

ENESCIANA

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Enescu, the Composer*)

I often wonder about the reasons for the discrepancy (which is very disquieting to many of us Romanians) between the obvious value of Enescu the composer, and the rather limited knowledge and popularity of his work the world over. For we cannot avoid this certainty: one of the great 20th - century creators, who must surely rank among the first ten or twelve, is still, in this year 2000, more a mere name than an active presence in concert life. A name that has asserted itself in the course of time owing mainly to the musician's brilliant career as a performer and teacher. Of course, the gap has continuously been narrowed, especially in the past two decades, thanks to the efforts made by some remarkable Romanian and foreign performers, thanks to the publication of important critical or biographical works, thanks to the dozens upon dozens of CDs that have been issued especially in France and Britain, but also, occasionally, in Germany, Holland, Switzerland and, of course, Romania. For instance, his masterpiece, *Oedipus*, has been staged not only in Bucharest, but also in Brussels, Warsaw, Berlin and Vienna, among other places; it has been given an excellent rendition on CDs in the original language of the libretto, featuring first-class performers (EMI-France), and has been played in concerts in Paris, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Lucerne etc. Nevertheless, we feel this is somehow inadequate.

I do not wish to become tiresome, but I am speaking as one who knows quite well not only a piece or another, but Enescu's Work almost in its entirety. Therefore, I am referring not only to all finished and published pieces of music, but - in addition - to some other, unfinished, compositions that are highly significant when it comes to knowing the artist, works which either I myself or somebody else have been patient enough to decipher in their sketsch form and in some cases complete their orchestration, thus making them available to listeners. And I can assure anyone it was worth doing.

Therefore, I come back to the question I have already asked in the opening sentence of this text. Of course, one can detect adjacent causes, but eventually some intrinsic causes will also come to light. Here are some of the adjacent ones: the composer's excessive modesty and reserve, the misfortune of having come to some Parisian publishers who, at least in the latter half of the

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century, did not do enough to help promote his work, the fact of being a great artist in a small country that was occasionally oppressed by the vicissitudes of history, his being temporally aligned with certain aesthetic currents that were somewhat aggressive, even if their results have but rarely been artistically justified. There might also be other adjacent explanations, but now I am going to move on to the substance of the question.

In Enescu's Work there are some characteristics which need emphasizing and which, in themselves, are often (or often seem to be) objective obstacles to the wide dissemination of his works. Let us enumerate them:

a) The amount of information contained in the final versions given by the composer, quite remarkable even at the time of his early masterpieces (e.g. his *Octet* - written at the age of 19), which continuously increased and reached its peak in the works of his late years. Actually this grew out of the magnificent inner hearing and the outstanding memory of the musician.

b) Enescu considered the melody to be the main bearer of the meaning, but the variability of his melodic lines (seldom do we find something repeated exactly) becomes more and more misleading, putting the ordinary listener's attention and memory to the test.

c) The continuous variability extends to all musical parameters: rhythm, harmony, timbre and intensity. These developments are actually the results of a great inner freedom, leading to the appearance of all kinds of asymmetries.

d) In his mature years Enescu's music is neither **thematic** (as it was in the beginning), nor **a-thematic** (a situation that can naturally be reached), nor - of course - **serial**. The musician resorts to something else: his creative proceedings are based on the **profile** (be it melodic or rhythmical), an abstract entity that can generate countless concrete materializations, by changes of intervals or durations, by deleting or adding sounds etc. The **profile** can be compared to Plato's **Idea**, a reality which cannot be known intrinsically and which only manifests itself through diverse concrete embodiments.

e) The freedom of forms: far from simply adopting any of the various traditional schemes, the composer considers again these forms in his own way and gives them originality and a marked degree of unpredictability. Quite often research into his works leads the various analysts to extremely different interpretations and conclusions.

f) Although the author deeply assimilated the spirit and freedom of folk music (of a *parlando-rubato* type), he determined the concreteness of his musical images (by means of the countless directions regarding rhythm, nuances, expression, ways of attack, fingering, pedals on the piano etc.) in a quasi-absolute

way. Nothing is left to chance, nothing goes unspecified. And the graphic aspect of the works Enescu produced in his mature years, has aroused the surprise and admiration of all those who have come to know them. These scores, as well as many of the preceding sketches, may be works of fine art in themselves.

g) Even though being a highly talented expert in polyphony, capable of the utmost complexities in this field (see his *Octet* or his later *Second* and *Third Symphonies*), the artist gradually evolved to something else, namely to **heterophony**. As one knows, this consists of two or more voices simultaneously going along the same melodic path; but mention should be made here of the unpredictable differences in time, in one directions or another, or small melodic mutations or, finally, changes in registers. According to composer Gheorghe Costinescu, the result shall be "a melody in relief, one that accompanies itself". Far from being a regress as against the classic contrapuntal proceedings, it turns - in the hands of such a maestro - into an extremely original stage of the polyphonic concept itself. Enescu has not yet been matched in the exercise of this new grammar.

h) Especially in his mature and late creations, an infinitely variable modal character is to be found, which is achieved by mobile degrees (almost any tone of the mode can get this quality). And the above-mentioned characteristic is strongly reinforced by a continuous change in timbres which results mostly from the so-called intermittent doubling. Quite misleading also can be the composer's tendency to give to the same melodic course different meanings, even radically opposed to one another, through various changes in tempo, register, colour, rhythm, intensities.

i) We can also point out his tendency to build up certain themes (especially the secondary ones) by resorting to a kind of "memory of the future", which works by anticipating things, first shyly and then more and more clearly and insistently, until one comes to discover the entire thematic profile (in one of its possible appearances, of course).

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Everything I have stated above must be corroborated with a heedful insight into the depths of Enescu's psyche. Indeed, the musician's innermost mentality is indebted to an eastern outlook on the world more than to a western, Cartesian one, an outlook which nevertheless underlies the solid process of his musical training. By "eastern" one should understand the Greek-Byzantine world, as well as the

Thracian (Dacian) component, and possibly also the Slavian features of Romanian psychology. To such an artist time passes differently, it can be intensely variable, it can be annulled or it can become outright reversible (see the "memory of the future", the heterophony, the thematic anticipations of subsequent movements). Instead of causality, contemplation or dreaming may at any time be inserted. Very few criteria by which European music of the past few centuries is usually appreciated can entirely be applied to Enescu. His inner freedom is almost incomprehensible within the rationalistic world of the West. The composer must be listened to with much willingness and relaxation *the horizon of expectations will not, as a rule, be fulfilled), but also with infinite love and much inner peacefulness. And the huge amount of information implies a number of hearings, more anyway than in the case of most "serious" good music. The patience that has been recommended will bear fruits without doubt: the listener will realize the inexhaustible quality of the meanings in any of the major pieces of the artist's output. A similar feeling will be given to the careful musicologist too.

When Enescu died, in 1955, few of his compositions were known (actually performed) in Romania; not even a quarter of his significant creation, and preponderantly pieces of his young days. Discovering, analysing and commenting, understanding his entire Work has required several decades even in their author's native country. To the rest of the world twice as much time will probably be necessary. But, in the end, one comes to the conclusion that what Menuhin prophesied, namely that Enescu will be one of the great discoveries of the 21st century, might come true.