

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
62 (1), pp. 68-80, 2015

The Evolution of the Art of conducting in the Choral Church Music from the West of the Country. The conducting and interpretative Style of Athanasius Lipovan

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Abstract

The XXth century was one of flourishing for the homophonic church music, and for the choral-one. The choral church music created the liturgical atmosphere which every believer needs, exalting him even more to God. The religious choral chant has the purpose to open to men new perspectives of knowing and discovering God in Trinity, of conducting through the Christian values, values which every Christian should acquire, and then to transmit to others, being in that way an example of spiritual living. Athanasius Lipovan was one of those who understood the role and the importance of the harmonic church music in the life of every Christian man, and contributed through his exceptional art at his development, giving the posterity a rich thesaurus of representative works, both harmonic and monodic.

Keywords

Choral church music, word and sound, logos and melos, art, chironomy, conductor.

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Prolegomenon: *word and sound, logos and Melos*, are living together in a perfect harmony in the composing of the human voice, there where music gives profoundness to the word, and the word borrows to these meaning. Beethoven says that “the art and science exalts the man to God”.

In the man, creation of God, are united the word and the sound in the ineffable tissue of music. Music express, in the seraphic language, the connection of man with his Creator, in a liturgical solemnity. The liturgical chant and the entire development of the cultic music imitate the cherubim service. That’s why, in the Holy Liturgy, “Let us who mystically represent the cherubim”, ennoble the musical message.

1. The importance of the choral music in the cult.

Conducting is an art, but, in the same time, a science. Presumes, besides the talent a series of knowledge of speciality, directly connected to this profession, but even the profound musical knowledge. To realize an authentic interpretation it should take account the style of the century when the piece was composed. A good conductor should have the qualities born with and the ambitions of a leader.

An authentic interpretation cannot realize if the conductor doesn’t know the intensions of the composer, which he should put into practice. For this, he should analyse the works under literary, musical and vocal aspect.

Any consideration of a theme should compose the emphasis of its role and importance in that specific domain and that’s why is important to take account of the opinions of some important specialists regarding the big family of which the church music is about. So, the only domains parts of our life which remains fully ours are the “art and the faith”. These two collocations cannot exist the one without the other, because both are the expression the most authentic of our lives.

It is good to not forget that “Church is the culture without equal in the history. And gave us word of communion with the One without beginning, which, humble, descends to the high of our mind, to elevate us at the high of His mind, the one without beginning”.¹

¹ Father Rafael Noica, in *Spiritual talk (Convorbiri duhovnicești)*, by Ioanichie Bălan, Ed. Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei Publishing House, Iași, 1995, p. 172.

As the importance of the art,

“experiences of centuries certifies that fact, the first thing as meaning in the Church is the art. To express the life, not an ideology. A painter or knows how to reproduce with his brush and colours his life experience, or what he is doing is good to trash away. A composer knows to say with his music something special from his life experience, otherwise he is useless.”²

From this perspective “it should consider the orthodox civilisation and culture, in comparison with the civilisation of the utilitarianism which managed to subject us.”³ Orthodoxy is between two complexes of inferiority and superiority which he should exceed, trying to define himself by being the opposite. If this superiority is perfect, then

“the perfection of the Orthodox Church, perfection at the liturgical level, artistic, theological, makes difficult the communion with the rest of the world... This is one of the biggest problems of the Orthodox Church in the Occident of communicate her perfection.”

To realize the value and the role of the music in Orthodoxy in general and in the divine cult in particular, we should watch from the negative perspective. So, how it would be the seven praise without music? Certainly the absence of the music will produce, will create monotony and boring. A beautiful thought at the importance of the ritual music of The Right Church of the East is that “through the church music we are in the communion with the saints and the rights of the Christian Church.”⁴

Without exaggerate with dozens of motivations the using of the music in the cult is the same of leaving the advices of the Holy Fathers about the importance of using the chant in our spiritual growing, is by mention the fact that “two quarters of the services are singed”⁵ and

“by the possibility of communion from the rays of this beauty (the heavenly music) and from the heavenly musical arrange-

² Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the Occident (Ortodoxie și occident)*, Ed. Bizantină Publishing house, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 69-70.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁴ Gheorghe Șoima, *The functions of the liturgical music (Funcțiunile muzicii liturgice)*, Ed. Revistei Teologice Publishing house, Sibiu, 1945, p. 3.

⁵ Arhid. prof. Ioan Brie, *Chants at the religious services (Cântări la serviciile religioase)*, Edited by the Romanian Orthodox Arhidiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, Cluj, 1987, p. 3.

