

Ciprian Porumbescu, creator and protagonist of the Romanian operetta

ROSINA CATERINA FILIMON

“George Enescu” National University of Arts Iași
ROMANIA*

Abstract: Musical-theatrical pieces of the nineteenth century, propagated by Italian, French and German troops, were an inspiration for Romanian composers. They will create similar fashionable musical theatre genres, in Romanian, for entertainment purposes. Works placed on the border between vaudeville and the lyrical genre can be identified in the creation of the newly emerging genre of operetta: such pieces are the compositions of Alexandru Flechtenmacher, Eduard Wachmann, Eduard Caudella. In the cultural atmosphere of the time, patriotic musician Ciprian Porumbescu (1853-1883) would find the perfect way to put a longstanding artistic wish into practice: to compose an operetta, following the success of his humorous musical-theatre pieces *Cisla* and *Candidatul Linte* [Candidate Linte]. A multifarious personality, a lover of folklore and of his nation, Ciprian Porumbescu – one of the founders of the national school of music – contributed to the authenticity and identity of the Romanian musical language through his extensive works; one important contribution is the composition of the first Romanian cultivated operetta *Crai Nou* [New Moon] (1882). As a tribute to his art, on the centenary of his birth, the **creator** of the operetta *Crai nou* becomes the **protagonist** of the operetta *Lăsați-mă să cânt* [Let me sing] (1954) by Gherase Dendrino, set during the time of the staging of Porumbescu’s musical-dramatic work. *Crai Nou* and *Lăsați-mă să cânt* are highlights of the Romanian lyrical theatre, from the artistic past and present, and hold their position as musical pieces frequently performed and received with interest and enthusiasm.

Keywords: Ciprian Porumbescu, *Crai nou* operetta, Gherase Dendrino, *Lăsați-mă să cânt* operetta

Motto:

Crai nou! Crai nou! Crai nou! [New Moon]

La noi bine-ai venit, [Welcome]

Crai nou! Crai-nou! Crai-nou!

Fă-mi dorul împlinit! [Make my wish come true!]

Vasile Alecsandri

1. Biographical highlights

1.1. Family environment and first teachers

Patriotic musician Ciprian Porumbescu (1853-1883) (Fig. 1, painting by Misu Popp), a son of Bucovina, a lover of folklore and of his nation, embodied a multifarious personality – composer, violinist, pianist, conductor, teacher, poet, theologian, and philosopher.

* rosinafilimon@yahoo.com



Fig. 1
Ciprian Porumbescu

His father, Iraclie¹ was a remarkable personality of his time – he was an Orthodox priest, a writer, poet, composer, folklore collector, Romanian patriot; he was involved in the social and cultural life of Bucovina; his nickname given by George Breazul was “a Creangă² of Bucovina” (Breazul, 1966, p. 302). In the year when unique poet Mihai Eminescu was born (1850), Iraclie married Emilia Klodnitzki (1826-1876) (in the church at Volovăț, founded by ruler Stephen the Great). Three years later, their son Ciprian was born in the village of Șipotele, county of Suceava, “the backwaters of the Carpathians in Bucovina” (as Iraclie says) (Morariu, 2014, p. 290).

Ciprian Porumbescu’s first educator was his father, who taught him reading, writing and music. He shows an early interest in music and has special musical sensibility. Thus, after listening to the village fiddler on the occasion of a peasant womens’ wool-spinning gathering held at the parish priest’s house, he announces his wish to have a violin. “Dear mother, I’d like to have a little fiddle of my own!”; his father fulfils his wish and buys him a “child’s violin.” (Morariu, 2014, p. 282)

The first professional musician to contribute to Ciprian Porumbescu’s artistic education is Carol Miculi³, born in Bucovina of Armenian descent; he was a pianist, composer, musicologist, teacher, the director of the Lemberg Conservatory, Frédéric Chopin’s disciple and then assistant and editor. During his summer holidays (1859-1864), he made a stop in Porumbescu’s house, bringing along his piano transported by train from Lemberg to Chernivtsi and then brought to Șipote in Iraclie’s wagon, drawn by six horses.

In his grandparents’ village, Ilișești, Ciprian Porumbescu attends the Romanian-German Primary School (1860)⁴, where he is given violin lessons by school master Simeon Meier. He graduated three elementary classes in two

¹ Iraclie Porumbescu was initially named Golembiovski (1823, Sucevita – 1896, Frătăuții Noi); from his youth he called himself Porumbescu, but officially the family’s name was changed in 1881, as was young Ciprian Porumbescu’s case; Iraclie was a parish priest in the following villages of the Bucovina region: Șipotele (1850-1857, 1859-1865), Boian (1857-1859), Stupca (1865-1884), Frătăuții Noi (1884-1896).

² Ion Creangă – Romanian writer, raconteur and school teacher, a main figure in the 19th century; he is best known for his *Amintiri din copilărie* [Childhood Memories] volume, his novellas and short stories and his many anecdotes.

³ Carol Miculi (1821-1897), author of the work *48 Airs nationaux roumains*, four notebooks of 12 Romanian national piano arias, a collection of harmonized Romanian songs and games.

