

Richard Taruskin - “Titan” of Universal Musicology. On the Fascination and Imperative of *Cursed Questions*

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Abstract: On the first day of July 2022, the headline of an article in the *New York Times* officially announced the passing of the great American musicologist Richard Taruskin. The news of the loss of a world-renowned researcher, whose prolific activity changed ancient paradigms of musical thought, constitutes an impetus for the new generations of musicologists of the 21st century in approaching music history and analysis from a new, multi-branched and integrative perspective, constantly adaptable to the reality of our days. The present study aims to systematize and promote the ideas gathered in the last volume published during the author’s lifetime, *Cursed Questions: On Music and Its Social Practices* (2020), which comprises in a condensed form Taruskin’s conceptions regarding the relationship between music, external factors and the other adjacent disciplines (aesthetics, philosophy, sociology).

Keywords: Taruskin, sociocultural musicology, historiography, analysis, musical essays.

1. Introduction

The passing of the renowned American musicologist Richard Taruskin (April 2, 1945 – July 1, 2022) led me to recall the contexts in which I first heard his name, when I came into contact with certain scientific studies that were necessary at the time, but which later aroused my interest to (re)discover his books, articles, ideas, way of thinking. Just as in the field of musical creation there are composers with a predilection for broad, massive genres, standing out through the force of ideas, the wide-ranging perspective and the monumentality of their works, in musicology there are researchers with a robust, solid personality, endowed with a fascinating ability to write, to articulate their ideas in an original, provocative and often polemical way. One such author is the American musicologist Richard Taruskin, whose contribution in the field of historiographical and analytical research is essential for universal musicology through the extraordinary volume of his work and the penetrating spirit evidenced in the manner of expression, problematization and systematization of the information, ideas and conclusions gathered in 18 books exceeding 10000 pages! To these volumes he added a great number of chapters included in collective volumes, musicological studies published in scientific journals and academic publications, as well as many

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newspaper articles published on the websites of institutions with a long journalistic tradition in the U.S.A., such as *New York Times* or *New Republic*.

2. Richard Taruskin – sociocultural musicologist, historiographer, researcher (scholar) – philosopher

Through his polemical manner of debating certain topics considered sensitive or difficult to approach, through the direct style of formulating the essence of the debated issues, sometimes having a sharp tone, which could be felt even in the written texts, Taruskin was considered a “pit bull of academic music”, because he “has apparently never encountered a dispute he isn't eager to ignite” (Kosman, 2014, web source). Taruskin is not a neutral or easy-to-read author; he did not write about music in general or to leave posterity an (one more) updated and revised history of music. He was the type of researcher-philosopher, who expressed his goal openly and directly: the hope to contribute to the expansion of the horizon of knowledge, to increase the level of permanent information in order to get as close as possible to the truth. As he states in the introduction to *Cursed Questions: On Music and Its Social Practices*, “it is no business of mine as a historian to take sides; my business is to show the sides (and measures) taken, by whom, and with what result” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 12).

For his entire work of investigation, interpretation and critical debate of early music, modern Russian music and the history of Western music through extensive socio-cultural contextualization of each historical stage, Taruskin was awarded the honorary title of “professor emeritus” and numerous prizes, distinctions, medals, the most important being the *in Arts and Philosophy*¹, awarded by the *Inamori* Foundation. The official announcement of the *Kyoto Prize* stated: “The quality and volume of his work reveal that in music, creativity can be found not only in composition and performance, but also in meticulous discourse contextualizing the art – and that this, in itself, can contribute significantly to the world’s music cultures.”²

His books represent a fundamental pillar of the music history from the modern perspective at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the third millennium. In a metaphorical statement, Richard Taruskin’s professional stature stands almost visually like a “gigantic colossus”, an imposing “titan”

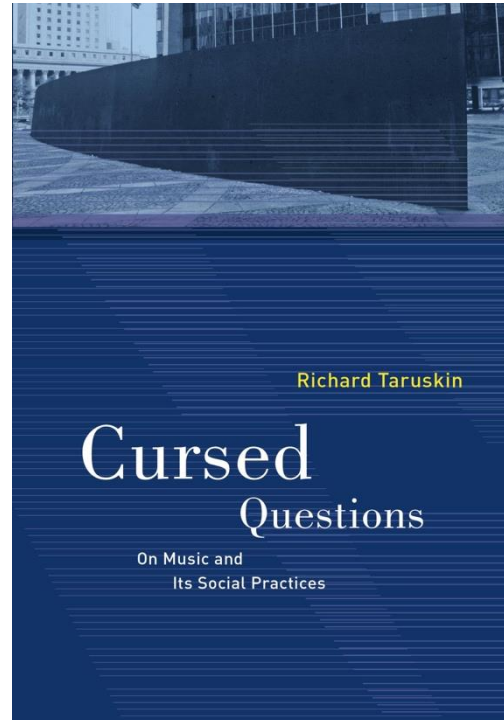
¹ This prize is considered the most prestigious distinction offered to artists or researchers that are not usually nominated for the Nobel Prize, as Kathleen Maclay stated (representative of UC Berkeley Media Relations from UC Berkeley, Arts and Design Department), in the article *Music Professor Wins Prestigious Kyoto Prize*, published on 20.06.2017. Until R. Taruskin, Kyoto Prize was offered only to conductors and composers (Olivier Messiaen, John Cage, Witold Lutosławski, Pierre Boulez, Yannis Xenakis, György Ligeti, Nikolaus Harnoncourt). <https://artsdesign.berkeley.edu/literature/news/music-professor-wins-prestigious-kyoto-prize>. Accessed on 20.07.2022

² https://www.kyotoprize.org/en/laureates/richard_taruskin/

among the numerous treatises, covering eras, cultures, currents, schools, social and political issues of approximately 1500 years.