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ments, the Christian... receives all the help of the music from the earth. On this music wings of a sensible beauty, he wants and manages to elevate by the beauty sky beyond the world.”⁶

Certainly we shouldn't discuss the importance of the music in the Orthodox Church, even if in small monastic communities, which are exceptions, had renounce at singing⁷ from certain local reasons.

2. Defining reasons regarding the evolution of the conducting art.

The word conductor came from the Latin verb “*dirigo*” which means, to guide a collective, to conduct. The existence of the conductor goes close to the development of the musical art and has an age of millennia. We shouldn't confound the role of the modern conductor with the role of the conductor from Antiquity, from the Renaissance. If today, the conductor is regarded as an artist- interpreter, educator, organizer, it cannot talk about that kind of conductor in other centuries.

The conducting art, as the vocal and choral music, being the first form of artistic manifestation of the men, is not known his beginning, and we put the question: how the conductor appeared and what factors determined this thing?⁸

The spiritual life of the primitive man made that music to be accompanied by other arts, as dancing, theatre, i.e. As this artistic form begun to develop, quantitative and qualitative, was the need of a conductor, organizer. Under the pressure of this necessity, the conductor distinguished himself through authority inside the executants, being the most knowledgeable, in the person of the tribe chef or the priests. The role of the conductor was to organize and establish the rhythm of the collective performance, emphasizing the beginning and the end of the manifestations with claps of hands, with foots, with animal bones, or with the help of the rhythmic movements of the body or the arms.

This procedure of conducting was rudimentary, allowing in this way only a rhythmic organisation, certainly not artistic. For the coral music of

⁶ Ghe. Șoima, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁷ In Greece - Mount Athos there are monasteries where the ordinary services are read, not chanted.

⁸ Nicolae Gâscă, *The conductive art (Arta dirijorală)*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing house, Bucharest, 1982, p. 4.

the old Greeks, the conductor should be more skilled, and he was called “coryphaeus”. For the Dionysian celebrations “the Choregs” were choirs of 12-15 persons. In Antiquity, the choir symbolized the people and had the role of comment the action. At need, the choir divided into semi-choirs which ranted alternatively the text. The coryphaeus had solo interventions, participating in this way actively at the realisation of the dramaturgy. The music of the ancient people developed in time, crystalizing new forms as: the psalms and the antiphonic chant at Jews, the hymns with the two forms (pean and ditirambic), odes, and the choirs of the old Greek tragedies, is the necessity of a new system of conducting this ensemble, system that should compensate the lack of notes and the ways of measurements. The noisy beats with foot in the performance were distracting for the listeners. Complex songs from intonation and rhythmic way should have been transmitted by the conductor (a singer more experienced and with good memory) to the choir, even in the rehearsals and in the artistic manifestations. In that way appeared the chironomic movements (the gestures of the hands).

By some movements of the hands, which indicates conventional signs, shows the up or down of the intonation, the rhythm, meter and the force of the sound. A good help is from some movements of the body, head, and the face expression.

The true affirmation of the chironomy was in the choral practice of the old Greeks, meanwhile the old ways of conducting through clap of hand or with the foot remained in the dance music, parties and marches. Chironomy realized a step forward in the direction of an artistic conducting of the vocal ensemble. From this period are the first confessions of the existence of some choral conductors, as Stescichoros, the famous conductor of the ancient Greece around VII century and the beginning of the VI century.

An inscription discovered at Histria says:

“the old singers from around the great god Dionysos venerate the leaders Flavius Iuncundus, Flarius Dioganus and Aurelius Dionysos (the second), son of Hestiaios, with the victory from the time of Aurelius Gregoras, the son of Artemidoros, and the father Achilleus, son of Achilles, the chef and conductor of the choir being Aurius Elei, son of Elei, and the poetical instructor was Demetrias of Demetrianos.”⁹

⁹ C. Ghenea, *From the past of the romanian musical culture (Din trecutul culturii muzicale românești)*, Editura Muzicală Publishing house, p. 27.

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At the beginning of the Middle Age, the chironomy practiced in the religious music, in the liturgical chant, which, even if was monod, through the presence of many vocal runs – in this sense “Haleluya” – couldn’t be thought and performed in group from the memory and without a chironomic conducting. In the West Church seems that it was brought by Saint Ambrosious – from Milan in the IV century, with the response chant and antiphonic. In the Latin Church, with the help of the chironomic movements, were conducting the second cantors at the melody and rhythm lessons.

