

Ключові слова: свобода, відповідальність, справедливість, етика, моральність, законність, санкція.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 14.10.2013

UDK 37

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„ASTRA” AND THE CHOIR FROM ORĂȘTIE

The requests made within the programme belonging to *The Association for the Romanian Language and the Romanian people culture*, set up at Sibiu in 1861, have been those of promotion and exploitation of national traditions, the way they have been kept since immemorial times. All the social categories have exemplarily answered this imperative. „Astra” has imposed something unique, has succeeded into an innovation within the Romanians from the places of the Hunedoara county, that have realised due to the proportion between the specific domains and solutions to perpetuate a programme, some ideas and some traditional means, coming from all the social categories.

Notable merits had „Astra” also in the action of artistic activity stimulation, especially by setting up and supporting choirs, brass bands, folk dance bands, by organizing social soirées and literary-artistic soirées, both in towns and in villages. There have also been initiated prizes contests, a special attention being paid to the training of some artistic bands leaders, recruited among the villages intellectuals, thus contributing to the enrichment of the spiritual life of the rural villages and to the promotion of the authentic values.

In 1913 the „Astra” general reunion was held. That was why the inhabitants of Orăștie did their best for this holiday not to miss out the traditional contest of the choir with a great programme. The choir had a rich and select repertoire, singing from the creations of G. Dima, Timotei Popovici, Augustin Bena, D. Chiriac, C. Porumbescu¹⁵. If a few months ago the „Astra” reunion had as a conductor the young Ionel Rădulescu, in September 1913 the choir was conducted by Aurel Medrea graduate of the absolvent al Viena¹⁶ Conservatoire. The programme was well chosen and to ensure the success, singers from other towns, such as Veturia Tritean from Sibiu and Cella Delavrancea¹⁷ have been invited.

¹⁵ Ion Iliescu, Tiberiu Istrate, *Orăștie 750 ani*, Deva, 1974, p. 156.

¹⁶ Maria Vîrtopeanu, *Din activitatea Reuniunii de cântări din Orăștie*, în *Sargetia*, 1982-1983, nr. XVI-XVII, p.622.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

The Orastie Assembly was a grandiose manifestation, and the choir production was one of the attractions of the cultural festivities in Orăștie. The chorus success was due to the organised music, a new stage from the second half of the 19th century when a greater responsibility appeared towards the social life. The patriotic message was better thought and the choir was organised on more solid grounds within the *Songs Reunion*– 1883¹⁸ and it was greatly led for some decades by Ioan Branga, a talented student of the composer George Dima. This reunion was not only a form of artistic manifestation, but also a strong means of spiritual manifestation, throughout the songs of the choristers spreading the faith in fight victory for the Romanians`rights.

The first mentions about the activity of a chorus band in Orăștie have been dating since 1865. On the 3rd/15th of May the Romanian pupils from the Reformat College were going to the festivity in the town forest, singing the march „Today, Romanian brothers/ We see ourselves as masters”. Three years later, the Romanian pupils, from the same college, formed into a *Lecture Society*, organised a „soirée with sayings and songs”¹⁹. In 1870, the president of the Orthodox Parish Committee was chosen the lawyer Avram Tincu, originary from Sebeș. From his initiative and that of Ioan Mihai, a church choir is formed, led by a German conductor. The choir has its debut in the church but it can` t maintain itself, as the conductor couldn` t understand the Orthodox liturgy²⁰.

In the autumn of 1883, the Sibiu Consistoriu named Ioan Branga as a teacher at the normal Orthodox school in Orăștie. His name is mentioned in the protocol of the teachers` conference within the Orthodox school in Orăștie²¹. At his first point, the president Nicolae Popovici let the audience know that after teacher Sebastian Olariu` sleaving the school, the position was taken temporarily by teacher Ioan Branga²². In the following meeting from October 28th, 1883, he was chosen as a librarian. The young teacher, originary from Poiana Sibiului, was endowed with a great voice, taking into account the appreciations of those who knew him: „a good singer, having also musical knowledge, lays the bases of the most wanted”²³. He sets up, right in the autumn of 1883, a mixed church choir, formed by artisans, Romanian pupils from the Reformed College, ladies and misses from the town. Around the general reunion of „Astra” in Orăștie, in the summer of 1884, the teacher filled in the choral band with some members of the

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 618.

