

ALEX VASILIU, Professor PhD  
 “George Enescu” National University of Arts Iași  
 ROMANIA\*

**Abstract:** Being part of the group of Transylvanian and Banat musicians who started their activity in Iasi, Sabin Pautza stood out as a complex, original, spectacular personality. The “engine” of his creativity was innovation – as a teacher at the “George Enescu” Conservatory, conductor and composer. A powerful “engine”, assembled from the “model pieces” of the whole European musical culture and of the young but original North American musical culture. Sabin Pautza has attracted students with his original, direct, integrative way of teaching knowledge in the harmony course, bringing together academic and pop-rock-jazz works; he founded one of the most valuable choral ensembles in the country – *Animosi* –, he has adapted his culture and inventiveness to an astonishing variety of compositional techniques and genres: the choral piece in classical and modern styles, the light music song, the musical, the quartet, the concerto, the symphony. In his youth, he enjoyed public success, the appreciation of the musical profession (including the Romanian Academy Prize), and had his works published on record. His creative adaptation allowed him to establish himself as composer and conductor of the Plainfield Philharmonic, USA. He acclimatized to the American musical environment also as a teacher, orchestrator, conductor. Sabin Pautza has succeeded in transposing famous poems by Mihai Eminescu into music, and his pieces for choir are among the Romanian masterpieces. His music, regardless of genre, has passed all the tests of time with flying colours and is still listened to today with surprise, interest and delight.

**Keywords:** “George Enescu” Conservatory, Plainfield Philharmonic, choral pieces, classical and modern styles.

### 1. Intrada

What spiritual geographical space significantly nourishes the formation, the evolution of creator’s personality? The space where one has appeared in life, where the first steps of knowledge were mounted, or the one that allows unabridged inventiveness? The primordial status specific to the earth from which a flower emerged is almost undisputable, as a successful transplant into a downright contrasting climate owes much to conjunction, to the new organism’s power to adapt and to endure. These questions shed light on the essential data of a protean, apparently contradictory personality. Should we

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\* [alexvasiliujazz@gmail.com](mailto:alexvasiliujazz@gmail.com)

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consider the moments when important composers' lives began, it would seem that zodiac signs also explain to a sensible degree the fundamental features of certain people of spirit and creation: Georg Friedrich Händel – 23 February, Richard Oschanitzky – 24 February, Béla Bartók – 25 March. Anyway, among the ground rules of Pisces and Aries the obvious ones are belonging to the artistic universe, the apparently surprising versatility of a lifetime's creative preoccupations, a pleasant nature in society, a reflexive inner climate favouring interrogation, generosity, sincerity, a spirit of action, the strong headedness of supporting personal projects, boldness, an interest for novelty, the opulence of ideas. Many of these qualities can easily be found with the three mentioned composers and with Sabin Pautza. Obviously, in variable proportions. Yet, the resemblances, here and there the identity are easily detectable.

## **2. A general view of his own musical evolution**

In the order of the explanations of a general nature displayed so far, Sabin Pautza's place and date of birth were essential. The Călnic of Reșița belongs to the multidimensional ethnic-spiritual universe specific to the Banat, favourable to the formation of a young man's artistic personality through the powerful, natural link to the traditions of the native region in conjunction with the sensitivity to Western influences. Born on 8 February 1943, Sabin Pautza experienced as early as his childhood, followed by his adolescence, the privations of the intensely obsessive, for the Romanian political authorities, Proletkultist policies for over a decade (1948-1963) but was lucky enough to have a fundamental relation with the familial-regional universe. Gramophone records with tracks recorded in the motherland of jazz itself, North America, found their place in the family home. The young man's precocious resonance with this type of music received a shot at value through a half hilarious, half serious detail: he also had at his disposal an off-tune piano with an identical sonority to the real or mechanical pianos, which reproduced as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and a long while into the next, in America's poorer bars, the ragtime repertoire enriched by Scott Joplin, James P. Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, Thomas "Fats" Waller and other successful practitioners of the dancing musical style. A style with admirable melodic qualities, with absent names in these lines but exclusively retained in the generous dictionaries with detailed historical information. These were Sabin Pautza's first "antennae" turned towards the popular musical tradition of North America, which the official censorship in the beginning of his formation as a musician could not "dismantle". It was not able to, since the American, Western European radio stations and those from the neighbouring former Yugoslavia were freely broadcasting this type of music.

I am here opening the parenthesis due to a specific "detail" for the evoked time slot: Sabin Pautza was expelled from the high-school in Reșița because he

organised an instrumental ensemble interested in Dixieland. What was left was a first experience, it's true, smaller in dimensions, similar procedurally to Richard Oschanitzky's experience at the same time at the Conservatory. The innocent atmosphere, rhythm and sound of the defining style for the dancing youth of jazz scared the management of the educational institution, faithful to the official attitude, suspicious in those years of any public manifestation favourable to Western European and American culture. This radical action was framed in the context of the political events of 1956 Hungary, which generated the retreat of the authorities within the limits of repressive policies, as it naturally remained a flaw in the postwar history of Romania. All the more so since top personalities of culture and science in our country suffered the tough effects of the reprisals, of official preventive action.

The Conservatory freshman's pleasant surprise was that in the select restaurants of Bucharest most of the musical programmes were actually constituted by the dance music with a primordial jazz character. The happy (but officially unaccepted) dictatorship of American jazz, with primitive and classical styles gradually joined by the contrasting lights of modernism, was also clarified for the Banat native, acclimatised for a few years in the cultural environment of the capital city.

Supplementary arguments supporting the integration in the normalcy of musical actuality were the permanent broadcast on Romanian radio stations of American jazz under the name imposed by Moscow, "stage music" and the same Richard Oschanitzky's example, his older colleague from the Conservatory. The former brilliant student at Mihail Jora's composition class, unanimously appreciated by colleagues, by teaching staff, had already been awarded two important prizes but had been hunted away from the higher musical education institution exactly because of the free display of his passion for jazz, an attitude which stirred the invariable political and administrative punitive measures resuscitated in the years 1958-1959.

