

Experience of editing a new religious hymn book

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This paper is purposed to constitute a tribute brought to one of the diligent workers in the domain of Romanian language hymns who had the courage to overcome the ages and gave priority to worship hymns for the one that is above all ages.

Who is M. V. Diaconescu – MVD – as we are going to abbreviate him in the following pages, is already written as an autobiography in the forth coral album introduction, one of the seven albums that are going to be published at our printing house.

Being a descendent of a “family from the superior valley of Ialomita, family with old and respected church traditions, didactical, literal, musical, artistic and plastic” – the great violinist Mihai Constantinescu, his cousin, being the one to represent some of these, - MVD had tasted in the early years the sweetness of the oriental church melody and text, than, through cultural contact, the one of the Gregorian and protestant hymn, along with the new protestant one, that formed his family. Even though he followed the medical career, his passion for hymns was also maintained through his “intense activity as an orchestra conductor and participation to the musical events in Bucharest and than in Germany”, at Aachen. As a result of his highly and passionately preoccupation for hymns, there were born four “Songs albums”, printed by Card Printing House, which are going to be presented in the following pages.

Four coral albums

In chronological order these are: **Forget me not, 2001; The Heavenly Bridegroom is close, 2002; A Sublime News and Spring Branch, 2004.** All of them were edited by the author, receiving also editorial observations from Constantin Tolici (that were included) arriving in this form at us ready for being published.

As the author specify, the text respects the interwar orthography established by Academy, and the graphic musical notation is made in Score program.

Forget me not

Forget me not, 2001, is a collection dedicated to Aurora Ionescu, author’s sister, who was also the generator of this album, she being the one that wrote the texts for “44 melodies, hymns and coral works” in original or using translation. To them there are added 8 more songs with another text writers, which are included in this album because it represents one of the main springs of this collection namely: the spiritual experience had at The Biblical Institute – Stupini which, regarding all these, can be considered the cradle of the new protestant hymnology in Romania.

The album contents 44 songs, hymns and coral works from the universal sacred music repertoire and 8 songs from School and for School, referring to Stupini – Brasov.

The songs, as there were characterized by the author himself, are belonging to different styles and subjects. Some are simple whimper of the soul, other, full grown works just like the ones made by Franck, Berlioz, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms. But even though, the author goes on, “there are German corals, Genovese psalms, Huguenot or pieties hymns, American gospels or even Romanian ballads, there are nothing but dangles of the soul before the altar”.

Considering the text, from the 44 songs “from the School” and “the Grant songs”, 25 are versifying translations and 19 have original verses. Selected by there origin, 16 of them are American, 11 are German and French, 7 are Romanian and 7 with uncertain origin. Those between 1945 – 1947 have as a principal source “Hymnes et Louanges” collection, Lutheran coral predominates between 1948 – 1949 and American songs are present between 1945 –

1960 with a culmination in 1948 and having as a source “Christ in Songs” – F. E. Belden. Ten of the American ones are reproduced by heart by MVD without finding a documentary source.

The Born oh the Collection

An obvious characteristic of this corpus is its “functional” origin. The very life “ordered” it, the need for a spiritual expression. Besides, using the introductive “technical device”, MVD provides along with the synopsis (p. VII – VIII), containing data bases for every song, an index with the composers (p. IX) and other sources and musical instructions (p. X), the text for every song with a small commentary and some biography detail, marking out the Romanian beginning of the song (p. XII – XIII). Divided by “functionality”, 21 are liturgical predominant, 24 set apart for the choir, and 7 are for solo.

Musical and Moral Co writers

MVD mentions a group of friends orientated to music and spirituality, who also stood as a spring for some of the songs. They were composers like Otto Herman and Horst Gehann, performers like Verona Parvan and Otilia Teodosiu Manea and sources for some “unfound manuscript” – I. T. Bujor and Octavian Coconcea. We cannot end without mentioning the students of The Biblical Institute Brasov – Stupini and the choirs members of the Seventh Day Adventist community – Bucharest Grant.

Songs for School

The album ends with a supplement – “another old and new songs from School” with verses from seven authors, including MVD and Aurora Ionescu. This is something that overflows as an effect of what God gave to that generation.

Spreading

These songs were not designated to form an album being born to fulfill a need. After 1949, as a result of the continual reduction of the authors’ field and the continual less appreciation, most of the manuscripts were spread without any copy or being a part of some collections used in these decades. It was commonly not to be mentioned the source of the text or the author. Some of them were even foisted, maybe without intention. Some became part of the “folklore” while other remained almost unknown or died along with the generation that needed them for expressing the momentous feeling. Anyway, brought back to life by MVD with love and professionalism these compositions stay now at hand to every Romanian Christian.

The Heavenly Bridegroom is close

This collection, published in 2002, has a special place among all seven intentioned by MVD. Common to these is the passion for “archeology”, proper to a digger in the musical ruins due to the rich introductive study – 88 pages in this case comparing to 62 that has the collection - and the passing of the time and most important of all the conviction that his work has an upper sense – that of a new infusion with real Christian value, worm, sweet, just like the one between 1839 – 1844, proper to the Miller followers.

