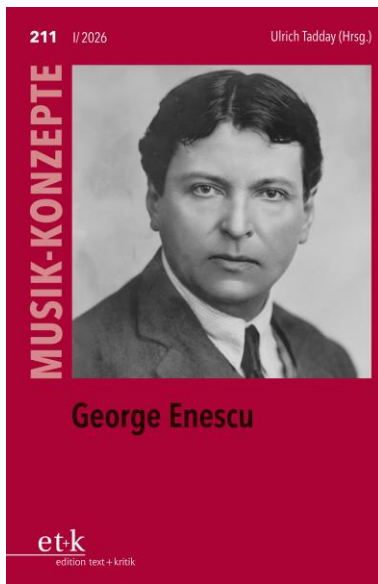


RECENZII

Enescu the Progressive. On the Latest Volume of “Musik-Konzepte”¹ and Its Most Impressive Predecessor²

Thorsten Gubatz³



“Musik-Konzepte (Music Concepts)” is a prestigious quarterly musicological series, published by “edition text+kritik” in Munich. Founded in 1977 by Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, its editor since 2004 is Prof. Ulrich Tadday from the University of Bremen. In order to better understand what it may mean that a volume on Enescu appeared in this series in 2026, it will be worthwhile to take a look at its main founder, Heinz-Klaus Metzger (1932-2009), one of Germany’s most prominent music theorists of his time.

¹ **George Enescu**, edited by Ulrich Tadday. – Munich: edition text+kritik im Richard-Boorberg-Verlag 2026 (Musik-Konzepte, Vol. 211). 117 pp., Softcover ISBN: 978-3-68930-141-5 (GE)

² **Enescu im Kontext (Enescu in Context)**, edited by Violeta Dinescu, Michael Heinemann, and Roberto Reale. – Oldenburg: BIS-Verlag der Carl-von-Ossietzky-Universität Oldenburg 2019 (Archiv für osteuropäische Musik. Quellen und Forschungen [Archive for Eastern European Music. Sources and Research], Vol. 5). 419 pp., Softcover ISBN: 978-3-8142-2379-7

free download: https://oops.uni-oldenburg.de/4682/1/2379-7_Dinescu-Heinemann-Reale_Enescu%20im%20Kontext_opti.pdf (EK)

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When Metzger first attended the Darmstädter Ferienkurse (Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music) in 1950, the rediscovery of New Vienna dodecaphonism was at its heyday, and so was the progressist self-awareness of Darmstadt's most memorable voices. Theodor W. Adorno was among the lecturers, taking the New Vienna School as a paradigm for the Spirit who knows to grasp, to penetrate, to appropriate the historical 'material' of its art, to understand the logic of its development, and therefore to develop it further, actively and creatively. Anybody who would not understand the turn to dodecaphonic atonality as such a creative decision motivated by historical necessity would therefore count as reactionary; and who would understand this step, but refuse to make it, would be even worse, that is, archi-reactionary. In 1952, when Darmstadt embarked on radicalizing dodecaphonism to serialism, Pierre Boulez put it bluntly "that any musician who has not felt the necessity of the dodecaphonic language – we do not say understood, but well felt –, is USELESS. Since his whole work situates itself on this side of his time's necessities."¹

George Enescu, in turn, is quoted to have said on his deathbed in 1955 to conductor Sergiu Comissiona: "All this dodecaphonic music ... tell them, tell them this is not music! Music has to go from one heart to another."² – Therefore, Adorno, Boulez, and young Metzger, too, would very likely have assigned Enescu to the *massa damnata* of the useless. But history went on, and with wonted violence, it would ruin and crush even the firmest beliefs on how it should necessarily go on. For Adorno, it was essential for the work of art "to make itself the – albeit tragic – image of good life";³ Darmstadt in 1958 saw lectures by John Cage for whom this was idolatry and a way of replacing the good with its illusion. But even if, for the sake of the true liberation of mankind, art had to be abolished, this was still a model of how history should proceed.

¹ "[A]ffirmons, à notre tour,] que tout musicien qui n'a pas ressenti – nous ne disons pas compris, mais bien ressenti – la nécessité du langage dodécaphonique est INUTILE. Car toute son œuvre se place en deçà des nécessités de son époque" (Pierre Boulez, „Éventuellement...“. In: La revue musicale 21 [1952], pp. 117-148, here p. 119).