Of course, the period of his studentship was important for Sabin Pautza because he was trained under the guidance of prestigious instructors, who familiarised him with the compositional manners ordered from the Baroque period until close to the core of the modern era, as much as the latter could be freely studied in the period 1958-1965, the year of his graduation. One must mention Ion Dumitrescu – harmony, Victor Giuleanu – theory, Tudor Ciortea and Ștefan Niculescu – musical forms, Marțian Negrea – composition, Marin Constantin – choir conducting. The word "free" lost its inverted commas as late as the post- 1989 period, when Sabin Pautza revealed in the audio-visual and written media the substantial influence immediately exercised by Richard Oschanitzky onto him over the course of his studies.

“In ‘61<sup>2</sup> I met Oschanitzky. When he heard me playing on the piano especially music influenced by jazz, by the styles of the American pop songs of that time, he urged me to write arrangements, orchestrations. He gave me some of the pieces that he had been commissioned, he had 12 on the table at the same time and he could not finish them all. At the time there weren’t that many people who orchestrated. Apart from Radu Șerban, Richard Bartzler, Jean Ionescu, Vasile Vasilache Junior there wasn’t anyone. Later Bogardo, Cristinoiu appeared.” (Vasiliu, 2011) “[...] there were a few great men who revolutionised the art of orchestration, such as Berlioz, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss. I learned from Richard Oschanitzky, who had this gift of timbrally colouring the music” (Hotoran, 2023, p. 125) “I consider him the most important musician that I have met in my life. And I have met many, I’ve worked with many appreciated ones, but he was the man who moulded me, he was my mentor. I had this opportunity, although he was only 5 years my senior. / When I was admitted at the Conservatory, I was 17 years old, I was a child. [Then] I wrote some sketches for string quartet that were played live there. We were about seven candidates and he happened to be there. He was in his fourth year. [...] I entered Marțian Negrea’s class, who had come from Cluj, the only one among our professors who had studied in Berlin, Leipzig and not in Paris. / Oschanitzky took me under his wing and at 17 years of age I started working with him. I was orchestrating for the composers of easy-listening music of that time. I’ll give you some names: Aurel Giroveanu, Temistocle Popa, Camelia Dăscălescu, they were well-known composers of hits but they did not orchestrate. We’re speaking of the years ’60-’62. [Later] I orchestrated all of Alexandru Mandy’s pieces [...]. I had this opportunity, because [Oschanitzky] took me under his wing and taught me. [...] he told me: “it’s high time you started working”. And he gave me a piece to orchestrate, which was then awarded a prize at the Mamaia Festival. It’s called „Unde ești, fericirea mea?”, it was sung by Cornel Constantiniu, composed by Aurel Giroveanu. [...] I returned three days later with the orchestrated piece and he said: “it’s good but no harp here, we don’t work with harp”. That was the moment when he accepted and passed on a work I had orchestrated. I wasn’t even 20, yet, I was 18 in ’61.” (Hotoran, 2023, pp. 127-128)

The story of orchestrating musical ideas belonging to other authors continued decades later, from 1984, on American soil. A musician from Hollywood would send him the melodic themes for films in their piano versions for orchestration.

Like his colleagues born around the year 1943, among whom I mention here Corneliu Cezar, Costin Mioreanu, Costin Cazaban, Iancu Dumitrescu – Sabin Pautza began his major compositional experiences (I am writing the word

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<sup>2</sup> A year in which Sabin Pautza was a student at the Bucharest Conservatoire.

“experiences” also considering his first successes) in the years of the relative, brief ideological liberalisation in Romania (1963-1971). It was a first wave with stimulating effects on the cultural level and in general. It was then that the discussions about the reforming ideas and opera accredited by Stravinsky, Bartók, Stockhausen, the Darmstadt School, the Polish school, the input of electronic instruments were greenlighted, it was then that necessary propaganda on the radio was organised through colloquia and the broadcasting of recent opera, official priority was given to the vocal-instrumental repertoire from the Italian Renaissance.

The second auroral beginning of multilateral self-assertion for Sabin Pautza was constituted by meeting Achim Stoia, the rector of the “George Enescu” Conservatory. Integrated as early as 1943 in the musical society of Iași as a professor of theory, solfeggio and harmony at the Conservatory, the Transylvanian from Mohu, county of Sibiu, allowed his education, his experience as a composer in the classical style to be “corrupted” by the harmonic, stylistic innovations that he became acquainted with during his studies in Paris. Acutely suffering from the dissolution of the Conservatory in 1950, contributing to the maintenance of the musical life of the city as a conductor of the orchestra and the choir, as manager of the Philharmonic, as an author of adaptations of traditional instrumental works and of compositions in the Romanian style, additionally having the vocation of nurturing, of supporting talented young people, Achim Stoia profited in the highest sense of the word from the renewed foundation of the institution in 1960, attempting to offer conditions that would befit the activity of young people of superior professional qualities. In 1962 he supported conductor Ion Baciú’s transfer from Ploiești to Iași, in the following years the Stoia-Baciú tandem proving to be a powerful ferment of rapid musical evolution in the old city. Achim Stoia is also owed the entrance of the three young graduates of the Bucharest Conservatory in the similar institution which had returned to life – as the infusion of an active, organised, innovative, specifically Transylvanian spirit dynamised the musical life of the place. I will only name here the ones who were employed at the Conservatory one after the other – from the county of Mehedinți Vasile Spătărelu (1963), Anton Zeman from Reșița (1964), the second native of Reșița, Sabin Pautza (1965).

An atypical reality in the Romanian higher education of those years, the Iași Conservatory did not have professorship tenures for most theoretical disciplines occupied by personalities with didactic experience. The exception was Achim Stoia, who offered the only 22-year-old youngster harmony courses and seminars. Sabin Pautza taught, without being anyone’s assistant, conducting, composition. One ought to mention that not only the ones who had entered the Conservatory as professors in the years 1963-’64-’65 enlivened the musical life of Iași – the list of the teaching staff, of instrumentalists from

Transylvania and Banat who ensured a new flow in this area of the country to pedagogy, to the art of performance, is sensibly longer.