In the performance of the liturgical chant, the chironomy was practiced especially in the monastic schools from Milan, Saint Gall and Montecassino. At Montecassino the conductor, called “chironomico” had in the left hand a rod covered by gold, silver or ivory, and when he elevate the rod, before starting the performance, he indicates the “general attention”, meanwhile with his right hand, through chironomical movements, he draws the borderline of the melodic line for the choir man placed before him. An example of chironomy was the guidon hand, an essential procedure in the understanding of the Hexachord. Thus, the steps of the Hexachord were represented by the articulations of the fingers of the right hand¹⁰, indicating the steps of the Hexachord. To indicate the shades were a series of conventional signs: pressing the right hand on the left one indicates the shade of forte, and for the piano, the index finger from the right hand was passed over the finger of the left hand.

The conducting art is a synthesis between the process of technique and of creation. The importance of the personality of the composer and his multilateral role results from his quality of conducting a collective of people. When we speak about the personality of a conductor we should make reference at three aspects¹¹:

The conductor as an organizer: the entire conducting activity is related to a series of actions with organizationally character as: discussions, steps, the arrangements of the collective on the scene, the materials multiplication and acquirement.

The musical skills of the choir conductor.

The musicality is the first one of these skills, means the skill of feeling the nature of the music, a certain refinement, a certain sensibility in decoding the meaning of music, of ideas and feelings of the composer.

¹⁰ N. Gâscă, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The development is through a systematically study and correctly, through many musical auditions.

The musical hearing is materializing through the capacity of the composer of distinguishing the qualitative elements of the musical sounds at the most sensitive differences, as precise as it can be. Regarding the discernment of the sounds, in relation to their height, the hearing can be relative and absolute.

The relative hearing gives the possibility of determination of the high of sounds and the musical intervals, without enclosing them in the general music scale, if isn't a mark sound.

The absolute hearing gives the possibility of fitting the sounds into the general scale of music without the existence of a mark sound, supporting exclusively on the memoire of the high of sounds. No doubt that the absolute hearing is the best one. He finds easily the mistakes, no matter the way of the musical score: traditional harmony, modern harmony, polyphony, linearism, and polytonality. This don't involve the exclusion of the conductor with relative hearing.

The musical hearing can be melodic and harmonic. If the first one involve the differentiation of the sounds and the melodic intervals, the second one has the qualitative and quantitative determination of the harmonic intervals, of the arrangements and the functional reports between them. No doubt that both are equals to a conductor. If the first one in easily to acquire, the second one is formed by studying the musical scores, the arrangements at the polyphonic instruments, especially piano. The knowledge of harmony and reading of musical scores contributes to the developments of the harmonic hearing.

Timbre hearing involves differentiating timbres of voices and instruments that must have a conductor. His training is based on the knowledge of timbre characteristics of voices and instruments performed by numerous musical auditions, the participation at concerts and opera performances by singing in the choir or orchestra.

The internal hearing gives the conductor the opportunity to perceive sounds and combinations of them, timbres, durations of sounds, and to form their image in the central nervous system without using voice or an instrument. Internal hearing is of great importance in conducting practice both studying the score, and especially during its execution.

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Feeling the rhythm of any conductor is absolutely necessary, given that one of the main tasks of the conductor is to achieve unity in the metrorhythmic musical execution. The music is a temporal art, so the art is called rhythmic, so the rhythm being the main element of organization. Hence the urgent need for the conductor to have a sense of rhythm as subtle and refined. He must feel the rhythmic structure of creation, that it can be transmitted through gestures.

Musical memory - and well etched in the memory the work, the conductor has the opportunity to follow more closely the manner of execution, to mark key moments in musical conducting, to give accurate and timely inputs, but especially to give in fully in the performance. This is possible thanks to the fact that attention is not dispersed to the conductor and overall score, but focused on assembly, on which it runs.

“Conductor - writes H. Scherchen - must learn the score so that during conveyance can always lead from memory. Only in this way he is free to keep his eyes on the choir”. It is recommended conducting from the memory, but keeping the musical score on the desktop for any unforeseen eventuality, for more safety.”¹²

Musical taste has great importance to the conductor. The ability to understand musical taste and appreciate everything correctly and to determine serves the musical performance. The smoothness and refinement of this skill depends on good implementation of the issues related to tempo, nuances, ensemble sonority. Musical taste determine the limits of the personal contribution of the conductor in the interpretation of a musical work. His education is done only on a solid culture.

The conductor must be firm and precise in everything he's doing, do not give up anything that has proposed to pursue his ideas to the end. He must persevere in achieving the desired result. A decision once taken, either in the interpretation or in the work of the whole organization need not to be changed. The qualities of willing are related to the temperament of the individual, but are determinate by the safety of conductor, of score knowledge and purpose wanted.

