

# Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu – A *Philocalic History of Music Review*<sup>1</sup>

LUMINIȚA DUȚICĂ

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**Abstract:** The volume titled *O istorie filocalică a muzicii* [A *Philocalic History of Music*] by the musicologist Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu offers an unusual approach to the relationship between music and religion. At the core of its demonstration lie the possible relations between the texts in the *Ladder of the Divine Ascent* from the *Philokalia* of Saint John Climacus and the masterpieces of Romanian and universal art music. In this volume, the author presents, step by step, the 30 “words of wisdom” without straying from the original text, using direct quotes from Saint John Climacus’ work, putting forward topics such as the renunciation of the world, repentance, obedience, humility, etc. The steps, representing the ladder of spiritual fulfilment, should be climbed so as to leave a mark on the souls of those who ascend. It is worth remembering that once a step is reached the others should not be forgotten, but furthered for the rest of one’s life. Each of the 30 chapters is preceded by quotes from the Old and the New Testament, or from the writings of great representatives of the Orthodox faith (Saint John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Dumitru Stăniloae). Besides the semantic dimension specific to this kind of approach, the book may also be linked to the field of art therapy. It is worth noting the author’s easiness in identifying the most representative religious texts and their matching musical pieces, as this fusion produces numerous opportunities to acquire apophatic knowledge and intense spiritual experiences.

**Keywords:** philocaly, music, orthodox religion, Ioan Scărarul

## 1. Introduction

A philocalic history of music, professed with so much sensitivity by the author of this volume, Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu, is another proof that nothing can ever be made and endure without faith, and that art made through this feeling may ease the way to beatitude and salvation. The author’s inspired idea to combine “the scientific endeavour with the spiritual one”, to link the significations of music to the orthodox religion, did not come from a momentary, solitary thought, but from true spiritual and mental doggedness. The explanation is quite simple: Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu’s **faith**. This was to become, in fact, the God-given drive that made it possible for the volume to be published and become known in this form. It addresses both the wide public and professional musicians.

<sup>1</sup> Petruța Măniuț, *O istorie filocalică a muzicii*. Craiova: Universitaria, 2016.

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## 2. “To step on a flowery meadow without touching a single flower...”

(Măniuț-Coroiu, 2016, p. 1)

A musicologist and aesthetician, a university professor and PhD supervisor at the Faculty of Music from Transilvania University of Brașov, Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu received a solid education that also included religion ever since her childhood, as she was born in a family of great intellectuals. Her love for the Church and the understanding of the Scripture and the books of the Great Holy Fathers was especially nurtured by the gifted orthodox priests from Brașov and also by her involvement in numerous charitable and cultural events organized with the Church.

Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu’s writings, be they poems, essays or strictly musicological studies, attract us by their inspired subject matters, which show her particularly sensitive side, matched only by her literary talent, that of a redoubtable philologist. This book is devoted to her mother, Maria, “with gratitude for the philocalic beauty of her soul” (2016, p. 7), being prefaced by a moving poem about her.

The book’s central idea is “**spiritual fulfilment**” through faith, seen from the perspective of its relationship with music, starting from the morals of the 30 steps described in the *Ladder of the Divine Ascent* from the *Philokalia* signed by Saint John Climacus (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century). A monk at a monastery on Mount Sinai and holder of an impressive repository of knowledge, John Climacus created for his brothers a “guide” with spiritual rules to be followed and put into practice throughout their entire life, preparing them for the Afterlife.

In this volume, the author presents, step by step, the 30 “words of wisdom” without straying from the original text, using direct quotes from Saint John Climacus’ work, which approaches topics such as the renunciation of the world, repentance, obedience, humility, etc. The steps, representing the ladder of spiritual fulfilment, should be climbed so as to leave a mark on the souls of those who ascend, as Saint John Climacus himself stresses: “Cei ce se supun cu simplitate în Domnul străbat drumul cel bun, necunoscând în ei prin iscodire amănunțită viclenia dracilor” (Scărarul, 1959, p.12). It is worth remembering that once a step is reached the others should not be forgotten, but furthered for the rest of one’s life.

Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu presents to us, in an essay, subjective form, a different history of philocaly. The author structures the book’s contents based on the **faith-music** binomial, taking over the titles of each chapter from *the Ladder*, wherein she places “the musical data under the absolute ascendancy of the spiritual imperatives prescribed as steps to fulfilment” (Măniuț-Coroiu, 2016, p. 5). The musical masterpieces selected for this volume are prefaced by brief introductions about the stylistic age and the composer who created them. The author seems to have aimed to create a spiritual guide for the music-loving reader.

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The musical opuses discussed were carefully selected, in accordance with the teachings retrieved from the 30 steps in Saint John Climacus' book. Each chapter is preceded by quotes from the Old and the New Testament, or from the writings of great representatives of the orthodox faith (Saint John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Stăniloae).

Here are the book's contents:

