The portrait of the main conductors from the Choir of Orăștie

Ioan-Marius POPA

Abstract: *The Choir of Orăștie does not have the meaning of a single musical activity, it has the meaning of an entire choral tradition of Orăștie. The first conductor for the choir of Orăștie was Ioan Bena. His choral activity was continued by the teacher Ioan Branga. After World War I, the choral activities of Orăștie were supervised by the conductor Nicolae Prația, a great music teacher and an important composer from this area. In the communist period, the main conductor of the choirs from here was Ioan Popa, the most important musician of Orăștie. This teacher won a lot of prizes at the main choral competitions of his time. Since 1996 the music teacher Petru Androne Eli has founded the choir „Vlăstarele Orăștiei”, that won a lot of prizes in Romanian or international choral competitions. The conductors mentioned here and those who are mentioned in our historical project are very important in studying the choral activities and choral competition form Orăștie.*

Keywords: *the Choir of Orăștie, Conductor, Choral activities, Choral competition, Ioan Bena, Ioan Branga, Nicolae Prația, Ioan Popa, Petru Androne Eli*

Introduction

The Choir of Orăștie means a whole musical tradition, not just a choir. The exact definition process is necessary in the continuation of our historical and musical study. We will see that many important conductors who have practiced in Orăștie have worked in different choirs. Here we have the founding of a choir in 1868 with the contribution of the teacher Ioan Bena, the father of the composer Augustin Bena.

After 1870, with the departure of the teacher Ioan Bena, the activity of this choir will not be constant, with many pauses and no remarkable results. From 1883, the conductor of the choral band here will become the teacher Ioan Branga, a graduate of the Pedagogical School in Sibiu, the student of the musician George Dima. He takes over the choir of Orăștie, outlining the profile of a competent band. Since 1896, a wider formula of the church choir will be called the "Reunion of Songs". Ioan Branga will have many successes with this choral reunion at the local level and will perform in Alba Iulia and Poiana Sibiului, as well as in the neighborhood villages of Orăștie in the current Alba and Hunedoara counties.

The year 1906 represents the moment of maximum affirmation of the "Reunion of Songs" in Orăștie. The choir accepts the invitation to attend the festival organized by the Coral Society "Carmen" in Bucharest, at the initiative of musician Dumitru G. Kiriatic. Following the concert at the festival, Ioan Branga was personally awarded with the Diploma of Praise and the Golden Medal, and the "Reunion of Songs" was awarded the Diploma of Honor and the Golden Medal. The participation of the choir from Orăștie to the Bucharest festival represents an important moment in the history of Romanian music and in the choral activity in this area of Transylvania. The participation of the choir directed by the teacher Ioan Branga in Bucharest helped to continue and develop the choral music from Orăștie until the outbreak of the First World War. In this special context, a few years after the Great Union, we will find Nicolae Prația in Orăștie as a music teacher at the newly established Romanian schools and conductor of the old church choir. Under the wand of prof. Nicolae Prația, the church choir will receive the name

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"Armonia". It is important to note that Nicolae Prația was the music teacher for two conductors of the town: Ioan Popa and Miron Rațiu

After 1948, Ioan Macarie, Aurel Subescu, Ion Brătescu and Francis Rojnavschi will be found as conductors of religious and secular choirs from Orăștie. From 1951, the Chorus of the Cultural House in Orăștie was led until 1987 by Professor Ioan Popa. The young conductor manages to stage the opera "La seceriș" by Tiberiu Brediceanu, "Crai Nou" by Ciprian Porumbescu and "Ana Lugojana" by Filaret Barbu. With the last operetta, prof. Ioan Popa obtained the 2nd prize at the national level in 1961. As a conductor of this choir, the professor was awarded with numerous 1st, 2nd and 3rd Prizes at inter-county and national levels during the period 1951-1987. After 1960, in the ecclesiastical environment of Orăștie, the theologian Ion Apostol is noticed for almost 20 years. Since 1987 we have found prof. Ioan Popa as conductor of the church choir "Armonia", and at the choir of Orăștie cathedral Ioan Gârliște and Doru Părau.

The fall of the communist regime brings a revival of church choirs, especially through the initiation in 1990 by prof. Ioan Popa of the Coral Festival of Sacred Music, "Cu noi este Dumnezeu". Until now, this choral competition is the oldest and most consistent musical manifestation of its kind in the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. Since 1998 the choir "Armonia" has been directed by teacher Petru Boloț until 2014. In 1996, the children's choir "Vlăstarele Orăștiei" was founded by prof. Petru Androne Eli. In a period of 20 years of activity (1996-2016), the children's choir directed by prof. Petru Androne Eli has won numerous I, II and III awards at national competitions as well as more than 30 awards won in various choral competitions in Europe and Asia.

All of these remarkable results were not possible without the contribution of conductors who have become much involved in musical-missionary or musical-artistic activity. Some conductors have succeeded in impressing through their talent and musical studies, others have not had such qualities, but through perseverance and kindness have led the Orthodox choral tradition. In this regard, a thorough research into the biographies of these personalities is necessary in our scientific study.

