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## GEORGE ENESCU IN WARTIME IAȘI, 1916–1919

### Introduction

When World War I broke out on July 28, 1914,<sup>1</sup> the thirty-three year old Romanian musical genius George Enescu (1881–1955) was in the midst of his by now customary concert tour in France and Western Europe, tours which were bringing him increasing recognition and renown as a composer, violinist, pianist, and conductor. He broke off his concertizing, and in September 1914, returned home, where he threw himself into an intense and taxing cultural and musical life.<sup>2</sup>

The Romanian Kingdom (the *Regat*) had remained neutral when the war exploded, and would not become a participant in the war until August 1916, when it joined the Allied forces against the Central Powers.<sup>3</sup> Despite early successes of 1916, the war went badly for the Romanians and by the end of November, 1916, King Ferdinand and the Romanian government led by Ion I. C. Brătianu were forced to go into exile in the northeastern Romanian city of Iași. George Enescu, who was born in northeastern Romania, had preceded them, and for the duration of the war, he carried out an exhausting musical program in support of his beleaguered country. This essay reviews that effort.

### Enescu in Wartime Iași

With Romania's entry into the war in 1916, George Enescu concentrated his efforts on giving concerts on virtually a daily basis for the wounded as head of a Romanian Red Cross artistic initiative. Enescu's view of the war as such was very pessimistic. In June 1916, asked in an interview about the impact of the war on music,

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<sup>1</sup> Though Romania was on the old style non-Gregorian calendar until 1919, all dates in this study are new style Gregorian calendar.

<sup>2</sup> Basic resources for this study are George Oprescu and Mihail Jora (eds.), *George Enescu*, București, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din RPR, 1964; Mircea Voicana (ed.), *George Enescu. Monografie*, București, Editura Academiei, 1971, two volumes; and Noel Malcolm, *George Enescu. His Life and Music*, Surbiton, Surrey UK, Toccata Press, 1990. Enescu's quasi-memoirs, conversations with Bernard Gavoty in 1951–1952, published as Bernard Gavoty, *Les souvenirs de Georges Enesco*, Paris, Flammarion, 1955, are surprisingly unhelpful on the war, though this is an edited text and the original recordings might be more interesting. This essay is derived from a longer study on Enescu during World War I.

<sup>3</sup> See my forthcoming *Romania and World War I, 1914–1918: An Introductory Survey*, in “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire”, for details. Of course, Transylvanian and Bucovinean Romanians in the Habsburg Monarchy were part of the war from 1914. See Liviu Maior, *Doi ani mai devreme. Ardeleni, bucovineni și basarabeni în război, 1914–1916*, Cluj-Napoca, Școala Ardeleană, 2016.

Enescu replied that it had damaged European musical camaraderie and broken spiritual connections. “It has created nothing. The current war has no shadow of the honor and cavaleresque spirit of the past. It is a war of attrition, scientific in its procedures and depressing in its consequences.”<sup>4</sup> In another interview, in 1918, Enescu declared that the war had had a seriously debilitating impact on music everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

While his work in 1914–1916 Romania had been primarily cultural and educational in nature (though he did work with the Romanian Red Cross to provide assistance for refugees from Habsburg Transylvania and Bucovina), from mid-1916 and thereafter, it became primarily therapeutic and spiritual in nature. He was motivated by what he felt was the impact of music on his listeners, many of whom, of course, were completely musically and culturally illiterate. He later told an interviewer

I have often noticed how great an uplifting of the spirit could be seen in the faces of the wounded after the first few notes. This transformation of the soul is the supreme *raison-d'être* of music. If it did not have this wonderful effect of calming and purifying the human spirit, music would just be a meaningless sequence of sounds.<sup>6</sup>

The relatively youthful Enescu had, according to the future writer Henriette Yvonne Stahl, “an extraordinary appearance. He was extremely handsome... like someone from the world of angels, of harmony. The impression of his innate beauty and of his music gave me a tonic, vital shock, to fight as much as I could in order not to degrade anything in my life.”<sup>7</sup> Another writer, Benjamin Fundoianu, commented in 1917 on Enescu’s modesty and method at the hospitals: Enescu “came anonymously and simply, to mix with the masses [of wounded soldiers] and to comfort them.” Those in the hospital rooms, according to Fundoianu, were simply transported by the magic of Enescu’s violin.<sup>8</sup>

In Iași, he carried out an exhausting program of concerts at the National Theater (he lived in a small house nearby on Strada Vovidenia, which did have a piano), in hospitals, and refugee camps, despite the fact that the over-crowded Moldovan capital was short of provisions and ravaged by epidemics. A budding violinist and refugee from București, the young Sandu Albu, had this to say about the situation:

Iași in this era had a tragic appearance. It was devoured by typhus. Winter was completely implacable. Soldiers were dying like flies... Dogs, permanent noise, filth, and crushing crowds... Romanian soldiers and a torrent of Russian soldiers of all sorts, refugees, the wounded from the front... all this remained in my memory as a nightmare.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cleante, *Psihologia creațiunii artistice cum o definește maestrul G. Enescu*, in “Rampa nouă ilustrată”, București, 19.VI.1916, reprinted in George Enescu, *Interviuri din presa românească*, vol. I, 1898–1936, edited by Laura Manolache, București, Editura Muzicală, 1988, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Alphonse Steinhardt, *De vorbă cu George Enescu*, in “Scena”, București, 27.VII.1918, reprinted in Enescu, *Interviuri, 1898–1936*, 1988, p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Henrietta Yvonne Stahl, *Enescu era din lumea îngerilor*, in “România Literară”, București, 15.XI.1990, excerpted in Viorel Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului. Evocări, amintiri, însemnări memorialistice*, București, Editura Casa Radio, 2003, p. 292.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Fundoianu, *Maestrul Enescu*, in “Opinia”, Iași, 4.I.1917, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 277.