⁴ Ciprian Porumbescu was sent by Iraclie to Ilișești primary school, founded by priest Dimitrie Bucevschi (1857), since there was no school in Romanian at Șipotele Sucevei.

school years (1860-1862). A few years later (1878), at Ilișești, in Pastor Traugott Gorgon's house, where he played the piano and violin, he also met his daughter, Bertha, for whom he would carry the torch of unfulfilled love.



Fig. 2 The quintet conducted by Ciprian Porumbescu

In Suceava, he starts attending the Greek-oriental higher school (at that time *Gimnaziu* [secondary school] (currently the National Highschool "Stephen the Great"), in the newly established 5th grade (1863). Here he was taught by Stefan Nosievici⁵, who later animated the artistic activity of the school and the town, encouraging the culturally oriented activities of his beloved student Ciprian Porumbescu. During the holidays he spent at Stupca, where his father had been appointed parish priest (1865), he became acquainted with the music of the fiddlers in this area.

His education and environment from Șipote, Ilișești and Suceava would play an important role in defining young Ciprian Porumbescu as a musician in love with folklore and as a Romanian patriot⁶: countryside life in close connection with his family, his Orthodox faith, his contact with the musical folklore heritage of Bucovina, with Romanian as his language of instruction, his study of music, his participation in and conducting of voice and ensembles. (Fig. 2, Cionca, 2011, p. 31)

1.2. Beginnings of his trajectory as a composer and artistic recognition

He attended the Theological Institute in Chernivtsi (1873-1877) and studied Harmony and Choir Conducting with famous teacher and composer Isidor Vorobchievici⁷. He studied violin, piano, cello and attended courses at the Faculty of Philosophy (1878-1870). During his time in Chernivtsi he

⁵ Stephen Nosievici (1833-1869) was a graduate student in Czernowitz and Vienna; he founded the Philharmonic Society of Suceava; he is the author of the first study of Bucovina folklore *Despre cântecul poporal român* [On Romanian folk songs] (1865); he was also the composer of the well-known soldier's marching song *Drum bun, toba bate* [Farewell, farewell, the drum is beating], with lyrics by Vasile Alecsandri.

⁶ He would manifest his patriotic feelings through the legendary participation in the first *Congres al Studenților Români de Pretutindeni* [Congress of Romanian Students Everywhere] from Putna (August 1871), together with other Romanian patriots such as Eminescu, Slavici, Xenopol, Kogălniceanu – and played fiddler Grigore Vindereu's violin to "the entire Dacia", as he enthusiastically told his father (Cionca, 2011, p. 44).

⁷ Isidor Vorobchievici (1836-1903), author of the first *Manual of musical harmony* in Romanian (1869).

composed religious works⁸, mostly for the male choir which he was conducting at the Seminar, but also for the choir of the Arboroasa Student Society⁹.

Within the Arboroasa Society, as a member and then as president, he actively manifests his creative and interpretative artistic spirit along with his patriotic feelings and beliefs, by composing numerous works that enliven social-cultural meetings (such as cantatas *Tabăra românilor* [The Romanians' camp], *Altarul mănăstirii Putna* [The Altar of Putna Monastery], both on lyrics by Vasile Alecsandri¹⁰). His first published composition dates back from this period, namely the elegy *Dorința* [A wish], for voice and piano, lyrics by Matilda Cugler-Poni, a poetess of Iași; this piece would open the way for further vocal and instrumental pieces.

The artistic effervescence, his love for music and his nation, his friendly, communicative, selfless nature soon contributed to bring young Ciprian Porumbescu professional recognition.

1.3. Education and culture in Vienna

Ciprian Porumbescu saw his dream of studying music in Vienna come true in 1879-1881, when he attended the courses of the Vienna Conservatory¹¹ (1st year); he was supported financially by Silvestru Moraru, the Metropolitan Bishop of Bucovina. He studied *Harmony* with Anton Bruckner, *Conducting* and *Choir composition* with Franz Krenn, *Piano* with Leopold Landskron and was privately tutored by Eusebie Mandicevschi¹² in *Music Theory* and *Composition*. In parallel he continues to attend the Faculty of Philosophy (3rd year) he had started in Chernivtsi.

In Vienna he was already well-known as the author of the piece *Cisla*¹³ – a musical satire with four soloists and a choir, which had already been played at the Romanian Youths' Academic Society, an organization of Romanian students. He becomes the conductor of the choir of this society, and part of the pieces composed for this ensemble are published under the

⁸ *Liturgies* (1874, 1875), *Psalms*, *axions*, *koinonikons*, *troparions*, *the Kontakion of the Holy Mother of God* (1876).

⁹ The *Arboroasa* Society was disbanded (1877) on the grounds that it exceeded its object of activity, and its members “were in «preventive» prison for 11 weeks”, then “were unanimously acquitted.” (Morariu, 1928, p. 142), then they were released and acquitted. *Arboroasa* is revamped as *Junimea* (1878), with Dimitrie Onciul as its president and Ciprian Porumbescu as its Secretary.

¹⁰ Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890) – Romanian poet, playwright, politician and diplomat. He collected Romanian folk songs; one of the principal animators of the 19th-century movement for Romanian cultural identity and the union of Moldavia and Wallachia.

¹¹ Konservatorium für Musik und darstellende Kunst

¹² Eusebie Mandicevschi (1857-1929) – Bucovina-born composer, choir conductor and musicologist, a friend of Brahms.