Ioan Bena

We can not discuss the great musical personalities of Orăștie without reminding of the one who in 1868, founded the first choir in Orăștie. It's about Ioan Bena. Unfortunately, the information regarding the year of birth is missing. Ioan Bena came from a family of priests from the village of Pianul-de-Jos (today in Alba county, near Orăștie), he had to maintain himself in school¹. Ioan Bena is also the father of the composer Augustin Bena.

As far as the professional training of the first conductor of Orăștie is concerned we know that Ioan Bena graduated from Sebeș high school and then followed the theology in Sibiu, but as the post of priest in Pianul-de-Jos commuted too late, Ioan Bena professed as a teacher. It is assumed that John Bena worked as a teacher or notary and before attending the theology in Sibiu².

It is well known that John Bena's skills have outgrown the church or musical sphere. Ioan Bena was a personality with great power of synthesis, and if the situation allowed him to continue his studies, surely today he would have been one of the great musicians of our country. Thus, besides some of his pedagogical articles spread in the periodicals, besides some translations from Goethe (well known German, Hungarian, Latin), Ioan Bena published a valuable study titled Contributions to the village of Pianul-de-Jos³.

Another important element regarding the activity of Ioan Bena is that the first conductor of the choir from Orăștie composed songs that remarked the one played by the young Pianul de Jos, who went to Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918⁴.

¹ Ion Iliescu, *Corul de la Orăștie*. Comitetul de Artă și Cultură al Județului Hunedoara, 1968, p. 70.

² *Ibidem*, p. 71.

³ *** *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, Deva, Editura Corvin, 2001, p. 78.

⁴ Ion Iliescu, *op.cit.*, p 72.

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Ioan Branga

The teacher and conductor Ioan Branga was born in Poiana Sibiului and did pedagogical studies in Sibiu, excelled in music, being a student appreciated and encouraged by the great composer Gheorghe Dima, and since 1883 he has been conducting for more than a quarter of a century, the choir from Orăștie.

In 1886-1887, "the Consistor, as definitive teacher, has chosen and consolidated Ioan Branga, who set up the choir, resorting to the villagers and peasant girls in the locality"⁵. By the term of establishment in the present case it is not understood the foundation of a choir, but the reorganization of an already existing chorus by bringing younger members.

In 1906 at the Romanian Arenas in Bucharest, the Carmen Music Society, led by Dumitru Georgescu Kiriac, organizes a festival of coral societies in Romania, including Transylvania and Banat, then under Austro-Hungarian rule. 25 choral bands participated at this coral festival. The Choir of Orăștie and its conductor, in the person of Teacher Ioan Branga, receive gold medals separately. This choir also called the "Romanian Reunion of Songs", thanks to its successes, made many personalities of the time come and support various artistic programs in Orăștie⁶.

Ioan Branga was one of the most active people in the social and cultural life of Orăștie. He was a member of the Supervisory Committee of the "Ardeleana" Bank and then a member of the Board of Directors. He was also a member of the Parish Council and the City Community. Thanks to Ioan Branga, the first Funeral Society was founded in Orăștie and it functioned for a very long time⁷ until the communist regime was established. The conductor Ioan Branga retired from the choral activity in 1913, but afterwards the choral activity

⁵ ***, *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, p. 77.

⁶ Maria Vârtopeanu, *Din activitatea Reuniunii de cântări din Orăștie*, în „Sargeția”, Nr. 17-18, Deva, 1982-1983, p. 619.

⁷ ***, *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, p. 77.

intensifies, especially after the Great Union of December 1, 1918 in Alba Iulia and the establishment of the "Aurel Vlaicu" High School in Orăștie.

Valeriu Bora

He was born in 1890 in Crivobara - Banat, Caraș-Severin County, and died on 30 July 1976 in Șibot commune, Alba County. His father was priest and his mother was housewife. He studied at the Greek-Catholic Upper Gymnasium in Blaj - maturity in 1911 and (further) until 1913. He followed Theology to Blaj and then continued Theology at Lugoj (Greek-Catholic) until 1915.

He becomes a Greek-Catholic priest in Homorod and Vaidei (Hunedoara County) until 1919, when, in the lack of qualified cadres, he is sent as a physical education teacher at "Aurel Vlaicu" High School in Orăștie, following the university qualification in Cluj as many Transylvanian intellectuals did after the Union of 1918⁸.

He remains at this high school until 1948 when retiring to the village Șibot, Alba County. The literary debut is achieved by publishing lyrics in *Unirea de la Blaj*, 1910, editor C. Domșia, which encourages beginners in writing. He continued to publish in "Românul" printed in Arad, led by Vasile Goldiș⁹.

Magazines and newspapers to which he collaborated: "Unirea" (Blaj), "Românul" (Arad), "Drapelul" (Lugoj - director Valeriu Braniște), "Societatea de mâine" (Cluj - director Ion Clopoțel), "Gazeta Hunedoarei", "Frontul plugarilor", "Dacia Traiană", (Sibiu), "Neamul românesc" (director N. Iorga), "Sfarmă - Piatră" (Director I. Gregorian), "Gândirea", "Mișcarea literară", "Țara noastră", (Director O. Goga), "Biruința" (Cluj - director V. Mereuță), "Libertatea" (Orăștie), "Solia dreptății" (Orăștie).