Music creator Sabin Pautza also enjoyed the advantages of a multidisciplinary musical education at the Bucharest Conservatory (composition, choir and orchestra conducting), of having the “instruments” necessary in order to convert scores into sonic-expressive realities. “Instruments” that had long been well calibrated (the philharmonic orchestra and choir) and especially invented to spread new works – personal ones or belonging to world creation. One should mention in chronological order the instrumental ensemble “Musica Viva” founded by Vichentie Țușcă (1967) and the Chorale “Animosi”, organised by Sabin Pautza. Naturally, the two illustrious models stated by Dorin Pop (“Capella Transylvanica”, 1955) and Marin Constantin (“Madrigal”, 1963) played an important role – as Marin Constantin had also been Pautza’s choir professor at the Conservatoire. I can only imagine the maestro’s appreciative words about the one who forged “Ave Maria”, because he undoubtedly read the score composed by young Pautza, who revealed the carats of his composer’s talent as early as 1956.

The relative liberalisation occasioned to young Pautza the study of the techniques, of the aesthetic meanings of conducting and modern composition in 1970 Italy (in Sienna) with three renowned pedagogues: Franco Ferrara (among his disciples one can mention Riccardo Chailly, Riccardo Muti) – Franco Donatoni (his courses were attended, among others, by Giuseppe Sinopoli, Pascal Dusapin, Essa-Pekka Salonen) – Bruno Maderna. I tend to believe in Maderna’s strongest influence on the Romanian student because of his ambivalent creative interest in the genres and forms accredited centuries before (the requiem, the concert), for the modern, atypical writing modalities and instrumental formulas. In fact, taking part in the master-classes in Italy, especially in the ones held by Bruno Maderna, meant for Sabin Pautza the connection to the ideas, the experiments of the most important creators of compositional modernity, should we consider the Italian musician’s education and collaboration, of amazing polyphonic stylistic coverage and polygraphy, with personalities such as Francesco Malipiero, Hermann Scherchen, Luigi Dallapiccola, Pierre Boulez, John Cage, Luigi Nono or Karlheinz Stockhausen.

The second zigzag itinerary covered by Maderna among compositional genres and styles – including the creation of scores for theatre performances – was successfully enriched by Sabin Pautza after his return home. Other authors’ melodies in the genre of easy-listening music, which he never ceased to orchestrate or which he composed, the scores destined to the performances of the Theatre for children and youth from Iași, the creation dedicated to mixed choir, chamber ensembles, the symphonic orchestra, his uninterrupted interest in the Anglo-American pop-rock values, which he minutely analysed in his harmony lectures, thereby stimulating students’ interest and admiration,

attenuating or neutralising the more or less negative reactions of some of his chair colleagues – everything contributed to the constitution of a personality of recognised rigorous musical education, talent, creative phantasy, consummate mastery of conducting technique, pedagogical success, also having as a final result the acceptance of his iconoclastic character. The environment, the habits of Iași, faithful to tradition, were vanquished by the restless young Banat native because the “wind of freedom” in the era was strong, while on the “ship” meeting the waves of modernity Sabin Pautza was joined by a numerous staff of Transylvanians and Banat natives who interpreted correctly the signals coming from Western Europe or the far-flung North America.

The value of the works composed by Sabin Pautza was confirmed until 1984 by the “George Enescu” Prize of the Romanian Academy, the Prize of the Romanian Composers and Musicologists’ Union, the Prize of the Romanian Television. Equally important were the very many distinctions obtained by the composer with every concert in which his symphonic, choral and chamber works were performed – I am not adding inverted commas to the word distinctions but they were accredited by the interest prefacing the wait and the success of every occasion. Irrespective of genre. It’s true, his success was different depending on the audience: on the one hand there was the success of his easy-listening melodies, of the musical commentary in theatre performances, then there was the success of his choral concerts (“Ofranda copiilor lumii” [Offering to the children of the world] had become thanks to “Madrigal” and other mixed-voice ensembles a veritable hit – the memorable “Electrecord” recording is a brilliant argument) and then there was the success of the quartets performed by “Voces”.

1984 was in the life of the man and musician Sabin Pautza *the Orwell year*. It was then that he chose North America as his new geographic-spiritual universe. Why not the closer, so welcoming, France, so convenient to Romanians, should we only consider his colleagues at the Bucharest Conservatory, Vladimir Cosma, Costin Mioreanu and Costin Cazaban. Was the Parisian compositional environment too generous yet with experiences of all kind, however, unfit structurally to the creator Pautza, more inclined towards the dramatism, the playful vivaciousness and the receptiveness of wider audiences – still keeping within the limits of impressive performances? Didn’t the model of the success that Vladimir Cosma’s film music enjoyed tempt him? Especially since Sabin Pautza mastered, like the virtuoso violinist in the years of his Bucharest studentship, almost all musical genres, equally proved to be a high-performance, inventive orchestrator. And his ease of compositionally adapting to the requirements of librettos or scripts I think would have placed him on a par with Cosma.

Sabin Pautza’s option for the United States of America is explainable. That was the offer of the moment. A believably promising opportunity since

North America has remained par excellence *the new land of the unprejudiced coming from anywhere*. Through its only two centuries of history, a New World in which traditionalism and conformism keep an unbalanced relation to the boldness of novelty, of experiment. The scales preponderantly tilt towards invention. I also believe that Sabin Pautza dosed through his vocation, intelligence and sense of balance the elements of rigorous European academic writing with the rhythmically ad libitum, original, melodically-harmonically-psychologically impressive elements of Romanian, East- and Central-European origin and the American (through blues and jazz) ones in an attractive, emotional musical performance, captivating to the last note.

