

## **Affirmation of Romanian music and culture in the vision of the composer Iacob Mureşianu**

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*In the pages to follow, we shall analyze the letter, unedited documents, and the most important acts of the Mureşianu Family, in order to sketch their role in the history of Romanian music and culture. The most relevant moment in the life and activity of the musician Iacob Mureşianu and of his family (Iacob Mureşianu – father, journalist, Aurel Mureşianu – brother, publicist) have been identified and analyzed.*

*Marking personalities of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the members of Mureşianu family have always militated for the preservation and promotion of national culture.*

*This article covers periods in the life of the musician Iacob Mureşianu, with a focus on the years of study and the onset of his activity as a composer, teacher, and conductor. The entire activity of the musician relies on the processing of Romanian folklore.*

*He was the founder of the magazine "Musa Română" (Romanian Muse), where he published his own creations and revealed the principles underpinning his entire music.*

Key-words: *Mureşianu, culture, tradition, correspondence, patriotism, ideals*

### **1. Introduction**

The life of Iacob Mureşianu, the journalist, is one of the important chapters in the fight for culture and national freedom of the Romanians in Transylvania.

After solid studies completed in the citadel of Romanian Transylvanian culture – Blaj-, where his teachers were Timotei Cipariu and Simion Bărnuţiu, Iacob Mureşianu answered the call of patriots and settled in this town, in 1837. The establishment of a newspaper in Romanian and the founding of cultural institutions ranged amongst the important ambitions of the Romanians in Transylvania.

In 1838, "Gazeta Transilvaniei" (The Gazette of Transylvania) saw the light of day, a newspaper to the service of all national interests, but which permanently faced suspension.

Illustrious figures in the Mureşeni family continue to appear: carrying forward his father's social and publicist activity, Aurel Mureşianu (1847 – 1909) is qualified

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by the historians of the time: "representative of Romanian thinking and feelings, defender of national rights and liberties", takes over "Gazeta Transilvaniei" in 1878, when Iacob Mureșianu, the father, withdraws.

The new editor has the merit of having brought the quality of the magazine to the level of the imposed requirements, meant to highlight the true and consistent line of national interests. Most of his articles focus on the solidarity and organization of the political life of the Romanians in Transylvania, calling upon the still combating masses to protect the national identity. The torch carried by Aurel Mureșianu was taken over by Iacob Mureșianu, the composer, who understood that his role as an artist was to bring all his talent to work for the initiation of a Romanian school of music. He has activated for almost forty years, one after another, as a pianist, conductor, teacher, musicologist, folklorist and, especially, as a composer, touching on almost all musical genres. In 1888, he brought to light the musical magazine "Musa Română". The words on the first page of the magazine may be regarded as the manifest program for the establishment of a Romanian music school: "it is in the folklore that we have to look for the source of those countless songs, round dances, doinas; it is from the folklore that they should be collected, depending on their specifics and on the customs, and then processed according to the harmony rules". (Buta Sandala 2000, 23)

## 2. Content

In the study of the historical periods, the clearest evidence resides in the written word, in the documents that challenge us through the amazingly generous richness of historical, artistic, and social arguments.

It is a privilege that we are currently able to sketch, based on the correspondence, the principles underpinning the development of the time's personalities under the careful guidance of family, teachers, of the intellectual nucleus during the respective historical period. The analysis of the publications and correspondence of the time materialize in the discovery of the ideals, work, and disillusion of these marking figures, an aspect that has clearly influenced the formation of a musical culture specific to the Romanian people and of a school combining all creative, theoretical, and scientific perspectives. The wide correspondence between the Mureșianu family members offers a lesson of living history, with all aspects this field of knowledge triggers. The letters sent by Iacob Mureșianu – the father to his sons, are a page of wisdom and a proof of the desire to carry forward the life principles that fostered the development of an elite generation. A letter sent by the composer Iacob Mureșianu from Năsăud on January 11, 1880, highlights these principles: " ... you have very beautifully developed the way in which I should work for the promotion of music and, especially, of singing. I have put up a choir; we had two performances, but afterwards stopped singing together. I

want to go to Vienna, to undergo a Conservatory examination. Here, in Năsăud, I've had several obstacles with my choir. Aurel should also read my letter..." (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1880, no.4)