<sup>9</sup> Recounted in Sandu Albu, *Cu vioara pin lume... Amintiri repovestite de Alexandru Bilciurescu*, București, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, 1972, p. 28 ff. I had the distinct and memorable pleasure of meeting Albu and his beloved wife Alice in 1973, through our mutual friend Prof. Gretchen Buehler.

Albu was delighted to find that Enescu (who he had met previously in București) along with other leading lights of Romanian music had also taken refuge in Iași and in addition to their work with soldiers, the sick, and the wounded, had together formed an orchestra, which Albu (who was sent to artillery school) was able to hear numerous times. “Enescu was tireless, giving concerts throughout the hospitals... bringing relief and comfort to many in those dark days.”<sup>10</sup> According to Albu, Enescu was at his peak, “the magic which flowed from his playing was indescribable... These were unforgettable interpretations, rare moments of happiness and ecstasy.”<sup>11</sup>

Among those touched by Enescu’s work was the young Moldovan composer and another future luminary of Romanian music, Mihail Jora. In November of 1916, Enescu gave a concert at the Sfintul Spiridon Hospital in Iași. That same day, Jora had “had a leg amputated in a two-hour operation without anaesthetic. Enescu delayed the start of the concert till Jora came out of the operating theatre; Jora later wrote that this concert gave him back the will to live which he had lost.”<sup>12</sup>

Another future artist, the sculptor Ion Jalea, recalls this:

In the years of the First World War, Enescu was in Iași... [often] by himself, with his violin in his arms, he went everywhere to play for the wounded in the hospitals and for so many unfortunates who lived a difficult and miserable life. I found myself in the hospital, wounded and in serious condition; Enescu came to play in my room of suffering.<sup>13</sup>

The commander of a Red Cross hospital in Dorohoi tells of his experiences in 1917 with Enescu:

We remained in a country reduced to a fragment; cold, misery, recurrent fever, typhus, and, in addition, a great disillusionment in the unoccupied part of the country... During a terrible snow storm on 12 January 1917, the sentinel informed me that a man wished to speak with the commandant... He entered and introduced himself: ‘I am George Enescu and I want your permission to sweeten the lives of these soldiers.’ I didn’t recognize him and asked what he thought he could do: do you have space for them or clothes and underclothes, etc.? G. Enescu responded that he had nothing but his violin. Then I realized that I was in the presence of the great violinist George Enescu. Since we didn’t have a large hall, I arranged for him to play in several rooms. I took him with me and... showed him how soldiers came from the front, infested with fleas. Shocked, he asked me if this wasn’t dangerous. I told him that was the situation.

In fact one of his doctors had just died from typhus and another was ill from it. “The soldiers, bitter and downcast, listened with veneration and thankfulness and asked him to play more.”

Finding there was also a piano on the premises, Enescu performed for more than two hours.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 118. Jora was the first cousin of Enescu’s eventual wife, Maruca Cantacuzino.

<sup>13</sup> Ion Jalea, *Se pare că l-am cunoscut de totdeauna*, in “România Literară”, 19.X.1972, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 312.

<sup>14</sup> Major Dr. Nicolae Hasnaș, *George Enescu printre exantematicii de la Dorohoi*, manuscript in the possession of Viorel Cosma, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 326–327. For similar accounts, see George Lungulescu, *Cântul său printre răniți reprezintă de fapt adevărata apoteoză a vieții*, in “Universul”, București, 23.VI.1942, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*,

There was no doubt that Enescu raised the morale of the soldiers... He returned many times to our hospital. At first he was afraid of contamination, but eventually he got used to it and said, half in jest and half seriously, 'If I am not somehow killed by you, I am still useful to the country.'<sup>15</sup>

In 1917, Enescu was joined in his relentless concertizing by the young pianist Nicolae Caravia, with whom he began a forty year collaboration. Another refugee in Iași, Caravia served as Enescu's accompanist in 1917–1918. Caravia later wrote:

We walked together across most of the Moldavian towns, we travelled hundreds of kilometres, and I can say I have never seen him show any sign of tiredness. After our concerts, most of the times we were asked to sit and be photographed together with the soldiers. The Master never refused anybody. When he left, people would shake his hand with tears in their eyes.<sup>16</sup>

The crowds often followed Enescu and Caravia back to their hotel and waited for them to appear on the balcony. "He always thanked them" and, modestly, "tried to find some excuse for the performance, explaining that the piano was very out of tune and he had to tune his violin accordingly."<sup>17</sup> At the end of 1917 and into 1918, Caravia also cooperated with Enescu in the establishment of a war time symphony orchestra in Iași, assisted by Nicolae Bârsan, Alfred Alessandrescu, Mihail Jora, Jean and Constantin Bobescu, Vasile Filip, Romeo Drăghici, among others.