¹³ *Cisla* (in Moldovan, popular) means *chat*.

title *Colecțiune de cântece sociale pentru studenții români* [A collection of social songs for the Romanian students]¹⁴.

The successful event, occasioned by the Romanian Youths' Ball in 1880 demonstrates the musicians' appreciation that Porumbescu enjoyed in Vienna. Thus, "Master Eduard Strauss, who, on principle, conducted only compositions by Strauss, made an exception and kindly accepted to open the dance with Ciprian Porumbescu's waltz *Florile dalbe* [White flowers] and only demanded that this title, incomprehensible to him, should be changed into one that the Viennese public would understand. Ciprian Porumbescu accepted the title *Camellias* for this piece and so it was performed successfully and highly admired." (Cionca, 1974, p. 126)

Beside his studies at the Vienna University, he enthusiastically attends numerous concerts, opera and operetta performances, which he listens to and analyses; this is recorded in his correspondence. He had the privilege of listening to the works *Fidelio* by Ludwig van Beethoven, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* by Richard Wagner, *Faust* by Charles Gounod, *Les Huguenots* by Giacomo Meyerbeer and the operettas *Fledermaus*, *Karneval in Rom*, *Das Spitzentuch der Königin* by Johann Strauss Jr., *La Mascotte* by Edmond Audran, *Les cloches de Corneville* by Robert Planquette etc.

After this important artistic experience, Porumbescu assimilates the musical forms and genres studied in Vienna by adapting them into his own creations of folklore inspiration, producing a synthesis between the national and the universal, between folk music and European currents.

2. Ciprian Porumbescu, creator and protagonist

2.1. The period spent in Brașov and the staging of operetta *Crai Nou*

Musical-theatrical pieces of the nineteenth century propagated by Italian, French and German companies were an inspiration for Romanian composers. They would create similar fashionable musical-theatre genres in Romanian for entertainment purposes. Works placed on the border between vaudeville and the lyrical genre can be identified in the creation of the newly emerging genre of operetta: such pieces are the compositions of Alexandru Flechtenmacher¹⁵, Eduard Wachmann¹⁶, Eduard Caudella¹⁷.

¹⁴ *Colecțiune de cântece sociale pentru studenții români* [A collection of social songs for the Romanian students] consists of 20 choir pieces, some of them with patriotic *Cântecul gînteii latine* [Song of the Latin race], *Imnul Unirii* [Anthem of Unity], *Cântecul tricolorului* [Song of the country's colours], *Inimă de român* [A Romanian's Heart].

¹⁵ Alexandru Flechtenmacher (1823-1898) – operetta *Baba Hârca* (1848, Iași), *Coana Chirița sau Două fete ș-o neneacă* [Madame Chirița or Two girls and an auntie] (1850, Iași), *Scara mîței* [Cat's cradle] (1850, Iași), etc.

¹⁶ Eduard Wachmann (1836-1908) – *Păunașul Codrilor* (1857, Bucharest), *Spoielile Bucureștilor* (1863, Bucharest), etc.

In the cultural atmosphere of the time, Ciprian Porumbescu, returned to the Romanian lands, finds the perfect way to put a longstanding artistic wish into practice, “my warmest wish” (Morariu, 2017, p. 30): to compose an operetta, following the success of his humorous musical-theatre pieces *Cisla* and *Candidatul Linte* [Candidate Linte] (with the subtitle *Rigorosul teologic* [The rigorous theologian]) which anticipates Constantin Tanase’s¹⁸ musical-satirical couplets.

Ciprian Porumbescu had moved to Braşov in November 1881, encouraged by his compatriots from Bucovina¹⁹ who had chosen to live there; he is very active in Braşov: he works here as a music teacher at the Romanian Greek-orthodox church high school (currently National High School *Andrei Şaguna*), the conductor of the Choir of St. Nicholas Church and assistant conductor of the Romanian Society of Gymnastics and Chants. (Fig. 3, Cionca, 2011, p. 215)



Fig. 3 Romanian Society of Gymnastics and Chants

Together with the members of the Society, he staged the operetta *Crai Nou* [New Moon], his most extensive work. He is allowed to use the festive hall of the Romanian High School (February 3rd) and rehearsals are scheduled.

¹⁷ Eduard Caudella (1841-1924) – *Harță Răzeşul* (1872, Iaşi), *Olteanca sau Urechile bărbatului în dar de nuntă* (1880, Iaşi), *Fata răzeşului* (1881, Iaşi), etc.

¹⁸ Constantin Tanase – Romanian actor and writer for the stage; a key figure in the revue style.

¹⁹ Teachers Ipolit Ilasievici (Panca, Storojineţ county), Lazăr Nastasi (Siret) and Gheorghe Chelariu (Stroeşti) (Banciu, 1933, p. 400); Nastasi, close friend, would become a character in Porumbescu’s operetta, as would Bertha Gorgon.

On the evening of Saturday, March 11th, 1882, the world premiere of the operetta is performed (Fig. 4), whose income is intended for national philanthropic purposes. Due to its great success, the premiere is followed by numerous other performances.

O societate de diletanți
va reprezenta
Sămbătă în 27 Februarie st. v. (11 Martie st. n.)
în sala cea mare a Gimnasiului român de aici

OPERA
CRAIU-NOU
de Vasile Alecsandri; muzică de Ciprian Porumbescu.