⁸ Ileana Lucia Floran, *Un secol de poezie în orașul Paliei*, Antologie 1911-2011, Orăștie, Editura Emma, 2012, p. 36.

⁹ Petru Baci, *Orăștia de la Târg, Reședință de Scaun și Oraș, la Municipiu*, Deva, 1995, p. 122.

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At his initiative and action, on the basis of a plebiscite, in Cluj-Napoca was founded "Societatea scriitorilor români", from Transylvania- whose President was Victor Papilian. Valeriu Bora published the following volumes: "Truda noastră", "Sfaturi și îndemnuri pentru popor", Arad, 1917; "Visează pământul", verses, Orăștie, 1920; "Când purtam cu minele soarele", poems "Fără îngeri", Editura Tipografiei săteanului, Sibiu, 1928; "Drapele și lauri", verses, Deva, 1939. In his literary work, he often signed with the pseudonym Iasmin¹⁰.

His merit is great in the choral history of Orăștie. Valeriu Bora led choruses in the interwar period in Orăștie, and after 1948 he contributed greatly to the spread of the good name of the choir from Orăștie to the literary world. Unfortunately, even though he has been conducting a period of about 15 years, so far no details of the choirs directed by Valeriu Bora are known. He worked extensively with composer Ioan D. Chirescu from Bucharest and was uncle on the maternal line of Prof. Ioan Popa¹¹.

Some of his poems have been translated into music. First of all, "Imnul Orăștiei", which had two titles, "Multiseculară Orăștie" (until 1990) and "Orăștie, vatră de cultură" after 1990, as well as two songs, made by Ioan D. Chirescu, composer, university professor and conductor who has collaborated with Valeriu Bora many times with a long correspondence and the other by Ioan Popa, a teacher, conductor and composer of Orăștie, who also signed the music of other songs on the poet's poems: *Cântec lui Aurel Vlaicu; Școlarii; Noi, corul de la Orăștie; Pacea lumii*¹².

He enjoyed the friendship and appreciation of N. Iorga, Liviu Rebreanu baptized his daughter Tatiana and came three times in the house of the poet from Orăștie; I.U. Soricu, Aron Cotruș, Nichifor Crainic, O. Hulea, great artist, I.D. Chirescu, E. Lovinescu, Bogdan

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p 123.

¹¹ Ileana Lucia Floran, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 38.

Duică, I. Agârbiceanu. Valeriu Bora died in Șibot, Alba county, where he has established after retirement.

Nicolae Prația

Nicolae Prația was born in 1891 in Abrud area in the Apuseni Mountains, Alba County. Graduate of the Pedagogical School in Sibiu, Nicolae Prația was the student of the priest and musician Timotei Popovici. After 1920 he attended the Conservatory in Cluj-Napoca, being a good instrument-player in violin, double bass, piano and accordion. At Cluj-Napoca, he is remarked and appreciated by Augustin Bena¹³. In 1925, when prof. Gheorghe Pârvu and Gheorghe Oancea (the brother of the composer Nicolae Oancea) left, Nicolae Prația was appointed as a music teacher at "Aurel Vlaicu" High School in Orăștie.

Shortly the pedagogical skills of Nicolae Prația were complemented by his involvement in the entire choral activity in Orăștie. The teacher formed and directed the mixed chorus on four voices, "Maica Domnului" of high school "Aurel Vlaicu" and "Despina-Doamnă" girls school¹⁴. Besides the demands of the school events, the "Maica Domnului" choir gave answers to the liturgy in the chapel of the high school, as well as to various occasional religious ceremonies in Orăștie. At the same time, the best performing students in the upper high school classes were selected in the choir "Armonia" of the parish "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" in Orăștie. In parallel with the choral activity, the teacher also took care of the training and conducting of the high school orchestra. With the choir and the orchestra of the high school, Nicolae Prația performed various concerts in almost all the localities around Orăștie¹⁵.

From 1925, for a period of about 20 years, the musical leadership of the church choir mentioned above returned to Nicolae Prația. The

¹³ Domin Adam, *Repertoriu Coral – AUGUSTIN BENA*, Alba Iulia, Editura Reîntregirea, 2012, p. 11.

¹⁴ Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹⁵ Ioan-Marius Popa, *Repertoriu Coral – Nicolae Prația*, Alba-Iulia, Editura Reîntregirea, 2016, p. 10.

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young teacher begins reorganizing the choir, imposing a severe rehearsal program. Starting with Nicholas Prația, the church choir will be called "Armonia". The liturgical songs from the collection of Timotei Popovici were imposed from this period. The conductor introduced in the chorus repertoire "Armonia" many liturgical songs from the collection of Antoniu Sequens, former music teacher of Timotei Popovici and from the collection of Ioane Ghica-Comănești¹⁶.