Another deep friendship and collaboration that Enescu cemented in Iași was with Romeo Drăghici, a local lawyer and violinist who had been so taken with Enescu that he travelled every Sunday to București for Enescu's concerts in 1914–1916. With Romania now engaged in the war in full fury, Drăghici recalled, Enescu was fully engaged:

Every day, the wounded were coming from the front by the hundreds. The country was bleeding, its hospitals crowded. Eager to comfort the wounded, Enescu went the rounds of the hospitals and convalescent homes together with Nicolae Caravia, his favorite accompanist, playing works by Sarasate, Kreisler, Bach, and others. In that atmosphere of general demoralization, Enescu had the extraordinary idea of founding an orchestra, with the Conservatoire professors and the musicians who were refugees to Jassy or called up for the front."<sup>18</sup>

Drăghici wrote elsewhere that he and his friends viewed Enescu with unmitigated awe. They

[...] were astounded by his power of work, his spirit of initiative, since it was to him that the assembling of the orchestra was owed. No one could have believed that in only two weeks we had succeeded in putting together a concert. Each of us was proud to stand beside this generous man, this genius of music.<sup>19</sup>

p. 440–441; and 'Varga', *Simț ce nu se poate tălmăci cu vorbe*, in "Curierul Muzical", București, iunie 1933, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 452.

<sup>15</sup> Hasnaș, *George Enescu de la Dorohoi*, p. 327.

<sup>16</sup> Nicolae Caravia, *A Collaboration of More Than 40 Years*, in "Romanian Review", vol. 35 (1981), Nr. 8, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> Romeo Drăghici, *The Great Friend in My Life*, in "Romanian Review", vol. 35 (1981), nr. 8, p. 132.

<sup>19</sup> Romeo Drăghici, *Am fost prietenul lui George Enescu*, in Maia Cristea, *Correspondență*, vol. IX, 1.VI.1980, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 397.

Drăghici also was taken by Enescu's character. The man was by nature "gentle, reserved, [and] particularly amiable with people of no importance."<sup>20</sup> Further:

Enescu had an altogether remarkable sense of duty. He never shirked any professional obligations. On the contrary, he deliberately complicated his existence. When he went to play for the wounded or the war orphans, it did not matter to him whether it was raining, or whether he had to travel over certain stretches of road by cart. In those two years of war, the Maestro travelled to all the localities of Moldavia from north to south, by his own means and at his own expense, serving his country and people with one of his three 'weapons': the violin. Always accompanied by pianist Nicolae Caravia, Enescu knew no rest. In moments of respite he stayed in his room in Vovidenia Street, composing.<sup>21</sup>

In March 1917, Enescu was sent to Russia on a concert tour for the benefit of the Russian Red Cross and was actually playing to a huge audience on March 10 at the Marinsky Theater in Petrograd during the outbreak of the first Russian Revolution. Among the music that he performed was as soloist in Mozart's Concerto Nr. 7 in D Major and as conductor of his own *Romanian Rhapsodies*, Op. 11.<sup>22</sup> Asked later about Russian music, he found it to be nearly the equal of the French and German schools, and more interesting than that of the Italians. "I have a great admiration for Russian music which has given us several incontestable geniuses, which shows that in this people there live superior latent qualities." On the other hand, he was somewhat surprised at the poor reaction in Russia toward his *Romanian Rhapsodies*.<sup>23</sup>

Much to Enescu's chagrin, in 1917, the Romanian government sent a trainload of national treasures for safekeeping to London, via Moscow. Here is Malcolm's summary:

Among the various crates of documents which accompanied the bullion was a big wooden box labelled 'Musique Manuscrite Georges Enesco'. It contained a large collection of his manuscripts, including even the childhood pieces which he had fondly preserved. It also included the only copies of several recent works: the Second Orchestral Suite, the Second Symphony, and all Enescu's sketches for the opera *Oedipe*, which he was now hoping to complete. The box reached Moscow and disappeared. Nothing was heard of it for seven long years, [and Enescu felt] a crushing sense of having to start all over.<sup>24</sup>

Of all of Enescu's musical talents – performer, director, teacher, and composer – composing was his first love, greatest joy, and principal preoccupation. (It was always somethings of a personal regret for him that his performing and directing virtuosity overshadowed his composing.) In wartime Iași, in totally unfavorable conditions, Enescu created, worked on, or completed four significant works: *Pièces impromptues*

<sup>20</sup> Romeo Drăghici, *Adevărul despre Enescu*, in "Tribuna României", 1.VIII.1981, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 395.

<sup>21</sup> Drăghici, *Great Friend*, p. 132–133. Drăghici noted that "Caravia had the merit of understanding, of intuiting Enescu exactly," p. 134.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>23</sup> I. Mateiu, *O convorbire cu maestrul Enescu*, in "România Nouă", Chișinău, 5.IV.1918, reprinted in Enescu, *Interviuri, 1898–1936*, 1988, p. 85–86.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 122. With the help of Bruno Walter and French diplomats, the box was returned in 1924. For Enescu's own commentary on this, see Gavoty, *Les Souvenirs*, p. 134–135. On the Romanian treasure, part of which still remains to this day in Russian hands, see Marian Voicu, *Tezaurul României de la Moscova: Inventarul unei istorii de o sută de ani*, București, Editura Humanitas, 2016.

