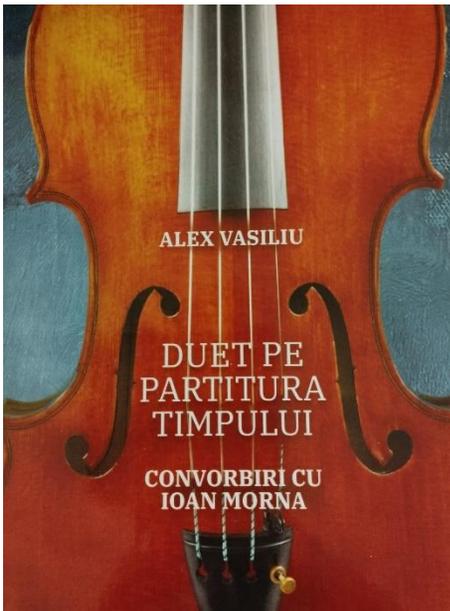


***Duet pe partitura timpului. Convorbiri cu Ioan Morna*
[Duet on the score of time. Conversations with Ioan
Morna]¹ by Alex Vasiliu**

LOREDANA IATESEN, Assoc. Prof. PhD
“George Enescu” National University of Arts Iași
ROMANIA*

The idea of writing a history book today regardless of the period under consideration also involves taking a challenging and complex approach. Beyond the well-known route, which involves documentation on the subject, discovery, selection, comparison, and systematization of scientifically-accredited sources, the author is obliged to confront the document, the testimonies of some protagonists of the respective era in order to provide the receiver with an image as close as possible to the historical truth. Moreover, acknowledging the different capacities of assimilating ideas on the part of a reader becomes essential for the effective process of interpreting phenomena from the near or distant past. Annoyed by the phraseology of some authors from other eras, who wished to impress readers with countless pages of clustered and unprocessed information presented in an emphatic manner, the reader seeks to discover the emotion that



transpires from the content, the power and originality of the argument, the psychology that lies at the root of the research in question, the author's experience on the subject. Nowadays, the receiver is hurried, selective, and demanding, and unless they are offered the long-awaited solution, unless they experience the state they imagined when they opened the book, they will certainly not reach the last page. Because, regardless of the seriousness of the content, the manner of its transmission matters, according to a known systematization of the degree of impact after reading.

There are several types of books: the ones you browse through, the ones from

¹ Editura Muzicală, București, 2022.

* iatesenloredana@yahoo.com

which you draw ideas useful for other studies or volumes, and those books that you devour in such a way that you feel the need to memorize them... It is this latter category that the present opus belongs to, suggestively entitled, *Duet on the score of time. Conversations with Ioan Morna* (Editura Muzicală, București, 2022). The author, Alex Vasiliu reveals yet-to-be-known details of the history of Iasi as a city of music starting 1963, with the help of his interlocutor, the musician Ioan Morna. And, given that the post-war history of Iasi is seen through the eyes of a musician, of a cultural man – the violinist and teacher Ioan Morna (1943-2019), who is induced to recount his memories by the author – a music journalist, musicologist and keen observer who has spent decades investigating artistic phenomena, this book on music and musicians becomes a document. Indeed, regardless of the journalistic genre he has cultivated, the perspective of his approach (as a radio-TV journalist, music critic for the written media, musicologist, academic) and, above all, the manner in which he has dealt with unique topics in a series of volumes following the two coordinates of his main interests – the past and present artists in academia (*Non-protocol dialogues*, Editura Cronica, Iasi, 2005; *Musicology and journalism. The presence of classical music in the Romanian media after 1989*, Editura Artes, “George Enescu” National University of the Arts, Iasi, 2007); and jazz musicians (*The work of Richard Oschanitzky. Stylistic features*, Editura Muzicala, 2012; *Jazz in Romania – Romanian Jazz. Vol. I: Jancy Kőröszky*, Editura Artes, 2014) –, Alex Vasiliu has always stood out by providing readers with the documents, the testimonies of some active participants in the reconstruction of history as it was.