¹⁹ Anton E. Dörner, Vasile Ionaș, Ioachim Lazăr, *Orăștie – 775*, Deva, Editura Omnia, 1999, p. 147.

²⁰ *Viațaromânească în Orăștie*, în, *Cosînzeana*, year III, nr. 35-36, Orăștie, 1913, p. 513.

²¹ MCDR, *Protocolul din 21 octombrie 1883*, in *Registrul Conferințelor învățătoresc din Orăștie*, f. 22.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ C. Baicu, *Memorialul Școlii capitale greco-orientale române din Orăștie*, Orăștie, Libertatea Printing Press, 1921, p.16.

*Saxons of Transylvania songs Reunion*²⁴, with ladies belonging to the Hungarian and German ethnics from the town. Next to the religious songs of the church choir, Branga also added a repertoire of folk songs with which he would come out in the public. The time recorders commented on the mixed choir programmes, for example, the article *Concert in Orăștie* shows that „the young mixed choir set up soon in Orăștie held its first production on 3rd/15th of June led by teacher Branga. The income was destined to the usage of the school”²⁵.

A stimulant for the cultural activity in general of the choir especially was the general reunion of „Astra” from Orăștie. With this well-trained band, Ioan Branga had his debut, and he obtained success, as the *Cosînzeana* magazine put it „was probably the strongest impulse for the music to have its foster on”. But the Saxons of Transylvania and the Hungarians would retire from the choir which makes teacher Ioan Branga organise a peasantry choir from which the *Songs Reunion* would form, with statuses approved by the dualist state²⁶.

The full programme that the mixed choir presented with the occasion of the mentioned festivities, proves the strength of this band, but also its rich repertoire, prepared during several months, as it was known ever since May 1884 that the general reunion of the „Association” would be held in Orăștie²⁷. Ioan Branga’s work was not in vain, the choir programme being a pleasant surprise for the guests and the inhabitants of Orăștie. Observations were made in the chronicle *The Romanian Festivities of Orăștie*, where the article referred to the given concert and it told some aspects connected to the show itself: „On the improvised stage comes a numerous choir of ladies and gentlemen, led by the teacher from the Romanian school in the region, Mr Ioan Branga. This gentleman has composed a choir out of the music amateurs, to perform at the „Association” festivities. The first song performed by this choir, the Romanian song arranged by Gheorghe Dima, *Sărmana frunză*, proved us that we had to deal with a good singer. The second song, *Rămâisănătoasă*, performed with the same precision, confirmed the hard working powers, and with the third song, *Cântecul ciocârlii* by F. Mendelsshon, the choir showed that it knew to overcome hardships”²⁸. It was still in this article that the merits of performance were revealed: „the accuracy of expression, the entire harmony” that all could be the result of a study „made with much diligence”. For all this, it was said that „the audience was frappe”, that due to the frenetical applauds it was necessary the repetition of the last song, that Mr Branga „also received private congratulations”.

²⁴*Ibidem*, p.17.

²⁵*Concert la Orăștie*, in *Familia*, nr. 24, 1884, p. 200.

²⁶*Reuniunea de cântări*, in *Cosînzeana*, year III, nr. 35-36, Orăștie, 1913, p. 514.

²⁷*Tribuna*, nr. 25, 15/17 May 1884, p. 2.

²⁸*Festivitățile de la Orăștie*, in *Tribuna*, nr. 95. 1884, p.379.

At the end of 1884, teacher Ioan Branga leaves the school because of some misunderstandings with George Candrea, who has also been named the headmaster²⁹, his place being taken by Toma Popovici from Boşorod, graduate of the state pedagogical school in Deva. His attempt to remake the peasantry choir fails. Yet, in 1885, the artistic activity goes on, if we take into consideration that during this year the *Ardeleana Credit Institute* is set up, within the Romanian intelligence in Orăştie, coming up a more energetic life, as the social conveniences patroned by this institution also had a „musical syllabus”³⁰. The press then relates about the „teachers` choir from Orăştie” that presented a musical literary production held in the edifice of the Romanian Greek-Oriental capital school in the town³¹. It was still in the chronicle where it was mentioned the fact that the conductor of the choir was, in 1885, teacher Toma Popovici, but also that the band was called *The Romanian Ploughmen from Orăştie* and it was made up, of course, of the singers that Ioan Branga had earlier recruited. The choir activity was sustained firstly through the men choir and the mixed choir of the ploughmen, then through the teachers` choir.