Sabin Pautza did not cultivate as prime-conductor of the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra (New Jersey), an institution he led, preponderantly his personal stylistic options, but always observed the local audience's audition habits, accommodating them with perspicacity, continuity and balance to the novelties of compositional language or ethos. Praiseworthy arguments remain the selections of Romanian modern music which featured opera by Filip Lazăr, Marcel Mihailovici or Liviu Glodeanu. The promotion of the Romanian academic sonic art by Sabin Pautza also included the presence on the concert stage in Plainfield of well appreciated performers, among whom I quote pianist Dan Grigore, violinists Liliana Ciulei, Șerban Lupu, clarinetist Aurelian Octav Popa, lyrical bass-baritone Ionel Pantea. Balancing out the repertoire with monumental works in the history of music and entertainment work, the successes of the concerts of the Plainfield orchestra took shape (an admirable fact all over the world, all the more so on American soil) through an increase in ticket sales – arguments in favour of Sabin Pautza's entry among the emblematic personalities of the city. Critic Michael Redmond wrote in "The Star Ledger":

"Ever since the new conductor and manager took on the lead of the Plainfield orchestra, it became completely different. The programmes were different, performance changes. High levels of professionalism were reached, the results now are impressive." (Caraman Fotea, 2017, p. 54)

All the pieces of information selected here about Sabin Păuza's American stage (1984-2005) explain the composition prize of the International Contest of Salt Lake City (Utah), the "Rudolf Nissim" Prize of the Union of American Composers, the "Doctor Martin Luther King Jr." Grand Prize for composition, the recording of his works by "Swift Music Group" in the "Opera Omnia" series, the publication of his scores by the New York publishing house "San Nicobian", the quality of honorary citizen of the city of Plainfield.

The enunciation of some many successes, to which are added the beginning of his collaboration with Leonard Bernstein as an orchestrator, the admirable artistry of his polyphonically and long proven music as commentary of visual performances, stimulates the question of what prevented Sabin



Pautza's entry in the American world of film music authors. I think that the explanation is twofold: his relatively late arrival in the United States of America, at 41 years of age, and Hollywood's status of closed, exclusive citadel. The full credits at the end of cinema productions, broadcast industrially on television stations and various media platforms, are conclusive. This is undoubtedly a small regret – the musician's and ours. A shadow which must be removed by shedding light on the many stable successes in various genres.

Musician Sabin Pautza's fast self-assertion in Plainfield and not only was also explained through his proven professional qualities as a pianist and organist, by the swiftness of composing the lay or religious works commissioned. Additionally – an essential fact in the American world – through audience success. To these professional qualities there were added, equally important, the human Sabin Pautza's communicativeness, his sense of humour, the popularity he also enjoyed there.

The listed considerations, his family settling down in North America, would have fully justified a definitive stay in the New World. Yet, his psychological-emotional ties with his mother land were stronger. Neither could the luminous history of his evolution in his native land as a multilateral musician, an evolution accredited with so many successes, be pushed into the obliviousness that the new generations are subject to because of the lack of updated information, because of the Romanian reality in fast, continuous disorder. For audiences here, familiarised with his music before 1984, for younger listeners who discovered him as a conductor and composer after 1990, Sabin Pautza's name kept the resonance of quality, asserted itself as a reference. His musical culture, his experience as a *performer with a baton*, his efficiency and ease in working with orchestras have remained unchanged, reasons for pleasure for ensemble instrumentalists. Equally, the conducting courses held at the "George Enescu" University of Arts, the anniversary of the "Animosi" chorale in the historic hall 26 of the institution (nowadays the "Eduard Caudella" concert hall), the documentary film directed by Anca Sîrbu, the rhythmic broadcast of his works in the programmes of the radio station Radio România Muzical, on TVR 3, the extensive journalistic and detailed commentaries with examples from scores (Gherman, 2019, pp.42-51) – reflect the qualities of the complex musical work kneaded by Sabin Pautza. The recognition of his merits in his native region also took shape through the yearly organisation in Reșița of the "Sabin Pautza" International Festival, by inscribing his name on the frontispiece of the local Arts Highschool.

### **3. Fragmentary views of his creation**

Repeated underlining of the significance of the native ethnic-spiritual space comes into prominence in the detailed (here only selective) commentary of the musical creation branded by Sabin Pautza. But now the space can be

related to the spirit of the formative individuality. After the manifold permissive ethnographic confluences of the Banat, *Béla Bartók's* personality is worth taking into consideration. Sânnicolau Mare and Câlnic were the first richly nourishing melting pots for the development of the maestro and the disciple (Sabin Pautza being the rival with personal ideas). Some Bartók-Pautza resonances are evidenced as compositional principles and techniques. One must above all underline the Romanian musician's respect for the ancient tradition, first of all from Transylvania and the Banat, which Bartók continuously tried to impose on the academic musical environments in his native country, Hungary. These environments were exclusively favourable, at the confluence of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, to the repertoire of urban folklore in which the melodic-harmonic-rhythmic streaks were substantially modified at the will of urban clients, who would pay harmonists to satisfy their various wishes. Joining the first impassioned folklorists and composers in the Romanian space (Ion Bîrlea, Octavian Belu, Constantin Brăiloiu, Dumitru Georgescu Kiriac, Tiberiu Brediceanu), Bartók studied, using the gramophone, with unique rigour in remote villages at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several categories (*doinas*, *carols*, wedding songs, dancing arias, dirges, etc.), classifying them depending on their character, use a. s. o., accumulating the huge capital which "subsidised" an important series of his own academic works in various genres. Here is where Bartók own's words should be inserted, of out which two essential ideas stand out: the uniqueness of the ancient Romanian store and compositional techniques creatively fructified by Sabin Pautza.