PERSÓNELE:

Moș Corbu, cimpoier bătrân.	Anica, orfană.
Bujor, căpitan de jandarmi.	Dochița, tânăra țărăncă.
Leonaș, tânăra.	Fete, fiică de munte.
Ispravnicul.	Jandarmi.

PREȚURILE:

Fautoul 1 fl.; loc numerisat parterre 70 cruceri
pe galerie 80 cr.; entré parterre 40 cr.

Bilete se află de vânzare la librăria M. I. Ciucou și oăra la casa.

Începutul la 7 ore seara.

Brașov, 22 Februarie st. v. 1882.

Stranjatorii.

P. S. Venitul curat este destinat pentru scopul filantropic-nationale.

Fig. 4 Operetta *Crai Nou*,
the billboard of the world premiere

peasant girls chant three times and worship The New Moon [*Crai Nou* of the title], which is the name it is given in folk tradition. Alecsandri²⁰'s work has as its literary source his poem *Crai Nou* (1842-1843).

The plot is set in a village at the foot of the mountains. The main characters, who are different human types, bear genuine Romanian names: Old Man Corbu (old bagpiper), Bujor (captain of gendarmes), young Leonaș, High Steward Corbu, Anica (orphaned girl), Dochița (young peasant). In a Moldavian idiom, the librettist and composer tell a love story in a comical manner, "the world rolls with laughter!" (Morariu, 2017, p. 41) The native Romeo and Juliet are played by Master Leonaș and Miss Anica, and the ending is a happy one.

The show of the operetta *Crai Nou* cast more than 60 amateur performers, accompanied by the orchestra of the Brașov Philharmonic Society; the orchestra was conducted by the composer himself. The premiere cast: Anica – Carolina Lengher (Fig. 5, Cionca, 2011, p. 218), Dochița – Cornelia Roman, Bujor – Andrei Bârseanu, Leonaș – Vasile Voinea, Ispravnicul – Gheorghe Strâmbu, Moș Corbu – Zosim Butnaru. (Cioanca. 2011, p. 214) The artistic director is merchant Ioan Bucur Popp, who financially supported the staging of the operetta. Composer Gheorghe Dima's brother, Pantelimon (Pandele) Dima, is the prompter of the show.

The libretto belongs to Vasile Alecsandri; the writer took inspiration from a popular myth: in order to meet the young man they are destined to marry and to have good luck in love, nubile

²⁰ The topic in Alecsandri's work had also been used previously by Alexandru Flechtenmacher and Ion Andrei Wachmann.



Fig. 5
Carolina Lengher as Anica

/ Țara mea cea românească! / Sai, voinice, și nechează! [approx. *As long as my hand lies heavily/ on my weapon of war / My Romanian country / need not worry at all! / Jump, you sturdy man and neigh!*]



Fig. 6 Maria, the composer's sister and and two choir girls in *Crai Nou*

The text between the musical parts is written in prose and the lyrics of the songs are rhymed, as the composer used the sounds and rhythms of the national language with the aim of creating melodic structures that lead to a genuinely Romanian profile. There are many pearls of wisdom specific of the local folklore, some of which are as follows: *Pomul dacă 'mbătrânește, pune-i paie de-l pârlește* [approx. if a tree grows old, strew hay around it and singe it] or *Ba ești mândru, de diochi / Și-mi ești drag...ca sarea-n ochi* [approx. You're so beautiful that you attract the evil eye/ and I hate the sight of you]; among them, there are a few patriotic, inspirational messages, supported musically by patriotic songs. An example is Corbu's aria, *Român verde ca stejarul* using the text of the poem *Cântec ostășesc* [Soldiers' song] by Alecsandri: *Cât mi-a sta mâna voinică, / Pe-a mea armă războiască, / N-aibă grijă de nimică*

The setting creates a rustic atmosphere, which is complemented by the protagonists' traditional Romanian costumes, thus described by the composer's sister, Maria (Fig. 6, Cionca, 2011, p. 218): "After such a beautiful and melodious Overture, the curtain rises. (...) Girls to one side, boys to the other! They are all in a grove and the New Moon shines high, and the youth have come out to worship it. [They are] all in national costumes; (...) such wonderful costumes! I thought I was in a fairy tale world. (...) beautiful faces, tender faces – these little Romanian lassies – you could eat them with a spoon – eat them all! Old Man Corbu is right when he says: if you have seven villages filled with such girls, you can eat them up with a spoon, skirts and all! (..) The boys are in long white cloth trousers, beautiful shirts



Fig. 7 Crai Nou – Overture (manuscript, fragment)



Fig. 8 Crai Nou – Hora (manuscript, fragment)

made of white cashmere, richly decorated with tricolour silk; (...) the boys each have a coat thrown across their shoulder, also made of white woollen cloth and decorated with stripes in black and tricolour!” (Morariu, 2017, pp. 40-41) Porumbescu creates a syncretic performance – voice and instruments are used, as well as music, dance, sets, and costumes – each of the components including a rich popular and national element.

