

## Romanian religious choirs from Orăștie in the interwar period

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### Abstract:

*The Choir from Orăștie*, a phrase which implies a whole musical, church and church tradition, after the First World War, has gained a strong development in the same locality. The presence of talented and well-trained music teachers such as: Gheorghe Pârvu, Nicolae Prația, Savel Horceag, Ioan Ienea or Valeriu Bora, led to a diversification of the choral activity in Orăștie. Whether we are talking about church choirs or choirs belonging to other institutions, all these groups have a profound religious character and were a good means of Christological confession through harmonic music.

### Keywords:

Church choir, choral activity, repertoire, liturgic chants, composer, conductor, sacred music

### Historical context

In our scientific research, the *Choir from Orăștie* actually involves a whole tradition, not just a single choir. Here we have the founding of a choir in 1868 with the contribution of the teacher Ioan Bena, the father of the composer Augustin Bena. Alongside the famous choir founded in Lugoj in 1840, the band founded in Orăștie is one of the oldest in our country. After 1870, with the departure of the teacher Ioan Bena, the activity of this choir will not be constant, with many pauses and no remarkable results. From 1883, the con-

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ductor of the choral band here will become the teacher Ioan Branga, a graduate of the Pedagogical School in Sibiu, the student of the musician George Dima. He takes over the choir of Orăștie, outlining the profile of a competent band. Since 1896, a wider formula of the church choir will be called the “Reunion of Songs”. With this choral reunion Ioan Branga will have many successes at local level and will perform in Alba Iulia and Poiana Sibiului, as well as in the neighboring villages of Orăștie in the current Alba and Hunedoara counties.

The year 1906 represents the moment of maximum affirmation of the “Reunion of Songs” in Orastie. Along with renowned ensembles from Transylvania and Banat, the choir honors the invitation to attend the festival organized by the Coral Society “Carmen” in Bucharest at the initiative of the musician Dumitru G. Kiriatic. Following the concert at the festival, Ioan Branga was personally awarded with the *Diploma of Praise* and the *Golden Medal*, and the “Reunion of Songs” was awarded the *Diploma of Honor* and the *Golden Medal*. The participation of the choir from Orăștie to the Bucharest festival represents an important moment in the history of Romanian music and in the choral activity of Transylvania and Banat. In this special context, a few years after the Great Union, we will find Nicolae Prația in Orastie as a music teacher at the newly established Romanian schools and conductor of the old church choir. From the very beginning, all the bands that have performed musical acts during the interwar period, whether they are church choirs or the choirs of schools or other institutions, all these ensembles had religious songs in their repertoire and were made up of members of church choirs. Also, the main choral activity of the conductors was reflected especially in the church society.

#### **The repertoire of the Orthodox Church Choir from Orăștie between 1919-1925**

From the cultural and especially the choral point of view, the lack of stable choir members in the time of the First World War, led Ioan Branga to the abandoning of the George Dima Liturgy in favor of Dimitrie Cuntanu’s “Two Voices Liturgy”, simpler and easier to present to the faithful. We consider that for that time the variant found by Ioan Branga for the church choir was the most inspired, the choir continued its activity and the choral responses were rendered in a harmonic version.

The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in two voices, in the version harmonized by Dimitrie Cuntanu, was sung by the church choir until the end of 1919, when certain fragments of the Liturgy of George Dima were resumed and intro-

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duced again in the church song. Also after 1918, a few liturgical hymns from Sibiu, from the collection of Timothy Popovici were introduced in the repertoire of the church choir. Also, at the beginning of 1920, Ioan Branga has given the leadership of the church choir to the music teacher Gheorghe Pârvu.

Music teacher Gheorghe Pârvu organized a male choir at the newly established High School “Aurel Vlaicu” in Orăștie since 1919, when he came here. Gheorghe Pârvu takes over the church choir in 1920 when Ioan Branga withdraws definitively from any choral activity.

Prof. Gheorghe Pârvu took with great enthusiasm the Branga church choir. Towards the end of 1919 the church choir resumed the liturgical responses to George Dima’s musical version (mixed choir)<sup>1</sup>. Only the *Antiphones*, *Veniți să ne închinăm* and the *final answers* after the communion of the priests and the faithful were those of Dimitrie Cunțanu’s version of two voices. From 1921 we can talk again about a serious religious repertoire dedicated to a choral formation that has already celebrated its half of the centenary.

In the period 1922-1924, prof. Gheorghe Pârvu made numerous journeys of the orthodox church choir “Adormirea Maicii Domnului” from Orăștie, giving answers to the Holy Liturgy at the churches of Căstău, Romos, Pricaz, Beriu, Orăștioara de Jos, Ludești, Aurel Vlaicu, Geoagiu and Șibot<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of 1923, on a visit to Sibiu, prof. George Pârvu was in possession of the last work of the musician Timotei Popovici: *Cântările Liturgiei Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur pentru cor mixt*<sup>3</sup> which led to the enrichment of the repertoire with many songs from new music collection. We can conclude that in the years 1920-1924, prof. Gheorghe Pârvu made remarkable achievements with the Orthodox church, enriching and continuously renewing his repertoire. Between 1924 and 1925, the choir of the school “Aurel Vlaicu” and the church choir from Orăștie were directed by Prof. Gheorghe Oancea, the brother of composer Nicolae Oancea from Sibiu. As a substitute professor, Gheorghe Oancea fails to achieve great achievements with these two choral groups as his activity in Orăștie took place only during one year.

<sup>1</sup> Pentru o privire de ansamblu asupra repertoriului liturgic al corului bisericesc din Orăștie oferim spre studiu: G. Dima, *Liturghia Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur pentru cor mixt*, tipărită cu ajutorul Ministerului Cultelor și Artelor, Ediția a 3-a, Litografia și Tipografia Schildkraut, Cluj. Aici constatăm că și Liturghia lui George Dima nu era completă, aceasta începând doar de la *Sfinte Dumnezeule*. Lipsa unor imne liturgice esențiale din Liturghia Catehumenilor explică utilizarea în continuare a răspunsurilor lui Dimitrie Cunțanu.