3. *Cursed Questions: On Music and Its Social Practices* – a must-read of musicological bibliography

Richard Taruskin's last volume, published during his lifetime at the University of California Press in 2020, includes a series of studies previously published in specialized journals or presented to the public in the form of scientific communications at international conferences and congresses where Taruskin was invited. Starting from the book's title, *Cursed Questions: On Music and Its Social Practices*, readers understand that reading the volume cannot be done from a naive perspective, for general information or analytical interpretation. The author's questions, although starting from that natural wonder of people, in a philosophical perspective facing the fundamental problems of life, neither offer clear



answers, nor they remain rhetorical; instead of nostalgic resignation or discouraged retreat in the face of the most controversial issues, Taruskin changes his attitude by reformulating the question, even if he finds no answers, because certain questions are not adequately formulated and the answers given to any question are beyond the capabilities of real human beings, as he himself considers. Therefore, we arrive at those necessary, vital, obsessive, “cursed” questions as in the title of the volume. The phrase is inspired by the poetry lines belonging to the German poet of the first half of the 19th century, Heinrich Heine, from whose poem entitled *Zum Lazarus* he extracted the first quatrain:

*Laß die heiligen Parabolen,
Laß die frommen Hypothesen -
Suche die verdammten Fragen
Ohne Umschweif uns zu lösen.*

Knowing Russian language at a high level, Taruskin quotes in the introduction of the volume the translation of the Russian writer Mikhail Larionovich Mikhailov, making a subtle poetic analysis between the two

versions. The choice of M. L. Mikhailov's translation is justified by the strong censorship that existed in the Tsarist Empire after the fall of Emperor Napoleon I, so that certain words and expressions with possible risky connotations had to be avoided. The strophe quoted by Taruskin in English is as follows:

*Give up your allegories
And empty hypotheses!
To cursed questions
Give us straight answers!*

R. Taruskin's guiding idea is expressed in the volume's introduction: "to encourage the regulation of practice in accordance with ethics, seeing such regulation in terms of what in mathematics is called an *asymptote*: a line that a curve perpetually approaches but never reaches as it heads toward infinity. The asymptote symbolizes the perfect practice that we will never achieve. The curve of our actual practice must nevertheless be seen in relation to the unreachable goal, and must be seen to approach it" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 10).

The subject matter of this volume is extensive, widely spread, focusing on various topics, from the general history of music and also from the problems that concerned Taruskin, regarding the methods of historiographical research, the correct styles of expression within the historical, critical or analytical discourse, reaching the deep areas of interference between musicology and aesthetics, philosophy, sociology, psychology (with application in the artistic field). Taruskin debates the so-called "historical evolution", "aesthetic autonomy", "the essence of music" or of any art, the "elitism of Western European culture", the notion of "tradition" promoted with a romantic sense of high, superior art during the 19th century, the idea of "censorship" applied to certain works or creators without clear criteria. Taruskin's way of discussing made him a real "myth buster" of modern musicology, due to his reluctance and arguments systematically brought to dismantle myths such as the evolution of music over the centuries (as if it were oriented towards a specific goal), the reluctance to the idea of a purely artistic essence, since the meaning of any form of culture or art is given by society, so it strictly depends on the human factor. Thus, Taruskin believes that any conception of the European culture's superiority is outdated, obtuse and extremely dangerous for the world of the new millennium, which has gone through the catastrophes of the 20th century, stating that "Art is not blameless. Art can inflict harm" (Robin, 2022, web source).

The content of the volume highlights the gathering of thirteen chapters with different themes, containing either studies or papers previously published with a different purpose, or scientific communications presented at certain international conferences where Taruskin was invited to give lectures, or essays, articles, other texts prepared for different events, brochures, art projects. Even if the essays do not have a common theme, they are linked by a common goal: to

deepen historical information through new details and arguments and to allow a better understanding of the topics or phenomena under discussion.

The first chapter – *The History of What?* – is actually the introduction to the entire cycle *The Oxford History of Western Music*, published in the opening of the first volume. Since his books have generated a lot of reactions, written in the form of a large number of reviews, some with neutral criticism, others vehemently formulated, the author insists on an essential idea that he had as a general principle in writing the history of music for the Oxford Publishing House: “This set of books is an attempt at a true history” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 10), marking the difference between a historical survey and a history written according to certain scientific drafting rigors historiographical. For this purpose, he cites as a motto Francis Bacon, who aimed for “events to be coupled with their causes”, by the simple “narrating the fact historically, with but slight intermixture of private judgment” (Bacon, 1857-1882, pp. 419-420, *apud*. Taruskin, 2020, p. 30), without the interference of personal perspective, which implies taking a particular side or a point of view against another group of upholders. After delimiting the temporal, geographical framework and the categories of musical genres targeted by the title of the six volumes, the author then explains the meaning and purpose of his critical study, focused on the complexity, heterogeneity and resistance over time shown by the music disseminated in the West part of the world. By critical study, Taruskin means that kind of research that “does not take literacy for granted, or simply tout it as a unique Western achievement, but rather ‘interrogates’ it (as our hermeneutics of suspicion now demands) for its consequences” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 32). Even if the tradition of Western music is frequently attacked in the more recent debates of researchers in the last 10-20 years, due to the disputes about discrimination of race, gender, nationality, that are so promoted all over the world, Taruskin assumes the risks generated by the postulate of his six volumes: “The literate tradition of Western music is coherent at least insofar as it has a completed shape. Its beginnings are known and explicable, and its end is now foreseeable (and also explicable)” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 32).

The second chapter deals with the issue of censorship applied to certain composers, creations, techniques or compositional styles, where the author also traces the situations in which the term was used inappropriately. For this reason, the title of the chapter is interrogative – *Did Somebody Say Censorship?* –, with the purpose of an invitation to debate, to clarify the terminological meaning and differentiate cases of censorship from situations in which it was desired to attract attention, to consider some works as reactionary, deliberately rejected in certain contexts or socio-systems political. Therefore, some compositions have come to be associated with the idea of resistance to coercion, with the movement of resistance in front of totalitarian ideologies just because they resort to forbidden techniques, languages or styles. This form of speculation gives rise to creations

whose aesthetic value is questionable in other contexts, but which are successful because they resonate with certain aspirations of the general public. Taruskin presents several cases in the history of music in which the original text was adjusted, due to the anti-Semitic connotations acquired in the 20th century by works considered representative creations of Western music (J. S. Bach, *Matthäus-Passion*, the choir *Sein Blut komme über uns*; W. A. Mozart, *Requiem in D minor*, *Offertorium* section, words *Quam olim Abrahae promisisti* became *Quam olim homini promisisti*) or of imperialist glorification from the 18th-19th centuries in some works with poetic text (L. van Beethoven, cantata *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, published posthumously and discovered only in 1997), of the incompatibility of the tsarist context with the new Soviet regime after the Second World War (Mikhail Glinka, the patriotic opera *A life for the tsar*), later, after the fall of communism, numerous works being vehemently disapproved due to their dedication to Stalin and his political ideology (Igor Stravinsky, *Cantata on Old English Texts*; Sergei Prokofiev, *Symphony no. VII, Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*, *Cantata Zdravitsa* – meaning *Toast to Stalin*; Dmitri Shostakovich, cantatas with patriotic titles such as *Song of the Forests*, *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*) or because of the more recently discussed aspects of racial discrimination, gender discrimination, issues of feminist emancipation, clothing preferences, orientations in personal life, social tolerance or terrorist acts (Arthur Sullivan, the comic opera *The Mikado – The Town of Titipu*; Aaron Copland, the symphonic work *A Lincoln Portrait*; John Adams, the opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*). Taruskin's conclusion to these examples in the chapter on censorship is couched in a clarifying idea: "(...) the act itself is neutral. The motivating values are what count, and they cannot be inferred from the act itself, only from our knowledge of the circumstances and our evaluation of them. For such knowledge and assessment, we ourselves are individually answerable. Not the act but the values are what deserve praise or censure" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 71).