The Carols are an important chapter in which Timotei Popovici's songs were spread through Orăștie by Nicolae Prația. Here we remember the collection "Florile Dalbe"¹⁷, Volume I, which became a normative work for the mixed choir "Armonia". "Florile Dalbe" collection was purchased in about 50 copies for the "Armonia" choir, becoming the basic repertoire of carols and star songs of this band for a long time. In addition to the 20 songs printed here for mixed and male choir, we find only one musical piece that does not belong to Timotei Popovici. This is the star song *Trei Crai* in the processing of Nicolae Prația. The printing of the star song in the stylization of the teacher from Orăștie along with the songs of his mentor from Sibiu represents the national recognition of Nicolae Prația. In the coming years, many religious collections or school textbooks will contain this beautiful workmanship¹⁸.

The participation with the choir "Armonia" at the sanctification of the orthodox church in Pricaz village in 1934 and participation in the

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Timotei Popovici, *Florile Dalbe*, Colecțiune de colinde și cântece de stea pentru cor mixt și de bărbăți, Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1928.

¹⁸ The star song *Trei Crai*, as we find it in the collection *Florile Dalbe*, was taken and used in other books: Mihail Gr. Poslușnicu, *Istoria Muzicii Contemporane și Moderne la Români*, București, Editura „Cartea Românească”, p. 130.; *** *Carte de Cântări Bisericești*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București 1975, p. 67; Ioan Brie, *73 de colinde*, Cluj-Napoca, 1980, p. 32; Ioan Brie, *Cântări la serviciile religioase*, Cluj-Napoca, 1988, p. 328; *Colinde și cântece de stea*, Volumul I, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Aperta, 1994, p. 44; Nicu Moldoveanu, *Antologie de colinde pentru cor mixt*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1999 și ediția a II-a, 2005, p. 124; *Repertoriu Coral*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003, p. 548.

Holy Mass with the chorus "Armonia" in Beriu¹⁹ followed by an artistic program offered by the "Maica Domnului" choir and the orchestra of the High School "Aurel Vlaicu" in 1936. A last tour in the countryside, with an extensive artistic program offered by the pupils' choir and the orchestra of the high school, was organized in the village of Folt, with spectators from neighboring villages: Bobâlna, Pricaz, Boiu and Cigmău. The program was rich and well-prepared, including "Cinel-Cinel" by Vasile Alecsandri, a musical vodevil²⁰. In the middle of 1944 he formed and directed the choir that was built at the newly built cathedral in Orăștie, now known as the "Arhanghelii". Between the years 1944-1948, the musical leadership of the choir "Armonia" returned to prof. Aurel Subescu.

Last but not least, Nicolae Prația has been an example for many generations, a model for his students, providing the musical and pedagogical guidance necessary for serious and eager young people to study. Here are cultural and musical personalities such as: Ioan R. Nicola (university professor, folk music collector, musicologist, conductor of several choirs in Sibiu, Iași and Cluj-Napoca), Felician Fărcașu (deacon, folk singer and folk songwriter), Mircea Breazu (professor, musicologist, soloist of the Hungarian Opera, director of the Romanian Opera in Cluj-Napoca), Ioan Popa (composer, folk collector, music teacher and conductor of Cluj-Napoca, Cugir and Orăștie), Nicolae Popa (music professor, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Cluj-Napoca - contrabass), Ioan Budoiu (professor and soloist of the Romanian Opera in Cluj-Napoca), Miron Rațiu (conductor and director of the Oradea Philharmonic Orchestra) or theological personalities such as: Vasile Coman, Bishop of Oradea, arch. prof. dr. John Floca and the theologian Andrei Scrima. After retirement, in 1947 he moved to Cluj-Napoca and was involved in the formation and conducting of church choirs. Nicolae Prația has died in 1969.

¹⁹ ***, *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, p. 229.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

Ioan Popa

The musician Ioan Popa was born on November 12, 1926, in a family with a strong musical tradition. He attended the courses at "Aurel Vlaicu" High School in Orăștie, and then the university courses at the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Conservatory in Cluj-Napoca, the musical pedagogy section between the years 1946-1950. His teachers were here the great musicians: Traian Vulpescu, Sigismund Toduță, Constantin Bugeanu, Ioan R. Nicola, Lucian Surlașiu, Anton Ronai. After graduating from the Conservatory he is assigned to the same institution as a trainer at the Folklore Department and then, on request, transferred to 1951 as a general culture professor at the Agricultural Technical School in Orăștie and a music teacher at the "Aurel Vlaicu" from the same town.

From 1962 he became a university lecturer and head of the chair at the Pedagogical Institute in Cluj-Napoca, and from 1964 professor at the Cugir Middle School, and since 1965, secretary of the Committee for Culture and Art of the Orăștie District, professor at "Aurel Vlaicu" from Orăștie from 1967 to 1979, and in the last period 1979-1987 he is a music teacher at the General School no. 1 from Orăștie. In 1987 he retired from school²¹.