This time, the key figure of the post-war music history of Iasi is Ioan Morna: a teacher at the National College of Arts “Octav Băncilă” (1965-2001) and the Conservatory (1968-2005) – institutions where he taught for four decades –, as well as a violinist and leader of the second violin section in the *Moldova* Philharmonic Orchestra, an exceptional personality in the local and national musical context whose prodigious culture and memory acquaint us with the effervescent ambiance of Iasi in the latter half of the 20th century, with the endeavours and achievements of both himself and his contemporaries (musicians, teachers, managers of cultural institutions). Thus, the musician / character helps to reconstruct a piece of history which, albeit politically difficult, is revealed from the sublimated perspective of the superior artist who has overcome vicissitudes and focused on the artistic and didactic self-improvement. A sensitive evocation through utterances laden with meaning – sometimes nostalgic, sometimes humorous, but always imbued with a profound spirituality, with the deep consciousness of an extraordinary man who is endowed with the talent of word and deed and, above all, who is capable of sharing some of the secrets he has learnt during his remarkable life. Since in *the duet on the score of time* the key-character of the book, the violinist Ioan Morna, is accompanied by the *interpreter of the word*, Alex Vasiliu, whose formidable experience in the

field of publishing implies the innovative approach of genres, we are not surprised by the original concept of the volume, which goes beyond the sphere of traditional conversations by intertwining pages of memoirs with pages of portrait or chronicle.

Interestingly, the creative approach of the colloquium is reflected in the structure of the volume (*Preface, Late beginnings, Professors and colleagues from the Conservatory of Iasi, Experiences and successes in the Moldova Quartet, We joined the new orchestra of the Philharmonic in the Ion Baciuc era, The Chamber Orchestra of the Philharmonic in Bayreuth, Great Romanian and foreign performers on tour in Iasi, George Vintila, Impressions about violinists, Great conductors of the Iasi Philharmonic, Unfortunate policies – troubles and sufferings, Pedagogical activity*) by correlating some moments that trace out the personality of the musician Ioan Morna with episodes from the activity of musicians and music institutions so that, in the end, the reader enjoys a beautiful overlap between the man and the musical dimension of postbellum Iasi. Obviously, a book that reconstructs the history of an era based on the affective memories of an artist determines a different approach and analysis. For example, in the section *Late beginnings* we empathize with the suffering of the musician, the son of a Greek-Catholic priest, marred by the sad childhood years when his father, who “officiated the service in Salaj county, at Valcaul de Jos, near Simleul Silvaniei, from 1942 to 1948” (p. 10), was imprisoned twice at a time when the “social origin was extremely important” (p. 10). Moreover, the emotionally-stirring chapter *Unfortunate policies – troubles and sufferings* confronts us with the stark reality of the communist regime which allowed and accounted not only for the delayed schooling of the Morna children but also for the desperation of a single stay-at-home mother who was left all alone to support her four children in the absence of any income. Thus, we understand the reason that led the young musician Ioan Morna to start studying the violin as late as the eighth grade with Professor Eugen Simon at the Folk School of Art, later continuing at the Music High School in Satu Mare. This was a centre opened during 1946-1950 which aimed at providing a solid musical education if we consider the author’s accounts of the concerts given by the three orchestral bands (two children’s ensembles and an adult one) with different programmes put together by conductors trained in prestigious institutions. One of the names that stands out is that of Alexandru Munteanu, a “disciple of Antonin Ciolan at the Conservatory of Cluj” (p. 13) who led the *Glinka* symphonic orchestra, a highly-trained professional musician who supported the young violinist Ioan Morna and did not hesitate to show his generosity when he invited the new Conservatory graduate to return to the city of his first years of musical education, this time in the honourable role of soloist in a lecture-concert – “From Pre-classicism to Romanticism” (p. 13).