"[...] out of all the peoples of old Hungary, the Romanians kept the probable original form of their music in the most relatively untouched way. The feature of a traditional music yet unchanged by urban culture and academic music seems to be the division of melodies into categories, according to the various occasions that they are played." (László, 1985, p. 221)

The techniques of the composer's referencing the peasant tradition accepted by Bartók – taken over by Pautza are the quote and the invention in the spirit of the original melody. Without following here the chronological order of their composition, I will choose a series of opera in which Sabin Pautza observed the two ideas-principles. *Suita cu colinde* [The Suite with Carols] and *Suita Margana* [The Margana Suite] for mixed choir illustrate the succession, then the well-argued combination, irreproachable as a musical result, of the **quote-invention** tandem. The initial display first draws attention to the beauty and originality of the carol melody, immediately naturally imposing the development process, the commenting on ideas through the counterpoint writing, through the gradually modernised harmonisation which in no way betrays the style, the spirit of ancient patterns. The attractiveness of these works bearing Sabin Pautza's signature is increased by the caesuras, by the rhythm changes (*Florile dalbe* – White flowers, *Mă luai, luai* – You took me, took me)

happening close to the nuance of fortissimo, changed with the *parlando* mode of delivering text (*Junii buni* – The good youngsters), by the pedal which stipulates the chromatic state in order to support the rich, modal harmonisation, enriched with modern chords, by the passing of the melody to the four voices (*Romanița* – The Chamomile). The original, spectacular character of the fourth episode from *Suita cu colinde* [The Suite with Carols] is reached by alternating the forte-pianissimo nuances and the decendingly *glissando* notes. So that the finale (*Noi umblăm și colindăm* – We walk and sing carols) reaches the brilliant but not ostentatious demonstration of the compositional craft for this type of vocal ensemble.

The expressive-architectural element observed by Sabin Pautza in most of his works, irrespective of genre, is the conclusive aspect, constituted out of clear tonal chords in forte/fortissimo nuances, having a hymnic, festive character. A side comment would be that the beauty of the melodic themes, the harmonic consonances, the mastery, the artlessness of his writing, the bright, festive endings observed the climate desired by the communist authorities but, as opposed to many obsequious works belonging to other composers, Sabin Pautza's delighted, finding a place that is difficult to win on the list of yesterday's public's preferences, enduring the criteria of today's audience.

The same observations fit the second series of opera for choir and soloists, *Suita Margana* (The Margane Suite), based on traditional melodies from Banat. One of the most spectacular moments is *Straga Nana*. The originality of the writing transpires in the intonation of the dynamic melody by the childish voices, alternated with the already mentioned *parlando*, as the whistled repeat of the theme by the same innocent voices harmonically supported by the voices of the mixed choir and the dynamics of the rhythm are increased (including from the point of view of the fine sonic nuance) with the help of bells. "Sări mândră" ["There goes the belle"] has long entered the category of Romanian choral hits taken over by many ensembles, imposing the conductor and choristers' experience and virtuosity, thus ensuring a rapid, stable success. The complexity of the writing, which does not bear on the lyrical beauty of the theme, keeping the purely Romanian introverted character and psychological-spiritual climate (in the first movement), the ebullient dynamism reached through the contrapuntal display of the melodic theme combined with the rhythmic accents obtaining through stomping and with the compound metre of the clapping, which are left to musicalise everything in the absence of the voices – this whole mix of elements denotes the novelty, the ingenious, inspired momentousness of the score. I do not shy away from considering *Suita Margana* [The Margana Suite] as one of the most valuable, most attractive Romanian musical "export products".

Sabin Pautza's next plea for the not only amiable but happy relationship between tradition and modernity was ordered in the series *Jocuri* [Games]. The

idea section especially involved the string instruments assembled as an orchestra, quartet, cello-strings-percussion, clarinet-piano or bells. The enumeration of the sonic-expressive devices indicates the line going through the far-off ancient background reaching the evanescence, the bitterness, the uncertainties, the modern dissonances of the last century and of this one. As early as the first measures of the *Series-opening games* the author's intentions, conception, techniques are clear. The modality of performance, the inflections, the sonorities of the Alpenhorns are not imitated but recomposed by the string instruments, even allowing the ear, accustomed for many decades to all manner of electronically-produced music, the temporary impression of the virtual sonic-expressive substance. The musical performance is admirably substantial, as the alternance of dream-like images with the dynamic, dancing ones evidences various strata of the ancient Transylvanian sonic culture. The diversity is increased by the soloist moments, by the free counterpoint of the "voices" in the ensemble, fed with melodic ideas "of yore". The drawing with a rhythmically *ostinato* feature, the *doina*, the dirge supported by the percussively emitted sounds on the body of the cello, the sonic canvas evoking an immemorial past felt as dream-like atmosphere – everything completes the fascinating musical performance. *Jocuri I* [Games I] is a first example (out of the works commented on here) of self-sufficient music, also having the merit of stimulating the imagination of listeners, of documentary film and video reportages illustrators. Longer or shorter sequences have the pictorial force, which would place them in relation to visions entirely different from one another belonging to modern figurative creators – I'm thinking of Ion Țuculescu, Liviu Suhar or George Apostu. I hereby anticipate one the qualities of Sabin Pautza's music, which I wish to comment upon preferentially, according to its merit, in the concluding part of these notes: his *artfulness*. Even if I will defer until then from repeating it, it will stay as an implicit continuous presence, since it is the "trade mark" of his entire body of works.

*Jocuri II* ([Games II]) also observes the law of contrast. From the start, through the dance melody from Maramureș displayed in its original form through the well-known witty couplets, now mentioned vocally, soloistically by an instrument in the orchestra. The contrast is maintained in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement (the traditional Andante), then in the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement, a scene of traditional dance in which the melody is again reproduced as it reached us from the past. The composer's inventive spirit is consistent, as the ensemble weaves "the harmonic canvas" unaffected by the "lanky" sounds, "hanging" chromatically. Maybe the alternance of the short rhythmic-dynamic sequences with the introspective-lyrical ones suggests the change in morale through the feast prolonged by the authoritative or supplicatory urge ("hai ș-om be" / "let's drink"). The supposition is allowed by the composer, whose constitutive sense of humour is also consistent in communicating through the language of musical sounds. The

supposition changes its paradigm, its stylistic and iconic background in next tableau: the sprightly melody, also of traditional nature, is drawn so as to recall the elegant dances from 18<sup>th</sup> century Western European princely courts. Just for a moment. The repeat of the supple melody in a simple arrangement for the entire chamber orchestra restores the Transylvanian landscape and spirit.