(sometimes called the *Piano Suite Nr. 3*), Op. 18; *Trois mélodies sur Poèmes de Fernand Gregh*, Op. 19; his *Symphony Nr. 3 in C Major*, Op. 21, and his *String Quartet Nr. 1 in E Flat Major*, Op. 22.

The *Pièces impromptues*, Op. 18, were composed between 1913–1916. The work (often erroneously referred to as the *Piano Suite Nr. 3*) was thought by Enescu to have been lost in the war, but was later

[...] rediscovered only after his death by Romeo Drăghici. No one hearing this group of pieces could possibly guess that it was composed under the threat of war. It contains some of Enescu's more limpid and untroubled piano music, written with what seems at times...like ingenuous simplicity... It points forward to the structure and harmony of the third movement of the First Piano Sonata, eight years later.<sup>25</sup>

The *Trois mélodies*, Op. 19, were a product of 1915–1916. Noel Malcolm writes: “The poems are all similar in character: atmospheric expressions of tristesse, resignation or longing—a French symbolist equivalent of Romanian ‘dor’.”<sup>26</sup> This traditional (and somewhat untranslatable) Romanian sentiment of *dor* was perfect for the saddest days of the war.

His major work during this period was, obviously, was the *Third Symphony in C Major*, Op. 20, begun in Sinaia in May 1916. He finished the second movement during the direst part of the war in January 1918 in Iași, and completed the third movement during 1918. Malcolm writes:

Emotional intensity may therefore be expected, but it would be foolish to derive a sort of psychological-historical ‘programme’ from this sequence to explain the music... The first movement is alternately brooding, questioning, heroic and lyrical; the second is a sort of scherzo, often blackly sinister... and the third is serene in a solemn, almost liturgical way. It ends in a sort of quiet ecstasy.<sup>27</sup>

Malcolm further notes that

The character of these new [wartime] works...is often astonishingly untouched by the atmosphere of crisis and suffering which surrounded the composer. Nowhere is this more true than in the opening movement of the First String Quartet (Op. 22, No. 1), which Enescu started writing in 1916. He resumed work on the Quartet in mid-1918 and completed it in December 1920. The first movement is pervaded by a mood of serene, gentle nostalgia [*dor* again]; there is a fierceness and passion elsewhere in this work... but the whole Quartet goes far beyond any possible explanation in terms of its origins in wartime. It offers, in the course of its 47 minutes, a complete and self-contained world of feeling.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to these compositions, Enescu wrote a 1916 setting for orchestra and choir of Mihai Eminescu's ballad of the supernatural, *Strigoi*, that was never finished,<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 130–131. These have recently been brilliantly recovered by Raluca Știrbăț in her George Enescu, *Complete Works for Piano Solo*, Hänssler Classic, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 131–132.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125–130. The first performance in May 1919 in București “was a great success” (p. 128–129). On the other hand, Enescu was still revising it three decades later. For further, in depth discussion of Enescu's wartime composing, see Voicana, *Monografie*, vol. I, p. 405 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 136–138.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129–130.

a *Hora Unirei* for violin and piano in 1917,<sup>30</sup> a draft of a *Piano Trio in A Minor*,<sup>31</sup> and sketches for his great opera, *Oedipe*, Op. 23, eventually completed in 1931.<sup>32</sup>

Enescu's life between 1916 and 1919 was not all work, whether this be traveling across the breadth and width of Moldova, directing, performing, or composing. Drăghici mentions in passing that Enescu did have one amusement in Iași: he saw every new silent film at Sidoly's Theater. It was there, incidentally, that he discovered the great violinist Vasile Filip, playing in the cinema orchestra.<sup>33</sup> Filip, who then studied with Enescu in Iași, later described him as

[...] sober, modest, unself-interested, and a tireless worker in the arts. His idea of relaxation was to vary his work. I loved him as a professor, for his invaluable qualities as a teacher... From him, one learned the beauty of art... All of his public performances, as an instrumentalist or as a director, were truly lessons in music.<sup>34</sup>

It was also the case that Enescu's relationship with the love of his life, Marie ("Maruca") Rosetti Cantacuzino, who was also from northeastern Romania, blossomed during the war. Her family home at Tescani was just a few hours from Iași (a house that contained no fewer than five Beckstein piano-fortes and a harmonium); she also had a lavish home in Iași.<sup>35</sup> The French General Henri Berthelot wrote of attending a soirée at Princess Cantacuzino's at which "the violinist Enescu amazed us with his talent on the piano as well as the violin. We didn't get home until 1 o'clock in the morning."<sup>36</sup> The King and Queen were present at another gathering on New Year's Eve, 1917–1918. The Queen wrote: "We saw the New Year in to the sound of Enescu's most glorious music at Maruca's house; even the King, making an exception for once, came with us. We did not get to bed till two!"<sup>37</sup>

In 1917, a French Military Mission under General Berthelot had managed to resurrect the Romanian army. This led to the heroic battles of Mărăști (July–August), Mărășesti (August), and Oituz (August). These actions saved the Romanian state,

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 274.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133–136.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 139 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Drăghici, *Great Friend*, p. 133. See Vasile Filip, *I was his Pupil*, in "Romanian Review", vol. 35 (1981), nr. 8, p. 140–141. In addition to playing in Enescu's orchestra, Filip studied with him for two years before going to France in 1919, where he won the First Prize at the Conservatoire de Paris.