² Noel Malcolm, *George Enescu. His Life and Music*. Baskerville 1990, p. 260.

³ In the German original of his "Philosophy of New Music": "sich zum sei es auch tragischen Bild richtigen Lebens zu machen" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der Neuen Musik*. In: Id., *Gesammelte Schriften XII*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt 1975, p. 166).

Everything became much more complicated when also Cage's highly optimistic, anarchistic yet strangely puritan, iconoclastic progressivism somehow failed to convince all of mankind.

Although he would never break with Adorno, Metzger was highly fascinated by Cage and an advocate of him; but then he would also witness the collapse of avantgarde progressivism on both sides of the Atlantic in the late 60s and early 70s. Composers looked back to the creative chaos at the beginning of the 20th century and asked themselves what opportunities might have been missed because of the predominance of dodecaphonism and serialism after World War II. Was major-minor tonality really 'exhausted', and were there other kinds of tonality or atonality that definitely were not? – This is the historical situation in which the series "Musik-Konzepte" had its beginning. Each of its volumes (211 so far, plus 37 special issues) is dedicated either to a particular composer or to a problem which is considered topical by the editor(s). All in general, the quest is for progressive spirit in the history of music up to the present times, always keeping in mind how problematic the concept of progress has become – in 1998, vol. 100 bore the title "Was ist Fortschritt? (What is Progress?)".

Eastern Europe came into focus with some major figures: Janáček (7), Liszt (12), Mussorgsky (21), Bartók (22), Skrjabin (32/33 & 37/38), Stravinsky (34/35), Chopin (45), Ligeti (53), Lutosławski (71-73), Martinů (special issue 2009), Ustvolskaya (143), Hölszky (160/161), Dvořák (174), Kurtág (special issue 2020), Veress (192/193), and Kodály (202). So there is still much work to do about the avantgarde greenhouses of Eastern Europe after World War II, especially Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. But at least, now there is a volume on Enescu (211), and the era of Western avantgarde exclusivism is sufficiently bygone that "Musik-Konzepte" finally could ask for the progressive spirit in his work. This is done in six essays by Romanian and German musicologists.

In the first one (GE 7-20), Valentina Sandu-Dediu points at a tendency in Romanian musicology to stylize Enescu as a national cultural hero, and therefore to misinterpret many features of his music as typically Romanian. Concerning his "Sept chansons sur Clément Marot",

she states that “if one listens to this music by Enescu today with European ears, one will definitely attribute it to the French sphere, and one will ask if it makes any sense still to look for a Romanian folkloristic tone” (GE 9).¹ As to his third sonata for violin and piano, written explicitly ‘in Romanian folk style’, Sandu-Dediu writes that it was “one of the preferred subjects of musicologists who analyze innovative elements of the compositional structure and language, as potential sources for new generations of composers” (GE 13-14),² since it “contains unspectacular, yet groundbreaking contributions to the innovations of the music of the 20th century: the integration of free rhythm, heterophony, microtones and improvisation into Western musical forms.” (GE 14)³ Instead of tracing back Enescu’s ‘Romanian folk style’ to particular Romanian folk traditions, Sandu-Dediu pleads for focussing rather on how he succeeds in “integrating nuances from his homeland into a universalism of conception and compositional technique” (GE 20).⁴ In the second essay (GE 21-30), Michael Heinemann aims for the same goal when he retraces the genesis of the ‘Romanian’ idiom in Enescu’s first piano sonata, as “an idea which is territorialized so as to make discernible, in its deterritorialization [...], the potential of a national idiom.” (GE 21)⁵

The order of the last four essays roughly follows Enescu’s biography, from his first works to his last one. Adalbert Grote (GE 31-54) shows how young Enescu first learned and appropriated traditional

¹ “Wenn man [jedoch] diese Musik mit europäischen Ohren hört, ordnet man sie heute zweifellos dem französischen Raum zu und fragt sich, ob es Sinn macht, noch nach einem rumänischen Volkston zu suchen.” (9)