Jacob Mureșianu's words are a page of the musician's life history, where everything is so transparently described, all problems, disillusion, conflicts he was to face in the year to follow, but which were not going to bring him down. Quite on the contrary, they have given him the power to continue. Aurel Mureșianu, the composer's brother, plays an important, and sometimes decisive, role in his life, activity, and goals. Even though they do not manage to meet too often, they periodically exchange letters, and Aurel Mureșianu would become, in time, Jacob Mureșianu's closest friend and confidant. After a time spent in Leipzig, he confided to his brother: "...I cannot pursue my goal and objective in art from here; I can only do that in my country. I have used everything I have heard and known so far - Romanian music. I want to gather folklore songs, put them on notes, and share them with Romanian public. For that, I will return to the country..."(Mureșeni Family Archives, 1881, file 582, nr. 53)

The lines to follow highlight Jacob Mureșianu's fondness for his father and the respect for his goals, for his ideals, which he has never strayed from, and which he desired to transmit to his successors: "...this is a pleasant recollection day, as it is the birthday of my beloved father, who has always strived for the welfare of the nation and his family..." (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1881, file 582, nr. 8)

The evolution of the national music in Jacob Mureșianu's vision is held back because it does not benefit from sufficient support. His hopes as to the redressing of the situation fluctuate, depending on the perspectives, on the confidence in the future, on the historical framework, but, in the meantime, the musician finds refuge in work.

Hoping that his ideas on promoting the national culture and music will be brought to life, Jacob Mureșianu – the father ceaselessly sends them to his successors, wanting to make them part of his goals, and wishing for his sons to be the ones to carry on his initiative.

The daughter of journalist Jacob Mureșianu, Elena, also contributes to the promotion of national culture. This is revealed by a letter she sent to the latter on December 27, 1885: "... I was very happy that you managed to improve the faith of music by developing the activities, through public performances, with the help of the town hall, meant to support the art of music. You could publicly state the goal of setting up a Reunion with a regulation and no restrictions ..."

The letters include pieces of advice, encouragements, ideas that, in the journalist's vision, may become reality, as well as the desire to help and support all initiatives that could contribute to the achievement of his ideals.

An apparently peaceful history, but, in fact, quite stormy in everyday life, the details of which remain unknown, at times with tragedies, contours the life of Mureșeni family.

The noble character, delicacy, and modesty, these wonderful personality traits, have determined them to be more discrete and not make public their lives in all aspects, which is why the correspondence between the family members represents pages of unwritten history.

The delicate moments in the history and life of Iacob Mureșianu are witnessed in the lines of the letter to follow. In a letter to his brother Aurel, Iacob Mureșianu divides the sheet into two: the first part contains problems related to the publication of an issue of "Musa Română": "...I am busy with the first issue here, in Leipzig, I have subscribers waiting, then I am going to come back to Blaj and work there...", and the second part of the letter concerns the concerts organized by him in Blaj, as gymnasium conductor. His desire to also organize concerts in Cluj faces financial problems that cannot be solved, so nothing happens. His fears came true, Blaj was no longer safe for Iacob Mureșianu, the barriers of history affect his work, and positive results are out of the question.

Confident in his aspiration, his work, the composer hoped that his sacrifice for study and, later on, for his work as a teacher, would bring him satisfaction and stability. He sees all difficult periods as small obstacles, which, if he managed to overcome, would grant him the achievement of his aspirations, moments that he was to rarely rejoice. He was an optimist both during the studies and in the first part of his activity as a teacher, but, in time, the documents will present a skeptical musician in relation to his future.

In Vienna, he finds a lively artistic, musical, and cultural climate, where numerous Romanian students grouped around "România Jună" society intensely affirmed themselves. The experience of the two years in Vienna determines Iacob Mureșianu to approach the engineering carrier and dedicate himself to music. In 1877, he becomes a music teacher in Năsăud, until 1879, when he decides to complete his musical studies at the highest level and in 1880 he goes to the Conservatory in Leipzig.