<sup>34</sup> Vasile Filip, *De la el se învăța frumosul*, in "Muzica", 1955, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 209.

<sup>35</sup> She was renting the historic former house of Mihail Kogălniceanu. More could probably be said for the Enescu – Cantacuzino relationship, but not here. See Viorel Cosma, *Eseuri, exegeze și documente enesciene*, București, Libra, 2001, p. 104–105; and Maria Cantacuzino Enescu, *Ombres et Lumières (souvenirs d'une Princesse Moldave) / Umbre și lumini (amintirile unei Prințese Moldave)*, bi-lingual edition edited by C. Th. Ciobanu and Elena Bulai, Onești RO, Aristarc, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Henri Berthelot to his sister-in-law Louise, 31.V.1917, in Henri Berthelot, *General Henri Berthelot and Romania. Mémoires et Correspondance 1916–1919*, edited with a biographical introduction by Glenn E. Torrey, Boulder CO, East European Monographs, 1987, p. 75–76. For an account of another such gathering at the Cantacuzino house in 1917, attended by the King and the Queen, see the memories of the Russian diplomat, A. A. Mossolov, *Un muzician incomparabil*, in A. A. Mossolov, *Misiunea mea în România*, București, Editura Silex, 1997, excerpted in Cosma, *George Enescu în memoria timpului*, p. 354–355.

<sup>37</sup> Queen Marie of Romania, Entry for 13.I.1918, in her *Ordeal. The Story of My Life*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935, p. 292. This date in the old calendar is 31 December. Enescu also performed for the Royals on Christmas Day by the New Style or English calendar. See the entry for 25.XII.1917, *Ordeal*, p. 284: "My daughters made a little Christmas tree... and we asked Enescu to play for us, which he very kindly did, playing divinely all our favorite things."

though when the Bolshevik coup occurred in Russia in November, the Romanian position in the war became increasingly untenable.<sup>38</sup>

Apparently, Enescu's music was just as therapeutic for the Romanian elite as it was for wounded soldiers and Transylvanian refugees. In December of 1917, as the Romanian government faced the Bolshevik takeover in Russia and a grim winter of defeat, Queen Marie noted in her diary:

The situation remains awful. We have simply begun to speculate in which way we are going to die. Whichever way we turn we are sold, we are betrayed... Of all the bitterness we have had to taste the knowledge that all along we have been betrayed is the most unbearable. There seems no way out. Russia is in a state of putrefaction, is falling to pieces, and no one stands up to take things in hand.<sup>39</sup>

(In this same entry, Marie bursts out "Oh God, if only I were a man, with a man's rights and the spirit I have in my woman's body! I would fire them to desperate, glorious resistance, *coûte que coûte!*") A day later she observed: "The awful nightmare continues, the darkness, the impossibility of seeing clearly in anything; and of course people begin to lose their heads, the good and the bad come out at those moments."<sup>40</sup>

On December 8, 1917, Marie wrote: "I seemed to see everything through tears," and yet,

[T]his rather terrible day came to an end in Maruca [Cantacuzino]'s house where, surrounded by faithful allies of several nationalities, we listened to Enescu's marvelous music, which to-day rose to an agonizing pitch of beauty, well in keeping with the vibrating tension of the hour. It is especially that prodigious sonata of Lequeux<sup>41</sup> that lifts one beyond oneself into a world of inconceivable emotion, and Enescu plays it like no one else. He then left his violin for the piano and played the 'Erlösung' of Parsifal, and I can only say that it sufficed as emotions for one day.<sup>42</sup>

That a good deal of the impact of this was due to Enescu and not merely to emotional music is corroborated by Marie's negative reaction to musicians two days earlier: "[...] politeness obliged me to let them play, which was certainly difficult to stand to-day – the music seemed to be grating on my racked nerves."<sup>43</sup>

In December 1917, Enescu's Iași orchestra began preparing on an ad-hoc basis, eventually numbering seventy musicians. Their first concert, at the National Theater in Iași, was on December 26. Romeo Drăghici recounts:

Enescu immediately proceeded to rehearse in the machine room of the National Theatre. We multiplied the scores ourselves. Each instrumentalist copied his part during the night, and in the morning we rehearsed from 8 to 12. A fortnight later Enescu succeeded in giving the first concert. The season consisted of twenty-seven concerts. Every Friday at eight

<sup>38</sup> For a first-rate history of Romania and the war, see Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I*, Lawrence KS, University Press of Kansas, 2011. Also useful is Torrey's *Romania and World War I. A Collection of Studies*, Iași, The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Queen Marie, Entry for 4.XII.1917, *Ordeal*, p. 270.

<sup>40</sup> Queen Marie, Entry for 5.XII.1917, *Ordeal*, p. 272.

<sup>41</sup> The little-known Belgian composer, Guillaume Lequeux (1870–1894), student of Franck and d'Indy.