Yet, despite the hardships of the era and the terrifying political system, the young musician Ioan Morna still dreamt about furthering his studies and fulfilling his vocation as a violinist. Inspired by the prestigious historical, cultural, and musical milieu of Iasi, by the personalities who had shaped the destiny of so many generations, the musician chose to take the admission exam at the “George Enescu” Conservatory in 1963 and was subsequently assigned to the distinguished Professor Gheorghe Sarbu whose training as an instrumentalist had been carried out in a double direction: “The Conservatory of Chisinau, under the guidance of Professor Mark Pester and the Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in Bucharest, in Professor Cecilia Nitulescu-Lupu’s class” (p. 23). It is worth noting that the violinist Morna remembers some of the professors (Achim Stoia, George Pascu, George Rodi Foca), classmates (violinist Dragos Cocora, violist Gheorghe Haag) and musicians who marked his existence (conductors Ion Baci, Antonin Ciolan, Emanuel Elenescu, George Vintila, Ludovic Bass; violinists Stefan Ruha, Ion Voicu, cellists Vladimir Orlov, Radu Aldulescu; pianists Dan Grigore, Stefan Gheorghiu), but not in a mere and conventional succession of names, as we are used to when reading articles from dictionaries or lexicons. On the contrary, he draws true portraits of these musicians using accurate information from historical, stylistic, interpretive perspectives which he correlates in the context of the era, of cultural and social affiliations, of their different teaching styles characteristic of the various music education institutions in the country or abroad.

Among the professors and colleagues from the Conservatory of Iasi, some stood out in Ioan Morna’s evolution as a violinist, contributing to his first “experiences and successes with the *Moldova* Quartet” (p. 37). For example, in 1963, at Professor George Pascu’s urging and under his careful guidance of repertoire choices, four of the best students of the Conservatory (Dragos Cocora – first violin, Ioan Morna – second violin, Gheorghe Haag – viola, Stefan Virginas – cello) formed a chamber ensemble whose members changed in time (although Dragos Cocora and Ioan Morna remained permanent members); together they performed in recitals and concerts, either independently or during the chamber season of the Philharmonic, in the country and abroad, playing classical, romantic or modern works – some less known, others in first audition. This is first-hand information about the existence and activity of a professional ensemble which did not go unnoticed during its nine-year activity, as proven by the numerous posters, reviews and recordings with Radio Iasi or Radio Bucharest. Even though almost all the recordings were lost during the communist period, there are still the enthusiastic reviews of the critics who had the chance to attend the chamber concerts of the *Moldova* Quartet. We remember Grigore Constantinescu’s comment (*Cronica* magazine, November 1971) on the quality of the repertoire and especially on the memorable performance of emblematic opuses in the history of the genre which, unfortunately, are rarely

approached by professional ensembles. “After an agreeable performance of Mihail Andricu’s *Quartet op. 14* and before the expressively fluent rendition of Brahms’s Clarinet Quintet (featuring clarinettist Vasile Dumitriu), the *Moldova Quartet* offered a significant interpretation for its current level – Bartók’s *Quartet op. 6*, for which they deserve the warmest appreciation” (p. 60).

As the readers go further, they discover a fascinating new stage in Ioan Morna’s career as a violinist “in the new orchestra of the Philharmonic, in the era of Ion Baciú” (p. 67). Although this is another particularly important period in the history of post-war music of Iasi, Professor George Pascu and journalist Alex Vasiliu have been the only authors who wrote reviews, articles, studies, and book chapters dedicated to the Maestro Ion Baciú. This is another reason for those readers who have a keen interest in the living history of an era to receive wholeheartedly interesting information on the first-year activity (1968-1969) of the *Moldova Philharmonic* orchestra under Ion Baciú’s baton when the violinist Ioan Morna witnessed the achievements of a prestigious orchestra with performances in Iasi, Piatra-Neamt (over the 14 seasons of the *Musical holidays*), Bucharest and abroad. The musician / character recounts the fascinating rehearsals of the orchestra that gained its widespread fame thanks to a visionary conductor who had the courage to take on the employment of sixty student instrumentalists in the course of one day in order to breathe new life into the ensemble; the unflagging joy of a unique baton master to permanently lead an ensemble knowing the technical and expressive possibilities of each instrumentalist, and to “create that professional affinity with his own orchestra” (p. 89); the Maestro’s patience and tenacity in obtaining a unique sound quality suitable for each individual opus (an aspect which has been intensely debated by highlighting the difference between a Philharmonic ensemble and a Radio orchestra, the latter being much more challenging due to multiple recordings); his favourite styles (postromantic, impressionist) or works (Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred*, *Pathétique*; *Symphony No. 2*, *Symphony No. 3*, the *Academic Festival Overture* by Brahms; Richard Strauss’ *Symphonic Poems Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel*; Suite No. 2 *Daphnis and Chloé* by Ravel; Debussy’s *Nocturnes*, *Suites*, *Concert Overture*, *Rhapsodies*) which peaked with the remarkable recordings of George Enescu’s *Symphony No. 2* and *Oedipe*; the respect for the music of our fellow neighbours, as well as the promotion of contemporary composers from Iasi (pp. 90-91). What is imparted onto us by these moving pages in which the musician Ioan Morna depicts the legend of the orchestra led by a magician of the baton with the sensitivity of a literary man and the knowledge of a musicologist? A phenomenon of post-war music in Iasi, seen from the inner perspective of the industrious violinist in a continuous and steady evolution, but also from the outer stance of the musician possessing the skills of a historical analyst, of a thorough researcher, endowed with an amazing memory and capable of selecting the relevant data that ensures the accuracy of a