² “[Von da an bleibt diese Sonate] eines der bevorzugten Themen von Musikwissenschaftlern, die innovative Elemente der Kompositionsstruktur und -sprache analysieren, als potenzielle Quellen für neue Generationen von Komponisten.” (GE 13-14)

³ “[Diese Partitur von Enescu] enthält unspektakuläre, aber tiefgreifende Beiträge zu den Innovationen der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts: die Integration von freiem Rhythmus, Heterophonie, Mikrotönen und Improvisation in westliche Musikformen.” (GE 14)

⁴ “[Vielleicht werden erst junge Musikwissenschaftler Enescus raffinierte stilistische Synthese wiederentdecken und ihn eher als jemanden wahrnehmen, dem es gelungen ist,] einheimische Nuancen in einen Universalismus der Konzeption und der Kompositionstechniken zu integrieren.” (GE 20)

⁵ “eine Idee, die territorialisiert wird, um in ihrer Deterritorialisierung [...] das Potenzial eines nationalen Idioms erkennbar zu machen.” (GE 21)

forms and then quickly emancipated himself from them, so quickly that his String Octet, written at age 18, would become “one of the most unusual works of chamber music at the turn of the century” (GE 42): “On the one hand, Enescu exploits just every available technique of counterpoint; on the other hand, concerning harmony and the organization of voices, he orients himself by conventional harmonic rules, and he aims at consonant relations of sounds, which more often than not acquire an additional charm by a Romanian tonal repertoire.” (GE 49)¹

In the fourth essay (GE 55-69), Dan Dediú speaks of a fractal thematic order in Enescu’s symphonies, one that works with motifs which, in turn, consist of runes and gestures. This order “becomes the origin of Enescu’s athematism, such that the themes become similar, almost indistinguishable entities, since they are built from the same rhythmic-melodic units. The multiplicity of thematic paths is sometimes unsettling, and it leads to a kind of athematism by overthematization” (GE 64).² Concerning traditional forms, an “Enescu form can start as a song, but then it can as well proceed as a sonata and end as a development.” (GE 65)³ “The thematic overlappings always lead to the sidestepping of clear cadences, each end of a section being at the same time the beginning of another section.” (GE 66)⁴ According to Dediú, this “merging of all thematic elements into one stream of sound [...] has its roots in Wagner’s infinite melody and leads Enescu to *infinite*

¹ “Enescu reizt einerseits alle nur verfügbaren kontrapunktischen Techniken aus; andererseits orientiert er sich in der Frage des Zusammenklangs und ihrer Stimmführung an konventionellen harmonischen Regeln und bemüht sich um konsonante Zusammenklänge, die nicht selten einen zusätzlichen Reiz durch einen rumänischen Tonvorrat erhalten.” (GE 49)

² “[Diese fraktale thematische Ordnung, die mit Motiven arbeitet, die ihrerseits aus Runen und Gesten zusammengesetzt sind,] wird zur Geburtsstätte des Enescianischen Athematismus, in dem Sinne, dass die Themen zu ähnlichen, fast ununterscheidbaren Gebilden werden, da sie aus denselben rhythmisch-melodischen Einheiten aufgebaut sind. Die Vielzahl der thematischen Pfade ist manchmal beunruhigend und führt zu einer Art Athematismus durch Überthematisierung”. (GE 64)

³ “Eine Enescu-Form kann als Lied beginnen, aber auch als Sonate weitergehen und als Durchführung enden.” (GE 65)

⁴ “Die thematischen Überlappungen führen immer dazu, dass klare Kadenz umgangen werden, jedes Ende eines Abschnitts ist gleichzeitig der Anfang eines anderen Abschnitts.” (GE 66)

polyphony." (GE 66)¹ In the following contribution (GE 70-92), Roberto Reale, who wrote his PhD thesis on "Elements of Lament in George Enescu's Opera 'Œdipe'",² shows how Enescu generates *Leitmotive* in his *opus magnum*.