<sup>42</sup> Queen Marie, Entry for 8.XII.1917, *Ordeal*, p. 277. Marie and Maruca Cantacuzino were close. See the entry for 29.X.1917, *Ordeal*, p. 71: "Maruca came to me, it did me good: Maruca is one of the only people I can stand."

<sup>43</sup> Queen Marie, Entry for 5.XII.1917, *Ordeal*, p. 273.



o'clock in the evening the National Theatre was taken by storm... The proceeds of these twenty-seven concerts were deposited with the General Headquarters and assigned to the Red Cross Society. During the summer [of 1918], our orchestra broke up for the holidays. Enescu, however, did not discontinue his activity.<sup>44</sup>

The concerts included a wide variety of music including Mozart, Tchaikovski, Haydn, J. S. Bach, Franck, Beethoven, Rameau, Glinka, Schubert, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Saint-Saëns, Dvořák, and Wagner, among others.<sup>45</sup> By Enescu's own calculations, the orchestra raised some 350,000 lei for the Romanian Red Cross.<sup>46</sup>

1918 brought the collapse of the war on the Russian front with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March and the imposition by the Germans of a brutal and humiliating armistice on the Romanians. Brest-Litovsk and the looming Treaty of Buftea plunged the Romanian elite into deeper despair. Queen Marie had a violent policy argument with the King, shouting at him "If we are to die, let us die with our heads high, without soiling our souls by putting our names to our death warrant. Let us die protesting, crying out to the whole world our indignation against the infamy of what is expected of us."<sup>47</sup> Part of the demands by the Central Powers was that Allied personnel in Romania were to leave. On March 8, Queen Marie wrote: "[...] all the favourite friends assembled around us for the last time for a little music." While Marie fought a last ditch battle to prevent caving in to the Central Powers,

[...] in the next room Enescu was playing marvellous music... But I played my last card and – lost. Thereupon I threw myself into a corner of Elisabetta's large sofa and asked Enescu to play us Lequeux's symphony, and there, surrounded by the friends who tomorrow are to leave us to our humiliation and despair, I listened with all my soul to that superhumanly exquisite music, and in its every note I seemed to hear the agony of our dying country... Enescu stood calm amidst the storm and played like a god one of the most glorious pieces of music ever written, and it was as though with his violin he were sobbing out into the night all the grief of my soul which I was unable to express in words.<sup>48</sup>

In his later conversations with Bernard Gavoty, Enescu was caustic about the Soviet betrayal, feeling that the Bolsheviks had in effect "declared war on Romania." However, "Once more, all our hopes rested on France."<sup>49</sup>

Berthelot and five trains left Iași for home via Russia on March 9.<sup>50</sup> Enescu had been offered a seat, but reportedly refused, saying "In these hard times, when the country is torn apart and the people are enduring hardships, I have no right to leave."<sup>51</sup>

In the end, the Romanians escaped by equivocating. The Romanian Kingdom's passive-aggressive strategy slowly paid off. In April 1918, they were able to reacquire

<sup>44</sup> Drăghici, *Great Friend*, p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Oprescu and Jora, *Enescu*, p. 183.

<sup>46</sup> Steinhardt, *De vorbă cu George Enescu*, p. 89. Enescu's collaboration with the Red Cross was facilitated by its Iași Vice-president, Princess Maria Moruzi, the divorced first wife of I. I. C. Brătianu and mother of the historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu.

<sup>47</sup> Queen Marie, Entry for 3.III.1918, *Ordeal*, p. 313.

<sup>48</sup> Queen Marie, Entry for 8.III.1918, *Ordeal*, p. 318–319. An armistice with the Central Powers was signed on March 5, followed by Buftea on March 18.

<sup>49</sup> Gavoty, *Les Souvenirs*, p. 124–125.

<sup>50</sup> Henri Berthelot, Entry for 9.III.1918, in Berthelot, *Mémoires et Correspondance*, p. 165. See also Glenn E. Torrey, *Henri Mathias Berthelot. Soldier of France, Defender of Romania*, Iași, The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001, p. 231 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Drăghici, *Great Friend*, p. 133.

Basarabia. This opened up another field of endeavor for Enescu. From April 6 to 10, he and Caravia carried out a goodwill concert tour in Basarabia. There, Enescu told an interviewer, their reception made an exceptional impression on them, showing “a perfect hospitality, something which was a traditional custom of Moldovans,” and noting that “The Basarabian public knew how to appreciate the true value of symphonic music.”<sup>52</sup> The funds raised were to be for the benefit of Basarabian war orphans and for Transylvanian refugees in Basarabia (who Enescu saw as “martyrs of the national ideal”).<sup>53</sup> Asked about the musical future of Basarabia, Enescu urged the establishment of a conservatory, an opera, and an orchestra in Chişinău. “Such things need to be achieved as quickly as possible because, in addition to the [political] union that has been established, there needs to be a spiritual union in order to show our Basarabian brothers that we have a well-defined culture.”<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, by April of 1918, Enescu confessed that he felt “unusually wearied” by his intensive wartime activities and was badly in need of rest.<sup>55</sup> He was able to do some composing in the summer of 1918; by September he had finished his Third Symphony.