comparison: "... today there are many young, talented instrumentalists, it is practically the orchestra of another generation. And even though there is still a strict selection of instrumentalists for a permanent position with the orchestra, we nevertheless feel the lack of a tenured conductor with pedagogical talents who has time to work, to smooth the rough edges, to create an interpretive conduct..." (p. 92).

The evocation of the history of post-war music goes on, drawing our attention to another recently-discovered episode, namely "The Chamber Orchestra of the Philharmonic in Bayreuth" (p. 93). The journalist and critic Alex Vasiliu makes a welcome addition, signalling that "in 2019, the publishing company 'Ecou Transilvan' issued the volume *Bayreuth, the city of festivals*. The author, Gheorghe Musat, wrote about the Romanian representation and brought to light information, documents, posters and concert brochures that attest... the participation of the ensembles and Chamber Orchestra from Iasi conducted by Ion Baciuc in this festival" (p. 94). Returning to the violinist Ioan Morna's recollections, we are challenged by other new information related to the personality of Erich Bergel, a musician of Transylvanian origin with a brilliant career abroad. As conductor of the Bayreuth extended orchestra, he gave a memorable concert in 1976, which included major works: *L'Ascension* by Messiaen, Haydn's *Symphony No. 94* for violin, oboe, bassoon, cello and orchestra, and the *Symphony in D minor* by César Franck (pp. 93-94).

And yet, Ioan Morna always returns to his first passion, the model of Ion Baciuc whose style remains unmistakable. Around it, comparisons are gradually built – with Erich Bergel, whose relaxed and quite humorous manner was well-liked by the public, and particularly with Emil Simon, the leader of the Philharmonic Orchestra from Cluj-Napoca, "a very good professional who mastered the science of conducting" but lacked "the magic that Ion Baciuc was spreading" (pp. 95-96).

If the orchestra of the *Moldova* Philharmonic gave beautiful performances in Cluj, Bucharest or abroad, these invitations were mainly due to the quality of the ensemble that, under the leadership of Maestro Baciuc or other important conductors, had gradually gained a highly-individualized personality, a prestige to be envied by other similar instrumental ensembles while, at the same time, playing with the orchestra in Iasi represented a challenge for the great musicians in Romania or abroad. This is an essential chapter for today's performer, musicologist or music lover who are provided with the opportunity to understand the importance given to the thorough musical training of the soloists of those times, their stylistic and repertorial preferences, their differentiated interpretive views, the nature of their constructive emotions in relation to the highly-skilled orchestra of Iasi and especially with the select audience accustomed to superior performances. These are just some of the thoughts of the exciting journey in the episode dedicated to the soloists from all over the world who came on tour in

Iasi, which are lent weight, on the one hand, by the evocations of the musician Ioan Morna and his comparative perspectives on the interpretive manners of certain soloists (“Vladimir Orlov, a refined cellist, who was rather restrained, maybe even introverted, compared to Radu Aldulescu who was more sonorous and gave everything”, p. 102); on the subjective stylistic rendition of the repertoire (“pianist Dmitri Bashkirov exhibited romantic tendencies even when playing Beethoven”, p. 104); and on the other hand, by the journalist Alex Vasiliu who watched the musicians’ live performances in Iasi at different stages of their artistic career, who wrote reviews and portraits, who did interviews and radio or television shows and thus provided the readers or listeners with well-supported pictures of various artists.