<sup>2</sup> Ion Iliescu, *Corul de la Orăștie*, Comitetul de Artă și Cultură al Județului Hunedoara, 1968, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> A se vedea în acest sens: Timotei Popovici, *Cântările Liturgiei Sf. Ioan gură de aur pentru cor mixt*, publicate de Timotei Popovici, profesor de muzică la Școala normală Andrei Șaguna și directorul corului bisericii mitropoliei, Sibiu, 1923.

### The activity of the Church Choir “Armonia” between 1925-1948

From autumn 1925 the church choir from Orăștie was conducted until 1944 by prof. Nicolae Prația. The period 1925-1930 was the one in which the repertoire of the church choir of the “Adormirea Maicii Domnului” parish from Orăștie was crystallized. Nicolae Prația has given the name “Armonia” for the Orthodox Church Choir.

In 1926, the choir “Armonia” gave the answers to the sanctification of the statue of King Ferdinand I, on the site of the current Orthodox cathedral from Orăștie. From the information of the time, we have noted that “on the day of the Holy Cross, at the eleventh and thirtieth hour, before the civil and military authorities, the” Service of Deposition of the Fundamental Stone “was made by Mr archpriest Domșa surrounded by the clergy, and the answers were given by The “mixed choir” of the town, under the leadership of Prof. Prația”<sup>4</sup>.

After 1926, the choir grew considerably, reaching about 40-45 people, being a large band. After 1930, the number of chorists decreased considerably, and in order to improve the position, Prof. Nicolae Prația selected pupils performing the final courses of the schools in Orăștie to complete the ensemble. After 1935, the ensemble grew considerably, returning to the proportions of 1926, and completed with some students became more numerous. After 1941, the constant staff of the choir until 1944 was about 40 members.

The Carols are an important chapter in which Timotei Popovici’s songs were spread through Orăștie by Nicolae Prația. We recall here the collection “Florile Dalbe”<sup>5</sup>, volume I, which became a normative work for the mixed chorus “Armonia”. The “Florile Dalbe” collection was purchased in about 50 copies for the “Armonia” choir, which is the core repertoire of carols and star songs of this band for a long time<sup>6</sup>. Besides the 20 songs printed here for mixed and male choir, we find only one musical piece that does not belong to Timotei Popovici, namely the star song *Trei Crai* in the processing of Nicolae Prația. The printing of the star song in the stylization of the teacher from Orăștie along with the songs of his mentor from Sibiu, represents the national recognition of Nicolae Prația. In the coming years, many religious collections or school textbooks will contain this beautiful choral work<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> \*\*\*, “Eveniment la Orăștie”, în *Clujul Românesc*, V (1927), Nr. 37-38, 18 septembrie, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Timotei Popovici, *Florile Dalbe*, Colecțiune de colinde și cântece de stea pentru cor mixt și de bărbați, Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1928.

<sup>6</sup> Ioan-Marius Popa, *Repertoriu Coral – Nicolae Prația*, Alba-Iulia, Editura Reîntregirea, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Cântecele de stea *Trei Crai*, așa cum îl regăsim în culegerea *Florile Dalbe*, a fost preluat în lucrări precum: Mihail Gr. Poslușnicu, *Istoria Muzicii Contemporane și Moderne la Români*, București, Editura „Cartea Românească”, p. 130.; \*\*\* *Carte de Cântări Bisericești*, București, Edi-

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At the end of 1931, we notice a considerable regression of the choir “Armonia”. In a letter to the musician Timotei Popovici, prof. Nicolae Pratia complained about the dissolution of the choir. The special mention of Nicolae Pratia did not refer to the reduction of the staff of the choir members, but to a moral crisis present in the Romanian society of those years, a crisis that for a short time, at least in Orăștie, affected the activity of choirs here. Nicolae Pratia tells Timotei Popovici of the weakening of the chorus activity in general and of the “Armonia” choir because “there is such a great apathy everywhere, it is a wonderful crisis of soul”<sup>8</sup>.

In 1933, a commemorative concert was given to commemorate the 20 years since the death of Aurel Vlaicu, choir “Armonia”, together with secondary school bands and the accompaniment of the 92nd Regiment and the high school orchestra. Among the songs presented at the event, we mention the *Marșul lui Vlaicu*, *Mic purpuriu românesc*, *Mult mă-ntreabă fir de iarbă*, *Ce te legeni codrule*, *Omul când e necăjit*, *La oglindă*, *Doinitorii noștri*<sup>9</sup>.

The choir “Armonia” has given the religious answers at the sanctification of the Orthodox Church in the village of Pricaz in 1934. Two years later the choir gave the answers to the Divine Liturgy in the village of Beriu<sup>10</sup>, and at the end of the religious ceremony there was a concert offered by the choir “Maica Domnului” and the High School orchestra “Aurel Vlaicu”<sup>11</sup>. After 1940, on Sundays, when prof. Nicolae Pratia made trips to the villages around Orăștie to give concerts or to give the liturgical answers, the choir “Armonia” was directed by Aurel Subescu. The main conductor of the band remained prof. Nicolae Pratia.

In 1944, the choir “Mother of God” became the new choir built in Orăștie. The Choir “Armonia” was conducted during 1944-1947 by Aurel Subescu. In 1944, intermittently, the Choir “Armonia” was directed by prof. Nicolae Pratia at special occasions. At the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1948, political changes led to the interruption of the choir’s activity and the movement of the band within the cathedral.