From the perspective of the positive traits of character, the profession of conductor cannot be conceived without: spontaneity reflexes, sense of observation, spirit of initiative, calm and self-control, strength of character, sense of discipline, punctuality, modesty, and enthusiasm in work. In

¹² *Ibid.*

different circumstances the conductor should act quickly to find the most appropriate solutions. At the same time he must not show nervousness, irrepressible self, which things are fast forwarding to the assembly members.

In other words, the conductor should have a keen sense of observation, to be able to timely notify all the mistakes and to intervene to correct them. This implies a distributive attention. The spirit of discipline is mandatory in a community. But conductor shouldn't be excessively severe, as there should be neither overly lenient. His observations must be firm, specific, timely, but asked in a polite way. Besides all these qualities, which must possess any musician performer, conductor profession implies the presence of special skills that we call a skill of conductor or talent of conducting.

The presence of this skills explains why a conductor manages to make easily understood by members of the ensemble, he manages to captivate them, but another does not. Her lack explains the failure in conducting art of great musicians, instrumentalists, composers and performers. Music History records sufficient examples. Doubtless only the amount of skills and qualities, above - external and internal - guarantee the success in the profession of conductor. But the skills, qualities alone are not sufficient. They must be coupled with a serious general and specialist training, the profession of conductor is an entire knowledge of general and musical culture.

3. Athanasius Lipovan - conductor and interpreter of the choral church music in the western country

He was born on April 1, 1874, at Sânnicolaul Mare, Timis County, and died on April 27, 1947, in Timisoara. His father was John and his mother Sofia. He attended Orthodox religious school in his native village and gymnasium in the town of Santana, then with the support of the community in his native city in the autumn of 1888 he attended Preparandia courses in Arad. In 1894 Athanasius Lipovan married Paraskevi Iancuț of Toracul Mic. They have two children: John and Cornel. Unfortunately, at only 23, in 1901, his wife Paraskeva died, leaving the family in a lot of pain and suffering. It will remarry again with Maria Bugariu. That was a teacher in Comloșul

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Mare and soloist in the choir "Doina". They had 6 children together. In the fall of 1892¹³ it is provisionally called teacher in Toracul Mic, and after qualifying examination (1894), he is called teacher forever. In the summer of 1896 he called teacher in Comloșul Mare, where he will take over the leadership of the local choir. In autumn of the same year, 1896, Athanasius Lipovan it is named teacher in his hometown, Sânnicolaul Mare. He will be appointed conductor of the choir "Doina", Lipovan Athanasius immediately putting his mark on the repertoire, making the men's choir, a mixed choir. It only sets up the first choir composed of children from Sânnicolaul Mare, plastic choir called "Wonder". As speaker of Hebrew languages, German, English, Italian, French and Hungarian, he would eventually set in 1907, also in Sânnicolaul Mare, Craftsman choir made up of singers of different nationalities.¹⁴

Ludovic Ciobanu, school inspector and later conductor of the same chorus writes: "The first choral colony in the village dates back to the 1860s, all the zeal of a teacher ... Choir Doina... was imposing to the public interest in 1902, as in 1906 and onward to overpower the scale. Developed vital in this formula, a complex notion, religious and national, the seat of coral from Sânnicolaul Mare, animated by the talented and special training of master Lipovan constitutes a valid and permanent, dynamic and fascination call to a new way of life, replete with creative resources and superior strength. "For Athanasius Lipovan, returned home, family natal village community will be the start of an extraordinary conducting and fruitful activities. He will be present with choruses "Doina", "Miracle" and "Choir craftsmen" on a multitude of different activities and festivities, at home and abroad. In 1906, the choir "Doina"¹⁵ at the invitation of "Carmen" Choral Society in Bucharest, will participate in the festivities dedicated to the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the enthronement of King Charles I, 25 years after the proclamation of the Kingdom and 1800 years after dismounting Emperor Trajan in Dacia.

In Bucharest, the choir "Doina" directed by Athanasius Lipovan shared the first place with the famous choir conducted by Ion Vidu from Lugoj.

¹³ Church and School (Biserica și Școala) (Arad), year XVI (1892), Sunday 1/13 November, nr. 44, p. 352.