Another personality who contributed to the development of the musical life in Iasi from multiple directions was George Vintila (tenured conductor of the *Moldova* Philharmonic orchestra from 1959 to 1986; director of the same institution until 1968; chamber music and orchestra teacher at the National College of Arts “Octav Băncilă”; professor of orchestra at the “George Enescu” Conservatory). His training (he studied conducting at the Conservatory of Iasi with Antonin Ciolan) and further studies (he graduated from Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Conservatory and was a classmate of some remarkable musicians of the Russian school such as Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Igor Oistrakh, Evgeny Svetlanov) account for the complexity of the repertoire options where Russian music (opuses signed by Korsakov, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Glinka, Shostakovich) was promoted (a natural consequence of the communist ideology as well), but especially Romanian works (George Enescu’s *Rhapsodies*, *Suite No. 1*, *Symphony No. 1*). This was a period which, despite unfavorable politics, is marked by an intense and effervescent musical activity. The musician Ioan Morna, the character who connects the post-war and the contemporary eras, highlights various names of soloists who performed in concert (violinists Ion Voicu, Stefan Ruha, Mihai Constantinescu, Frank Peter Zimmermann, cellists Radu Aldulescu and Vladimir Orlov, pianists Alexandru Demetriad, Silvia Serbescu, Valentin Gheorghiu, Dan Grigore, Dan Grigore, p. 108); and he stresses the important role that Professor George Pascu played in shaping the musical taste of the audience by means of the presentations he made before the concerts on Friday evening and Sunday morning. This new piece of information leads us to meditate on that enthusiastic generation of musicians who were involved enormously in the post-war culture and managed to overcome ideological or financial obstacles. The role of the musician Ioan Morna becomes even more significant since he represents one of the symbols of the golden generation, the guiding artist through the meanders of a history that revolves invariably around its landmark, its focal point: Ion Baci. This is an essential idea that is further developed by the comparison with another powerful conductor of the *Moldova* Philharmonic, Alexandru Lascae (1992-1996) who, in

spite of “an energetic temperament, the precision of his conducting and a more ‘mathematical’ manner than Baciú’s, did not achieve as brilliant a rendition of Enescu’s *Symphony No. 2* as the Maestro. The live recording from the ‘Enescu’ Festival reveals a great musicality of the orchestra” (p. 124). If the Maestro was always fondly and vividly remembered by the musician Ioan Morna, he continues to this day to excite the interest of Alex Vasiliu – a distinguished musicologist who is particularly sensitive, observant, well-informed, who has steadfastly promoted culture and conveyed his thoughts through a particularly poetic choice of words laden with meaningful literariness that reveal a refined correspondence with the musician’s visual-aural perception. The following are but a sample of how masterfully Alex Vasiliu intertwines his profound considerations with the musicality of his text to sketch a portrait of the conductor Ion Baciú: “... I believe the student, a disciple of Constantin Silvestri, had the ability, the gift to create a particular mood. Let us take as an example Wagner’s *Prelude and Death of Isolde*, performed at the Athenaeum in Bucharest in 1969. If you watch the video recording, you are musically influenced by his face – attentive to the orchestra yet transfigured, you are influenced by his body language with his undulant conducting gestures as if he were drawing a contour, by his shaping of the melodic phrase in an elegant manner, or by his ample, vibrant movements. You had the optical illusion of the musical phrase as an entity that was being born in pain right then and there!” (p. 118).

Nevertheless, the author of the conversations with Ioan Morna undoubtedly aims at bringing arguments, step by step, to his initial premise: revealing the personality of the violinist in relation to the artistic events of the post-war era when the various conductors and instrumentalists ensured the evolutionary dynamics of the musical life. A special episode, with affective and professional resonances, is dedicated to the “impressions about violinists” (p. 125) that paint an impressive portrait of the man and musician Stefan Ruha, “a natural talent, an innate artistic force of genuine virtuosity, an energetic temperament” (p. 127) who is described in comparison to another soloist of the same generation yet of a different temperament, namely Ion Voicu. At the end of the chapter, we read an extensive comment on musicians from various periods (David Oistrakh, Mihai Constantinescu, Florin Ionescu-Galati, Gabriel Croitoru, Remus Azoitei, Dan Claudiu Vornicelu) who gained worldwide recognition due to their own individual ways of approaching romantic or modern repertoires.