Only in 1886 the chorus activity is retaken in Orăştie under the care of teacher Constatin Baicu. Having a good tenor voice, he also led the liturgical songs in the church. In 1887, Ioan Branga comes back to Orăştie, sets up the choir again, this time only with the peasants` boys and girls in the town. He manages to realize one of the strongest choirs in Transylvania. By recruiting the peasant element, the music spread within the people, leading to raising its music culture. The press comments in favour the public performances: „The mixed choir from Orăştie fixes a concert in its favour, having the following programme:

- 1) *Retour victorieux*, mixed choir by H. Bianchi;
- 2) *Marşul comunei*, arranged for piano with four hands by F. Mendelssohn Bartholdi;
- 3) *Fântâna cu trei izvoare*, mixed choir by G. Dima;
- 4) *Plecarea păsărilor*, tube accompanied by piano by F. Mendelssohn, translated by Ştefan Roşianu;
- 5) *Cântec final*, mixed choir by R. Kreutzer;
- 6) *Nor de vijelie*, romance for one voice, piano accompanied by V. Humel;
- 7) *Hai înhoră de-a juca*, mixed choir by G. Dima”³².

It is to be mentioned in this repertoire the multitude of manifestation forms: choir, singers, accompanies the variety of the Romanian musical products

²⁹ C. Baicu, *Memorialul Şcoalei*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Conveniri sociale în Orăştie*, in *Familia*, nr. 47, 1885, p. 563.

³¹ *Serată muzicală în Orăştie*, in *Familia*, nr. 48, 1885, p. 577.

³² *Corul mixt din Orăştie*, in *Familia*, nr. 52, 1887, p. 623.

but also those of the foreign classics. In order to materially strengthen the choir, different actions are organised, whose gain was „in favour of its fond”³³.

Over passing the beginning hardships, the choir will be fully strengthened, its concerts are richer and richer, the public performances more numerous, modestly calling itself *Concert from Orăștie*³⁴. With this title, *The Concert* announced by *The Family* on the 10th of June 1888, had Ioan Branga as a conductor, with the contest of I. Demian and it had 13 points. Due to these successes, the choir leader will determine a teachers' movement that initiates on its own some cultural manifestations, supporting at the same time and more intensely the chorus band. We give as examples the songs performed by *The Choir of Branga* at the general reunion of the *Romanian Greek Orthodox Teachers' Reunion from Deva county* in 1891: *Deșteaptă-teromâne* by G. Muzicescu, *Din depărtare*, quartet by I. Vorobihievici, *Cântec final* by Kreutzer, *Oșteanul român*, *Nevasta care iubește*, both by Muzicescu, *Stăncuța*, *Răsăitul* and *Ileana* also by Muzicescu. In a new article, commenting on this concert, it was said that „it came out well”, being in the public eye several songs, some singers and the concert organizer, teacher Ioan Branga³⁵.

The preparation for these programmes needs a lot of time and effort, reason for which the choir conductor, in his orientation towards public productions will not totally involve himself in the church choir activity as well. Since 1888, the activity of the church choir was rarer and rarer, so the committee decided to oblige the leader to sing in the church early only 25 times. At the same time it was settled that the earnings of 100 Florins to be paid to the conductor, in the choir productions, that is each production, 4 florins³⁶. This statement remained available for the following years as well, since, in 1892, was made a proposal that the conductor „should be constrained to perform in his choir, otherwise his earnings will be withdrawn”, and one year later one of the members of the committee proposes „to make the choir vanish as well as those one hundred Florins, that are paid for the choir to be shared between the two teachers, obliging them to adjust to the above mentioned and to perform with the pupils on Sundays and holidays, one on the right of the priest, the other on the left”³⁷.

A positive activity, secondary to Branga, also developed Constantin Baicu within the *Songs Reunion* and that of the church choir. Although he didn't have Branga's passion and endowment, he organised tens of soirées, cultural reunions, festive soirées where, though more were the theatre plays, those solistic and chorus were not excluded either. At the Romanian school, where he had

³³ *Corul mixt din Orăștie*, in *Familia*, nr. 52, 1887, p. 623.

³⁴ *Concert în Orăștie*, in *Familia*, nr. 22, 1888, p. 246.

³⁵ *Concertul din Orăștie*, in *Familia*, nr. 43, 1891, p. 513.

