

The drummers of 1970s progressive rock in the Socialist Republic of Romania: creative solutions under censorship

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Materials and methods

This study is based on a combination of primary sources, audio recordings, and contextual historical materials. The primary sources consist of two interviews I conducted in March 2023 with Romanian progressive rock drummers Mihai Farcaş (Progresiv TM) and Costin Petrescu (Phoenix). These interviews focused on the musicians' influences, technical approaches to drumming, access to instruments and equipment, and recording conditions under the cultural constraints of Socialist Romania.

The musical analyses draw on studio recordings by three representative Romanian progressive rock groups of the 1970s: Phoenix (*Cei ce ne-au dat nume*, 1972; *Mugur de fluier*, 1974; *Cantafabule*, 1975), Progresiv TM (*Dreptul de a visa*, 1976), and Sfinx (*Zalmoxe*, 1979). These recordings were selected because they exemplify two distinct aesthetic strategies within Romanian progressive rock: a synthesis of folkloric and Western elements (Phoenix and Sfinx) and a more explicit engagement with Western musical language (Progresiv TM). All recordings were accessed in their officially released versions, using digitalized reissues on Apple Music, YouTube, and Spotify.

Additional contextual materials include interviews and secondary literature on the cultural influence of censorship in Central and Eastern Europe. These sources were used to situate the musical analyses within their broader political and ideological contexts.

Musical analysis was conducted through close listening to selected tracks, with particular attention to rhythmic structures, meter,

timbre, instrumentation, and interaction between the drummer and other players.

Finally, the study situates these musical practices within their political and cultural context, particularly the impact of the July Theses of 1971 on Romanian artistic production. By combining musical analysis with firsthand testimony and historical framing, the article aims to identify both shared characteristics and divergent approaches in Romanian progressive rock drumming during the 1970s.

Introduction

Romanian music began receiving influences from rock as early as the 1960s, with beat and rock band appearing during the second half of the decade under Communist rule (Volceanov 2013, 746-747). However, this cultural opening would dramatically end with Nicolae Ceaușescu's announcement of the July Theses in 1971, which initiated a period of intensified ideological control over the arts, culture and society, and a return to Stalinism (Stanciu, 2013).

While British progressive rock band such as Yes and King Crimson drew their musical language primarily from classical music and jazz fusion (Martin and Halliwell 2011, 11), Romanian bands faced a different set of pressures and possibilities. Under Ceaușescu, folk cultural heritage was used for political and ideological purposes, particularly to reinforce the cult of personality and legitimize the regime (Rus 2024). This approach surprisingly created a unique style of Eastern European progressive rock, as some bands kept their Western musical influences while embracing Romanian folk themes, melodies, and rhythms.

While progressive rock scholarship has flourished in recent decades (Macan; Martin; Holm-Hudson), with detailed attention to British and American bands, the Romanian progressive scene remains largely unexplored in Anglophone scholarship. Works on rock music in the Eastern Bloc (Ryback; Ramet; Beard and Rasmussen) have begun to recover these histories, yet the specific musical practices of Romanian progressive rock have received no sustained analytical attention. Drawing on my own analysis of Romanian progressive rock for this

study, I propose a twofold trajectory for the genre's development in 1970s Socialist Republic of Romania.

The first zone comprised bands with strong folkloric influences, in which melodies and compound meters of Romanian folk music were mixed with Western tendencies of the genre. Phoenix exemplified this approach most successfully, creating a unique version of progressive rock that satisfied both artistic and ideological constraints. The second zone included bands that embraced Western European musical language more openly, such as Progresiv TM from Timișoara, a city situated close the Yugoslav border.

Despite the historical and cultural significance of this music, little has been documented about the musical language of the few Romanian bands that popularized progressive rock in the 1970s. Rhythmic analyses of the pieces are almost non-existent in musicological literature, and the creative solutions developed by Romanian drummers remain largely unexplored. In this context, conclusions about the rock drummers of the decade were drawn following two interviews I conducted in March 2023 with drummers Mihai Farcaș (Progresiv TM) and Costin Petrescu (Phoenix). These interviews provide information about the creative processes, material constraints, and musical influences that shaped the development of Romanian progressive rock. The interviews reveal not only technical details about drum techniques and equipment but also illuminate the broader cultural and political context in which these musicians operated.