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tura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București 1975, p. 67; Ioan Brie, *73 de colinde*, Cluj-Napoca, 1980, p. 32; Ioan Brie, *Cântări la serviciile religioase*, Cluj-Napoca, 1988, p. 328; *Colinde și cântece de stea*, Volumul I, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Aperta, 1994, p. 44; Nicu Moldoveanu, *Antologie de colinde pentru cor mixt*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1999 și ediția a II-a, 2005, p. 124; *Repertoriu Coral*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003, p. 548.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae Pratia, *Corespondența cu Timotei Popovici*, Arhiva prof. univ. dr. Dumitru Jompan, Marga, jud. Caraș-Severin, fond Nicolae Pratia.

<sup>9</sup> Ion Iliescu, *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>10</sup> \*\*\*, *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, Deva, Editura Corvin, 2001, p.229.

<sup>11</sup> Ioan-Marius Popa, *Repertoriu Coral – Nicolae Pratia*, p. 11.

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### School choirs

After 1918, with the establishment of “Aurel Vlaicu” High School, the town of Orăștie entered a new stage of education, which led to decisive changes in the school’s school, economic, social and cultural life. The establishment of the prestigious educational institution had a beneficial effect on the music activity of Orăștie, by attracting here some music teachers, specialized and specially trained for the training and conducting of choirs. The first music teacher of “Aurel Vlaicu” High School was Prof. Gheorghe Pârvu, who helped professor Ioan Cheri, director of the high school from 1919-1921, coming from Brad, and then prof. Aron Demian, the director of the institution for many years and a remarkable personality of Orăștie, formed a complete archive of scores, musical studies and instruments to form a school choir and orchestra. Between 1919 and 1924 the choir choirs from Orăștie were directed by prof. Gheorghe Pârvu.

A first action supported by the high school choir was occasioned by the return of the 92nd and 108th regiments from the front, during which the band directed by prof. Gheorghe Pârvu sang *Se-ntorc vitejii*<sup>12</sup>. The male choir, sometimes combined with the choir of the state civil school for girls, mixed chorus formula, held numerous concerts on various school and cultural events in Orastie, attended by personalities of the time from centers such as Sibiu, Brașov, Cluj-Napoca, Lugoj and Bucharest. In various performances of the choir “Aurel Vlaicu”, choir members from the traditional formations of the city such as Maria Lienerth, Liviu Cocora, Valeriu Todea and Ioan Macarie, worked as a whole formation. The local press recorded the concert given by the high school band “the young choir conducted with great zeal and skill by prof. Pârvu”<sup>13</sup> on the occasion of the inauguration of the Casina.

Between 1920 and 1923, the high school choir performed recitals on the occasion of national celebrations, and on 1 December the choir participated in the celebrations in Alba-Iulia. Also in these years was established the orchestra of “Aurel Vlaicu” High School, a reference school in Orăștie and surroundings for the entire interwar period. prof. Gheorghe Pârvu has always formed a manly group of carols every year between November and December. On the occasion of the carols, large sums of money were collected and collected in the school choir. For example, on the occasion of the carols recital held in the years 1921-1922 the amount of 3200 lei was collected.

In the period 1920-1922 the choir gave the answers to the Holy Liturgy in the Orthodox churches in the neighboring villages of Orăștie: Turdaș, Pricaz, Gelmar,

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<sup>12</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op .cit.*, p. 127

<sup>13</sup> \*\*\*, “Deschiderea sărbătorească a Casinei”, în: *Libertatea*, Nr. 40/1920, p. 3.

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Bințiți (Aurel Vlaicu), Romos and Căstău. The liturgical repertoire used during this period was from the collection of the musician George Dima, but after 1922, the sacred repertoire has undergone considerable changes<sup>14</sup>. Also in these years, the high school choir held many concerts together with the Choir of the Craftsmen Reunion. From 1921 until 1940, the choir of the high school (sometimes mixed with the choir of the girls' school) and the orchestra participated in the commemoration of the Aurel Vlaicu aviator in the village of Binunte.

The Orăștienii had the honor in 1922, through Prof. Gheorghe Pârvu, to attend a concert performed by the Male Choir of the Romanian Opera from Cluj. It is worth mentioning that such events, organized by academic choirs in Cluj, were supported in many Transylvanian localities, such as the concert held on June 20, 1936 at Sebes by the Choir of the Academy in Cluj, conducted by prof.dr . Vasile Petrașcu<sup>15</sup>.

An important concert of the high school choir was supported by the Reading Society, which commemorated Mihai Eminescu in 1922. The choir performed several songs, we can remark *Rugăciune*, by Teodor Teodorescu-Iași, a song composed on the lyrics of the poet Eminescu. The concert encompassed many instrumental or solo vocal moments. Maria Lienerth sang *Ce te legeni codrule*, by Scheletti, accompanied by E. Weltzer, the orchestra of high school played *Serenada* by Augustin Bena, and Ioan Macarie played *Doine* by Tiberiu Brediceanu<sup>16</sup>.

In 1924, the "României June" Festival was organized in Orăștie, reflected in the written press from Orăștie and Deva, being noted the "choir of women", trained and led by prof. Gheorghe Pârvu<sup>17</sup>. We assume that the female band was the choir of the girls' school in Orăștie. At the beginning of the same year, the high school choir held a concert at Sebeș<sup>18</sup>. Between 1924-1925, the high school choir was directed by prof. Gheorghe Oancea, brother of the composer Nicolae Oancea. Prof. Gheorghe Oancea, as a substitute professor and in a short time failed to achieve notable performances during the period he taught at Orastie.

The arrival of professor Nicolae Prația in the autumn of 1925 as a teacher specialized in the teaching of music brought a total change for the choral activity of Orăștie. Through profound didactic and pedagogical methods prof. Nicolae Prația imposed an indisputable discipline in the high school choir and then in the church choir.