At the end of this volume (GE 93-108), Corneliu Dan Georgescu first takes a closer look at Enescu's last major works, the "Concert Overture" and the "Chamber Symphony", and then sketches "a comprehensive, synthesizing perspective on Enescu's compository thinking in general" (GE 106),³ which he summarizes briefly in the abstract to his essay as "a pan-European orientation, melodic primacy, heterophonic textures and orchestration, fluid formal architecture, structural flexibility, chromaticized modal tonality, and a fusion of introspective lyricism with a transcendent musical atemporality – positioned outside the dominant modernist paradigm of his era." (GE 111)

Sandu-Dediu's and Heinemann's contributions may be read as reminders that Enescu, like any great composer, does not belong only to one nation, but to the entire world, and that – just as Georgescu points out at the end of the book – Enescu's vision was pan-European from early on: "The merger of German symphonics with the refinements of French impressionism and echoes from Romanian *lăutări* folk music runs like a common thread through Enescu's entire output." (GE 106)⁴ Anyway, through his entire output, that is: until the end, until the "Chamber Symphony" of 1954, two years after Boulez had written his

¹ "Diese fließende Konzeption des musikalischen Kondukts, dieses] Verschmelzen aller thematischen Elemente zu einem Klangstrom, hat seine Wurzeln in der Wagner'schen unendlichen Melodie und leitet Enescu zur *unendlichen Polyphonie*." (GE 66)

² Roberto Reale, *Elemente der Klage in George Enescus Oper "Œdipe"*. Oldenburg 2022 (Archiv für osteuropäische Musik. Quellen und Forschungen [Archive for Eastern European Music. Sources and Research], Vol. 7).

https://oops.uni-oldenburg.de/5498/9/978-3-8142-2404-6_reale.pdf

³ "[Angesichts der besonderen Stellung, die die beiden hier behandelten Werke im Gesamtwerk Enescus einnehmen, wird der Versuch, ihre Charakteristika zu beschreiben, letztlich zu] einem umfassenden, synthetisierenden Blick auf das kompositorische Denken Enescus insgesamt." (GE 106)

⁴ "Die Verschmelzung der deutschen Symphonik mit Raffinessen des französischen Impressionismus und der Echos aus der rumänischen volkstümlichen *lăutări*-Musik zieht sich wie ein roter Faden durch Enescus gesamtes Schaffen." (GE 106)

“Structures Ia” and Cage had come forth with “4’33””. In this perspective, Enescu can appear very conservative, remaining true to a pan-European, yet dated musical culture of the early 20th century. But it is exactly this early 20th century that suddenly fascinated young composers again since the late 1960s, and the essays in this volume shed some light on Enescu as a great example of what an independent brilliant musical mind could achieve when it neither joined the paradigms of modernism nor those of conservatism that would come to power since the 1920s. When Boulez acknowledged that Berg radicalized a tendency in Austro-German music towards forms “that practically never cease to develop, and that do not implicate any return”,¹ or that he loadened traditional forms with “such an emotional and formal overload, that they break down under the weight of all these overloads”,² he could as well have said this about Reger or Enescu.

In another text, Dan Dediu also refers to Boulez’ remarks on Berg, namely about the “Kammerkonzert”:

I saw that here is quite something else in Berg than this kind of romanticism that is easy to grasp at first glance. And, from discovery to discovery, what fascinated me more and more, is the complexity of this spirit: the number of self-references, the intricacy of the musical construction, even the esoterism of many references, density of texture, all this universe which is in perpetual movement and that keeps turning around itself, all this is absolutely fascinating.³

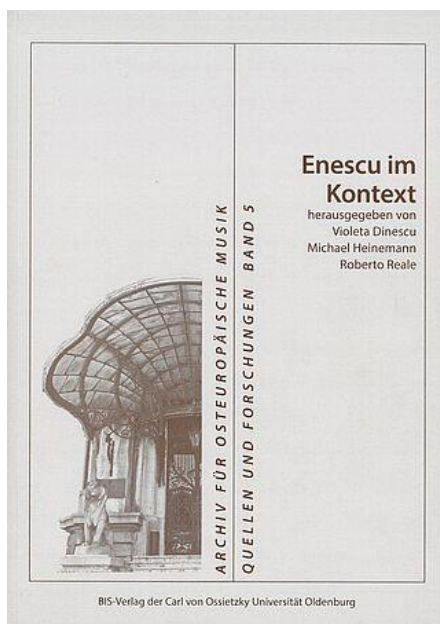
¹ “[C]e que je trouve, par exemple, chez Berg, c’est un sens du développement continu avec énormément d’ambiguïté, ce que j’appelle le «développement romanesque»; c’est-à-dire qu’il ne s’agit plus, à ce moment-là, d’un développement architectural simple avec des points de symétrie (perspective toujours facile à prendre), mais, au contraire, de formes beaucoup plus intriquées,] qui, pratiquement, ne cessent de se développer et n’impliquent aucun retour” (Pierre Boulez, *Par volonté et par hasard. Entretiens avec Célestin Deliège*. Paris 1975, pp. 17-18).