Again contrast in *Jocuri III* [Games III], since the first musical act is radically modern in type through the rubato manner of the cello, somewhat assimilable to modern jazz improvisation, close to the “free” style, an improvisation lacking the classical guidance of the blue notes, of blues. A rubato performance slightly touched by traditional melody in Sabin Pautza’s score. It is only the orchestra that directly relates to the Transylvanian suggestion, as the harmonies alternate between a modal conformism supporting the melodic idea and the chordal fluctuations. The allegro cavalcade from the second episode, also stimulated by a traditional melody, observes the stylistic role of the cello but is rhythmically dynamised by the percussion. Intensely lyrical, only supported by the measured steps of the cellos in tutti, the soloist’s singing overwhelms, affects, especially since it is beautifully clothed by the ensemble of strings. The andante-allegro-andante alternance is another original element, contrasting but not surprising, which ensures diversity and dramatic fluency to the music. The flyback to tradition remains contrasting because it is now that the cadence from the Western European academic concert appears, preceding the last allegro in the 4<sup>th</sup> movement. One of the most beautiful, inspired, substantial and spectacular pages in Sabin Pautza’s creation. I imagine that his mentor, Béla Bartók would not have disliked this *Joc III* [Games III], either.

Tirelessly inventive, also betting on the “card” whose symbol is the word “different”, Sabin Pautza thought of the clarinet and the viola for *the fourth round of Jocuri* [Games]. It is important stakes, provoking the concentration of ideas, still numerous, still contrasting, on only two instruments. As the ancient-modern relationship needs to still be observed. Actually, the word “needs” does not justify its presence, because the tradition-modernity tandem was, at first unconsciously, then dualistically natural-programmed, a mode of existence for composer Sabin Pautza. In the case of these *Jocuri* [Games], the traditional nostalgia and dance melodies became a dialogue between the clarinet and the viola, more of a confessional dialogue, which clearly illuminates the ideas, the expression, the nuances.

*Jocuri V* [Games V] is concentration pushed to the limit, the only type of sonic source remaining the bell, while the duration of the work does not exceed three minutes. Although he never sinned by inflating his opera with few ideas, Sabin Pautza traced now the connecting line between the ultra-short range of the expressive offer owned by the tubular bells and the time reduced to a minimum. The contrast is, again, obvious because there lacks tradition of any

kind. Commissioned in the United States of America, this work could have at least left room for suggestion, to a fine allusion to Afro-American music, since it was dedicated to the memory of the civil-rights advocate Martin Luther King Junior. But the game of sonic iridescence, the rhythmic impulses produced by the bells constitute, as it continuously happens in Sabin Pautza's music, a reference to the clearly assumed theme, an incentive for the imagination.

*Trio de coarde în șapte mișcări* [String trio in seven movements] exemplifies the ways in which tradition can inspire and free *the impassioned game of modern ideas*. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement there's no lack of ancient melody in the violin solo – a meditation subtly influenced (as in Bartók's works) by Oriental inflections. The ancient ethos is additionally clarified in the 4<sup>th</sup> movement through the way of playing the violin reminiscent of traditional practice, through the Alpenhorn-like sounds suggested by the flageolets of the violin. In the 6<sup>th</sup> movement, a melodic theme treated in counterpoint in two ways of performance: with the bow and in pizzicato. One of the most modern, most interesting pages in Sabin Pautza's creation. A performance of intelligently, subtly “staged” ideas. The 7<sup>th</sup> movement, another brilliant achievement of the writing, in which the originary-original (this is not a cheaply speculative formula) melodic motif from the 1<sup>st</sup> movement shortly returns. Again, one should admire the masterful transformation of the melody of ancient growth in a typically modern form of language and expression, in a short soloist and group “cadence” resonating with the entire series of musical act which confiscate attention and impose admiration. Towards the end, Shostakovich's musical signature appears slightly changed. The entire musical substance of the String Trio could find its beauty, dramatism, strangeness, sonic fullness, momentousness in the version for a string orchestra.

Given the presence of very young voices, *Suita pentru orchestră și cor de copii „Canti profani”* (The “Canti profani” Suite for Orchestra and Children's Choir) should have been another performance, this time “in sight”, of the relationship between folklore and modernity. A tradition represented by the childish songs typical of the Banat (*Maico, Maico* – Oh, mother). In the beginning the vocal writing is simple, since it is limited to displaying a melody from children's repertoire, yet the text continues in stressed *parlando* fashion, while the enchanting melodic development, lyrical in nature, receives contrapuntal robes. The attractiveness is owed to the alternance of the dynamic-lyrical sequences, to the combination of novel instrumental timbres (winds, piano, celesta, percussion), to the lyrical melody displayed vocally in canon. The andante-allegro opposition, added as a stipulation to the title of the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement (*Dalbe flori* – White flowers) is obvious in the contrasting writing for the female soloist (lyrical) and the ensemble's rhythmical voices in the following sequence of this musical act, conveyed intense rhythm through the overlaying of complex voice measures and the instrumental apparatus. These

elements are resumed equally spectacularly in the last movement (*Dimineața ziuă bună* – Good morning to you). The simplicity of the text in the first measures of the triptych *Canti profani* was delightful but deceiving, because the vocal ensemble needs solid musical training in order to face the melodic and rhythmic complexity in its score, overlaying the typologically identical combinations left by the author to the orchestra. However, the aesthetic-expressive-sonic-musical result proves admirable.