<sup>14</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op .cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Dragoș-Șuşman Ioan, *Monografia Muzicii Culte Românești din zona Sebeș-Alba*, Volumul I, Alba Iulia, Editura Altip, 2015, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op .cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> *Libertatea*, nr. 48/1923 *apud* Ion Iliescu, *op .cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op .cit.*, p. 129-130.

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During the first years of choral activity, Prof. Nicolae Prația carried on the actions started by Professor Gheorghe Pârvu: the musical archive was preserved and permanently enriched, the choir's choir continued to work, for the important actions of the city, the high school choir was complete with The choir of the girls' school, the orchestra of the lyceum continued to perform, supporting numerous concerts and during the winter holidays, male groups were organized for the carols<sup>19</sup>.

Between 1925-1930, there were organized many journeys for the choirs and orchestras of the "Aurel Vlaicu" high school. Compared to the period when professor Gheorghe Pârvu worked, Prof. Nicolae Prația did not accomplish so many trips in five years, but these took place at considerable distances from Orăștie and were much more thoroughly prepared. We would like to mention, for example, the organization in 1927 of a concert in which the main repertoire was the *Poem of Avram Iancu*, by Timotei Popovici, a program held at Orăștie, Zlatna, Sebeș and Mediaș<sup>20</sup>. In these years, concerts with the enlarged ensemble were supported in Simeria, Hațeg, Deva, Hunedoara, Alba-Iulia and Aiud. We mention the presence of Prof. Adela Brătescu as a music teacher and conductor only of the choir of girls school in Orăștie<sup>21</sup>.

In 1929, Nicolae Prația requested the help of his former teacher, Timotei Popovici, to intervene with Ion Vidu, then a general school inspector in musical matters to solve his appointment as a teacher in Orăștie. "If you are in good terms with Mr. Vidu and if you find me worthy of the support that I ask you, please give it to me because [...] in this small country ... you can not reach the right way, but only through the intermediaries"<sup>22</sup>.

In 1931, Nicolae Prația, in his correspondence with Timotei Popovici, writes to the musician in Sibiu about "the necessity of extra-curricular activity, a musical life. It is my soul food, and it would be almost impossible for me to live this food" (Orăștie, December 9, 1931)<sup>23</sup>. Nicolae Prația's statement strengthens the data that our scientific research revealed about the particular activity of school choirs. The information appeared in antithesis with the other letter in which Nicolae Prația was disappointed with the weakness of the quality and activity of the choir "Armonia". During the same period, the best performing students in high school classes were selected in "Armonia" choir of the parish dedicated to "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" in Orăștie, to rejuvenate the band.

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<sup>19</sup> Constantin Rîpă, *Prefață*, în Ioan-Marius Popa, *Repertoriu coral – Nicolae Prația*, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> A se vedea "Solia dreptății" Nr. 18/1927 și "Solia dreptății" Nr. 20/1927.

<sup>21</sup> Orăștie – Enciclopedie, p. 119.

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

<sup>23</sup> Nicolae Prația - Corespondența cu Timotei Popovici, Arhiva prof.univ.dr. Dumitru Jompan, Marga, jud. Caraș-Severin, fond Nicolae Prația.



Around 1930-1933 we are witnessing the establishment of the chamber choir “Maica Domnului”, a band made up of approx. 25 members, high school students of “Aurel Vlaicu” high school and “Despina Doamna” girls school<sup>24</sup>. Regarding the musical quality, the “Maica Domnului” was the best performing band in Orăștie until 1940. The chamber choir repertoire was predominantly religious, but included folk songs and patriotic songs like *Marșul lui Vlaicu*, by Grigorie Buică and *Poemul lui Iancu*, by Timotei Popovici. Regarding liturgical music only, “Maica Domnului” was singing both the liturgy composed by Timotei Popovici and the composition composed by Ioana Ghica-Comănești, an extraordinary performance for the choirs of those times. The choir often gave answers to the Holy Mass that was frequently attended in the chapel of the high school, the current Festive Hall of the institution.

We consider that prof. Nicolae Prația had to create a chamber choir because, after 1930, the material possibilities of the Romanians diminished considerably, and in the case of a longer journey, the costs caused by a group of 25, up to 30 members, were obviously low. After 1930, it was harder to support the expense of moving an extended group of 50-60 students, to which the high school orchestra often added.

With the choir “Maica Domnului”, prof. Nicolae Prația gave the liturgical answers in many orthodox churches around Orăștie, and among the most important locations we mention: Turdaș, Mărtinești, Simeria, Deva, Dobra, Cugir and Alba-Iulia. With this band, accompanied by the orchestra of “Aurel Vlaicu” high school, a concert was held in the village of Beriu, Hunedoara County in 1936. We mention that “Maica Domnului” was for several years an elite band of Orăștie, fact confirmed by the presence in many locations. At the local level, the chamber ensemble also appropriated the repertoire of the Wedding and the funeral repertoire, and Prof. Nicolae Prația was invited to offer the choral answers to the events of the particular life of the leading people of the Interwar period<sup>25</sup>.

From 1944 until the end of 1947, the “Maica Domnului” directed by Prof. Nicolae Prația was the choir that gave permanent liturgical responses to the newly built cathedral in the center of Orăștie<sup>26</sup>. From the autumn of 1947, for a few months the choir was directed by Prof. Ion Brătescu. Due to the political changes at the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1948 the student choir was abolished.

<sup>24</sup> *Orăștie – Enciclopedie*, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 229.

<sup>26</sup> Ioan-Marius Popa, *Repertoriu Coral – Nicolae Prația*, p. 11.

### The “Reunion of Songs” between 1911-1925

After the withdrawal of the teacher Ioan Branga from the ensemble’s desk, the situation of the “Reunion of Songs” became unstable. The choir has not managed to achieve notable performances, and the concert activity of the meeting, with few exceptions, took place only in Orăștie. The main element that led to the weakening of the band’s activity and the visible decrease of the artistic quality was determined by the frequent changes of the conductors.