In parallel with the activity in the field of education, he has also carried out a rich cultural activity at the Orăștie Cultural House, as a conductor of the choir, of the semi-symphonic orchestra and for a little while and of the folk band, achieving performances in Orăștie and other localities with the operetta: "La seceriș" by Tiberiu Brediceanu, "Crai Nou" by Ciprian Porumbescu and "Ana Lugojana" by Filaret Barbu. With the operetta "Ana Lugojana", having as soloists two artists of the Romanian Opera from Cluj, Lia Hubic and Cornel Fănățeanu, he won the 2nd prize at national level. For many years he has been conducting

²¹ Constantin Toni Dârțu, *Personalități române și faptele lor*, Iași, Editura Anglodac, 2001, p. 188.

the Choir of the House of Culture, with which he earns the greatest distinctions in county or national choral competitions²².

With his retirement, Ioan Popa took over the choir "Armonia" of the orthodox parish, "Adormirea Maicii Domnului", Orăștie II, which he raised to a high artistic performance. In 1990, he is the main initiator of the Inter-County Coral Festival of Sacred Music "Cu noi este Dumnezeu", which reached 2016 at the XXVII-th edition. In 1991 he organizes an international choral concert in Orăștie with the participation of the choir "Armonia" and "Liedertafel" (of the lutheran community) in the locality and the recital of the reformed choir in Saint-Etienne (France). Since 1992, he has begun organizing the Pascal Ecumenical Concert, where there have participated for many years, the choirs of the historical confessions of the town.

For outstanding merits in the activity he was awarded honorary titles and medals, among them: Medal of Labor, the title of Leading Professor, Order "Cultural Merit" 4th grade and Honorary Citizen of Orăștie in 1999. The creation activity is found in the choral, secular and religious compositions recognized by originality and harmony, as well as by the value of the folkloric processing. He is the author of 35 secular and religious songs, has harmonized a collection of about 50 folk songs and also has a collection of over 60 harmonic choirs for mixed choir.

Miron Rațiu

He was born in 1929 in a family of peasants, the father being an interpreter of many amateur instruments, the mother being from the Vasileoiu family in Căstău, a large family with 12 children, some of whom managed to make commendable studies and careers. He came daily at the "Aurel Vlaicu" High School in Orăștie, from his grandparents from Căstău.

In the family home of Căstău he found a violin repaired by Bela Alfodi, a well-known violinist from Orăștie area. This violin opened his

²² Ioan Marius Popa, *Ioan Popa – o viață închinată muzicii*, Orăștie, Editura Emma, Ediția a II-a, 2011, p. 5.

appetite for music. He began to sing at the church of Căstău, at first the Apostle and Our Father, then different songs and hymns. Guided by his uncle, he takes violin classes from his high school music teacher, Nicolae Prația, for four years. He is delighted with his new disciple at Căstău. He appreciates his voice, the musical hearing as well as the digital performance and the perseverance that proves it. After four years of violin, Prof. Nicolae Prația told him bluntly, "From now on, son, you can make music yourself"²³. What impresses in the case of Miron Rațiu is the fact that after the graduation of "Gheorghe Dima" Conservatory from Cluj-Napoca, he followed for four years the conducting courses at the same institution.

He was part of the master's degree A. Ciolan. He kept in touch with the high school teacher, moved to Cluj. Miron Rațiu was singing in the choir of the "Maica Domnului" church in downtown Cluj, conducted by his former teacher, retired then. In 1956, on the scene of the Romanian Opera in Cluj, the first act of the opera "The Wedding of Figaro" was directed by Miron Rațiu. The guest was also the high school music teacher, Nicolae Prația. After the show, he embraced him in front of all, with master A. Ciolan standing there, exclaiming, "I put his wand in his hand!"²⁴.

For conductor Miron Rațiu, music is above all the arts, and more than literature addresses emotional states where music is no longer needed. And as a music theorist, he is convinced that music is a time-consuming art, and to practice it requires professional time. In Oradea he has diversified his musical activity over the years, leading to the performance of amateur choirs, as in the 1970s Hilaria. At the Art High School in Oradea he taught violin, chamber music and orchestra, setting up a class with this profile.

As a conductor in Oradea he organized a permanent orchestra, symphonic ensemble balanced and sufficiently instructed, the conductor being appreciated by the chorus and instrumentalist as a true master. Tours in the country and abroad are abundant in glorious

²³ ***, *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, p. 234.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 234

appreciation of the original conductor from the Orăștie area. "Miron Ratiu's performance wand brings strength, balance, a sincere experience and a great power to exteriorize the emotional content of the work"²⁵.

At an interpretation lesson organized in Prague in 1969, the meeting with the great Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache, would mark him profoundly, becoming more ambitious and more determined. The success of his daughter Anca Rațiu, a violinist recognized on the West's scenes in Spain where she has settled, is an opportunity for Miron Rațiu to satisfy himself and his self-esteem. Through all that he has done, Miron Rațiu remains a son of Orăștie, with whom this town can feel honored in the contemporary musical world.