The operetta *Crai Nou* begins with an overture (Fig. 7), which is one of the first of its kind in the history of Romanian music. “Porumbescu’s overture, with its *hora* dance, the old song, dithyramb, outlaws’ *doina* and its heroic melody and suave love romance, is such a varied complex of threads from the people’s soul, is the synthesis of a troubled past, only the inner strength of the nation could create that force which endured all tempests.” (Morariu, 2014, p. LXXV) Duets, trios, sextets, choirs are present in the structure of the operetta. Girls, mountain lads, gendarmes participate in the overall scenes.

In this piece, as in most of his other works, Porumbescu places great emphasis on the folk song. The specific nature of the national music is achieved by using folklore as inspiration for the melodic and rhythmic elements of his music (Fig. 8); in his operetta the folk song – *doina*, *balada* – as well as the

folk dance – *hora* – are an expression of the author’s national identity. Used as a quote from folk music and as inspiration for the melodic themes with modal sonorities, they are orchestrally harmonized according to melodic specificity. For example, the popular song *Măi ciobane de la oi* [Shepherd from the sheepfold] (Fig. 9), which the composer had been in love with since childhood,

becomes Leonas' Aria, *Copiliță de la munte* [Little lass from the mountains] (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9 *Măi ciobane de la oi* [Shepherd from sheepfold] (fragment)

Voice

Tempo de horă

Pian

1. Co - pi - li - ță - de - le - mun - te -
 2. Că - pri - oa - ră - sprin - te - oa - ră -
 3. Ci - ne - a - ve - de - pria - pă - du - re -
 4. Dar - oa - tre - ce - pe - pu - ti - că

Fig. 10 Leonas' Aria, *Copiliță de la munte*
 [Little lass from the mountains] (fragment)

Along with the melodic folk sources of inspiration, the work brings together romances, waltzes, arias with a Verdian opera sound, such as the Prayer aria sung by Leonas (*O! Doamne preasfinte! L-a mea rugăminte Fii îndurător*) [O Lord, be merciful and hear my prayer!] or patriotic marches, such as the choir *Haideți, haideți* [Come along, Come along]. The element that binds together the folk genres and those belonging to the European area – the march, waltz, belcanto style arias – and of urban folklore such as the romance, is the use of the inflections specific of folk music; the composer thus preserves the national musical atmosphere.

The operetta is a synthesis, a combination of the composer's creation which relies on the music of pre-existing compositions, such as the waltz *Te-ai dus iubite* [You are gone, my beloved], which is reworked as the Dochița's aria (of the same name), and the romance *Lăsați-mă să cânt* [Let me sing], for voice and piano with lyrics by poetess Matilda Cugler-Poni (1881); the last one is then converted into Anica's aria, *În aste haine așa simple* [In such simple attire]; they offer an example of Porumbescu's melodicy and expressiveness.

The author himself offers an extremely important insight into the source of inspiration of his work; annoyed at the chronicle after the premiere (from *Gazeta Transilvaniei* [Transylvania Gazette], no. 27, 1882, p. 4) (Fig. 11), in which he was accused that his new creation owed too much to Viennese operetta, he will answer them thus: "And if there is a composer whose work I

have been diligently studying, let me say then that creator is the Romanian people itself, whose work is above those by Offenbach, Genée, Suppé etc.” (from *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, no. 31, 1882, p. 3)



Teatru romanu in Brasiovu.

Craiu nou! Craiu nou! Craiu nou!
La noi bine ai venit...

Suntemu siguri că multi voru fi asteptatu cu ne-rabdare se veda ce critica vomu face reprezentatiunii de Sambata si de Dumineca a operei „Craiu Nou“ (luna noua) scrisa de V. Alesandri, pentru care a compus music'a d. Ciprianu P o r u m b e s e u, profesorul de music'a la gimnaziulu romanu de aici. Amu asistatu la amenduoe reprezentatiunile, der' trebuie se marturisimu, ca puține momente amu pututu dedica criticeii, caici voieamu se gustamu deplinu bucuria ce simtiamu la aspectulu frumóseloror Romaneutiei, cari cantau si jucau cu atata gratia de 'ti ridea anim'a in peptu!

Deca ne-a trebuitu o dovéda pentru aceea ca, cu tote neajunsele timpului, societatea nóstra romana din Brasiovu a progresatu multu, apoi acésta dovéda ne-au dat'o pe deplinu cele duoe reprezentatiuni din septemana trecuta.

Celu ce cutéza, castiga, dice proverbulu nemtieseu si d. Porumbescu a esperiatu adeverulu lui prin efectulu celu bunu ce l'a produsu compositiunea s'a asupra publiculu romanu de aici si chiaru asupra strainiloru. Amu disu: a cutezatu, pentru ca prima incercare a unui componistulu este intodéuna cutezata. D. Porumbescu posedu fara indoela unu talentu multu promitietoriu si o fecunditate mare in compositiune. Music'a ce a compus'o pentru „Craiu Nou“ e viua, forte placuta si ne dovedese, ca a studiatu cu multa diligintia operele compositoriloru moderni Offenbach, Genée, Strauss, Suppé, Lecocq s. a.