1. **Lepădarea de viața deșartă și retragerea** [On renunciation of the world] is juxtaposed to a piece by composer Samuel Barber – *Adagio for string orchestra*;
2. **Despățimirea** [On detachment]: J. S. Bach – *Orchestral Suite no. 3 in D major (Aria)*
3. **Înstrăinarea** [On exile or pilgrimage]: F. Chopin – *Prelude in E minor*
4. **Fericita și pururea pomenita ascultare** [On blessed and ever-memorable obedience]: V. Timaru – *Symphony 3 "Miorița"*
5. **Pocăința cea făcută cu grijă și deplin arătată** [On painstaking and true repentance]: J. S. Bach – *The Passion of Saint Matthew (Peter's penitence)*
6. **Pomenirea morții** [On remembrance of death]: R. Wagner – the opera *Tristan and Isolde*
7. **Plânsul de-bucurie-făcător** [On joy-making mourning]: J. S. Bach – *Prelude in B flat minor*
8. **Nemânierea și blândețea** [On freedom from anger and on meekness]: A. Bruckner – *Te Deum*
9. **Ținerea de minte a răului** [On remembrance of wrongs]: G. Verdi – the opera *La Traviata*
10. **Clevetirea** [On slander or calumny]: S. Rachmaninov – *Concerto no. 2 for piano and orchestra*
11. **Multa vorbire și tăcerea** [On talkativeness and silence]: F. Chopin – *Concerto no. 1 for piano and orchestra*
12. **Minciuna** [On lying]: A. Vivaldi – *Spring*, concerto for violin and orchestra
13. **Lenea sufletească** [On despondency]: L. van Beethoven – *Symphony no. 5*
14. **Pântecelul atotlăudat și tiran** [On that clamorous mistress, the stomach]: Fr. Liszt – *Dante Symphony*
15. **Curăția și neprihănirea nestrăicicioasă, agonisită de cei stricăcioși prin osteneți și sudori** [On incorruptible purity and chastity, to which the corruptible attain by toil and sweat]: Jules Massenet – the opera *Thais (Meditation)*
16. **Iubirea de arginți și neagonisirea** [On love of money, or avarice]: A. Stroe – *Melodramas on the Book of Jov*

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17. *Nesimțirea, moartea sufletului înainte de moartea trupului* [On insensibility, that is, deadening of the soul and the death of the mind before the death of the body]: P. I. Ceaikovski – *Symphony no. 6 (Pathetique)*
18. *Somnul, rugăciunea și cântarea în obște* [On sleep, prayer, and psalmody with the brotherhood]: D. Lipatti – *Concertino in the classical style for piano and chamber orchestra*
19. *Privegherea trupească* [On bodily vigil]: G. Fr. Handel – the oratorio *Messiah*
20. *Frica lașă, nebărbătească* [On unmanly and puerile cowardice]: J. S. Bach – *Toccată and fugue for organ in D minor*
21. *Slava deșartă* [On the many forms of vainglory]: F. Liszt – “*Faust*” *Symphony*
22. *Mândria cea fără minte și fără stăpânire* [On mad pride]: C. Orff – *Carmina Burana*
23. *Gândurile negrăite ale hulei* [On unclean blasphemous thoughts]: H. Berlioz – *Fantastic symphony*
24. *Blândețea, simplitatea și nerăutatea agonisite prin sângele înțeleaptă, viclenia* [On meekness, simplicity, and guilelessness]: G. Enescu – *Prelude in unison (Suite I for orchestra)*
25. *Preaînalta smerită-cugetare* [On the destroyer of the passions, most sublime humility]: C. Porumbescu – *Ballad for violin and orchestra*
26. *Deosebirea gândurilor, patimilor și virtuților. Dreapta socoteală bine deosebitoare* [On discernment of thoughts, passions and virtues. On expert discernment]: J. Brahms – *Symphony no. 4*
27. *Sfințita liniștire a trupului și a sufletului* [On holy stillness of body and soul]: *The music of the Triodion*
28. *Fericita rugăciune, sfințita maică a tuturor virtuților* [On holy and blessed prayer, the mother of virtues]: W. A. Mozart – *Requiem (Lacrimosa)*
29. *Nepățimirea, cerul pământesc; desăvârșirea și învierea sufletului* [Concerning Heaven on earth, or Godlike dispassion and perfection, and the resurrection of the soul]: L. van Beethoven – *Concerto no. 4 for piano and orchestra*
30. *Legătura treimii virtuților: dragostea, nădejdea, credința* [Concerning the linking together of the supreme trinity among the virtues: love, hope, faith]: J. S. Bach – *Missa in B minor (Credo: Crucifixus)*

In this volume, Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu stresses the need for emotion and feeling in the performance of artistic acts. Thus, “the depth of the musical art reveals the soul that created it; that is why music is just a sign of that which cannot be seen – the heart” (Măniuț-Coroiu, 2016, p. 45). Discussing Valentin Timaru’s work, the author mentions the Maestro’s reflections on faith, humility, generosity, wisdom, etc. detailed in his writings. His portrait is

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completed by quotes from his own aphorisms (Timaru, 2008): “Gratitude is the virtue of the chosen. Few are honest enough to acknowledge how much they are indebted to their peers” (Timaru, 2007).

A very special moment is step 16, *On love of money or avarice*, which quotes the words of Saint John Climacus “Iată altă luptă. Cel ce a câștigat-o călătorește în chip nematerial la cer. Cel ce a biruit-o a agonisit dragostea sau a tăiat grija” (Măniuț-Coroiu, 2016, p. 102). In this chapter, Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu finds it appropriate to propose a comparison with the work “Melodramas, interludes and symphonies for the Book of Job” by the Maestro Aurel Stroe. Composed during his student years, in the communist period, without benefiting from a much deserved audition due to its forbidden topic, this opus is “a mimodrama on music that belongs to the spiritual-cultural framework of the Antim monastery, where (...) he had been called to write this work that initially had no text” (Măniuț-Coroiu, 2016, p. 109).

Unfortunately, after the composer’s death only the first 63 manuscript pages were found, says Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu, the author who took it upon herself to analyse Aurel Stroe’s entire creation.

### 3. Conclusion

By the volume titled *O istorie filocalică a muzicii* [A philocalic history of music] the musicologist Petruța Măniuț-Coroiu brings a valuable contribution both to the musical-theological field and to other related areas. The originality consists of identification the most representative religious texts and their matching musical pieces, as this fusion produces numerous opportunities to acquire apophatic knowledge and intense spiritual experiences.

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