The third chapter – *Haydn and the Enlightenment?* – proposes a deeper meditation on a historical period with broad reverberations on all Western European societies and cultural domains existing in the occidental space, from the perspective of its connection with the cultural phase considered as a reference point for the history of European music: Enlightenment and musical Classicism. The direct link appears between the essay published by Immanuel Kant in 1784, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* [*An answer to the question: what is the Enlightenment?*] and certain features of style and language in Joseph Haydn's works. A more complex question emerges from the title of this chapter, concerning the relationship between equity and excellence. Since the 18th century, artists were aware of the power of culture to resonate with human nature, to make spectators, listeners, readers vibrate in front of art. But the concept of "genius" applied to a limited number of thinkers, creators is in obvious contradiction with

sensus communis. Following the composition of the oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, Haydn was received as a common composer, with a musical thinking that seemed too bright, expressing an optimism considered inappropriate and lacking in piety when compared to the oratorios known until then, which had a sober, rigorous style. Composed in the last years of his life, the two oratorios reflect the impact of similar genre works created by Haendel and heard by Haydn after his travels in England, “exemplifying the natural religion of enlightened thinkers — including the Masons, Haydn having joined a Vienna lodge in 1785” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 98). The two works reflect, in fact, the free perception of divinity, the joy generated by the act of creation both in a religious and artistic sense, the celebration of nature through a pantheistic approach in the oratorio genre. The essay thus brings a series of arguments in favour of Haydn, who was a point of balance between traditionalist perceptions of time and tendencies to reconfigure particular socio-cultural paradigms. The author explains why Haydn can be considered a representative of the Enlightenment musically, “Haydn’s excellence had raised the standard, allowing humans, accordingly, to improve in their equality” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 97).

The next chapter generated one of the most acute scientific disputes in the academic community, targeting a phrase heavily used in the field of aesthetic investigation of music: “aesthetic autonomy”. The article, originally published in two consecutive issues of *Archiv Für Musikwissenschaft* in 2006 (both in English and German), invites readers to meditation, analysis and reordering of some long-circulated conceptions of the so-called “aesthetic autonomy”, idea found both in a general philosophical plan and in the case of the arts, especially in music. The title of the original study, also maintained in the title of the chapter integrated in this volume – *Is There a Baby in the Bathwater? On Aesthetic Autonomy* – is unusual, bizarre, suggesting a hard-to-find connection between the two components. The connection is, of course, metaphorical and with a slightly ironic tone on the part of the author, the aesthetic field being compared to a child whose joy is naively manifested without having the self-consciousness of that state, so that the disputed autonomy is an illusory feature, similar to the freedom of the child in the water bathroom. Starting with the organization of the meanings of the term “autonomy” into four categories, Taruskin launches a series of questions on the existence of an essence of music, artistic immanence in relation to the social, cultural environment and other external factors, on the genres considered by some aestheticians as “absolute music”. The author believes that „the doctrine or discourse of aesthetic autonomy is an attempt to answer a question – the big cursed question – (...) why it is that people sit still and enraptured in concert halls, intently watching and listening while people on stage zealously hit skins with sticks, blow into brass tubes or cane reeds, and scrape horsehair over sheep gut. Anybody who does this will know what *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck* is all about without elaborate explanations (...). We know that art is valuable for its own sake, worth our time

even if it does not give us new or useful knowledge” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 107). Taruskin debates the ideas of I. Kant, “for whom music was more to be compared with perfume as a sense experience than with philosophy as a cognitive one” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 101), of E.T.A. Hoffman, who considered instrumental music superior to vocal music and who appreciated works composed disinterestedly, without solicitation, dedication or financial remuneration (as *ars gratia artis*, for art’s sake, as they say), which „merited the epithet ‘Romantic’ (implying fully autonomous) in the strongest sense” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 103). Taruskin also brings up the views of Th. Adorno, who wrote in 1957 an essay on *Neue Musik, Interpretation, Publikum* [*New Music, Interpretation, Public*], promoting the selective broadcasting of creations approved at that time on certain radio stations, calling them “music worthy of human beings” (Adorno, 1999, p. 37, *apud* Taruskin, 2020, p. 145) – expression that betrays an attitude of superiority of the author in front of “dichotomy between a monolithic culture industry and a heroic, equally monolithic avant-garde of resisters” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 145). Another famous author that Taruskin cites and comments in this essay is the historian Carl Dahlhaus, who launched the famous game of highlighting and emphasizing significance by requiring a choice between *history* of art or history of *art*, an issue approached and discussed in the previous *Cambridge History of Music* volumes. Taruskin calls this binomial *The Great Either/Or*, considering that “the essential task of the art historian is not to choose between mutually exclusive alternatives, but to attempt their integration within a narrative that describes the mutually influential and mutually accommodating — in short, the truly dialectical — interaction of powerful agents and the mediating factors that specify their affordances” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 137). One may feel a sharp and somehow pained tone of speaking in Taruskin’s ideas, generated by the speculation of A. Schopenhauer’s ideas in the context of our contemporary existence, in an „halcyon vision of intellectual life, still floating ethereally, like a fragrant cloud, above the reality of worldly activities”, characterizing “the tenacious belief of many theoreticians in the guiltless and bloodless history of philosophy, science, and the arts” as a “growing lie with every passing year” of our century. “At the dawn of the third millennium, with the guilty, bloodstained twentieth century at last behind us, it seems incredible that historians could still subscribe to such a view” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 137). Towards the end of the chapter, Taruskin comes to the well-grounded and fully argued conclusion that it is much more important to ask the right questions than to look for answers, one such example being the disappointment of some authors that music could make humanity better, more humane. Taruskin’s question in the end invites us to ponder: “Can’t we find better reasons to cherish art?” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 146).