Composer Tiberiu Brediceanu writes in his notes: “As early as his operetta *Crai Nou*, the guiding principle is clear that only unaltered folk motifs can serve as the basis for creating genuine Romanian artistic music. Porumbescu is the first who, choosing beautiful folk songs, tries to process them and make them fit for the stage.” (Brediceanu, 1908, p. 316)

A piece of undeniable value in the national artistic heritage, the operetta *Crai Nou* represents the peak of Porumbescu's career that was to be brought to a premature end (1883) after a short but prolific life. After the premiere of the operetta, Ciprian Porumbescu enthusiastically writes to his father: “I've lived to see my dream come true, the audience applauded frantically my opus, I have heard hundreds of voices excitedly calling my name, I was lifted up, praised, flattered, laureate.” (Morariu, 2017, p. 30)

Fig. 11 The review of the Operetta *Crai Nou*, *Transylvania Gazette* (fragment)

2.2 Ciprian Porumbescu, protagonist of operetta *Let me sing!* by Gherase Dendrino

As a tribute to its composer, on the 100th anniversary of Ciprian Porumbescu's birth, the creator of the operetta *Crai Nou* becomes the protagonist of the operetta *Lăsați-mă să cânt!* [Let me sing!] (1954) with the subtitle *Episod din viața lui Ciprian Porumbescu* [An episode from Ciprian Porumbescu's life] by

Gherase Dendrino (Fig. 12)²¹; the moment when his musical-dramatic work is staged is presented in this piece. The name of the operetta is given by the title of the romance *Lăsați-mă să cânt* by Porumbescu.



Fig. 12
Gherase Dendrino

The composer “uses themes from the most popular songs by Ciprian Porumbescu and masterfully suggests the atmosphere in which this great Romanian musician lived, fought and composed.” (*Teatru și muzică* [Theater and music], no. 8, 1954, p. 34) Dendrino was awarded the State Prize (1955) for this work. The libretto has three authors: Erastia Sever, poetess and writer of *Iași* (Miss Romania in 1931)²², Liliana Delescu, composer, poetess and writer (Miss Romania in 1932)²³ and musicologist Viorel Cosma. (Fig. 13)



Fig. 13 *Lăsați-mă să cânt*, authors of the libretto: Erastia Sever, Liliana Delescu, Viorel Cosma

²¹ Gherase Dendrino (1901-1973) – a composer and conductor; he studied composition with Dumitru Georgescu-Kiriac and Alfonso Castaldi at the Bucharest Conservatory (1920-1927); simultaneously he attends the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Medicine (1921-1927); he was the conductor of musical Revue *Cărăbuș* (1932-1946), the “*Alhambra*” *Operetta and Revue Theatre* (1946-1949), *The Revue Theatre* (1949-1950), he was the first conductor of the Operetta State Musical Theatre (starting 1950); he composed the comic opera for children, *Poveste pe strune și pe clape* (1955), the Operetta *Lysistrata* (1960), music for the films *Afacerea Protar* (1955) and *Pe răspunderea mea* (1956) and many other musical pieces; he is also considered the founder of the school of Romanian pop music (with Ion Vasilescu); he acted in various plays and in the film *Visul unei nopti de iarna* [A winter night’s dream] (1946), (Manole’s part).

²² Erastia Sever – Miss România 1931 (Adevărul holding).

²³ Liliana Delescu – Miss România 1932 (Universul holding).



Fig. 14 Ion Dacian –
Ciprian, Silly Popescu –
Bertha

The premiere takes place on September 30th, 1954, on the stage of the Bucharest State Opera; the orchestra was conducted, as was the case of the operetta *Crai Nou*, by the composer himself, Gherase Dendrino, who was also the main conductor of the institution. The show was directed by Nicușor Constantinescu. (*Theater and music*, 1954, p. 27) The tenor Ion Dacian (1911-1981) (Fig. 14, *Theater and music*, 1955, p. 28), after whom the Operetta Theatre is now named, plays Ciprian Porumbescu, a role that will bring him many triumphs. In this role, tenors Mihail Petculescu, Viorel Chicideanu, Petre Valentin are also distributed.

The plot brings together reality and fiction, real and imaginary characters and actions, in order to ally fictitious) between the members of *Societatea Prietenii Artei Românești* [Society of the Friends of Romanian Art] – supporters of the music, and the struggle for the establishment of a national culture promoted by Porumbescu – and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as represented by the Count of Lichtenberg and the Society *Kultur und Musik*. Happy ending: the premiere of *Crai Nou* takes place with the support of friends and has a resounding success, according to the actual event in 1882. The cast consists of 42 roles, 18 main roles and 24 secondary roles, beside the vital role of the choir (The Voice of the people), supported by a large orchestra, along three acts (23 numbers). Dendrino recreates the musical atmosphere at the end of the 19th century using the sound of the waltz, polka, romance that accompany and define various types and characters (for example, Eduard Strauss is accompanied by a waltz); the opponents of Romanian culture are accompanied by a score with bold, caricature-like, grotesque elements. (Fig. 15, *Theater and music*, 1955, p. 28)



Fig. 15 A scene from *Lăsați-mă să cânt* [Let me sing] (1955)