Historical context: constraints, exploration, and innovation

Political constraints as a means of artistic discovery

Haraszti (1987, 45) argues that artistic production can persist even under totalitarian regimes, and that censorship may prompt musicians to develop new techniques and strategies. This particular dynamic can be reflected in the practice of progressive rock bands in The Socialist Republic of Romania, where the odd time signatures present in progressive rock camouflage it as a “folk-inspired genre”. Moreover, Whalen (2013, 1) argues that censorship of artistic work can

paradoxically stimulate and expand creativity rather than simply restricting it. Therefore, if Ceaușescu's plan in 1971 was to effectively remove Western influences from Romanian popular music, then it produced unexpected consequences, as rock musicians began to look for inventive ways of aligning with the Party's cultural values.

In an interview published in 2012, Phoenix band leader and guitarist Nicu Covaci recalled that when Ceaușescu demanded all Romanian art be based on folklore, the band responded, "If you want folklore, we will give you folklore." (Covaci 2012, author's translation). The band's next three albums, *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* (*Those Who Gave Us Names*, 1972), *Mugur de fluier* (*Flute Bud*, 1974), and *Cantafabule* (1975) effectively embrace odd time signatures and lyrics inspired by traditional Romanian folk songs, while simultaneously using rock instruments, such as electric guitars, synthesizers, and drum sets. In the same interview from, Covaci is quoted as saying:

At Electrecord [Romania's state-owned record label], I discovered an extraordinary resource: an archive of archaic music, a folklore anthology containing pre-Christian rituals. I would listen to it and weep, my hair standing on end; we would look at each other, tears streaming, trembling. We listened and listened until we began not merely to perform these songs, but to compose in that style ourselves. In this way, we were able to create a synthesis — and that is why I am proud, because we achieved a true synthesis (Covaci 2012, author's translation).

Therefore, the cultural environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s provided a fertile ground for the development of Romanian rock music that embraced Western aesthetics while remaining in line with the ideological frameworks. Fichter (2011) argues that "a vibrant countercultural and dissident movement developed in Romania between 1965 and 1975," in which young people "combined elements of the global youth movement with local cultural and political practices." Therefore, the musical vocabulary of Romanian progressive rock drummers had to be adapted to local conditions, including limited access to musical education and scarcity of professional instruments.

Within this context, Phoenix's band leader Nicu Covaci reflected on the challenges of innovating under difficult circumstances:

My intention was clear from the beginning, but the path had not been trodden by anyone before, so I did not know if I would succeed in turning the concept into reality. I persisted, and the result materialized into what can be called the “Phoenix style”. (Covaci 1994, 228, author’s translation).

However, Phoenix’s first record wasn’t initially well received by the Communist Party. In an article published in 2023, Romanian music outlet Rock FM notes that certain themes on the original *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* project were deemed “*taboo*” by the cultural arbiters of the Romanian Communist Party, leading to the planned double LP being cut to a single release. Tracks such as “Vișina” (“The Cherry”), “Cei ce ne-au dat nume” (“Those Who Gave Us Names”) and “Cocoșii Negri” (“The Black Roosters”) were removed from the original concept because they did not conform to the narrow folkloric and ideological frameworks promoted by the regime (Rock FM 2023).

However, Volceanov (2013, 747-748) argues that the Communist Party’s censorship was not always as effective. He cites the radio broadcasts of hippie songs such as Scott McKenzie’s “San Francisco” in the 1970s and the publication of translated Bob Dylan and Beatles lyrics in Romanian literary magazines in the following decade as examples of an uneven approach to censorship of Western musical and cultural influences.

Material constraints and creative solutions

In the period immediately following the July Theses of 1971, playing the drum set in progressive rock appears to have had several common characteristics, regardless of the musicians’ age, level of study, or geographic area. The two competing cities in the development of Romanian progressive rock seemed to be Bucharest, the political and cultural capital, and Timișoara, Romania’s westernmost major city (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023).

First and perhaps most significantly, the lack of formal education is evident across the entire cohort of progressive rock drummers. According to Mihai Farcaș, most drummers of the genre were self-taught and rarely graduates of high school or university studies in classical music. The absence of formal drum instruction meant that

Romanian rock drummers had to develop their own pedagogical methods, learning primarily through careful listening to records (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023).