The 10<sup>th</sup> piece from the Suite for orchestra *A Musical Journey* can be included in the series of opera variably owed to ancient culture. More than in the *Canti profani* cycle – the clear, simple but still inspired orchestration of a dance song from the Banat. His manner is reminiscent of the directness, the exuberance of the *Romanian Dances* in composers Béla Bartók and Theodor Rogalski's vision, of the *Three pieces for strings* by Constantin Silvestri (these especially with the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, *Pesante*, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, *Cantabile*), but over the course of the *Musical Journey* for which Sabin Pautza chose a multitude of ethnographic spaces (Mexican, English, German, Finnish, Polish, Swiss, Hungarian, Serbian, American) only “packaging” every exhibit in a simple relevant, easily convincing orchestral commentary proved to be feasible and attractive.

Through the series of musical cultures which he probed in his creation, even in the suite *A Musical Journey*, Romanian composer Sabin Pautza proved to have taken over the model instituted by his mentor Bartók, a creator interested in Central and Eastern European, Oriental, Asian traditions. Having been permanently attracted as early as his childhood years and his professional self-assertion by the representative music of North America – the blues, traditional urban dances, jazz – being intensely active in this geographic-spiritual space, Pautza naturally allowed his compositional thinking, his sensitivity to be marked by the new musical universe where he landed. Under various forms, in different creative gradations and dimensions. Considering the topic from the simple to the complex, one can mention the beginning and the ending of the *Musical Journey* symmetrically dedicated to America (by evoking revue shows), *Jubilee Simfonieta*, both tenderly, respectfully, evokable keeping George Gershwin's shadow, arguing in favour of the excellence of the craft of composition and arrangement, the mentioned artful quality springing forth images or fitful as commentary of video products, a quality impossible to ignore in this context. As his own vision on the American musical tradition, now under the guise of the mixed-choir voices, one should mention *Missa Brevis* and *Ebony Mass*. And the cosmopolitan *Migratory Creatures* proves its originality through the combination of medieval chant, the musicality of the English language and the insertion of asymmetrical measures from the traditional Romanian dance melodies. In the case of this miniature, the link to

the American environment gains a foothold through the melting pot of cultures – the essence of spiritual diversity.

Coming out of the sphere of influence of the multi-ethnic space of Banat, of the paradigms of the Bartók model, but observing the values of tradition of whichever nature, especially the values of immemorial tradition and from individualised centuries for the Romanian musical culture, Sabin Pautza felt an attraction towards the songs in the Lords's houses. He did not elaborate a considerable number of works with this specificity, yet *Byzantine Alleluia* remains one of the closest, most respectful ones regarding this bridge between centuries.

The beauty, the originality and profoundness of Mihai Eminescu's verses inhibited many Romanian composers' natural wish of approaching this universe. The word "inhibited" does not belong to me. Vasile Spătărelu (the author of the unforgettable poem *Floare albastră* – "Blue flower") and Sabin Pautza confessed to me how great their fear was of not being able to gather in musical sounds at least some of the meanings and climate of the stanzas, regretted the bulkhead which prevented them, after one of two successful attempts, from recovering the imponderable link. The latin proverb *non multa, sed multum* relieves maybe the melancholy of the composer evoked here, grateful for being able to retain in his scores much of the poetic climate, musical to start with, which reigns over the poems *Lacul* [The Lake] and *Peste vârfuri* [Over tree tops]. Two of the few *opera* in natural resonance with Eminescu's poetry.

### **3. Strictly referencing the old and new European academic canons**

The complete acquirement of compositional techniques which marked the evolution of academic compositional art was proven by Sabin Pautza through very respectful scores towards modalities, styles, through arrangements and orchestrations. Edifying are *Due canzone* in the manner of Girolamo Frescobaldi, *Passacaglia and fugue in C minor BWV 582* by Johann Sebastian Bach, *The Great Fugue opus 133* by Ludwig van Beethoven, *Suite opus 10* by George Enescu.

The impression of austerity is clear as early as the exposition of the well-known Bach theme. As opposed to the original version, uniquely and majestically expressive due to the organ sonority, from the very first notes of Sabin Pautza's version the pious state of the notes written by Bach beginning with the year 1708 is progressively touched by the poetic throb noticeable at the double basses, fully illuminated in the continuation of the theme reproduced at violins and winds. A poetic taste underlined by the subtle accents required by the orchestrator of the violins. Keeping the introverted climate of the famous generative motif in a different sonic state is admirable. The symphonic orchestra plays over the course of the entire work exactly the role of gradually



inoculating the musical substance invented by Bach with the finesse of the instruments invested with individual passages and the overall sonic-expressive opulence, observing the massiveness imposed by the character of the original score by the overwhelming sonority of the organ. One can say that the version under discussion accommodates Bach's music to the symphonic climate, taking its place among its the most pertinent and valuable answers.

The luck of having attended his studies at the Bucharest Conservatoire when the ideological liberalisation was beginning, his participation in the modern composition classes in Italy allowed composer Sabin Pautza to join apparently unrelated techniques and styles, also unrelated to tradition – wherever it may originate. Exemplifying can be the preclassical type of concerto grosso “staged” together with the melodics and the rhythm of Romanian traditional dances or the integral indeterminacy and the jazz treated separately in work obsequious to strict determination or to the freedom ensured by improvisation. The opera based on the strict determination and conditioning of mathematical calculation can occasion a commentary included in a separate chapter. I will stop here on one example: *Jocuri II, concerto grosso pentru cvartet de coarde și orchestră de cameră* (Games II, concerto grosso for string quartet and chamber orchestra). Like other works by Sabin Pautza, this work can be subtitled *The dance of surprises*: the exposition, the development of the originary melodic drawing does not have a horizontal, but a vertical configuration, as the subject-theme proves its new ideas, harmonic strengths in the commentaries displayed in parallel. A polyphony is thus born, which avoids the load of a throng of ideas, since the melodic seed has a powerful flavour, while the dancing rhythm eases perception.