The plot is set in the city of Braşov (1882), so the folklore area is different from that in *Crai Nou* and the idiom specific of Moldavia is replaced by the Transylvanian accent and dialect – for example, in the comic duet Suzana – Nastasi, *Nu-i bai! : Cu o glajă de nu-ți trece e și-n Murâș apă rece, Și-n Târnave, tăt-așa* (act I, no. 2) and in terms of musical themes, as in *Dans Ardelenesc* [Dance from Transylvania] (act III, no. 22). The Bucovina musical area is represented by his works, thus the composer becomes a twofold protagonist: as a character in the operetta and the composer of the music that completes Dendrino's work. Porumbescu brings along the two essential coordinates that define the operetta *Crai Nou*: the folk music of his homeland and his patriotic music! Some of the sources of his inspiration are stated in the score (those which are used in their full version): *Vis de iubire*, with the subtitle *Romance inspired from Ciprian Porumbescu* (act II, no. 12), *Copiliță de la munte* (*Inspired from a melody by Porumbescu*) (act II, no. 14). Other sources Porumbescu used partly are recognisable: *Balada pentru vioară și pian*²⁴ (Ciprian Porumbescu's leit-motif), the choir *hora Crai Nou*, *Cântecul primăverii* [Spring song] (that turned into *Cântec de 1 Mai* starting 1946).

Fig. 16 Gherase Dendrino – Ciprian' Aria, *Mugurel de cântec românesc* (act I, no. 7)

Patriotic composer Porumbescu's portrait is outlined by Dendrino through arias, duets, trios and *tutti* scenes; some of the most remarkable are: aria *Mugurel de cântec românesc* (which illustrates Porumbescu's artistic credo), (act I, no. 7) (Fig. 16), the dramatic aria *Sărmane lăutar pribeag* (final act II, no. 18 – Romance), the duet Bertha – Ciprian, *Te iubesc* [I love you] (act II, no. 16); these areas are part of many singers' repertoire.

2.3 *Crai Nou* and *Lăsați-mă să cânt* – Highlights of the Romanian lyrical stage, of the artistic past and present

The operetta *Crai nou* was widely known and sung in all Romanian artistic circles immediately after its premiere, and was a highly successful work. *Lăsați-mă să cânt* was highly popular – in the year of the premiere it was performed no less than 200 times. These two works are testimonies of Porumbescu's important role as an artistic personality; they have been often interpreted, in full form or as fragments, especially in the commemorative years when the composer or his country were celebrated, both in Romania and

²⁴ *The Ballad for violin and piano*, op. 29 (1880), his famous work in which expressive, sensitive sounds of the ballads, and the *doina* can be found.

abroad. Past and present generations are animated with enthusiasm and patriotic feelings when the music of Porumbescu and Dendrino is performed.

2.3.1 The artistic life of Iași and the operetta *Lăsați-mă să cânt*



Fig. 17 Romanian Opera of Iași – 125th anniversary of Ciprian Porumbescu's birth



Fig. 18 Vasile Filimon as Ciprian Porumbescu

On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Ciprian Porumbescu's birth, the audience had the opportunity to hear the operetta *Lăsați-mă să cânt* by Gherase Dendrino in the 1978-1979 season of the Romanian Opera of Iași, Romania (Fig. 17). In Ciprian Porumbescu's role were distributed tenors Filimon Siminic, Bucovina-born singer Vasile Filimon²⁵ (Fig. 18, personal archive), Ionel Voineag. The artistic direction of the show was by Dimitrie Tăbăcaru²⁶, while the conductors were Corneliu Calistru and Victor Dumănescu (Fig. 19, Opera of Iași, Program Notes, 1978-1979 season, personal archive).

Since the audience was closely acquainted with Porumbescu's legendary life and the great enthusiasm of the artists who participated in the performance,

²⁵ Vasile Filimon, founding member of the Music Highschool, of the reopened Conservatoire, of the Philharmonic Choir ensemble and of the National Opera in Iași.

²⁶ Dimitrie Tăbăcaru (1929-1985) – artistic director (1956-1985), staged operas in Romania and abroad; founding member of the Opera; manager of the Iași Opera (1974-1982); teacher at the Iași Conservatory (Opera Class).

some of them being from Bucovina, the success of the operetta was inherent. A large number of shows were performed in Iași and on tours.

Lăsați-mă să cânt

Operetă în două acte de GHERASE DENDRINO, Libretul de LILIANA DELESCU și VIOREL COSMA

conducerea muzicală CORNELIU CALISTRU VICTOR DUMĂNESCU	regia DIMITRIE TĂBĂCARU asistent MIHAI ZĂBORILĂ	scenografia CONSTANTIN RUSU asistent ANCA PĂSLARU	maestrul de cor ANTON BIȘOC coregrafia MARGARETA BALOGH
--	--	--	--

DISTRIBUȚIA
(soliștii în ordine alfabetică)