The collection was born as a gift for the experience had by MVD himself – the journey made in 1999 to Miller’s house, the precursory of the American Adventist movement. This trip was followed by an enthusiastic preparation of “ten Adventist songs”, which were offered to the New – Grant community and than spread all over. This event quickened the author who, along with Cornelius Greissing and Benone Burtescu, started to make a bigger collection. The following lines will give same information offered in the introduction.

About Romanian infiltration

The term is taken over from historical reality due to the moment when, under Constantin Brancoveanu, a relative of this ruler - monk Filoftei (the son of Jipa, prefect of Bucharest) – had transposed the “vast Byzantine psalm repertoire” producing “a sanctification of them through language and vice versa”.

Thereby, MVD with the two poets, as the text authors, wish to have songs “made in Romania” even though “the Miller”, as a spiritual experience, was born in America.

Addressees

Thus being made, the collection is designated to all Romanian Christians, no matter the religion they follow. The believers, members of one community and the pastors are regarded in order to refresh the waiting of The One that should come and whose kingdom will have no end.

Origins

The millerite song is foregone by what MVD call “The premillerite song”, itself having its origin in the English expression of protestant tradition, but to which is also added the continental – European one, particularly the German one from Whissahikon and Ephrata, born in the Sabbatharian – Messianic communities which had introduced, revolutionary, coral compositions which were originally acapella or had formed the first symphonic orchestra on the American ground. In the beginning only the psalms were accepted, the hymns, influenced by Calvin, being forbidden because of their optional non biblical text but in the middle of the XVII century, through local authors, there were accepted by the youth. Thus, in 1918, appears the “Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs of Isaac Watts...” collection completed by popular religious songs.

The Millerite Song

“Spiritual Songs” and anonymous authors will dominate the Second Advent Movement. Uncountable texts having the same melody were brought to life by this new experience lived by millerites. They were singing a capella. Most of these were singed without notes and the melody was optionally transformed by the leader. The movement started to grow and people were converted through music. That’s why the leaders thought to make 12 song books which were really suggestive. Many other details could be found in the introductory study which is followed by a bibliography, a list of these books, having a technical paper with the text written in Romanian and English. A unique work, global appreciated, is now standing at our hands.

Sublime News

The following two collections made by MVD are containing 44 melodies, hymns and corals, part of the universal sacred music repertoire, some of the with text provided and arranged by Aurora Ionescu, Mihai Tunaru, etc. With these we are getting closer to the real creation signed by MVD as author and composer. “A Sublime News” reunites “Songs from Grant” – coral works dedicated to liturgical services.

Sources

These Romanian songs emanated from occidental sources, with Gregorian influences, have not the purpose to represent an esthetical quality, but to have a practical purpose – to “offer the believers new moments of spiritual, religious and sacred growth”.

In the introductory study there is a brief look on the religious songs from Romanian Lands, followed by an analysis of the congregation taken in consideration. The enrich stages of the repertoire, text problems and those of prosody and melody are making this study highly useful along with some songs more or less known that are brought back to life.

Spring Branch

This final collection is worthy to get an appreciation from a musicologist, containing original compositions of MVD. Accompanied, just like the other ones, by a short introduction, this one has a free translation of the text in German, French and English. The specific material has 138 pages.

As the author mentions, these works are the fruit of his musical activities between the three periods: Grant (1948 – 1960), The Theatre (1968 – 1972) and Diaspora – Geneva and Aachen (1973 – 2000). There had seen the daylight just like the other ones – because of a specific spiritual “need”. Musical speaking, the author describes himself as “a romantic, a frank-ist and a Debussy-ist”; being the sustainer of the voice primate and not the piano accompaniment. The songs show themselves as not lately cosmetic improved but having the momentous load that born them. The designator is “all the Romanian”.

Instead of ending

The editorial experience which is procured by these four collections, due to MVD, was a total especially one. We first got the drafting. We have said our opinion and it is true in a small measure because MVD job was, in our opinion, not asking for more. Exigent with himself, MVD took over what was useful from the suggestions and produced a material which we only needed to multiply. This is a rare and a happy case for a hymnal production lover editor, because he himself needs to find sometimes those rare expressions of what he wants to say to the One who is the target of every true hymn, Jesus Christ, The Father and The Holy Spirit.

This was for us a real happy experience.

M. V. Diaconescu, Songs Albums I, *Forget me not*, CARD, 2001, p.4

Between 1968 – 1972, MVD formed and conducted “The Medical Choir”, at Romanian Theatre, Enescu Hall, all the members being Christian beginners, new protestant ones. Later, as an emigrant, between 1973 – 1974, at Geneva, he organizes a choir named “Collegium Byzantinum” and than at Aachen, in 1978 – 2000.

M. V. Diaconescu, Songs Albums IV, *A sublime news*, CARD, 2004, p. 5

Forget me not, CARD, 2001, p. 4, Introduction

Ibidem, p. 4 - 5

Ibidem, p. 5

Brasov, 1945 – 1949; Bucharest Grant, 1948 – 1958.

See the introductory study of the author

See p. VI

See *The Heavenly Bridegroom is close*, CARD, Cernica, 2002, p. III

Ibidem

Ibidem

This is applied to the period 1940 - 1944

See *A Sublime News*, CARD, Cernica, 2004, p. VI

Ibidem, p. V

Ibidem, p. VI