The German position in the West was gradually failing as the American entry into the war provided fresh troops in 1918. The collapse of the Ludendorff offensive of March–July in the West meant that the Germans were now on an inevitable defensive. The Romanians rallied and in October, Berthelot returned to South Eastern Europe to prepare for re-opening the war in the Balkans. However, Austria-Hungary surrendered on October 30 and German war ended soon thereafter.

In the fall of 1918, Enescu’s Iaşi orchestra resumed its performances. Drăghici recalls being present at its rehearsal on the morning of November 11 when “Someone came in with the newspaper *Opinia* announcing the end of the war. I cannot forget the enthusiasm roused by this news. After we all embraced, the Maestro suggested that we should sing the *Marseillaise*.”<sup>56</sup> Just a day prior to this, the Romanians had officially re-entered the war on the Allied side.

George Enescu was to remain in Iaşi until March 1919. His orchestra resumed its work, his concertizing around Moldova continued, and his efforts for the Red Cross persisted. In October, a Symphonic Society was established in Iaşi on the foundations which he had been laying since 1916. The Society and the Orchestra were named for Enescu and he was acclaimed as honorary president for life. Also in October he and Caravia made a return visit to Basarabia. In December, he was named honorary professor by the Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Arts in Iaşi.<sup>57</sup> That same month, he directed his first concert with the George Enescu Symphonic Society Orchestra in Iaşi. In February 1919, he was named a citizen of honor of Iaşi.<sup>58</sup>

George Enescu left Iaşi in March 1919. Once more in Bucureşti, he immediately resumed his cycle of concerts on “The history of the sonata,” accompanied by Alfred

<sup>52</sup> Maurice Bl., *Interviu cu Maestrul George Enescu. Maestrul comunică Teatrului de Măine impresiile sale din Basarabia*, in „Teatrul de Măine”, Iaşi, 15.IV.1918, reprinted in Enescu, *Interviuri, 1898–1936*, 1988, p. 87.

<sup>53</sup> Mateiu, *O convorbire cu maestrul Enescu*, p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> Maurice Bl., *Interviu cu Maestrul George Enescu*, p. 88. In another interview, with I. Mateiu, *O convorbire cu maestrul Enescu*, p. 88, Enescu argued that a conservatory in Chişinău was “indispensable”, as was a symphonic orchestra, indeed, just as essential as a Romanian university and a museum of Romanian art were.

<sup>55</sup> Mateiu, *O convorbire cu maestrul Enescu*, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> Drăghici, *Great Friend*, p. 133.

<sup>57</sup> See Iosif E. Naghiu, *George Enescu, Profesor Onorar și Rector Onorar la Iaşi*, in “Hierasus”, vol. 1 (1978), p. 512–518. In 1931, a bust of Enescu was erected in Iaşi.

<sup>58</sup> Chronology in Opreescu and Jora, *Enescu*, p. 184–185.

Alessandrescu,<sup>59</sup> and resumed his campaign for the establishment of a Romanian Opera. Interviewed shortly before his departure from Iași, he reported his satisfaction with the work of the orchestra and with the momentum that had been generated by it. Such an orchestra was “indispensable for a city like Iași. At the same time, the Conservatory will be reorganized,” a process that Enescu pledged to be deeply involved with. Asked what the future role of music should be in Romania, Enescu replied: “We need to work to spread and develop music on all levels of society. We need to give it an importance much greater than up to the present. Now, with the acquisition of new territories, we need to seek to unify ourselves also through music.”<sup>60</sup> Enescu felt that the road ahead would be long, but

Much could easily be remedied. Why couldn't each citizen clean the sidewalk in front of his own house? Why couldn't the bakeries be arranged so that the people could access it throughout the day...? Why couldn't the garbage which pollutes the air be transported by street car at night?<sup>61</sup>

He obviously intended these suggestions to be taken metaphorically.

As he left Iași, Enescu told his musical co-laborers: “I thank you all for the understanding and confidence you have shown me.”<sup>62</sup>

### Conclusion

In many ways, World War I was a microcosm of Enescu's life and travail. The war brought financial ruin, interrupted the trajectory of his musical career, and involved considerable personal, psychological, and material hardships. On the other hand, his work can only be described as heroic. Malcolm summarizes,

His ambition had always been that, after repaying his father and accumulating a reasonable amount of savings from his concert tours (savings which were invested by his father, partly in land), he would retire to the country and dedicate his time to composition. But the collapse of the Romanian economy in the War had worn away his savings and the land reforms promised to the peasants by King Ferdinand during the War were to lead shortly to the expropriation of a large part of his father's estate. Costache Enescu died in December 1919. There was little for Enescu to inherit, and he had to reconcile himself to starting again at the beginning.<sup>63</sup>

This was compounded by the loss of his manuscripts in 1917, mentioned above. Though these were recovered in 1924, Enescu was certainly thrown for a loop. Malcolm points out that

Perhaps it seems odd that Enescu, with his prodigious memory, should have felt so crippled by the loss of his manuscripts. In fact it simply helps to show that his gift was not a mere

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<sup>59</sup> See Alfred Alessandrescu, *Notes quotidiennes. Fragments concernant George Enesco (1912–1920)*, in “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art. Série Théâtre, Musique, Cinema”, vol. 29 (1992), p. 19–38.