The following chapter – *Shall We Change the Subject? A Music Historian Reflects* – brings again into discussion earlier topics, referring to censorship, historical objectivism, transgression as an act of violation of norms, but

transformed by certain artists into a method of intentional dissent sought in a certain context. The chapter was originally conceived as a presentation for a Stanford University conference in 2008, after the *Oxford History of Western Music* series had already been published, and the author was often asked what he was going to do next. In response, Taruskin wrote in this text that “historiography could be described as a distortion of what has happened and there will always be something happening” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 147). Another topic approached in it is the semiotic tripartition theorized by the Swiss linguist Jean Molino and applied in the artistic field as musical semiology by Nicholas Ruwet and Jean-Jacques Nattiez. Taruskin disapproves the delimitation of the artistic phenomenon in the three planes that has become famous (the *poietic* level, different from the *poetic* meaning, the *neutral* level and the *esthesis* level, distinct from the *aesthetic* meaning), which correspond respectively to the composer, the music itself and the receivers, commenting that any act of presentation of the creative process and of the resulting music lies in the realm of the *esthesis* level, however objective that description may be. Furthermore, this tripartition was also transposed by Nattiez on a theoretical level, where the *poietic* level corresponds to historical musicology, the *neutral* level to musical analysis, and the *esthesis* level aims at musical criticism. What Taruskin calls the “poietic fallacy” refers to the confusion generated by limiting musical historiography to the history of composition, as if “only composers are regarded as authentic historical agents” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 157). Other mistakes noted by Taruskin are the “organic error”, whereby music is far too often compared to a living organism, which grows and develops according to the laws of nature, the error of the aesthetic autonomy of music, which is seen as independent of the social, cultural and political context, as a superior preoccupation of a select class of people with “high” intellectual life. I also read and went with interest through the ideas related to the necessity of consonance between the multiple interests of a researcher, in Taruskin’s case between his side as a historian-musicologist concerned with the past and that of a journalist in the music field, connected to the present, both activities implying the same responsibility of research, documentation and presentation of events in the most realistic possible way, close to the truth. Even if Taruskin’s pragmatic perspective often suggests a pessimistic mindset, aware of the decline of the public’s general interest in music performed in concert halls and a mentality deeply anchored in the harsh reality of life, the author reveals his confidence in the power of change and the hope that his work is relevant and can contribute to this change: “If the music historians of tomorrow turn out to be a little less impressed by claims of autonomy, and a little less in awe of transgression, and if my work will have contributed to that change, I will die a happy man. And if it should rub off on social attitudes as well, that will be a musicological blow against some of the real evils we now face” (Taruskin, 2020, pp. 178-179).

The sixth chapter – “*Alte Musik*” or “*Early Music*”? *On Pseudohistory* – is a very interesting foray into the compositional techniques of relating to the music of the past. The idea of this research appeared in Taruskin’s interests following the invitation to a conference organized by the “Arnold Schönberg” Center from Vienna in 2009, originally entitled *Die Wiener Schule und die Alte Musik*, with its English version *The Second Viennese School and Early Music*. The translation of the two variants highlights some differences that determined Taruskin to prepare a scientific presentation about the Viennese school in general in relation to the second Viennese school (a subject which must be contextualised in a larger history, extending over several centuries, mixed with other European traditions) and the old music (*Alte Musik* from the Austro-German terminology used in the first half of the 20th century) in relation to the early music (*Early Music* from the Anglo-American cultural sphere). The distance from the Viennese composers which were emblematic for the Western European music and the approach to Russian culture, for which he does not bring words of praise, on the contrary, rigorously documented arguments, has attracted severe criticism in academic communities all over the world. A. Schönberg, A. Berg and A. Webern are not presented in the heroic light of the opposition and dissident movement of the Nazism heyday, but from the perspective of their studies, essays and letters left to the posterity, from which Taruskin quotes those specific fragments about the conception of German universality and the superiority of Austro-German composers. On the other hand, Igor Stravinsky occupies a significant space in Taruskin’s research, who includes him in this debate due to the exploitation of the so-called early music in all stages of musical creation, even if most of his works with early music references were framed in the neoclassical phase. Although the appreciation of Stravinsky’s music is obvious in all of Taruskin’s papers and books on Russian culture, the approach, the arguments he made, the use of terms such as “pseudohistory”, “historical fiction” in characterizing some of Stravinsky’s works, or “verisimilitude” instead of historical accuracy, „not historical accuracy but historical verisimilitude – „truthiness”, as we call it now in the States” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 185) generated vehement reactions from musicians such as Robert Craft, who had a close friendship with Stravinsky. Taruskin’s intention, although it seems anti-German, anti-Austrian and anti-dodecaphonic, is to “understand Webern’s, Berg’s and Schoenberg’s relationship to the past in its cultural context, and in its contribution to musical discourse” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 197), a goal that involves both historical narration and critical perspective, precisely because of such a tense and problematic socio-political context.

Chapter no. 7 – *Nicht Blutbefleckt?* [Unstained by Blood?] – was conceived in a written version in order to be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Musicology* edited by the University of California, which proposed as general subject the musical life during the Cold War. At the same time, the study was

written with the intention of providing an answer to the well-known musicologist Charles Rosen (1927-2012), who in 2006 had written an extensive review of the OHWM series, entitled *From the Troubadours to Frank Sinatra* and published in *The New York – Review of Books* (Rosen, 2006, web source). Starting from the style and techniques of composers Milton Babbitt, Aaron Copland, John Cage, Samuel Barber, Taruskin seeks to emphasize the necessity to consider the Cold War period (1947-1991) as a historiographical period with distinctive features and defining impact on the American musical culture. The most important result of that historical interval was the creation of a favourable climate for the stimulation of scientific discoveries, the support of cultural projects and the introduction of doctoral studies in composition. Starting from the premises of the correct scientific attitude, so necessary for a historical researcher, Taruskin emphasizes his responsibility to contextualize, not just to report or narrate, being aware at the same time of the difference between historiography and jurisdiction. Taruskin refers to the imperative need for the historian to maintain a skeptical position in front of any mass movement or pressures to take sides in a conflict, or encouragement for the so-called autonomy of thought and action. The mission of the historian is, in Taruskin's opinion, "if not to dispute taste, at least to interrogate and account for it; and above, all, to disenchant auras and demystify discourses" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 214). What Taruskin considers "legitimate historiography" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 213) aims at the researcher's neutrality, because "advocacy is not a historian's task, and a historian who indulges in it has become a propagandist" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 213). Even if the dispute between Ch. Rosen and R. Taruskin reached a high level of tension and extension of articles addressed to each other as scientific answers to the debated issues, in the world of the 21st century, these aspects seem already faded, overrate, less and less relevant. Taruskin was aware of the speed with which time fades the importance of any dilemma, because it is precisely the context, he invokes in almost every debate that changes the facts of the issues. What remains valid for any historical stage or period is the urge to exchange of ideas, the imperative of discussion, the need for balancing any point of view. At the end of the chapter, Taruskin expresses his intention to dedicate a tribute to Ch. Rosen, to whom he is deeply grateful „that by his own avowal incited my antagonist into action" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 226).

