

How the taragato became known in western Europe

Before World War II Hungarian and Romanian popular music were well known because of the distribution of the 75 rpm shellac discs. Grigoraş Dinicu (violin and composer), Fănică Luca (panpipes and vocal) and Maria Tănase (vocal) were the first to go across the Atlantic. This made the music and dance stay on the Sunday afternoon village square but at the same time also move to the concert hall. The main role of the music remained being a dance vehicle except for the typical drink songs and songs in which text is a most important element (de ascultare). Next to the logical development of the music as facilitator of joy, it also emerged as a performing art.

In 1914 the clarinet player Luță Ioviță from the Banat brought the tárogató from Hungary to Romania, which became known as taragot. Ioviță made it a well-known and appreciated folk instrument.

The taragot (tárogató) lived its life in Hungary. It played a modest, mostly supporting role in Hungarian orchestras. Sometimes name and sound of the instrument seem to evoke nationalistic sentiments. The production of the instrument was at an absolute stand still in Hungary between 1930 and at least 1990. The Timiș factory in Timișoara (Romania) produced an inferior instrument that could not be used in a band.

After World War II the two countries were submerged in totalitarian communism. This had two main effects. Grey coloured simplified music, without much emotion. Creativity became scarce, even dangerous and improvisation was forbidden. The repertoire was noted, checked and even “improved” by the communist party’.

Secondly, the regime functioned more or less as a buffer between tradition and western influence, which assisted with the preservation of traditional values. That it at the same time also was a buffer between spirituality of the people and their art remained unnoticed.

One should keep in mind that in those days folk art, folklore, was a living thing in Eastern Europe. It was not about nostalgic re-enactment of history, it was daily practice. The farmer paints in winter his cart and the family produces poetic songs for the opening of the local new bridge.

An orchestra that crossed the borders to perform in the west had much more freedom. This freedom was guarded on the spot by party officials. I remember a theatre tour in which the leadership insisted on having a Romanian national flag, with hammer and sickle, on the stage backdrop. The organisers refused. The ambassador was called in for judgement. The party officials lost.

The Romanian music outside of Romania was different compared with within the country. Locally emphasis was on vocalists who were mostly ethnic Romanians. The musicians, lăutari, were most often gypsies (Rroma). They were treated as being of marginal importance and their names were not mentioned in the programmes. However, on foreign stages emphasis was on violins and not on vocalists. The instruments had a broader exposure to smaller audiences. The way was being paved for typical folk music instruments like panpipes and taragot, to conquer the west.

In 1969 Dumitru Fărcaș, a young man from Cluj, Romania, toured Switzerland as guest hobo and taragot soloist of the orchestra Doina Argeșului from Pitești. He later tours Switzerland again with “Les virtuoses Roumains”.



In 1969 the ARION album “Les flûtes Roumaines”, recordings hand-picked by Marcel Cellier, the Swiss musicologist, was published. This album contains the beautiful 6:35 “Sua De Melodii Din Maramureş” played by Dumitru Fărcaş on his taragot. This album assisted in the coming into the public eye of panpipes and taragot. It all happened at the same time and things kept falling into place. The obvious quality was there. The only problem was how to spread the knowledge. The key person was Marcel Cellier.

In the sixties Marcel Cellier started radio transmissions that featured Romanian folk instruments. This was the start of the beautiful career of the panpipes. Gheorghe Zamfir is one of the most best-selling CD performers in the world. The relationship between Cellier and Zamfir is well known. Cellier also published an album “Taragot et Orgue” with Dumitru Fărcaş.

This historical meeting, initiated by Marcel Cellier, marked the beginning of Zamfir's rapid rise to fame. Philips made Zamfir known worldwide by producing his records and organizing concerts and having him play with renowned artists like James Last. <http://www.dajoeri.com/entwicke.html>



Zamfir built his own little orchestra (taraf), small enough to be flexible and handy for tours abroad, and consisting of the top talents from Romania. Ion Dragoi (violin), Ion Lăceanu (all kinds of flutes), Toni Iordache (cimbalom), and often the taragot player Dumitru Fărcaş as soloist. On “Zamfir à Paris” Ion Milu plays the taragot. Especially the live recordings are a joy to listen because they radiate vitality. The taragot only plays the role of melody solo instrument and it is not heard during other melodies.