Ion Apostol

He was born on 15 September 1911 in the village of Dragoslavele, Argeș County, from the parents Ileana and Ion Apostol. He attended secondary studies at the Seminar "Veniamin Costache" in Iași, where he was awarded in all eight years of study. Then he attended the courses of the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest, where he was the head of the promotion, obtaining the grade "cum laudae"²⁶.

Being attracted by the sociological problems, he followed the courses of the Faculty of Philosophy, the Sociology Department, and later, the School of Personnel organized by the Social Service in Petriș, Arad County.

Since 1938 his activity began under the direction of Professor Dimitrie Gusti, within the Royal Cultural Foundation. In the student teams, who were leading some great personalities of the time, they were caroling the country for the cultural and economic rise of the Romanian village. Under these conditions, Ion Apostol met her future wife, Veturia Ghigu from Orăștie, who became an eminent history teacher.

Feeling attracted to poetry and education, Ion Apostol attended the "Titu Maiorescu" Pedagogical Seminar in Bucharest, the specialization of Romanian theology. He was appointed professor at the

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

²⁶ Ileana Lucia Floran, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

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"Marele Voievod Mihai" High School in Bucharest, from where, in 1946, he was transferred to the Gymnasium of Rucăr, only five kilometers from his native village, where he remained until 1948²⁷.

On May 15, 1948, he was arrested and detained by several prisons, being released only in 1955, when he returned to his wife and children who lived in Rucar. He has published many sociological, theological and musical studies of documentary value, as well as studies about the customs and ancient customs of Romanians in Ukraine.

Ion Apostol was a collaborative activist of the "Romanian Telegraph" newspaper in Sibiu, where he published articles about the suffering suffered in the years of detention in Aiud, Ocele Mari, Pitești, or Canal prisons. Some of the articles published include some important poets Vasile Voiculescu and Nechifor Crainic, Ion Apostol having a nice collaboration with them²⁸.

An important part of Ion Apostol's activity, after his release from detention, took place in Orăștie, where his wife had his parent's house. Here he worked hard, although he was a learned sociologist and theologian. Closer to his retirement, he flushed as an accountant at the Episcopate of Arad and Hunedoara..

During this period, he carried out important missionary work on the musical realm, organizing church choirs at the Orăștie Cathedral, dedicated to the "Archangels Mihail and Gavriil" and then at the "Adormirea Maicii Domnului", Orăștie II parish. At these two churches in Orăștie he organized mixed choruses on four voices. Also during this period Ion Apostol worked as a member in the Choir of the Cultural House in Orăștie under the wand of prof. Ioan Popa. It should be noted that Ion Apostol received substantial help from prof. Ioan Popa in organizing a four-voiced religious chorus. Another interesting fact is

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

²⁸ Gh. Pârnuță, *Ion Apostol – profesor, preot, scriitor – dârz luptător pentru dreptate*, București, Editura Semne, 1997, p. 20.

that Ion Apostol has composed many poems that have been enlivened by the song by prof. Ioan Popa²⁹.

With great patience, Ion Apostol set up the church choirs in Orăștie, especially the "Armonia" choir of the Orăștie II parish. The "Armonia" Choir of the Orthodox Parish, "Adormirea Maicii Domnului", was so spiritually connected to its conductor, Ion Apostol, that it's members participated in Dragoslavele at the funeral ceremony of his wife Veturia.

In 1992, he was ordained a missionary priest, leaving all the places where he passed, deep traces, both by singing on the side and by serving religious services and his sermons. It passed to the eternal in 1995.

Petru-Androne Eli

He was born on 26 June 1957 in the village of Orăștioara de Jos, where he attended primary school in the class of teacher Victoria Feneșan. The gymnasium and lyceum classes followed at the Art High School in Deva, music profile, specializing in the clarinet. In 1976 he is admitted to the "Gheorghe Dima" Conservatory in Cluj-Napoca, the Faculty of Musicology and Composition, Pedagogy. During his studies he played in several orchestras with great success: folk ensembles "Mărțișorul" (led by Dumitru Fărcaș) and "Rapsodia Someșană" (led by Alexandru Tamas) - with which he participated in several tournaments and festivals - or The "Big Band" band of the Student Culture House, with which it won twice the 1st place at the International Jazz Festival in Sibiu. He graduated from the faculty in 1980, with the 10 grade at the state exam. Between 1980 and 1982 he worked as a teacher and deputy director of the I-X (Slovak) General School in Șinteu commune, Bihor County.

Here he formed a group of bălălaici with whom he participated, in 1982, at the festival in Detva, Czechoslovakia. In 1982 he came to Orăștie, taking over the Children's Club. Over the course of the 14 years, as part of this activity, he initiated more than 800 children on the

²⁹ Ileana Lucia Floran, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

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fanfare's instruments, some dozen of them performing a singing profession, and 25 went to high schools and music schools, and three of these followed the Conservatory.