The eighth chapter – *What Else? On Musical Representation* – seems to debate a largely consumed and perhaps clarified subject, aiming at the source of music's suggestive force that particularly preoccupied 19th-century musicians and critics. More recently emerging theoretical disciplines such as hermeneutics, semiotics, or concepts like intertextuality, metatextuality, structural and topical analysis of sound discourse, are based on the force of representing music as a constitutive element *ab initio*, as an immanent factor in deciphering the artistic message, even though the generation of formalists pleaded for the existence of a pure, absolute music, without the need for any descriptive, programmatic

content. Taruskin, already known for his “fallacy of essentialism” in music (holding that there is no essence of music itself), became interested in the new discussions surrounding this topic, noting that the dispute was not generated by the agreement or disagreement of musicologists with music’s ability to express something, but with the existence of many available alternatives: *express*, *evoke*, *arouse*, and so on, in addition to *represent*” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 227). Starting from Eduard Hanslick’s famous volume, *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854), Taruskin goes through the necessary bibliography for the subject, pointing out important ideas for the evolution of the debate on representation in music: Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (1967), Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (1991), Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (1980), Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (2000), Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (2000), Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes* (2004), Charles Nussbaum, *The Musical Representation* (2007). An important aspect in the discussion of sound representation is the emergence of the term “extramusical”, used by many of us to define and explain romantic music with programme, starting from H. Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*. Taruskin investigates the origin of the word, noting that it does not exist in the OED (*Oxford English Dictionary*)³, but another well-known online dictionary, *Merriam-Webster*, states that the first use dates back to 1923, without having an explicit formulation of the complete meaning, without reference to the musical field. After reminding some famous cases in the history of music about the attribution of more than lyrical meanings, with an epic or even theatrical-dramatic tendency about the unfolding of harmonic sequences or sections with different sonorities, Taruskin draws attention to the difference between the possible attribution of subjective meanings on the part of the listeners (a natural phenomenon for their different reception of music) and the particular cases of “poietic error” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 235), “ventriloquism” (Abbate, 1995, pp. 305-311, *apud* Taruskin, 2020, p. 235) or “aesthetic abuse” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 236) – all phrases referring to the attribution of meanings deduced by the listener to the composer himself, sometimes with too personal interpretations –. In verbal discourses about music, phrases such as musical expression, suggestion of sound images, stimulation of soulful experiences, evoking of sounds are often used, but, if we think strictly objectively, music does not have a meaning of its own. People are the ones who assign meanings surrounding things, especially in the case of those created by the human mind. But the question that started the debate still remains: does music have a real capacity to represent? And do listeners need the representation of music for a particular benefit? Taruskin’s answer is unexpectedly simple: “(...) we don’t need the kind of representation that

³ The term “extramusical” doesn’t exist either in Romanian Dictionaries.

Jonathan Bernard (arbitrarily denying octave equivalency) has provided of Varèse's space, or Allen Forte of Stravinsky's. These static images are indeed redundant reproductions of our intuitions, because they try to capture an abstracted image devoid of space and movement. But there is an inner space which composers and listeners do inhabit, where they can move and meet. Music, in representing it, provides the meeting place. What else could be its purpose?" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 251).

The next chapter – *Unanalyzable, Is It?* – starts another process of thinking and putting in order different ideas about music through a rhetorical question about analysis, whose implicit answer, offered by the author in the very first section of the study, is a capitalized NO. Taruskin's attitude also corresponds to our vision of the formulated problem, namely the relevance of the analytical approach, even in the case of the most hermetic works, by obtaining useful results, if the analysis is properly grounded and well directed. The situations mentioned in this essay refer to some of the "heresies" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 271) committed by Taruskin from an early age, contradicting another famous musicologist, Allen Forte, whom he challenged to a discussion and a clearer explanation of his analysis method presented in the volume *The Structure of Atonal Music*, published in 1973 at the Yale University Publishing House, known as *set theory*. This method consists in the segmentation of the musical surface into classes of sound heights (pitch-class) notated as sets of digits corresponding to the sounds. Although there have been other reactions to this theory (such as the reviews published by William Benjamin (Benjamin, 1974, pp. 170-190) and George Perle (Perle, 1990, pp. 151-172), the most highly tensioned dispute arose between Forte and Taruskin, due to the „very concrete and specific analytical terms rather than lofty theoretical generalizations" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 256) in Forte's case. My attention was drawn to Taruskin's way of conceiving his reasonings, by avoiding the use of conditional-optative verbs or impersonal verbs such as "may", "might" or "it seems possible that", and observing the rules of logic and argumentation when conceiving his premises and reaching to valid conclusions. The author emphasizes the idea that "evidence should not be regarded as optional to musicologists" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 262), because "the requirement of relevance requires a criterion of relevance, and the requirement of falsifiability requires a standard of proof. We want hypotheses, whether inferential or based on documentation, that can survive testing, not evade it." (Taruskin, 2020, p. 263). A technique that the author considers effective in the solid argumentation of a musicological research is the study of sketches, a method known under the scientific name of "genetic criticism" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 269), due to the investigation of the manuscripts left by a composer, either in the final version or in the form of sketches along his life. Even though it is considered an inferior stage of research, sketch study has a particular importance in Taruskin's opinion, providing essential information about the

compositional process of a musical work, the authentic intentions of the author during the creation, and sometimes about the reasons for changes that are difficult to justify. From the category of analytically controversial works, Taruskin focuses on Pierre Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître* from 1954, accredited by most theorists as a representative piece for the principles of the serial system in its most sophisticated state, being approached by Taruskin from the perspective of discovering the background behind the surface structure and the auditory perception of listeners. Along with musicologists Arnold Whittall or Alex Ross, Taruskin explicitly formulates the question of what a listener hears in a work based on sonorous aggregates, confessing that "My experience with such purported demonstrations of 'aural analysis' – and I have always sought them out at conferences – has been disappointing. Sooner or later, and usually sooner, the scores come out, and looking takes the place of listening" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 275). Even if he does not advocate an anti-serial music, bringing many arguments in favour of a composition that manages to combine the technical grammar of different sonorous systems with the aesthetic finality of a reasonable audition, Taruskin emphasizes, at the end of the chapter, his intention to „understand what was previously a mystery and learn to analyze the unanalyzable" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 281).