Sabin Pautza maintained the courage of orchestral reformulation of masterpieces, focusing on one of the most controversial works composed by Beethoven: *The Great Fugue opus 133*. A courage increased by the existence of several orchestral versions anterior to his initiative, like the ones signed by Wilhelm Furtwängler and Felix Weingartner. His courage was all the greater since other prominent conductors had imposed them in the international musical life through concerts and recordings, sonic documents now available to anyone. I will take as an example only the version recorded by Herbert von Karajan with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. This space does not allow for a comparative commentary of at least the versions left from Furtwängler and Weingartner. This is why I will mention, beside keeping Beethoven's style and spirit, the soloist role awarded to the winds, with their timbral-nuanced contribution. A role integrated with the consistent dialogue with the strings, integrates with the overall general framework.

Having taken the liberty of orchestrating the scores for organ and string quartet left from Bach, from Beethoven – Sabin Pautza was audacious enough to convert the musical substance of *Suita a II-a pentru pian, opus 10* (Suite no.

2 for piano opus 10) in the same instrumental formula. The *Toccata* received an increased festive flavour, the folds of the new attire of the *Sarabanda* and the *Pavana* amplify the musical substance as sonority, as richness of the expressive nuances, accommodate the opus to the post-Romantic symphonic climate with Debussy and Ravel connotations, a climate which prolonged with rays for a long time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *Bourrée* places this music even more soundly in the wake of an era and a style proper to Puccini, Stravinsky or Respighi, undoubtedly ensuring its own charm. I think Theodor Rogalski, Mihail Jora would have felt even happier as Enescu rivals, had they written such versions, Rogalski would have serenely accepted Sabin Pautza's collegial communion, had he met him.

One should underline the most recent homage paid by Sabin Pautza to composer George Enescu by orchestrating the oratorio *Strigoi* [The Ghouls]. Based on Enescu's sketches, Cornel Țăranu finalised the version for voice and piano inspired by the eponymous lines, while Sabin Pautza completed the orchestral version. It is common knowledge that in 2018 conductor Gabriel Bebeșelea recorded the *oratorio* together with the Symphonic Orchestra of the Berlin Radio, with soloists Alin Anca, Rodica Vică, Tiberius Simu and Bogdan Baci. The recording was published on disc that same year under the brand "Capriccio", while in 2021 the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the "George Enescu" International Festival was opened with this novelty related to Enescu's creation.

#### 4. The great synthesis – the symphony

A desired, accepted bet by any academic composer, drafting a symphonic opus is an experience of uncertain finality since the principles and writing technique can surpass the expressive force, the attractiveness, the hedonistic side of music. The first bet, the only one commented upon here, was a winning one because the stated dangers did not threaten Sabin Pautza. I believe that *Simfonia I „In Memoriam”* (Symphony no. 1 "In Memoriam") represents the type of *ars combinatoria*, which defines his whole music. The fugue, the passacaglia, the toccata, the choral conform in Pautza's symphony to the Romantic compositional style wholly hospitable to melodies of wide volutes, emotionally laden, amply expressed through the opulent but not fastidious sonority of the symphonic orchestra. Another traditional element, if I may call it that, a recognisable element as early as the first pages of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, *The Fugue*, is the melodic signature close to the one corresponding to Shostakovich. As it happens in the works of this type left by the Russian composer, the dramatism also concentrated by Sabin Pautza in four notes is invested into the character of the whole substance in the first musical act. The melodic signature becomes through the repetitive technique a way of accelerating towards polyphonic-sonic culmination, additionally tensed with the primordial

contribution of the cymbal and a leitmotif which acquires, according to the law of rhythmic contrast, stormy or lyrical appearances.

Again as inspiration owed to the illustrious models of Shostakovich or Prokofiev, the quotation from well-known songs becomes “the spark” of the developing explosion in the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement. In the first section, *Passacaglia e toccata*, the explosion envelops the entire orchestral edifice, in which the “dance” of melodic, rhythmic, sonic contrasts amplifies the dramatism of the musical substance. Over the course of the superb demonstration of symphonic writing, Shostakovich’s melodic signature appears in its original drawing, which urges me to believe in the Romanian composer’s obsession. I’m not saying this in a negative sense, but thinking of its germinal quality. The contrast proves to be a happy one in the next section of the second act, *Lamento, Pastorala e Corale*, the conflictual character being replaced by an innocent melody typical of the childish repertoire. A trail of light extinguished by the powerful dramatism returned from the melodic matrix of the symphony – the new melodic signature. Mentioned in passing at the beginning of these notes, one the fundamental qualities in Sabin Pautza’s music – *artfulness* – also manifests its monopolising presence in *Simfonia I* (Symphony no. 1).

## 5. Conclusions

Much can be said definitively about Sabin Pautza’s creation. One argues even more in favour of his talent-knowledge of timbrally colouring music through orchestration. He composed for instruments considering them voices (a basic influence of Marin Constantin). He used the digital technique only as an efficient device of writing and editing scores, not as an instrument in itself, with sonic-expressive virtues.

“The Return” is the title chosen by Daniela Caraiman Fotea for a chapter of her volume *Sabin Pautza – maestrul* (2017, p. 59), a chapter in which the musician’s deeds of art and life are recounted after the return to his native country. Having arrived towards the end of the portrait sketch looking for its last essential touches, I believe that this word, “return” can express the fundamental characteristic of his music. From the melodies listened to and danced in Transylvania, in the Banat of far-off centuries or closer to us – to the rules and calculations of the fiery 20<sup>th</sup> century modernists, from the sadness of blues and the rhythmic incandescence of classical jazz – which he listened to as child in Romania and as a grown-up in North America, from the Portuguese bossa-nova and the songs of peoples again listened to at home, then in the homeland of the world’s immigrants, to the poetic-philosophical susurrations of Eminescu’s lines – which always perturbed his sensitivity, from the austerity and introspection of the Romanian church chants to the inventive dances for chamber ensembles, and to the combinational art of compositional techniques enlisted in the history of music – everything meant for Sabin Pautza an

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argument for keeping his national, stylistic identity. The models taken over did not maintain his compositions at the stage of pastiche, of intelligent but obsequious reformulation. On underground walkways or in natural light, through refined suggestion or free, total display of the traditional streak in his country of origin, the music signed by Sabin Pautza is a delight, a spectacle, a revelation.

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