³⁶ Ion Iliescu, *Corul de la Orăștie*, p. 96.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

been a headmaster for many years, Baicuorganised regularly festive soirées, „from whose income he laid the bricks of a school library”³⁸.

The interest for the folk and laic music will lead to the emancipation of the choir under the leadership of the church. From this moment on, the choir was better settled, had experience on stage, the choristers loved their band so much that they couldn't break apart from it, they considered it a cultural necessity and sacrificed their free time to take part into rehearsals. On the other hand, it was supported by the audience as well, by those who had got a certain musical culture. Undoubtedly, an important role to maintain the choir united was played by its leader who, through his modesty of behaviour, his tact by which he got close to the people, knew how to attract them: „the peasantry choir was very interested and the peasants loved it so much that during the working days they would leave the cart to someone else, in the field and ran to the choir, `cause it was a brag to be a chorister”³⁹. The great concerts and the repeated successes woke the interest of the intellectuals who asked the conductor to approve their massive participation. The intellectuals and the teachers knew the musical notes and this eased the learning process of the more and more academic songs, and because a great part of the youth didn't know the musical notes, teacher IoanBrangastarted to teach them at school.

Between 1890-1893 for the national esthetical education, in Orăștiecontinued the Romanian balls, the theatre representations, the amateurs`productions that determined the departure, through this town, of some singers or foreign bands. The concert given in 1893 had the contest of Mrs Maria Popovici, graduate of the Conservatoire of București, ErsiliaPopoviciand MrIoanDemianfrom Sibiu⁴⁰. A year later IacobMureșanu had a concert, well known composer, distinguished teacher who has his debut also as a singer⁴¹. Artistic programmes were presented by choir bands, such as those from SebeșandSibiu, that obviously conveyed news referring to the repertoire making up and the performance quality.

In 1897, with the occasion of the general Reunion of the *Society for the Romanian theatre*, performed in Orăștie, will be organised a concert highly watched by the participants from the reunion, of which we remember the name of Iosif Vulcan, VasileBologa, Virgil Onițiu, George DimaandCoriolan-Brediceanu. The example of Orăștieand of its brave conductor is followed by other teachers in the area who also set up choir bands. Thus the choires from Rămosin 1900 and which is under the surveillance of IoanFleșeriu, atRămoșel,

³⁸ C. Baicu, *MemorialulȘcoalei capitale*, p. 18.

³⁹ *Reuniunea de cântări*, in *Cosânzeana*, year III, nr.35-36, 1913, p. 514.

⁴⁰ *Concertul la Orăștie*, in *Familia*, nr. 37, 1893, p. 445.

⁴¹ *ConcertulbaritonuluiMureșanu la Orăștie*, in *Familia*, nr. 42, 1894, p. 502.

in 1906⁴². It is still at the same time when the choir from AlmaşulMicand Balşa performed, where the well known priest and teacher NicolaeTodea activated.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the chorus activity, though it hasn't been financially supported the way it should have deserved, kept on developing. The local newspapers were announcing and commenting the public leadings out, for example the *Concert of the Romanian Reunion Songs from Orăştie* will have the following programme: *M-aşmărita*, mixed choir by Timotei Popovici, *Mândruţa*, men choir by NicolaeTodea, *Barcarolaveneţiană*, *Copilul*, solo for baritone by Flechtenmacher, *CefaciIoano?* Mixed choir by George Dima, *Foiaverde pup de crin*, *MătuşaAngheluşa*, mixed choirs by Timotei Popovici, *Fetelecasnice*, women choir by Timotei Popovici, *Nu-i dreptate*, mixed choir by George Dima⁴³. Though the announcement is concise, it is expressive in the thematic problems and exposure model. In more and more articles, the programme⁴⁴ was not only understood but afterwards it was commented on. Thus the programme given by the choir at Feredeus was announced in two numbers in *Bunuleconom*⁴⁵, in a third one were made appreciations about this: „The concert room was full of audience”, about the points that were rewarded with „endless applause” so the band had to sing again about three songs⁴⁶ over the programme. From this information we can conclude that the public knew the value of Branga and implicitly of the *Songs Reunion*, in the press of those times there already existing a musical criticism.