The first experience with the city was positive for Iacob Mureșianu: "... my first impressions after having reached Lipsca are favorable. It is a good place to study, the place of those who want to gain good knowledge and high culture ...", but an apprehension arises, i.e., the doubt that the hard work, the financial sacrifice of his family would not be for nothing and he starts wondering whether he would manage to achieve the goal for which he came to study, in time. ... and what is it all for, I wonder? Because people here are very serious, they put work and study first. All I hope for now is health, and then I will surely satisfy both our and my will, and I am going to achieve my goal ...".(Mureșeni Family Archives, 1880, file 582, nr. 47)

Because all his goals rely on the material support of the family, in the entire correspondence concerning his studies, he sent details on the subjects he studies, on the examination results.

Despite all financial difficulties Iacob Mureșianu faced throughout his life, he has never strayed from his actual priorities, i.e.: the importance of studies in the completion of his training as a musician and his role in the cultivation and promotion of Romanian music to those around him.

The start of his activity, after having graduated, as a teacher, as a choir and instrumental formation coordinator has not always been a combination of work and ideals.

Barriers, unflattering historical circumstances, conflicts with the management of the institutions he worked in, are only a few of the aspects of the social environment where he had to carry out his work.

He tries to share his spirit of sacrifice for art, for the national cause, for the promotion of Romanian music, cultivated in his family, with the intellectual environment he is a part of.

In difficult situations he is not immediately discouraged, he fights with his own weapons, the musical notes, but he also asks for his family advice. This is why the archives host many letters from the crucial, uncertain moments, meant to present the true side of the story.

The lines below support the ideas above: "... I have set up a choir in Năsăud. Nobody helped me, I think I am going to leave this place; anyway, it is the best church choir this town has ever had ..." wrote Iacob Mureșianu to his brother, Aurel, in October 12, 1879.

The hope for a better, safer life, where his work would be acknowledged, determines him to call upon his brother, confident that he would help him occupy a chair at the Bucharest Conservatory. It was a trend of the time, for the important, talented musicians, reputed teachers, unsatisfied with the corners of the world where life had taken them and where they hoped they would be able to develop and assert themselves artistically, to hope that, reaching the capital city, they would achieve everything they could not in the towns they came from.

Iacob Mureșianu believed in the opportunities Bucharest had to offer, disappointed by the problems he had to face in Blaj, though he had believed that was the place where he would be appreciated if he put all efforts into his work.

1895 finds him in Blaj, in difficult times: he is evicted from the house he lives in together with his family, his creations are not of interest, unless he gives them as a gift, and "Musa" has no subscribers. He confided to his family, in an attempt to put into words the difficult times he was going through and that, with their support, he would be able to overcome: "... I work a lot, I've tried to put something aside, but I haven't managed much. This is why, my dear brother, I need a little help to be able to focus on my aspirations ..." wrote Iacob Mureșianu to his brother, Aurel, from Blaj, on April 22, 1895. (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1885, file 582, nr. 69)

As time passes, the problems become more acute, others add up, and the following document is a lesson of history written by Iacob Mureșianu to his brother; not willing to resign, wanting to work, to continue struggling, he asks to be believed

that everything he writes is the pure truth, and also making a note at the head of this letter: "just for you", the composer asks Aurel Mureșianu's confidential advice meant to save his belief in the ideals acquired in family, trying not to disappoint the memory of the father. This note is not characteristic to him, does not represent him; almost all letters to the family are open to all members, asking for news about everybody and also sending information on him to all of them. In the autobiographic lines, he mentions that: he is not pessimistic, he does not make statements under the empire of delusion, he does not perceive reality in shades of grey: "... I've asked you several times to look for a better position for me. All noble feelings, all idealism has vanished for this place I am in, the word "devotion" is unknown. The national assertion and the patriotism have vanished from this place .... Yours, Iacob". (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1898, file 582, nr. 73)

The end of 1907 and beginning of 1908 do not represent a beneficial period for Iacob Mureșianu's life, quite on the contrary, black clouds start to appear in his existence, as the order of the ministry concerning the reduction of the music classes is reactivated, in parallel with the indication to acknowledge degrees obtained outside the country; two aspects the musician falls under and, without many alternatives, he has no choice but to accept them.