At all the festivals organized in the country he gained the first places. In 1989 the fanfare got the "Golden Ship" in Mariopol, Ukraine. He was invited to several international festivals, such as the Internationaler Kultursommer in Pörlau, Austria (1990, 1991) or Eurofanfare in Villefranche-de-Rouergue, France (1987), but failed to reach them, just later, in 1995, receiving four awards. It has also distinguished itself through its ongoing effort to improve the quality and number of tools and outfits. During this period he was also a member of the choir "Armonia" directed by master Ioan Popa. Also, Petru-Androne Eli participated as instrumentalist of the Folklore Ensemble "Doina Mureșului" at his most important actions, conquering in 1985 two gold medals (ensemble and orchestra) at the Larissa Festival that took place in Greece.

In 1994 he obtained his first degree with the grade 10, and from 1996 he returned to the chair as a teacher at the General School no. 1 (currently dr. Aurel Vlad) and at the "Aurel Vlaicu" Theoretical Highschool, currently a National College. Also in 1996 he founded the children's choir, "Vlăstarele Orăștiei", alongside the "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" parish in Orăștie, the second choral formation to ensure the answers to the Divine Liturgy³⁰.

Since 1997, she is a member of the International People's Art Organization, based in Vienna and affiliated with UNESCO. In the spring of 2000, the leadership of this organization was invited to be part of the specialized commission no. 10 in July 2000, he became a member of the National Coral Association of Romania (President Voicu Enăchescu) at the invitation of its leadership³¹. The choir "Vlăstarele Orăștiei" has participated in numerous tours in Europe and

³⁰ Florin Drăghiciu, *Corul de la Orăștie, 130 de ani de tradiție*, Orăștie, Tipografia Danielle, 1998, p. 4.

³¹ Alina Părvulescu, *Gala A.N.C.R.*, în „Buletin informativ”, al A.N.C.R., București, nr. 7, mai 2004, pp. 23-26.

was also present at a choral manifestation in China, gaining more than 30 international awards in 20 years of activity.

In 2004 he was awarded the "Meritul pentru învățământ" Medal, 2nd Grade, the M.E.C.T. Excellence Prize In 2005, the "Romanian School Olympians" Diploma awarded by the Romanian Government in 2008, Honorary Citizen of Orăștie Town in 2008. We must remember also the receiving of great awards as as "Excelent Choir Conductor" in 2001 in Vienna and the Excellency Prize of "World Choir Peace" from 2014 also in Vienna. For the special merits in the choral activity and the good image of our country presented and promoted in international competitions and festivals, on April 5, 2017, the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, decorated prof. Petru Androne Eli with the Order "Cultural Merit" Cavalier degree, "F" category, for "Promotion of Culture"

Petru Boloț

Petru Boloț was born on 25 July 1956 in the village of Vața de Jos. He follows the studies of the Pedagogical High School in Deva, becoming a teacher, a profession that he will not divorce in the next 40 years, although in the meantime he completes his studies at the Bucharest School of Music becoming a teacher.

The young 20-year-old graduate returns to his native lands, although good results in learning, and especially artistic merits at the musical level, entitle him to a good place in a big city. He debuted in his teaching career at Primary School in Prăvăleni, after that, his life moves the steps to the General School of Beriu, and the last stage he spends in Orăștie, at the General School "Dominic Stanca." In the natural course ascending ascends along time, all stages of the profession getting its degrees, distinctions and gradations that attest to its great love for children and for its profession.

The special merits that highlight the teacher Petru Boloț among the other colleagues are the artistic ones. The violin encounter, the love of his life takes place at the age of 14, and the one who puts it in his hand is even Aurel Colf, the founder and conductor of the Vața instrumental-band. With a passion for studying the instrument, he gets

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to sing in various orchestras in a few years: the Pioneers House, the Trade Union Club, the Orchestra of the House of Culture, the orchestra of the Petroșani Institute of Mines, but especially in his high school.

Here he had a happy opportunity to catch a special generation of instrumentalists, such as Ionel Coza, Ovidiu Miheț, Liviu Bulzan, Ionel Groza, Ghiță Albu, Vasile Bebeșelea and many others. In the middle of them was the great friend, the extraordinary talent, the interpret Drăgan Munteanu, the great singer of Transylvania. Petru Boloț was the conductor of this great instrumental band with whom he made tours all over the country and who, after 10, 20, 35 years, reunites yet to enjoy music together.

The life of the teacher Petru Boloț could be divided into three stages: Vața, Beriu and Orăștie. At Vața he has been active for four years, passionately engaging in artistic activities, but above all, integrating in the blower instrumental band and together with his extraordinary collaborator, the instrument-player Pera Bulz reorganizes it (because the conductor of the tutelage, Aurel Colf Had gone to Deva). In a very friendly friendship, the two bring again the renowned the band to the glory given to him by his founder in 1965. The band climbs all the stages of the contests at that time of the Romanian Singing and reaches to win again in 1979 in Reșița the first place in the country. Together with Pera Bulz, Ionel Coza, Ghiță Tuca, Cornel Bolcu, Mironuț and Stângă join the Getusa County Ensemble and participate in 1980 at the International Folklore Parade in Maastricht in the Netherlands, where Romania's name is at the top of the 28 of countries on all continents.