² “[On ne peut regarder l’évolution accomplie par Berg que comme une espèce de quête continue pour arriver à un maximum d’efficacité des formes, et on n’a pas plutôt trouvé leur maximum d’efficacité qu’on n’a qu’une hâte, c’est de les dissoudre progressivement et de les détruire ou de leur donner] tellement de surcharge émotionnelle et formelle, d’ailleurs qu’elles s’effondrent sous le poids de toutes ces surcharges” (ibid., p. 23).

³ “[J]’ai vu qu’il y avait bien autre chose en Berg que cette espèce de romantisme facile à saisir au premier abord. Et, de découverte en découverte, ce qui m’a passionné au fur

Dediu remarks:

The same words apply as well to Enescu's *Third Symphony*, *Vox Maris* or the *String Quartet in G*. Therefore, the question arises: How can the intellectual scheme be overcome according to which romanticism in the 20th century equals anachronism? By the discovery of complexity. If a work of music achieves a certain degree of complexity, it remains valid, even if it exhibits the Romantic lyricism. (EK 84)¹



One should add that any catalogue of criteria concerning musical 'validity' will always have to be extremely complex in itself, and Dediu's remark does not *per se* exclude the possibility of music which is strong and deep and valid in any sense, though rather simple. But what deserves even more attention is the book from which the quote is taken. This book is called "Enescu im Kontext (Enescu in Context)", and it was published in 2019 as vol. 5 of the series "Archiv für osteuropäische Musik. Quellen und Forschungen (Archive for Eastern European Music. Sources and Research)". This series

exists since 2013; it arose from the "ZwischenZeiten-Symposium", an annual academic meeting on Romanian music and its international

et à mesure, c'est la complexité de cet esprit: le nombre de références à soi-même, l'intrication de sa construction musicale, l'ésotérisme même de beaucoup de références, densité de la texture, tout cet univers qui est en perpétuel mouvement et qui ne cesse de tourner sur lui-même, cela est absolument fascinant" (ibid., p. 26).

¹ "Dieselben Worte passen ebensogut zu Enescus 3. *Sinfonie*, *Vox Maris* oder dem *Streichquartett* in G. Daher stellt sich die Frage: Wie kann man das Gedankenschema überwinden, das besagt, Romantik sei im 20. Jahrhundert gleich Anachronismus? Durch Entdeckung der Komplexität. Wenn ein Musikwerk eine gewisse Komplexität erreicht, dann bewahrt es seine Gültigkeit, selbst wenn es den romantischen Lyrisismus aufweist." (EK 84)

context, initiated by Violeta Dinescu during her activity as a professor at the University of Oldenburg in Germany (from 1996 to 2021), and continued by Michael Heinemann at Dresden's Hochschule für Musik. The very first "ZwischenZeiten-Symposium" in November 2006 was dedicated to Enescu; "Enescu im Kontext" contains the contributions to this event as well as some Enescu-related ones from later "ZwischenZeiten" meetings, together with historical documents about Enescu's life and *Wirkungsgeschichte*. All of the researchers who authored the essays in the new "Musik-Konzepte" volume belong to the same greater group formed in the context of the "ZwischenZeiten-Symposium", and compared to "Enescu im Kontext" with its 419 pages, the "Musik-Konzepte" volume with its 117 pages – in particular its last four essays – appears like a condensed introduction to the world of Enescu, inviting to step on into the broader horizon opened by the larger book. It deserves mention that all volumes of the "Archiv für osteuropäische Musik" can be downloaded for free (concerning "Enescu im Kontext", see the link at the beginning of this article).