On October 10, 1912, during a concert held in Orăștie, the presence and special vocal technique of tenor Ionel Rădulescu was remarked. In the musicological and press materials we find numerous positive appreciations for the tenor “as Rădulescu plays doina, is very pleasant to listen to it”<sup>27</sup>. The intention of the town citizens to invite the performer to become the new conductor of the Reunion was fully justified. Ionel Rădulescu was motivated to accept the invitation, since in 1912 the “Reunion of Songs” had a considerable number of members, and the band enjoyed a well-deserved prestige at Transylvania and Banat.

Ionel Rădulescu’s work as a conductor was crowded with many concerts in the localities of Orăștie and Geoagiu. A coral recital offered on July 6, 1913 was a good opportunity for Ionel Rădulescu to prove his conducting masterpiece. The local media, through “Cosânzeana”, wrote about the concert that “it was a moment of reuniting the rows of the Romanian society in Orăștie and I swear, a clean and enlivening occasion”<sup>28</sup>. Shortly after the concert, Ionel Rădulescu, as a reserve officer, received a military service presentation order, and the Reunion was again without a conductor.

In order to prepare the ensemble for the general sessions of ASTRA Reunion, organized in 1913 in Orăștie, the music management of the meeting was given to Mr. Aurel Medrea, a graduate of the Vienna Conservatory of Music, helped by the retired teacher Ioan Branga. Aurel Medrea was hired to prepare the events occasioned by the ASTRA Reunion.

The reception of delegates of ASTRA members from other Romanian cultural centers as well as honorary guests such as Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, Octav Tăslöanu, Andrei Bârseanu, Montani Braniște, I. U. Soricu, Virgil Arion and the composer Tiberiu Brediuceanu, was made by Ioan Branga who conducted the “Reunion of Songs” which performed *Maestrii și plugari*<sup>29</sup>. The concert program of the general assembly was coordinated by Aurel Medrea

Although appreciated by the present audience, the loaded program, probably prepared stealthily, was not fully depicted in an artistic formula required for such

<sup>27</sup> Ștefan Mărcuș, *Thalia română*, Timișoara, 1945, p. 277.

<sup>28</sup> \*\*\*, “Un concert reușit”, în: *Cosânzeana*, nr 27/1913, p. 384.

<sup>29</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

a moment. For example, in the specialized press, Dr. Ioan C. Iuga presented the successful and less prepared moments of the concert organized in Orăștie on the occasion of the ASTRA General Assembly. In the author's view, the most successful moments were the choral recitals, and the performance of the *Înșiră-te Mărgărite*, directed by its composer himself was the culmination of the concert. After the events of the ASTRA General Assembly, according to the agreement, Aurel Medrea withdrew from the leadership of the "Reunion of Songs", and the ensemble remained again without a conductor until November 1913 when Ionel Rădulescu returned to Orăștie. The local press recorded a concert in Orăștie in November, under the conductor of Ionel Rădulescu.

Ionel Rădulescu selected a male quartet and a soloist from the reunion with whom he supported an exceptional musical program in different localities of the current Alba and Hunedoara counties: Hunedoara, Petroșani, Ilia, Cugir, Sebeș and Șăliște<sup>30</sup>. On February 15, 1914, the "Song Reunion" concerted in Deva, making an important trip for those times. Through a concerted activity, Ionel Rădulescu managed to maintain and carry on the prestige gained by the reunion during the period in which he acted in. John Branga. Several historians and time musicologists have stated that Ionel Rădulescu's presence in Orăștie maintained a high artistic level of the Reunion, "enjoying the local society very much of its presence and taking part in all the demonstrations arranged in the nearby centers"<sup>31</sup>.

Following the Sarajevo bombing and the turbulent events of the summer of 1914, Ionel Rădulescu was arrested, and the "Reunion of Songs" was left without a conductor<sup>32</sup>. By the end of 1914, the "Reunion of Songs" had no presence at any cultural event. Between 1915-1919, the "Reunion of Songs" participated in few events, only in Orăștie, being directed by A. Schmidt and sometimes even by Ioan Branga. For example, in 1919, the local press invited those interested to participate in the Third Matinee, where there would be hold a concert by the "Reunion of Songs" directed by the teacher Ioan Branga<sup>33</sup>.

Prof. Gheorghe Pârvu took over the work of the meeting, but did not achieve any notable results, since he placed the main emphasis on the choir and the orchestra of the high school, and then on the church choir of the orthodox parish "Adormirea Maicii Domnului", the ensemble of the "Reunion of Songs" was the last preference of the music teacher. We believe that the decision of prof. Gheorghe Pârvu was motivated by the poor activity of the reunion in recent years and

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Ștefan Mărcuș, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

<sup>32</sup> \*\*\*, *Arestarea d-lui Rădulescu pentru omorul din Sarajevo*, în: *Libertatea*, nr. 27/1914, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> \*\*\*, *Matineul al III-lea*, în "Libertatea", Nr. 7/1919, p. 5.

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by the lack of motivation of the choir members to participate in a representative band of Orăștie.

After the departure of Gheorghe Pârvu from Orăștie, between 1924-1925 we find here Gheorghe Oancea as a music teacher, the brother of the composer Nicolae Oancea from Sibiu<sup>34</sup>. Prof. Gheorghe Oancea participates in the autumn of 1925 with the “Reunion of Songs” at the events occasioned by the commemoration of the Aurel Vlaicu aviator in the village of Bințiți<sup>35</sup>. In the fall of the same year we found Nicolae Prația as music teacher at “Aurel Vlaicu” High School, who disappointed with the low artistic level of the “Reunion of Songs”, does not want to take it further<sup>36</sup>.