The tenth chapter – *Essence or Context? On Musical Ontology* – brings again to the attention of musicians familiar with Taruskin's views the question of musical essence and the ultimate principles of this art. Originally a material prepared for a conference in Vilnius with the generic theme entitled *Music: Essence and Context*, this study is focused on the difference between the conjunction and mutual exclusion of the two aspects referred to in both titles. Taruskin considers that the use of the conjunction "or" is the appropriate one in the debate about the essence versus the context of music. The deepening of the subject leads the discussion to the area of interference between the field of music and that of philosophy, inevitably implying elements of aesthetics. As Taruskin puts it, "the difference between us and philosophers is that we read their work but they don't read ours" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 283). Unlike philosophers, whose speech tends towards abstractization and generalization, historians work with concrete data to get as close as possible to the truth, and in the territory of the musical field, researchers in the history of music often undertake the activity of analysis, combining the description of events with the observation of musical details in the scores. We should be aware that the attribution of any semantic, aesthetic and sometimes psychological interpretations has nothing to do with the so-called "essence of music", because these meanings are given by composers and receivers. Taruskin disagrees even with this phrase, or with the notion of "music itself", because it creates one of the logical fallacies that he calls "organic fallacy", according to which music exists as an autonomous organism and would grow, develop like any other being in nature. Indeed, music, strictly related to

our concrete existence, is invented by man (even if we sometimes have the impression of the intervention of a divine force, superior to humanity), so it has an evolution determined by the development of society, the cultural environment and all the external factors that influence human civilizations. Also, in the perspective of the American musicologist, there is no such thing as “pure art”, because music would no longer have a real status, but a sterile existence, detached from concrete being, which would constitute a flagrant untruth. Moreover, any philosophical approach with the purpose of universalization of some values (which do not have the same correspondent on other existential levels) can generate irreconcilable contradictions with other disciplines, such as history, or with other artistic fields. Philosophical ideas are relevant to music insofar as they are constructed “as contributions to reception and interpretation, and therefore part of the history of our shared subject” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 283). Therefore, after bringing to the readers' attention fragments, ideas from the theories of authors who are concerned with aspects of aesthetics, philosophy and psychology of music – such as Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), Leonard Meyer (1918-2007), Joseph Kerman (1924 -2014), Roger Scruton (1944-2020), Jerrold Levinson (b. 1948), Nick Zangwill (b. 1957) –, Taruskin argues for a clearer vision, like that of the musicologist Karol Berger, who was concerned with *A theory of art* (1999) oriented towards observing the relationship between the transmitter, the artistic object and the receiver, where the author considers that “music makes us aware of how it feels to want something, without showing us the objects we want” (Berger, 1999, pp. 33-34, *apud* Taruskin, 2020, p. 305). Taruskin considers this model of thought superior, as “it seems to correspond to terrestrial music, that is, to music as we practice it here on earth” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 305). The author’s conclusion at the end of the chapter suggests the image of a man with modest and realistic thinking, for whom the universality of philosophy invoked by other authors on a general existential and musical level, denotes an attitude of arrogance and vanity. Rather, we need the relevance of a well-specified and delimited context.

The eleventh chapter – *But Aren't They All Invented? On Tradition* – was designed as a presentation given during a doctoral conference at the “Orpheus” Institute in Ghent, 2017, with the generic title *Traditions and Transitions*. The subject is challenging, involving many contradictory arguments that mark a wide area of disciplinary interference with general history, anthropology and ethnology, the native domains of the notion “tradition”. The migration of the term in the sphere of musicology and ethnomusicology occurred naturally, determining the possibility of drawing unitary directions from certain phenomena of the past to possible future developments. Although it seems a natural result of looking back and observing historical constants or cyclical processes of transformation, tradition has been used, over time, both as a pleading for the preservation of values and as a premise for the need for change.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau has a special contribution in differentiating the terms “state” – legal entity – and “nation” – perceived as a community with imaginary boundaries – (Taruskin, 2020, p. 310). A significant moment for the history of European culture and all arts was in the 19th century, when traditions, customs and particular forms of artistic expression became the foundation for the aspiration towards national liberation and affirmation of state independence. Thus, Romanticism created an individual consciousness (through the manifestation of the creative self) and a collective one (through the need for unity), problematizing several other important concepts in the debate about tradition: originality, authenticity, nationalism. On the other hand, the history of the 20th century highlights the most significant number of meanings attributed to tradition, which was also used as a political weapon, a method of social manipulation or racist, xenophobic, chauvinistic incitement through intolerance and an attitude of superiority towards other traditions, cultures, races, religions. Another frequently debated issue surrounding this topic is the “invented tradition”, a concept considered as oxymoron by Taruskin and theorized in two volumes published in 1983: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. According to the first mentioned author, “invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 1, *apud* Taruskin, 2020, p. 312). In order to broaden the perspective of understanding the tradition, Taruskin brings numerous examples, both from his personal life (as an inconsistent practitioner of the Jewish religion), professional (as a pedagogue oscillating between the curriculum and tangential discussions with students), and from the musical field, through well-known examples from history of the 20th century (for example, the conducting perspective of Pierre Boulez, concerned with the revival of tradition by calibrating modernism, the invention of “tempo/ metrical modulation” by Elliott Carter in his works or the interpretation of *Studie II* by Karlheinz Stockhausen – the first composition electronic published in the form of a musical score). The musicologists which Taruskin cites in these sections of his research as valid opinions on the music he speaks about are Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, with *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music* (2007), *Musicology and Performance* (2009), and Sean Williams, in *Interpretation and Performance Practice in Realizing Stockhausen's 'Studie' II*. After going through this chapter, I extracted some essential ideas about tradition: it is not a static object, composed of the sum of historical data gathered and systematized, but a phenomenon in continuous transformation, subject to inevitable change; there is no real opposition between the “real” and the “invented” tradition, the two aspects being rather in a

dialectical relationship, due to the logical understanding of the phenomenon by which any tradition was created at a given time, in a certain context, which determined the gradual emergence of a new practice; “spontaneity”, “immemorial” profile or “organic” foundation, frequently attributed to tradition, must be understood as metaphors with a rhetorical function, the terms being borrowed from art theory, philosophy or anthropology (Taruskin, 2020, p. 313-314). Therefore, if during the 19th century, romantic thinking promoted tradition as the perpetuation of some forms of art considered superior or elevated, nowadays, reality shows us that any artistic practice is constantly influenced by the social environment, and tradition is constituted by the sum of these free manifestations, which give it dynamism and vitality. “(...) Tradition, like art (but even more obviously), is to be regarded as a mutable social practice rather than a static condition, let alone a thing; and that it is the representation of tradition as static that is the political enemy, the thing to be unmasked.” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 28) At the end of this research, Taruskin draws attention to the idea that „tradition, being a social and cultural instrument, does not have a nature, hence no inherent predilections. It does what we need or want it to do. Our needs and wants are what we need to evaluate before we take a stand about the traditions to which they give rise.” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 339) In my own way of thinking, I join this conclusion that reflects the reality of life, tradition being an important dimension of human civilization through which we anchor ourselves in the experience of previous generations, shape our thinking, adapt our actions and **re-invent** our existence.