<sup>60</sup> A. R. F., *Convorbire cu maestrul Enescu*, in “Lumea”, Iași, 4.III.1919, reprinted in Enescu, *Interviuri, 1898–1936*, p. 92. In 1921, he expressed his satisfaction that music was viewed as a serious enterprise in Iași and that the National Theater performances were usually sold out. “Iași today has bad streets, but excellent symphonic music.” See Cd., *Maestrul George Enescu despre ‘Simfonia de la Iași’*, in “Izbânda Ilustrată”, Iași, 1.V.1921, reprinted in Enescu, *Interviuri, 1898–1936*, p. 103–104.

<sup>61</sup> A. R. F., *Convorbire*, p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> Drăghici, *Great Friend*, p. 133.

<sup>63</sup> Malcolm, *Enescu*, p. 121–122.

photographic memory: music spoke to him as a kind of statement, and he remembered what it said. The finished works of other composers, if they were well said, would remain indelibly in his mind. But in the case of his own works the music was a palimpsest in which there lay, behind every achieved musical statement, innumerable layers of earlier, less finished and less clearly stated drafts – drafts both physical and mental. To recover these pieces might involve retracing all the steps of revision and reduction over which Enescu has agonized so much during the long and painstaking process of composition.<sup>64</sup>

Enescu's experiences between 1916 and 1919 were important in a number of respects.<sup>65</sup> Despite the hardships of war, he was certainly nourished by his native northeastern Romanian milieu. His more or less forced exit from the performing stages of Western Europe compelled him to think more deeply about his Romanian national musical environment. His attachment to Maruca Cantacuzino, with its positives and negatives, became life-long during this period. The vicissitudes of warfare and the simple, stolid courage of the Romanian peasant masses in war likely developed and deepened his sense of national identification. These same vicissitudes produced pluses and minuses for his career and continued to characterize the rest of his life during the interwar epoch, World War II, post-war Communist Romania, and eventual exile.

1916–1919 also broadened his musicianship under the harshest possible conditions as composer, performer, conductor, and teacher. In 1916, Cosma notes,<sup>66</sup> Enescu as violinist and pianist played around 100 pieces from the most diverse periods and styles in at least fifty performances. He mastered the entire concert literature for violin sonatas, and his “historical” concerts were virtually unparalleled. He was, for the first time in his career, director of an on-going symphony orchestra. This lay behind his spectacular post-war concertizing in the United States and elsewhere.<sup>67</sup>

This also led him to a deepened knowledge of vocal music, which was critical in his later master creation, the opera *Oedipe*, Op. 23, and convinced him (if he needed further convincing) of continuing his campaign for the founding of a Romanian Opera in București, which finally came to fruition in 1921. He also came to know and work with an impressive number of the next generation of Romanian musical luminaries.

Lastly, the war confirmed in Enescu a number of characteristics that would persist thereafter. His ability to compose whatever the circumstances certainly came through the fire of the war. He experimented with various forms of musical expression. He continued to drink deeply from the fountain of Romanian folklore and culture, especially that of his native Moldova. When the war began, he was a thirty-three year old budding genius as a performer and composer. By 1919, he was a mature thirty-eight year old master not only of composition and performance, but also a decisive and commanding conductor and director of others. The war had set him on his way to becoming recognized as Romania's greatest musician in every sense of the word as well as a member of the front rank of international music. His prodigious wartime activities had created an Enescu of mythical proportions. The war was a harsh teacher, but George Enescu had absorbed its lessons well, thanks in no small part to his experiences in wartime Iași between 1916 and 1919.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 122–123.

<sup>65</sup> Much of this is expertly summarized by Viorel Cosma, *Un moment de răscruce artistică: perioada înfăptuirii idealului național (1916–1919)*, in his *Eseuri, exegeze și documente enesciene*, p. 104–108.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105–106.

<sup>67</sup> Dumitru Vitcu, *George Enescu în spațiul artistic american*, Iași, Editura Omnia, 1994.

GEORGE ENESCU IN WARTIME IAȘI, 1916–1919  
(Summary)

*Keywords:* World War I, George Enescu, Romanian musicians, Iași, Romanian cultural life.

The paper examines in detail the activities of George Enescu in Iași during World War I, between 1916 and 1919. With Romania's entry into the war in 1916, George Enescu travelled hundreds of kilometres to all parts of his native Moldova at his own expense to share the therapeutic impact of music on soldiers and civilians alike. He declared "I have often noticed how great an uplifting of the spirit could be seen in the faces of the wounded after the first few notes. This transformation of the soul is the supreme *raison-d'être* of music. If it did not have this wonderful effect of calming and purifying the human spirit, music would just be a meaningless sequence of sounds." He also concertized in Russia and Basarabia, organized a full-blown orchestra in Iași, and laying the foundations for the post-war Romanian musical life. At the same time he was busy composing, most notably his Third Symphony in C Major. The war, in the end, was a microcosm of Enescu's life and travail. It brought financial ruin, interrupted the trajectory of his musical career, and involved considerable personal, psychological, and material hardships. On the other hand, his work for the Red Cross and as a musician/composer during the darkest days of the war can only be described as heroic and inspiring.