### The “Unirea” Choir

Another formation with a special activity for the interwar period was the mixed choir “Unirea”, founded and directed by the Greek-Catholic dean of Orăștie, priest Ioan Ienea. The basics of the choir were put in 1922, but this year there were few appearances of the band in the public space. The presence in the public space has increased since 1923. The activity of this band is attested by prof.univ.dr. Ion Iliescu, and the discovery of some scores belonging to the “Unirea” choir, by our research, in the archive of documents of the Romanian Orthodox Dean of Orăștie, reinforces the research of the mentioned teacher.

The repertoire consisted of secular songs, but also religious songs, carols and star songs. We have approached songs from the collection of composers Iacob Mureșianu, George Dima, N. Oancea, Timotei Popovici and D.G. Kiriac<sup>37</sup>.

In 1933, with the appointment of the priest Ioan Ienea in the canyon office of Lugoj, Valeriu Bora was the main conductor of the Unirea choir until 1945. The band was not only a coagulation medium for people with musical talent but was a strong “School” for developing and capitalizing on musical skills. The concerts offered by “Unirea” offered the possibility of asserting two vocalists such as Au-

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<sup>34</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup> A se vedea “Solia dreptății”, nr 24/1925.

<sup>36</sup> Nu putem afirma că prof. Nicolae Prația a desființat “Reuniunea de cântări”, încât ansamblul nu a mai avut o activitate stabilă după 1921. Practic “Reuniunea de cântări” era menținută doar pentru trecutul ei istoric, dar nu mai avea calitatea artistică necesară pentru a susține programe sau concerte de anvergură, nici măcar la nivelul Orăștiei. Conchidem că între 1921-1925, “Reuniunea de cântări” a fost menținută doar pentru rolul ei în tradiția *Corului de la Orăștie*, iar prof. Nicolae Prația doar a luat contact cu o realitate evidentă: reuniunea nu mai putea reprezenta o formație competentă pentru noile exigențe muzicale ale perioadei interbelice.

<sup>37</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

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relia Periam and Ilie Oancea. Valeriu Branga took care of the preparation of two second conductors such as Ilie Bodisteanu and Ion Maier<sup>38</sup>.

Through the “Unirea” choir, Valeriu Bora invited Lia Hubic, soloist of the Romanian Opera from Cluj-Napoca, to Orăștie<sup>39</sup>. Lia Hubic accepted the invitation and offered a nice recital, accompanied by the “Unirea” choir. The participation of soloist Lia Hubic was a climax of Valeriu Bora’s choral activity.

“Unirea” made various trips until 1940, where concerts were held in the localities around Orastie. Here we are traveling in the towns of Deva, Simeria, Hunedoara and Hateg. Most trips to rural areas were organized at Șibot and Romos. After 1941, the activity of the choir diminished considerably and in 1945, with the retreat of prof. Valeriu Bora from the conductor’s desk, the band abolished.

### **The Choir of the Craftsmen Reunion**

After 1911, with the official retreat of the teacher Ioan Branga from the leadership of the “Weighing Reunion”, we find a polarization of the choral activity in Orastie. The lack of a stable conductor at the meeting caused the activity to diminish, and at the same time the church choirs (Romanian, Hungarian and German) had a visible activity in the urban cultural environment.

However, there was a need to create a representative choir of the communities here, with conductor and stable activity. In 1912, the waiters’ requirement to have a permanent choir was concretized by the creation of the “Choir of the Reconciliation of the Craftsmen”<sup>40</sup>. The first certified conductor of the band was prof. A. Schmidt. The local press, through the newspaper “Libertatea”, encouraged and appreciated the evolution of the band in its first public appearances. In the choir of the craftsmen, more members from the Romanian society came to help our craftsmen in their beautiful hope<sup>41</sup>. Prof. Ion Iliescu informs us that at the most important moments like Ioan Branga’s “Meeting of Weights”, the “Choir of the Reunion of the Craftsmen” appealed to different teachers or musical culture officials, and important recitals were held in the hotel’s festive hall “Central”<sup>42</sup>.

Through its special benefits, the “Choir of the Craftsmen Reunion” participated on numerous occasions at various agrarian sessions, or at the events of other meetings of this kind. The most important participations were those held in Sibiu, the chorus of the meeting taking part in several editions of the crops.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131-132.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> \*\*\*, “Concertul meseriașilor noștri”, în: *Libertatea*, nr. 48/1912, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

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The “Chorus of the Craftsmen Reunion” attracted the attention of the musicians around Orăștie by organizing music courses through conductor A. Schmidt with the help of local military music. We attested at the end of 1913 to a “Conservatory of Music” which was taught the theory of musical instruments, piano lessons, violin, wind instruments, singing and musical theory<sup>43</sup>. Musical courses were held until the outbreak of World War I, when military troops had to focus on their main mission. Obviously, we can not discuss a training equivalent to that of a university or a high school of arts, but the initiative to organize musical classes was a formidable one. If Professor A. Schmidt’s initiative was to be continued after 1918, we could also discuss outstanding music education at the level of Orăștie. Prof. A. Schmidt remained the lead conductor of the “Choir of the Reunion of the Craftsmen” until 1918, being replaced at some concerts by C. Baicu.

We do not have any accurate information about how the conductors went to the scene of this choral meeting. The first conductor was prof. A. Schmidt, followed by C. Baicu, Ioan Ienea, Valeriu Todea, Valeriu Bora and Aurel Subescu.