Ciprian Porumbescu	— FILIMON SIMINIC, VASILE FILIMON, IONEL VOINEAG	Martin	— FLORIN HARBUZ, GEORGE SOLOVĂSTRU
Berta Gorgon	— GEORGETA BĂLAN, ANETA PAVALACHE	Mărioara	— PĂUNA ROTARU, MARIA SUPARACHI
Adalbert Roth	— VISARION HUȚU, DUIU MARIUS ȘUTEU	Lăzi	— ELENA CUCU, SVETLANA IONESCU
Marta Roth	— MARIA BOGA-VERDEȘ, GINA TRIPA	Paul	— VASILE FILIMON, VICTOR SOCACIU
Suzana	— MELANIA HERDEANU, ECATERINA ZĂRNEȘCU	Schurnacher	— PETRE CĂRCĂLEANU, TOMA ZOTA
Nastasi	— LEON CORDINEANU, CRISTIAN GEORGESCU	Götchel	— ION HUMIȚĂ, VICTOR SOCACIU
Roza Farcaș	— ATENA DIMITRIU, ELENA RUSU, BETȚY SMILOVICI	Hans	— LAURENȚIU GRIGORESCU
Eduard Strauss	— OCTAV AMBROZIE, CONSTANTIN CEPREAGA	Nichita	— LUCIAN DIMITRIU
Contele de Lichtenberg	— FLORIN HARBUZ, ION PRISĂCARU	Kugel	— DANIEL BLAJ
Lengheriu	— MIHAI MOȚ, ION SOANEA	Toader	— ION IURICIUC
		Nesecu	— TEODOR BAHU
		Ilenița	— DOINA ANTONICA
		Gall	— CONSTANTIN CONSTANTINESCU
		Subretele	— EUGENIA AMBROZIE, ELENA CALAMAZ, FLORICA CRIȘMARU, MARIA MLADIN, CONSTANȚA MOSCALU, MARGARETA UILECAN

ANSAMBLUL DE BALET AL OPEREI
regia tehnică : FLORIN HARBUZ

Pregătirea muzicală : FREDY PIRLITESCU, STOIAN SPICU
Producția : PETRE MIHĂILĂ
Sufleuri : VIRGINIA NAGACEVSCHI, GHEORGHE TUDORACHE

Fig. 19 *Lăsați-mă să cânt* by Gherase Dendrino, at Romanian Opera of Iași (1978-1979 season)

2.3.2 Centenary Year of Romania

The operetta *Crai Nou* is an emblematic and highly successful Romanian musical work; it has been staged in several musical institutions on the occasion of Romania's 100th anniversary (2018).

Given their historical significance, the performances from Brașov and Suceava are remarkable. The Brașov Opera staged the operetta *Crai Nou* both in the festive Hall of the National College "Andrei Șaguna"²⁷, the place of the world premiere, and at the Opera Hall (Fig. 20). Leonard Boga was the conductor and the show was directed by Anda Tăbăcaru Hogeș, who offered a poetic rendition of the piece. Two valuable creations were integrated into the work: *The Ballad for violin and piano* (in the orchestra version) and the *Romanian Rhapsody* for Orchestra.

²⁷ The event within the Great Caravan Union.



Fig. 20 *Crai Nou* staged at the Braşov Opera (2018)

The operetta *Crai Nou* was performed in authentic costumes from Bucovina, in the City of Suceava²⁸ (Fig. 21); it was staged by the “Ciprian Porumbescu” Orchestra and the ballet ensemble, along with students and teachers from the “Ciprian Porumbescu” Art College of Suceava, the “Vox Campus” choir of the Capu Câmpului; Emil Havriliuc was the conductor, while Doru Zaharia was the director. The show was also performed in the Great Hall of the House of Culture.



Fig. 21 *Crai Nou* at The Seat Fortress of Suceava (2018)

²⁸ The event was organized by the Suceava County Council through the Bucovina Cultural Center, within the “Ciprian Porumbescu International Festival of Arts” and the celebration of the centenary year “Bucovina 100”.

That same year, the “Nae Leonard” National Opera and Operetta Theatre of Galați presented the premiere of the same show – conducted by Eugen Dan Drăgoi and directed by Adrian Mărginean. A contemporary adaptation of Porumbescu’s work directed by Cristian Mihăilescu and conducted by Alexandru Ilie, under the name *Joc și Rock*, was staged at the Children’s Comic Opera in Bucharest.

The premiere of the operetta *Lăsați-mă să cânt* at the Cluj Opera was also occasioned by the 100th anniversary, but also by the 99th anniversary of the establishment of this artistic institution; Ciprian Porumbescu’s role was sung by tenor Cristian Mogoșan. The ensemble of the Opera, in collaboration with the members of the “Transilvania” State Philharmonic and the actors of the “Lucian Blaga” National Theatre from Cluj performed under Adrian Miller’s baton and were directed by Cătălin Ionescu Arbore; the result was a dynamic performance.

3. Conclusions

A multifarious personality, a lover of folklore and of his nation, Ciprian Porumbescu – one of the founders of the national school of music – contributed to the authenticity and identity of the Romanian musical language through his extensive creation; one important contribution is the composition of the first Romanian operetta *Crai Nou* [New Moon] (1882).

Ciprian Porumbescu, a brilliant new Romanian music writer, creates a syncretic performance, each of the components including a rich popular and national element. The first Romanian cultivated operetta *Crai Nou*, remarkable for its folk musical language and patriotic message, was a model for the composers of the operetta genre following Porumbescu: Bucovina-born Tudor Flondor, Iacob Mureșianu, Tiberiu Brediceanu, Filaret Barbu, Gherase Dendrino.

As a tribute to his art, on the centenary of his birth, the **creator** of the operetta *Crai Nou* becomes the **protagonist** of the operetta *Lăsați-mă să cânt* [Let me sing] (1954) with the subtitle *Episod din viața lui Ciprian Porumbescu* [An episode from Ciprian Porumbescu’s life] by Gherase Dendrino. *Crai Nou* and *Lăsați-mă să cânt* are highlights of the Romanian lyrical theatre, from the artistic past and present, and hold their position as musical pieces frequently performed and received with interest and enthusiasm.

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