The following chapter unfolds in the same manner of stressing the importance of certain conductors whom the violinist Ioan Morna knew in his position as an instrumentalist with the Philharmonic orchestra, highlighting in detail various personalities: Valery Gergiev, whose “achievements are the symphonies by Shostakovich” (p. 148); Daniel Oren, “who in the field of opera is brilliant, extraordinary” (p. 150); Emanuel Elenescu, dynamic, rhythmically precise, “worked like a clock” (p. 151); Cristian Mandeal, “very demanding,

influenced by the school of Herbert von Karajan” (p. 153); Horia Andreescu, “a particularly vivid presence, a great talent” (p. 153); Camil Marinescu, “extremely detail-oriented” (p. 154), conducted almost all of Gustav Mahler’s symphonies; Ludovic Bacs (a specialist in Baroque music); Gheorghe Victor Dumanescu (very fond of the operatic repertoire). Other conductors from several generations are also mentioned: Lawrence Foster, Roberto Benzi, Ilarion Ionescu Galati, Remus Georgescu, Paul Popescu, Gheorghe Costin, Alexandru Lascae, Ovidiu Balan, Cristian Orosanu.

If Alex Vasiliu, in his capacity as dialogue partner, has focused so far on outlining the portrait of the violinist Ioan Morna, leader of the second violin section in the *Moldova* Philharmonic Orchestra, in relation to the post-war musical life of Iasi, near the end of the book his focus shifts towards the “pedagogical activity” (p. 176) of a mentor to so many generations of pupils at the National College of Arts “Octav Băncilă” as well as students at the “George Enescu” National University of the Arts. How did this four-decade-long career (1965-2005) begin in both educational institutions where Ioan Morna successfully fulfilled his vocation as a teacher? “In 1965, when I was in my third undergraduate year, my violin professor Mr. Sarbu had the idea to hire a few of us as substitute teachers at the National College of Arts ‘Octav Băncilă’. Apart from myself, there were Dragoș Cocora, Albricht Horst, Gheorghe Haag” (p. 176). Thus began Ioan Morna’s activity as a violin teacher whose teaching style was influenced either by his own professors (Eugen Simon, Gheorghe Sarbu) or by violin mentors who came from different music schools in various cultures (Jenö Hubay, Leopold Auer, Leonid Popovici). He shared wholeheartedly with his students the secrets he had been given himself, thus becoming a valuable musical educator to a great many young violinists from several generations of pupils and students at both institutions (Doru Cepreaga, Mariana Onofrei Crisan, Doina Iaromenco, Dorel Chiruta, Cristian Barus, Ion Ilie, Vlad Hrubaru, Alina Tudorache, Adrian Berescu, Adriana Anania, Mariana Chiroasca, Cosmin Fidiles, Catalin Desaga, Cristina Alecu, Ciprian Filimon, Melinda Berea, Alina Chivu, etc.). Today, many of them are soloists, violinists in various orchestras, or violin teachers in music institutions in the country or abroad, and they all remember fondly their dedicated teacher who influenced their evolution into successful musicians.

As a family man, he enjoyed the appreciation, support and understanding of his wife, the pianist and teacher Codruta Morna, so his passion to study and practise the violin was passed on to their two sons, Liviu and Mihai, who forged their own careers as violinists in chamber ensembles or symphonic orchestras.

Today, on the three-year anniversary of his death, it behooves us to thank Ioan Morna, a violinist with the *Moldova* Quartet and the Philharmonic orchestra as well as a remarkable teacher, for all that he gifted us – from his exceptional qualities, his “seriousness, cult of work and respect for teachers, his respect for

value, no matter where he found it, his well-balanced ethics, his sense of relativity, his geniality” (p. 5) to his meticulous notes on the history of the Philharmonic starting 1968, and to his reception “as an important owner of documents” (p. 6) that bring to light unknown information on the history of the post-war music of Iasi. However, Ioan Morna accepted the challenge of conversing with the journalist Alex Vasiliu because he discovered those affinities of sensitivity, of a literary and musical culture, of a shared objective attitude of respect for history that translated into the reconstruction of some stages with the help of carefully-documented evocations. Thus, the relationship between the man – the musician – the teacher – the era is continuously supported by arguments in the 197 pages written admirably by Alex Vasiliu and his dialogue partner Ioan Morna, in a perpetual dynamism of the story about talented people who toiled in various music institutions to delight us today with the miracle of the history of post-war music in Iasi.