The concerts of the Reunion become more relevant. The conductor attracts new elements „men singers and women singers from the local intelligence together with voices chosen among the people”. At the same time, the experiences that the choristers have gathered from the professionalist artists with whom they have interacted, contributed to the choir preparation; it participated to the chorus festivity initiated by the *Carmen* musical society, from Bucharest, in 1906. Here the choir from Orăştie leave a special impression, performing in the contest next to the chorus bands in Sălişte, Lugoj, Dumbrăveni, Breaza, Reşiţa, Oraviţa and the choir *Armonia* from Cernăuţi. Thus, Ioan Branga personally got the a primit personal Diploma cum laudae and the Golden Medal, and the *Songs Reunion* was given the Honour Diploma and the Golden Medal. Besides some songs that the choirs presented under conductor D. Chiriac, among which we mention the songs *Pe-al nostrusteg*, *Tricolorul* and *Pui de lei*, the choir from Orăştie performed the songs *Bălcescumurind* and *Mândruliţă de demult* by George Dima. The choristers dressed in the beautiful folk costume from around Orăştie have

⁴²*Transilvania*, Holynumber, 1911, p. 578.

⁴³*Concertulreuniunii*, în *Bunuleconom*, nr. 6, 1900, p. 5.

⁴⁴*Bunuleconom*, year I, nr. 4, 1900, p. 5.

⁴⁵*Bunuleconom*, year I, nr. 24, 1900, p. 7; nr. 26, p. 6.

⁴⁶*Concertul de la Federeu*, în *Bunuleconom*, year I, nr. 27, 1900, p. 5.

impressed the audience from the capital, by its originality and by the quality of the performance of the two songs.

After such a great and long activity, conductor Ioan Branga feels tired and expresses his wish of retirement. The sanctification of the festivity room of the „Central” Hotel, in the autumn of 1911, gives him the chance to sustain a splendid concert that crowns his entire career.

After the concert, with an activity of over 30 years, Ioan Branga retires from the leadership of the *Reunion*'s choir, performing only within the church choir. For a good period of time foreign conductors have been brought to the leadership of the choir, only occasionally to prepare some shows.

After 1914, because of the war, the appearance of the choir in the public becomes more and more rare. We cannot say that the chorus *Reunion* abandoned any initiative, for sure being the fact that since then have not been organised any social soirees and great concerts. From the organisation point of view, the general reunions weren't held anymore and the funds became weaker and weaker. The personal-political preoccupations from this period are beyond those musical-artistic, the choristers being attracted when in one band, when in another, and the good singers in all of them. Though the chorus activity didn't have any organised character, it doesn't languish. Within the *Artisans Reunion*, the *Women Reunion*, the *Mixed choir of high school*, the band *Songs Reunion*, the *Ploughmen Choir* go on each to present the public different soirees, concerts and even prestigious shows. Among the conductors who have brought their contribution we mention Ionel Rădulescu, Aurel Medrea, A. Schmidt, Gh. Pîrvu, N. Oancea, N. Praţea, Savel Horcea, I. Pera, Valeriu Bora.

Year 1918 marks a new stage in the choir activity and of the *Songs Reunion*, in the town cultural life showing up other two choirs, the *Artisans reunion choir* and the *Aurel Vlaicu High School Choir* that will dominate the inter-war chorus life.

Along its existence, the *Songs Reunion* from Orăştie has organised great and beautiful concerts, valorising the wonderful folk costume in the area, and at the same time being a messenger of the song and dance here. With this choir have been organised musical soirees, concerts, parties, many of them with charitable aims or increase the financial fund of the choir. On Sundays and during holidays, the „divine song” was heard loudly in the church, in beautiful and high waves, and the people came in great number to listen to how it is sung in the church.

The choir will not be only a way of artistic delight, but also a strong means of spiritual manifestation that had as target a high mission, addressing to a more numerous audience and aware of this meaning. The band supported the school, it was present at the general reunions of „Astra”, it held concerts in favour of other reunions and societies, the way the *Society for fund of the Roma-*

nian theatre, Orăştie branch, did. Thus, this band represented a burning point of culture and a folk music spreader.

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„АСТРА” И ХОР ИЗ ОРĂŞТИЕ

Рассмотрено, что хор – это мощное средство для духовного проявления, которое имеет в качестве цели высокую миссию, обращаясь к многочисленным зрителям.

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„АСТРА” I ХОР З ОРĂŞТИЕ

Розглянуто, що хор - це потужний засіб для духовного прояву, яке має в якості мети високу місію, звертаючись до численних глядачів.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 15.09.2013

UDC 338

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Romania*

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN CONTEMPORARY MARKET- ING