¹⁴ George Indrecan, *Composers of traditional religious byzantine music from Crișana and Banat (Compozitori de muzică religioasă de tradiție bizantină din Crișana și Banat) (end of XIX century—the first half of XX century)*, Oradea, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

As a reward for his choir conductor Athanasius Lipovan they received the gold medal and a special diploma. Together with teachers and Romanian intellectuals in 1919 will set up The Meeting Chants "Harmony"¹⁶. The Choir "Harmony" will be the first Romanian choir made up of intellectuals and, together with its conductor Athanasius Lipovan will remain representative of the indigenous music of the time. Bishop John I. Papp insisted that this choir to organize the statutes and operating base as Episcopal Cathedral choir of Arad. Since its establishment in 1919, the choir "Harmony" sang the Cathedral and churches in various municipalities closer. As of September 1, 1922, Bishop Ignatius Papp would put Athanasius Lipovan professor of singing, instrumental music and typical Greek Orthodox at the Normal School "Dimitrie Țichindeal" (formerly Preparandia) School of Theology Institute church singers and Theological Academy of Arad later. Arad Theological Academy will deliver consistently to all four-year university subjects: Church Music, Vocal (choir) and Typical.

In Arad he will conduct the choirs of the Theological Institute and "Harmony" and will take part in all the moments of celebration of ecclesiastical and cultural life of the diocese of Arad. In 1938, at the age of 64, Athanasius Lipovan retired. After teaching activities and music stretched over a period of 43 years, Athanasius Lipovan will retire at his personal house in the village of Căpruța, Săvârșin village common. Lipovan Athanasius, who had a charming baritone voice, from 1938 will operate as a church singer at the Archdiocesan Cathedral of Timisoara. On 27 April 1947 at the age of 73, he is suffering a heart attack, which would be fatal.

The choral creation of Athanasius Lipovan has the following works:

- "Church songs" (Cântări bisericesti) – Budapest, 1906;
- "Carols" (Colinde) -1910
- "Liturgical answers and carols on 1-2 voices for the use into the primary schools" (Răspunsuri liturgice și colinde pe 1-2 voci pentru uzul școlilor primare), Arad, 1912
- "The eight voices" (Cele opt glasuri) – 1919
- "Church songs – troparyon, antiphon, cheruvim hymns, irmo, hymns" (Cântări bisericesti – tropare, antifoane, cheruvime, irmoase, pricene) – 1927
- "Church songs at the funerals" (Cântări bisericesti la înmormântare) – 1936

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

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- "Church songs – mourning canon, the three Satira, the Paques stiche-ron" (Cântări bisericești – Aghioase, canonul de plângere, Cele trei stări, Stihirile paștilor)- 1937
- "Church songs – cheruvim hymns, irmo and hymns" (Cântări bisericești – cheruvice, irmoase și pricesne) – 1938
- "Church songs all over the year" (Cântări bisericești de peste an) in four volumes (1944-1947)

In manuscripts we have "Three mixt choirs on folk themes" (Trei coruri mixte pe teme populare)

Athanasius Lipovan was music teacher at the Romanian denominational school (1896-1913) and the Civil School of Sânnicolaul Mare (1912-1913). Between 1913 and 1919 he was conductor of the Romanian choirs of St. Peter and St. Louis Paul from Chicago and Philadelphia, USA. Athanasius Lipovan had choral concerts at the Exposition in Bucharest (1906), Yugoslavia, Hungary, and USA. The same Ludovic Ciobanu, descendant of choir master at the choir of "Doina" in Sânnicolaul Mare, said: "Master Lipovan in his turn lags the general sense and objective recognition of Jewish leaders, due to the most representative pedestal son of earth that gave life and a great talent and profound generosity".

Choral Music remains, along with the homophonic, the vocal, a very important pillar in the development and beautification of divine worship. It is intended to raise the souls of those who listen, also aims to raise the level of the jobs, where there is a band can sing choral and harmonic, polyphonic. Respecting constant spiritual sacred values, religious music, both the choral and the homophonic, proposes two fundamental¹⁷ human condition before the Creator: Indoor - status retrieval prayer as I own the macrocosm reported eternity and outside - praise to God, an offering marked by optimism and faith. When talking about the style of a composer cannot exclude him outside the historical era to which it belongs. The beginning of the twentieth century was a flourishing in the church music both homophonic and for the church choir.

The style and his contribution fits perfectly into ecclesial musicological efforts from the early twentieth - century, being undertaken on the one hand the roots (Byzantine music) of the local church music and on the other musical influences of neighbouring peoples, especially church music Serbian. Athanasius Lipovan remains an illustrious representative

¹⁷ <http://www.coralanicolaelungu.ro>.

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of church music in western Romania, not only through his musical and interpretative contributions but also through his human model, spiritual becoming integrated into church life and how that passed Orthodox ethos in this part of the country.