In 1923, the local press mentioned the Greek-Catholic priest Ioan Ienea as the conductor of the choir<sup>44</sup>. We find the information that in that year, priest Ioan Ienea held various concerts in which he presented folkloric processing and organized the group of carols of the meeting. In the context of the fact that the old “Reunion of Songs” was present less and less in the public celebrations, the “Choir of the Reunion of the Craftsmen” reached a constant presence of the cultural actions of Orăștie in 1922-1925. In the years 1923 and 1924 we find many concerts in which we have performed the “Chorus of the Reunion of the Craftsmen” with the school bands, directed by Prof. Gheorghe Pârvu<sup>45</sup>.

Between 1930 and 1940, at the meeting, Prof. Valeriu Bora selected a group of men to sing funeral services (burials and funeral services) of the members of the meeting or of the most important people in Orăștie. The male group was sometimes completed with members of the “Unirea” Choir. The main repertoire consisted of Dimitrie Cunțanu’s collection<sup>46</sup>. Prof. Valeriu Bora tried to form a mixed group for funeral events, but the mixed group did not have a rich activity.

From 1940 to 1948 the conductor of the “Choir of the Reunion of the Craftsmen” was prof. Aurel Subescu. After 1945, following the abolition of the mixed choir “Union”, the assembly of the Craftsmen Reunion came to be formed from approx. 50-60 members, being the most important band of the town. With the help of his good friend and collaborator, prof. Ion Brătescu, Aurel Subescu managed to

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<sup>43</sup> \*\*\*, “Conservator de muzică la Orăștie”, în: *Libertatea*, nr. 43/1913, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> \*\*\*, “Producția meseriașilor români din Orăștie”, în: *Libertatea*, nr. 2/1923, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>46</sup> A se vedea: Dimitrie Cunțanu, *Cântări funebre pentru cor de bărbați*, Sibiu, p. 2-20.

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form a semi-symphonic orchestra of the Craftsmen Reunion, offering successful concerts during 1946-1948. In 1947, the chorus and the orchestra of the reunion, completed with pupils from the two high schools, “Despina Doamna” and “Aurel Vlaicu”, staged the operetta by Tiberiu Brediceanu<sup>47</sup>. Prof. Nicolae Prația and Prof. Ion Brătescu contributed in the stage of the operetta, and prof. Aurel Subescu was the music conductor. The harvest was watched six times by the public in Orăștie. Although he enjoyed the appreciation of the local audience, the operetta was not presented outside of Orăștie<sup>48</sup>. With the abolition of the Craftsmen Reunion in 1948, its band was taken over in the whole “Nicolae Balcescu” town house.

**Military Music and the first operetta played in Orăștie**

Under the name of military music, we meet the activities carried out within the 92 Infantry Regiment in Orăștie. About the Infantry Regiment 92 we know that it was established in the first months of 1919, through the Order of the Order no. 167 of 19 January 1919 and by the Order of Mobilization 771 of 21 March 1919. The Regiment was subordinated to the 18th Infantry Division of Sibiu.

Within the military structure, alongside military activities, artistic programs were also supported. Generally, many activities were not recorded until 1925. From 1925 to 1928, the situation has changed remarkably by the arrival of prof. Savel Horceag as conductor and chief of military music. Prof. Savel Horceag gave more importance to vocal activity and formed a mixed choir, inviting ladies from Orăștie to participate in the new choir, also accompanied by the military fanfare. Like the “Reunion of Songs” directed by Ioan Branga, the ensemble of Savel Horceag was made up of Romanians, Saxons and Hungarians<sup>49</sup>.

On April 22, 1928, a concert was organized, with the purpose of collecting funds, attended by the ensemble directed by Prof. Savel Horceag, the “Lieder-*tafel*” male choir of the Evangelical parish and the mixed choir of the Reformed Ladies Society<sup>50</sup>.

In 1928, through prof. Savel Horceag, an operetta was first staged in the choral history of Orăștie. By coagulating many competent singers and instrumentalists of the Town Hall, Savel Horceag staged the *La șezătoare* operetta by Tiberiu Brediceanu<sup>51</sup>. In this aspect, in 1928, we have the first stage staging of the operetta

<sup>47</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

<sup>49</sup> Monna Voinescu, *Orăștienii din “Corul lui Branga” ai primit, acum două veacuri, cea mai mare distincție obținută de un cor românesc*, în “Ziarul Hunedoreanului”, Anul II, Nr. 269, Luni 2 august 2010, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>51</sup> A se vedea “Solia dreptății” Nr. 4/1928, p. 4 și “Solia dreptății”, Nr. 6/1928, p. 2.

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*La șezătoare*, through prof. Savel Horceag, an exceptional fact for those times in a small locality. Until that time, in the case of secular music, the most difficult choreography piece performed by some choir in Orăștie had been made to be marooned by L. Domide.

The local press has long appreciated the performance, claiming Prof. Savel Horceag “the organizer of most of the musical productions in our city. Classical performances, music chosen at artistic height... “<sup>52</sup>. Valeriu Bora, probably also a member of the band, affirmed and appreciated in the local press the participation of members from social groups and different ethnic groups<sup>53</sup>.

Knowing that at the end of 1925, the “Reunion of Songs” ended its work, we can consider the ensemble directed and formed by Savel Horceag as legitimate follower of the old meeting, especially since some of its members worked under the head of military music<sup>54</sup>. In 1929 Prof. Savel Horceag was moved to military service in Craiova, and for almost four years we no longer mention significant actions of military music in Orăștie.

In 1932 Ioan Pera was responsible for the military music of the town, and he systematically resumed his activity in this direction “he managed to collect a number of about 100 Romanian chorus, preparing *La șezătoare* and *Rapsodia Română*”<sup>55</sup>. The act of these musical and theater creations, represent another important moment in the history of the *Choir from Orăștie*. Until the early 1940s, when we found conductors Ioan Limbeanu, but especially prof. Ion Brătescu, we no longer have information about the activity of military music. Tragic historical events such as the Odessa Battle of October 1941 and Stalingrad in September 1942 brought great losses to the 92th Infantry Regiment, which greatly reduced the musical actions of the ensemble. In 1943 a coral-instrumental concert was organized, before which prof. Ion Brătescu held a musical themed conference.