Since 1980 there is a period of another 10 years, more tumultuous, in Beriu commune. Here, in the village of Căstău, he meets the country's greatest instrument-players, Relu Sibișan father, son and grandchildren from the family of Urs with all their people playing violin. These "silk" Gypsies receive him with love and lead him to lead them by welding the best traditional land in Transylvania (there was then only one such high-performance band in the country, the Clejani band). The winner of several times with the first place in the country, the band from Căstău made valuable recordings in 1983 in the studios

of the Romanian Radio and at the Institute of Ethnological and Dialectological Research with the researcher prof.univ.dr. Speranța Rădulescu. The band then participated in two international tours in Switzerland in Bern and in France in Paris.

With the overthrow of the regime, we find Petru Boloț in Orăștie in a new stage of life that spans over 20 years. Through a strange complex of circumstances, he is almost obligated to take over from Professor Ioan Popa the choir "Armonia" of the "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" in Orăștie.

As conductor of "Armonia" choir, Petru Boloț lives great and permanent spiritual satisfactions through his weekly participation in the Divine Liturgy, but also through the appreciations he enjoys when the choir plays in other churches. Thus, claiming the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, he had the joy of meet and stand near some more spiritualists like Father John of Recea, Father Teofil Părăianu from Sâmbăta de Sus, Father Melchisedec from Lainici, Father Ioan Sabău from Folt and many others.

The choir he led until 2014 participated in many editions of the Sacred Music Festival "Cu noi este Dumnezeu" from Orăștie. At the same time he was present and appreciated at the choral festivals in Reșița, Lugoj and Caransebeș. In the year 2002, the Bishop of that time of Caransebeș, His Grace Laurențiu Streza, today Orthodox Metropolitan of Transylvania, exclaimed with delight at Reșița: "Blessed is the church and happy are the priests who have such a choir to support them"³². In December 2014, after a period in which he fought for his health, he passed out of this life.

Conclusions

We can see that the music activity in Orăștie is a particularly rich one. As we foreseen, although there is no particular musical school here, the choir in this city was a true institution where music was given a place of honor in this area.

³² Ioan Vasiu, *Corul Armonia la Caransebeș*, în „Palia Expres”, Anul VII, nr. 48 (173), 5-11 decembrie 2002, p. 3.

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In our study we saw the profile of the great musical personalities of Orăștie. Thus, we managed to get to know the intellectual profile of the teacher Ioan Bena, the father of the composer Augustin Bena, who in 1868 accepted the task of establishing in Orăștie the first chorus of voices, a personality with a great work and synthesis, to which Orăștia owes much, but little that has been written about.

After Ioan Bena, we must mention Ioan Branga, the disciple of Gheorghe Dima, who in 1883 became a teacher in Orăștie and became for more than a quarter of a century the choir conductor from Orăștie. In 1906, Ioan Branga and his choir are distinguished separately with the Golden Medal at the Bucharest Festival, organized by Dumitru Georgescu Kiriac.

The most important conductor who succeeded Ioan Branga was Nicolae Prația, another personality of the Romanian music from the 20th century, of who's life little is known. Also, Nicolae Prația is the one who gives the name "Armonia" of the church choir from Orăștie. Nicolae Prația sets up strong choirs in Orăștie and a new generation of musicians and conductors, who in time will become heavy names in Romanian music: Ioan Popa and Miron Rațiu.

About Ioan Popa we can say that he in fact an brilliant musician of Orăștie. We can point out that it was a university setting that preferred to return to their native lands to carry on the musical tradition here. He was the conductor of the House of Culture Choir and conductor of the Choir "Armonia". He initiated the Inter-County Coral Festival of Sacred Music "Cu noi este Dumnezeu" in 1990 and the Pascal Ecumenical Concert in 1992. Professor Ioan Popa is also a great composer whose name is linked to dozens of secular, religious and religious harmonies, processing and compositions.

Miron Rațiu is another personality of Orăștie who has worked in Oradea. Here, over the years, he has diversified his musical activity, leading to the performance of amateur choirs, as in the 1970s Hilaria. At the Art High School in Oradea he taught violin, chamber music and orchestra, setting up a class with this profile. As a conductor in Oradea he organized a permanent orchestra, a symphonic ensemble balanced

and well trained, the conductor being appreciated by choir members and instrumentalists.

Also, not to be forgotten, we mention the church conductors of the choir "Armonia" such as Ioan Apostol, of Dragoslavele origin, Argeş County, a high-ranking theologian, formerly detained in communist prisons, who through his wife arrived in Orăştie and unfolded a strong literary and musical-missionary activity at the Orthodox parishes here. Here we also mention Petru Boloş, a humble person, a very talented music teacher, who carried on the choral tradition.

The teacher and conductor Petru Androne Eli is the one who founded in 1996 the choir of children, "Vlăstarele Orăştiei", a special chorus with an impressive record. With this choir, Prof. Petru Androne Eli managed to represent the town Orăştie and Romania in many choral festivals on the stage of prestigious religious and cultural institutions of Europe.