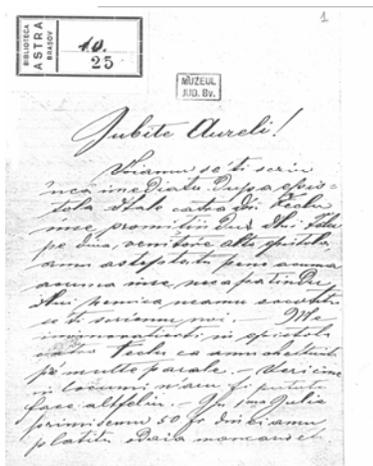
Though he was in a precarious situation, as he himself described it, the composer did not forget about his goals; he wrote compositions for the jubilee issue of "Gazeta Transilvaniei" and for "Musa română", in strict abidance of the idea inoculated by his father - to never forget, no matter how hard times are, that he has to work for the affirmation of natural culture: "... please find attached the composition of the jubilee issue, so that you can send it to Pesta, ask them to make a sort of photographic cliche, but to maintain my manuscript as such, as published in the country. The choir is good and nice, I'll also transcribe that for the piano...", a letter to his brother, Aurel. (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1908 file 582, nr. 91)

Overcoming all obstacles, Iacob Mureșianu regains the balance he so much needed in his existence, in work and in the concern to create new works that he can leave to his people, a fact that is also demonstrated by his life-long correspondence with his family.

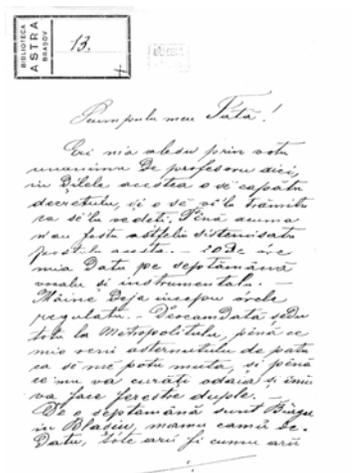
The composer has always been profoundly thankful to his parents and family for the education received, for the healthy life principles acquired, and for the development of the capacity to acknowledge actual values, worthy of being taken as models. One of the activities Iacob Mureșianu dedicates time to was the development of a musical culture of the developing middle class, made up of merchants and artisans.

He sets up the "Society of Romanian Artisans", whose goal was to promote the intellectual and moral interests of artisans through literary and musical evenings. The efforts Iacob Mureșianu has made for the spreading and preservation of national music, in the development of a diversified musical repertoire, also materialized in

the musical reunions and cultural societies, in the organization and support whereof he was very much involved.



**Fig.1** Letter sent by Jacob Mureșianu to his brother, original document (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1880, file 582, nr. 35)



**Fig.2** Letter sent by Jacob Mureșianu to his father, original document (Mureșeni Family Archives, 1881, file 582, nr. 13)

### 3. Conclusions

The purpose of this article is to offer a review of the most important moments in the life and activity of composer Iacob Mureșianu, based on letters and documents.

He has been regarded not only as a music teacher but also as a follower of the struggle for national emancipation, being the descendant of a family with a sound tradition in this country.

Authors have mostly written about Iacob Mureșianu after his death.

He was an exception from the general rule of passiveness, looking for novelty and originality.

The article also stresses the advice, encouragements, and life ideals the journalist Iacob Mureșianu desires to share with his children, as well as the decisive role of the personality of the musician Iacob Mureșianu in his era, and the reliability of his conceptions on art, in the light of contemporaneity. He has made a decisive statement in all his concerns, guided by the high sense of duty for the art he has served.

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