Chapter no. 12 – *Which Way Is Up? On the Sociology of Taste* – brings to the world of music a debate with strong reverberations from the space of social sciences, having as main subject the problem of artistic taste as a manifestation of musical preferences. As the study was published after having accepted the invitation to attend a conference in London, 2017, originally entitled *Music and the Middlebrow*, this chapter presents the stages of discussion between the involved researchers on finding a certain (temporary) consensus about the meaning of the term “middlebrow”, which contains different connotations with a discriminatory tone, starting from the linguistic structure, due to the imperative to relate that “middle level” to some marks or reference points. In order to arrive at some clear ideas about this subject, Taruskin begins with the meanings acquired by the word “middlebrow” over time in different contexts. The basic component of the term, “brow”, refers, in the most common sense, to social classes delimited according to family origin, political or social status, power of influence, economic potential: the elite, the bourgeoisie and the *hoi polloi* (the masses of people). This semantic foundation generates a hierarchy that is automatically installed in the consciousness of most people, preventing a neutral perception when using these terms in other contexts. Thus, if we are seeking for connections between these classes and some aesthetic categories or stylistic

tendencies, the term “middlebrow” inevitably acquires pejorative meanings, such as commoner, philistine, snob, common, aspiring mediocre or, in the case of the systematization of theoretical disciplines such as aesthetics, it ends up being considered “moderate modern”⁴. And indeed, as Taruskin observed, it is the kind of word that no one would ascribe to himself, having a rather general value, referring to other groups of people. The author makes an extensive historical, stylistic and critical journey, offering different examples of philosophers and theorists who defined categories of rhetorical styles (Cicero – *gravis, mediocris, attenuatus* → grave/ serious, medium, respectively flat/ plane style), musical genres (Johannes Tinctoris – *magnus* for mass, *mediocris* for motet, *parvus* for secular chanson genres), writers (Virginia Woolf in the essay *Middlebrow*), art critics (Clement Greenberg in the article *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, 1939; Dwight Macdonald in the essay *Masscult and Midcult*, 1962), who launched provocative discussions about the categories of art receivers. Taruskin’s research also includes some original images extracted from magazines and newspapers published around the middle of the 20th century, when the most surprising are the charts about the clothing, culinary, decorative, entertainment, artistic tastes (classified into preferences for reading, paintings, sculptures or musical records) of Americans according to the categories established by a particularly popular journalist in the USA, Russel Lynes. He made a hierarchical table with four levels, which appeared in a 1949 issue of *Life* magazine: low-brow, lower middle-brow, upper middle-brow, high-brow (Taruskin, 2020, pp. 354-355). The widely accessible character or, on the contrary, hermetic, sophisticated, were the main tie-breaking criteria in this ranking of everyday tastes, the middle classes being perceived as consumers of the most miscellaneous forms of art, with a variable level of culture and mediocre education, aspirants towards the class of the elite through partial appreciation and understanding of the so-called “high art”. In terms of music, the most distinguished historical-stylistic categories were the early music up to J.S. Bach and modern works, composed after Charles Ives (composer established by R. Lynes as a benchmark for avant-garde music). The classical-romantic genres belonged to the lower strata: symphonies, concertos and operas to the upper middle class, operetta, musicals and light genres to the lower middle class, while the pieces included in jukeboxes were associated with most of American citizens. Later, Taruskin imagines a system of perpendicular axes, based on the volume edited by the British musicologist Peter Franklin, *The Idea of Music. Schoenberg and Others*, where the horizontal axis starts from the extreme left of the strong valorization of art and the vertical one suggests the class mobility upwards, towards the elite level. As we can intuit, these aesthetic hierarchies determined by social rankings or by the preferences of the general public are subjective and ephemeral, having as object of observation the same

⁴ *Die gemäßigte Moderne* according to Th. Adorno’s terminology.

phenomena of real life. “But if you can look up to the lowbrow, what does “up” even mean? Not only can low appear high; high can just as easily appear low, especially when attached to spurious morality” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 391). The differences are given by the set of values and judgments applied to reality by one critic or another. Taruskin outlines this process in the sub-chapter suggestively entitled *Deconstruction over Time*, followed by the implications of the value biases and prejudgements on modernism, which many musicians (among them A. Schönberg) believed it has developed from the split between high and popular art. Thus, the association of modernism with the middle class determined Taruskin to express his disapproval of “the valorizing discourse that attaches it spuriously to the discourse of brows. That is how I arrived at the title of this talk. We have forgotten which way is up” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 367). Taruskin is rather concerned with the place of ethics in this discussion and the consequences of these value criteria for the moral spirit. For the second time in this volume, the author quotes the confession expressed by a *New York Times* reporter, to whom he accepted an interview invitation in 1998, who was unable “to explain those who sing Schubert in the evening and torture in the morning... I’m going to the end of my life haunted more and more by the question ‘Why did the humanities not humanize?’ I don’t have an answer” (Applebome, 1998, web source). Taruskin, for his part, confesses that he became haunted by this question, believing that the question was not correctly formulated, that people are capable of loving Schubert's music if they are already persons of superior morality. The author’s realism seems painful and cruel, but I would add the idea that if art does not have enough power to morally influence people to do good, then at least artists, humanists, intellectuals, those who are alive and can act in a concrete situation, they have the duty (if not the power) to try to change something, to fight. The author’s conclusion on the hierarchy of social classes concerns the so-called tastes, which “are not even tastes unless we are disputing them. As long as there was perceived social advantage in a taste for high art, and as long as its pursuit mandated the negation and avoidance of the low, (...) the middlebrow was part of the support system that sustained the art that could not pay its way, of which classical music was perhaps the archetype” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 398). Unfortunately, the interest in music and arts in general of this social layer that has been ridiculed and looked down upon has declined greatly in recent decades, causing the crisis of empty concert halls and the gradual loss of funding sources in the artistic field or in institutions with humanist profile. In the end, we all have to accept the idea that “that there can after all be more important things than what may matter most to me” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 399) and to each of us.