When Michael Heinemann, in his essay on the genesis of the 'Romanian folk style' in Enescu's first piano sonata, speaks of the amalgamation of traditional Western forms of musical articulation with another musical tradition, "inside of which sound and rhythm follow alternative modes of operationalization" (GE 29),¹ this calls for a characterization of these modes. In "Enescu im Kontext", Eva-Maria Houben gives an inventory of features characteristic of the 'Romanian folk style' concerning the third violin sonata:

chromatic turns, passages oscillating between major and minor, sounds and combinations of sounds which are colored by quarter-tones, glissandi and small upwards portamenti in the violin part, a parlando-rubato reminiscent of free speaking, ample ornamentation, sound colors quoting, as it were, those of other instruments like flute or cimbalom,

¹ "[Dazu dient die klangliche Annäherung an ein Idiom, das an Ravel und Debussy gemahnt und doch nichts weniger als Kopie ist, da die Diskussion kompositorischer Parameter nur auf der Grundlage einer anderen musikalischen Tradition zu verstehen ist,] innerhalb derer Klang und Rhythmus alternativen Modi der Operationalisierung folgen." (GE 29)

permanent fluctuation of tempo, of dynamics, of harmonic coloration. (EK 193)¹

Last but not least, Houben mentions heterophony. One may add the use of scales with augmented seconds, which was enough to give Satie's "Gnossiennes" no. 1 and 3 a 'Romanian' tint. It would definitely be interesting also to hear an ethnomusicologist about it, beyond all attempts of tracing back Enescu's 'Romanian folk style' to particular Romanian folk traditions. Sandu-Dediu's outlook on "Romanian Music after Enescu" (EK 401-409) sketches a tropical rainforest of music on which whole libraries have been, and far more should be written, especially by Western musicologists for whom they still are *terra incognita*. Anyway, at least for those who can read German, the new "Musik-Konzepte" volume and "Enescu im Kontext" are excellent for making a start and one step further.

SUMMARY

Thorsten Gubatz

Enescu the Progressive. On the Latest Volume of "Musik-Konzepte" and Its Most Impressive Predecessor

At last, the prestigious German quarterly "Musik-Konzepte (Music Concepts)", whose general quest is for progressive spirit in the history of music up to the present times, has dedicated a volume to Enescu. This is done in six essays by Romanian and German musicologists, culminating in Corneliu Dan Georgescu's characterization of Enescu's artistic approach by the terms of "a pan-European orientation, melodic primacy, heterophonic textures and orchestration, fluid formal architecture, structural flexibility, chromaticized modal tonality, and a

¹ "[Zu hören sind:] chromatische Wendungen, zwischen Dur und Moll changierende Passagen, durch Vierteltöne, Glissandi und kleine, aufwärts führende Portamenti in der Violinstimme gefärbte Klänge und Klangverbindungen, ein an freies Sprechen erinnerndes parlando-rubato, reichhaltige Ornamentik, Farbgebungen, die andere Instrumente wie Flöte oder Zymbalon gleichsam herbeizitieren, ständige Fluktuation des Tempos, der Dynamik, der harmonischen Färbungen." (EK 193)

fusion of introspective lyricism with a transcendent musical atemporality – positioned outside the dominant modernist paradigm of his era.” (GE 111) This volume sheds some light on Enescu as a great example of what an independent brilliant musical mind could achieve when it neither joined the paradigms of modernism nor those of conservatism that would come to power since the 1920s. It also reminds of a much larger book about Enescu, authored by the same, yet extended group of researchers, which was formed in the “ZwischenZeiten-Symposium”, an annual academic meeting at the University of Oldenburg. It is called “Enescu im Kontext (Enescu in Context)”, and it was published in 2019 as vol. 5 of the series “Archiv für osteuropäische Musik. Quellen und Forschungen (Archive for Eastern European Music. Sources and Research)”. The new “Musik-Konzepte” volume appears like a condensed introduction to the world of Enescu, inviting to step on into the broader horizon opened by the larger book.