In 1974 a little revolution takes place. Zamfir forms a new taraf. Dragoi and Lăceanu move to the Radu Simion taraf. The musicians involved claim that they had to leave because of their musical personalities. This may be true, although the new members had earned their spurs on local folk music scenes. Originally Zamfir left much room for individual soloists. Later he more and more focussed on his own talents.

In June 1976 I witnessed a concert in Theatre de Ville Sarah Bernard in Paris and I nearly fell from my chair. I was used to the Philips recordings of the time. They were much virtuosity but not enough heart. This new music was a whirlwind. It all was about collisions between panpipes and two taragots played by Dorin Cuibaru and Pavel Cebzan and also Marin Chisar's flutes. Efta Botoca played the violin and the cimbalom by Pantelimon Stînga. Petre Vidrean kept it all together with his double bass. This was fascinating stuff. It is amazing how much space Zamfir gave to his fellow musicians, this all within the framework of the composition.

Unfortunately there only are a few recordings from that time, probably because Zamfir then entered the commercial period of his career. I recall a Philips double album, recorded in Switzerland, titled “l'Orchestre de Zamfir avec la participation de Zamfir”. It starts with “Hommage a mon maître Fănică Luca”. 12 minutes or so of exiting inspired music. Highlights are the compositions Zig-Zag and Vibrato. A Romanian taraf went on stage, for the first time without folklore costumes. These were

intensively growing to maturity concerts for the taragot, from local Romanian instrument to international phenomenon.

In Romania a recording was made that comes close:



Gheorghe Zamfir Și Virtuozii Săi Electrecord – ST-EPE 01329

A Frunzei / Joc Din Maramureș / Joc De Doi 4:40 Bănățeanca 10:30 Hora Pe Loc 3:12 Ca La Nuntă 3:58 Suită Din Caransebeș 9:00 Breaza 6:15 Suită Bănățeană 6:53

Accordion – [Vasile Pandelescu](#)

Cimbalom – [Pantelimon Stingă*](#)

Clarinet – [Grigore Vasile](#)

Clarinet, Tárogató [Taragot] – [Dorin Cuibariu](#), [Pavel Cebzan](#)

Contrabass – [Nicolae Banciu](#), [Petru Vidrean](#)

Fluier – [Marin Chisăr](#)

Orchestra – [Orchestra Gheorghe Zamfir](#)

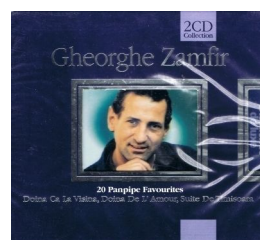
Saxophone – [Francisc Novacovici](#)

Trumpet, Accordion – [Nistor Mihăilescu](#) Violin – [Efta Botoca](#)

From time to time this recording turns up under vague CD labels, mostly as CD 2 of a triplet.

A comparison? Do I have to? It is like the freshness of 1920s New Orleans music. It has the energy of the first year of Charlie Parker at 52nd Street and the seriousness of Coltrane's "A Love Supreme". The importance? Compare it with Sidney Bechet start using the soprano saxophone.

In 2013 I discovered that a part of the Switzerland recordings were copied onto a new CD (CD 2/2). The applause of the audience was left out and especially some of the finest compositions (I recall Cent Mille de Flutes or may be Mirage de flutes (duet with Marin Chisar) and Vibrato (Pantelimon Stinga). The double CD is published under the misleading name 20 PANPIPE FAVOURITES (which suggests 'easy listening').



Go to <http://11thmuse.com/NoviSad1979.html> for an illustration.

Or browse youtube.com with "Zamfir Novi Sad 1979" for the full 52 minutes concert.

Henk Jansen
11thMUSE.com