The final chapter – *A Walking Translation? On Musicology East and West* – has a more personal character compared to previous studies, due to the direct involvement of the American musicologist of Jewish origin in creating bridges between Anglo-American and Soviet cultural traditions. In addition to

linguistic differences that are difficult to overcome for any native citizen of Central or Western Europe or from overseas continents, there was a huge cultural hiatus⁵ between Russia and the rest of the world that Taruskin fought to transform into dialogue and mutual openness throughout his career, by his own means: historical research in quest for truth, musical analysis to understand compositional innovations, approaching fields that are adjacent to music so as to promote literature, philosophy and arts in the Russian space. Although he did not have parents or grandparents originally from Russia (they were Jews who lived in Latvia and Ukraine, former territories of the Soviet Union), Taruskin was interested in Russian music and culture from a young age, managing to obtain a scholarship for a year in Moscow, in 1971, and later becoming the mentor of a student of Russian origin, whose thesis on the formation of musicology in the Soviet space was published in 2015⁶. But, even if Taruskin's interest in Russian music has led to seven volumes with topics related to notorious Russian composers⁷, a great number of scientific papers and articles about them, his work was frequently criticized, considered in the West "a neoliberal conspiracy" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 405), and in the Eastern space post-Soviet was accused of "vulgar sociology".⁸ Historically, Taruskin has been aware that these academic disputes actually reflect the social, cultural and political state of the external environment, his research tracing precisely the impact of these factors on how to compose and write about music. Following the investigations carried out and the experience gained, Taruskin believes that "Russian musicology fought the same battles (as German and Anglo-American musicology) on its way to professionalization between idealists and positivists" (Taruskin, 2020, p. 402). The main difference between West and East found by the author is the inversion of the predominant concerns in the activity of musicologists before and after the end of the Cold War, which had an overwhelming impact on the content of music research.

⁵ On these facts we may consider the political conflict with armed attacks, initiated on 24.02.2022, which R. Taruskin could not have anticipated either in the moment of presenting his research at the conference "Found in Translation" organised by Chicago University in 2016, or in the phase of publishing these materials in the volume *Cursed Questions*, in 2020.

⁶ Olga Panteleeva, *Formation of Russian Musicology from Sacchetti to Asafyev, 1885–1931* (PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2015).

⁷ *Opera and Drama in Russia: As Preached and Practiced in the 1860s* (1981), *Mussorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (1993), *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*. (1996), *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical essays* (1997), *On Russian Music* (2008), *Freedom from Violence and Lies: Essays on Russian Poetry and Music* (2013), *Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays* (2016).

⁸ *Vulgar sociology* = generic term for various forms of simplistic interpretation of the phenomena of spiritual culture, consisting in ignoring the specificity and relative independence of the superstructure from the economic-social base (according to Online Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, <https://dexonline.ro/>).

Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, Anglo-American musicology rather followed avant-garde currents, compositional methods and principles of sound organization (which led to the appearance of the term “formalism” in aesthetics), while Soviet authors, in addition to the mandatory promotion of communist ideology, they turned their attention to the social context of artistic manifestations and the musical results of composers. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, an interesting phenomenon occurred, through the interference of Western musicology with fields such as psychology, sociology and even political science, and on the territory of the new Russian Federation, the policy of restructuring and transparency (*perestroika*, *glasnost*) initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev determined a more poetic approach in writings about music, by changing aesthetical optics, increasing interest in new compositional techniques and pure analytical approaches, without socialist connotations. Numerous composers and musicologists from Russian culture are discussed, among which those known to a certain extent in the European space are Edison Denisov, Tihon Hrennikov, Aleksei Finagin, Boris Asafiev, Boleslav Yavorsky, Yuri Holopov, Georgii Khubov, Lev Abramovich Mazel', Viktor Tsukkerman, to which are added authors that Taruskin read in the original, becoming a deep connoisseur of the Russian language. As in other studies and scientific expositions, I noticed that Taruskin chooses the intersection of opposites (*Coincidentia oppositorum*), with an integrative vision of the differences between schools, cultures, continents, which should be in a dialectical relationship, should communicate and complete each other. Regarding Anglo-American, German and Russian research, following his own readings and translations, Taruskin states that “the styles of musicology as practiced east and west are not in an antagonistic or inflexibly reciprocal relationship, but in a complex counterpoint in which both traditions have responded to internal and external pressures in ways that can be fruitfully compared” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 405). In the light of these ideas, the author considers himself “a walking translation of Eastern ideas into a Western musicological context, and — now that my work has at least a few Russian readers — of Western ideas into an Eastern context” (Taruskin, 2020, pp. 435-436).

Richard Taruskin sought for historically grounded arguments to support the interaction of the creative process with socio-political factors, without believing that the external environment defines art itself. The pragmatism of his perception is anchored in a deep connection to the generative context of the creation, following both the path and concerns of the composer, his points of interest and artistic goals, the aspects that determined the idea of work, the people he consulted with (if concrete documents remained after their lives), the external, objective problems, either of a financial, social or political nature, that influenced his activity from a certain period (accelerating the

completion or postponing the composition, modifying the form, changing the subject, the text, etc.) He researched both European music and cultures from the American and Russian spaces, wrote both in elitist academic language (musicological volumes, scientific studies) and in a simple format, accessible to the general public (journalistic articles, chronicles and critical texts for American newspapers), he adopted polemical attitudes and had vehement reactions to anachronistic currents of thought. At the same time, he was equally a supportive mentor for young generations of musicologists, whom he encouraged to write applying the same principles of investigation and search for truth. His method was based from the first volumes on the “tandem of historical investigation and immanent analysis” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 411), becoming the author of a genuine “monumental musicology”, as the well-known musicologist and journalist Alex Ross states in a touching article published in *The New Yorker* (Ross, 2022, web source). Through all his activity, Taruskin sought to discover the middle ways, to find the common points between the multiple academic schools and traditions, to create interpersonal and intercultural connections, himself becoming a bridge between East and West, between the 20th and 21st centuries.

4. Conclusions

Richard Taruskin’s ideas are not much different from those of other researchers, historians or philosophers. Understanding a phenomenon to the end is not possible, like the comparison with the graphics of the asymptote in the field of mathematics, mentioned by Taruskin in the introduction of the volume. But the researcher’s mission is to go as far as possible, to investigate the approached problem as deeply as possible. The publication of this volume at the age of 77 draws attention by the diversity of the topics he had covered, the vast issues, the polemical way of writing and by the dedication addressed to the “Heineian disillusion” in the lines of the poem *Zum Lazarus*, considering it a “book intended, as Samuel Beckett instructs us, on failing better” (Taruskin, 2020, p. 4).

Whether it leads to failure or success, approval or vehement reactions, answers or even more “cursed questions”, to meditative acceptance or polemical debate, his way of thinking inspires strength, desire for knowledge, confidence in the power of the mind, the will to always go forward, with the goal of understanding more at the end of life than along the way. Through his own life, career and the immense written legacy he had left to posterity, Taruskin identified himself with the principles for which he fought: the search for truth and the invitation to dialogue, with the purpose of genuine connection between people, generations, cultures, continents.

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