In 1944, Prof. Ion Brătescu published in Orăștie a brochure titled Four Patriotic Choirs, a work approved by the Ministry of National Culture and Cults by order of 1802/1944. The work consists of the songs composed by Ion Brătescu: *Glasul Țării* (three equal voices). *La lupta sfântă* (three equal voices) *Am urcat plângând Feleacul* (mixed choir) and *Spre Ardeal* (three equal voices and mixed choir)<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> “Solia dreptății”, Nr. 6/1928, p. 2 *apud* Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>53</sup> Ion Iliescu, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134.

<sup>56</sup> Ion Brătescu-Comănești, *Patru Căntece Patriotice*, Orăștie, 1944, p. 1-4.



### The “Gloria” Choir of the Greek-Catholic Church from Orăștie

After 1922, at the initiative and with the contribution of the Greek-Catholic archpriest Ioan Ienea, began the efforts to create a chorus that would respond to the liturgical needs of the Greco-Catholic community in Orăștie. The first certified conductor of the coral group was Valeriu Bora. Over time, the choir began to receive new choirs in its ranks, with the constant staff of the choir being about 25 people. Until the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948, the choir of the Orăștie parish functioned under the name “Gloria”<sup>57</sup>.

In 1925 we find an intensification of the band’s activity. On the occasion of the carols held in December 1925 the choir “Gloria” collected the sum of 4200 lei, money that helped the choir for future actions<sup>58</sup>. A special mention is given to the list of people who have contributed to the Greek-Catholic church choir. The list contains both Greek-Catholic and Orthodox Romanians, which attests to a good coexistence of the two denominations in the interwar period in Orăștie.

The band’s repertoire included both the religious choir creations of Greek-Catholic composers, such as Celestin Cherebențiu, but had many songs adapted to Greek-Catholic cult from the collection of well-known composers of the Orthodox religious confession like G. Dima, I. Cartu and T. Popovici.

In 1929, the choir “Gloria” sang at the Greek-Catholic Church in Cugir on April 28th and in Sibiușel on May 16th. The choir offered liturgical responses on June 30 at the Church in Deva. After 1930, we notice a significant decline in the band’s activity, and we do not have any data about the trips or about the choir. On August 25, 1935, the choir gave the answers to the Divine Liturgy at Geoagiu<sup>59</sup>. Our research has not found any other data on the activity of the “Gloria” choir.

### Conclusions

The choir’s activity was rich in the interwar period, by continuing the activity of the church choir, by setting up the choir reunion choir, through an organized activity of the Liedertafel choir, but a weakening of the presence and the strength of the “Reunion of Songs”, at the head of which there have been several temporary conductors. Tenor Ionel Rădulescu was the conductor who managed to carry on the good reputation of the band. On the occasion of the ASTRA General Assembly

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<sup>57</sup> Silviu-Lucian Binea, *Greco-catolicismul orăștian – scurtă monografie*, Orăștie, Editura Emma, 2013, p. 87.

<sup>58</sup> *Ziarul Reuniunii de Cor a Bisericii Rom. Unite Orăștie, 1925-1935*, manuscris nepublicat, fila 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, fila 2.

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held in Orăștie in 1913, Aurel Medrea was hired to direct the choir only at this event. In the following years “The Reunion of Songs” was directed again by Ionel Rădulescu, and until 1925 we find A. Schmidt, I. Fleșeriu, Constantin Baicu, Gheorghe Pârvu and Gheorghe Oancea as conductors. At moments of maximum need, Ioan Branga has occasionally prepared and conducted the “Singing Reunion”, affirmatively answering to the cultural requests of the town.

After 1920, the “Reunion of songs” did not have any special activity, with the coral landscape being dominated by the Choir Reunion choir, the “Armonia” choir, the “Liedertafel” Choir and the school choirs. After the establishment of the “Aurel Vlaicu” High School we can see a rich diversification of the music activity through the appearance of some choirs and school orchestras. The contribution of the music teachers who worked here Gheorghe Pârvu (1919-1924) and Nicolae Prația (1925-1947) is undeniable, teachers who have made numerous trips with the vocal-instrumental ensemble and the church choir. We can remember the organization of many concerts of school choirs and orchestras with the band “The Reunion of the Craftsmen”, conducted for many years by prof. Valeriu Bora.

The creation of more choirs was the merit of conducting talents who were able to attract benevolent and capable people around them. Through the priest Ioan Ienea, the Greek-Catholic archpriest of Orăștie, and prof. Valeriu Bora, the “Gloria” Choir of the Greek-Catholic Parish and the “Unirea” Choir were established. In 1928, the operetta *La șezătoare*, by Tiberiu Brediceanu, was set up, an absolute premiere, possible by the contribution of prof. Savel Horceag, the head of the military music in the town.

Of all the conductors, prof. Nicolae Prația is the personality we can clearly notice. Student of the musician Timotei Popovici, a student appreciated by Augustin Bena and the great musical personalities of the time, Nicolae Prația is the first certified composer of the town. The publication of the star song, *Trei Crai*, in the collection of Timotei Popovici, marks a new episode in the national affirmation of the *Choir from Orăștie*. Among the special merits of prof. Nicolae Prația we mention: giving the name “Armonia” to the church choir “Adormirea Maicii Domnului” in 1926, setting up the mixed choir of high school students “Maica Domnului” and musical guidance offered to many students who have become over the years important personalities for the Romanian cultural and theological society.

At the end of our study, we can say with certainty that, regardless of the fact that at the level of Orăștie, we are talking about choirs belonging to the Church or choirs belonging to other institutions, all these groups had a profound religious character and were a good means of confession Christological, through harmonic music.