In this context, the construction of rhythms and drum fills in rock music was accomplished without formal knowledge of the technical elements of language on the instrument. Drummers developed their vocabulary intuitively, guided by their ears and musical instincts rather than by systematic instruction in rudiments, reading, or theory. Costin Petrescu eloquently describes this process, remarking that his accompaniment was created by appealing to knowledge accumulated over time, to the numerous and varied rhythms memorized, and adapting personal inspiration and technique according to the form and style of the piece (Costin Petrescu, personal communication, 2023).

Mihai Farcaș provides an even more striking illustration of this autodidactic tradition when he admits that he first encountered the term *paradiddle* (one of the most basic rudiments in Western drum pedagogy) only in 1979, upon receiving a drumming coursebook from jazz drummer Eugen Gondi. Until that point, Farcaș had developed his technique entirely through imitation and experimentation (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, March 2023). Moreover, the lack of formal training created particular challenges when it came to notation and communication with other musicians. Costin Petrescu notes that understanding and writing his drum parts required the assistance of his bandmates who were students at the Conservatory (Costin Petrescu, personal communication, 2023).

Another common point among Romanian progressive rock percussionists was the constant influence of foreign drummers, whose playing they studied, despite limited access to live performances or instructional materials. According to Farcaș, among the most frequently cited influences were John Bonham, Billy Cobham, Ginger Baker, Mitch Mitchell, Ringo Starr and Keith Moon (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023). The absence of the influence of drummers such as Bill Bruford or Carl Palmer, whose musical language uses elements from jazz music and classical percussion (Macan 1997, 47) suggests that Romanian drummers were more influenced by the foundational rock bands of the late 1960s than by the more elaborate and technically demanding progressive rock of the early 1970s.

In addition to individual drummers, both Mihai Farcaș and Costin Petrescu emphasize influences received from rock bands such as The Beatles, The Doors, and The Kinks (Mihai Farcaș and Costin Petrescu, personal communication, 2023).

Adding to their self-taught character and Western European influences, another defining feature of Romanian progressive rock drummers in the 1970s was the lack of superior quality instruments, compensated through various improvisations that demonstrate remarkable determination.

Mihai Farcaș reports studying with two broom handles on plastic hats, instead of the usual practice pad. This kind of resourcefulness was typical of Romanian musicians during this period, who mostly had to rely on low quality instruments made in the factories of The Socialist Republic of Romania (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023). Even more remarkable is Costin Petrescu's construction of an entire drum set from scratch. He states:

For the records I made with Phoenix in those periods, I used my personal set, which consisted of a bass drum, snare drum, two medium tom-toms, a floor tom, hi-hat, and two large cymbals. All the drums, except for the bass drum, were made of brass sheet, rolled, welded, and reinforced, manufactured in Romania with the help of my father, who had connections with workers in the field. They were fitted with a single head and original Remo plastic skins. I covered them with a special sticker, also brought with difficulty from Germany (Costin Petrescu, personal communication, 2023).

This account reveals the extraordinary lengths Romanian musicians had to go to obtain functional instruments, essentially becoming instrument builders in addition to players. More impressively, both the albums *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* (1972) and *Mugur de fluier* (1974) were recorded using this particular homemade drum set (Costin Petrescu, personal communication, 2023).

The improvisational aspect of drum set construction is also noted by Mihai Farcaș, who started using two bongos attached to the bass drum as tom-toms; a creative substitution that added a distinctive timbral quality to his playing while solving the problem of unavailable

tom-toms. The drummer's first professional instrument was a Pearl drum set purchased in 1972, representing a significant upgrade but also indicating that professional-quality instruments could be obtained, albeit with difficulty and expense. Like Costin Petrescu, Farcaș complemented his drum set with percussion elements from outside the sphere of rock music, including bongos and bells, instruments that were apparently more accessible than standard rock drum equipment (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023).

Drumming vocabulary in the works of Phoenix, Sfinx and Progresiv TM

Phoenix: Costin Petrescu and the jazz-influenced era (1972-1974)

Costin Petrescu's approach to drumming with Phoenix represents a good example of autodidacticism in Romanian progressive rock. His inclination toward jazz is evident throughout the LPs *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* (*Those Who Gave Us Names*, 1972) and *Mugur de fluiet* (*Flute Bud*, 1974), but reaches its apotheosis in the accompaniment and drum solo of the piece "Negru Vodă" (1972), a fourteen-minute epic that stands as one of the masterpieces of Romanian progressive rock. His rhythmic approach, characterized by extensive use of the hi-hat, cymbal work, and the performance of drums fills with a swing feel demonstrates a predilection for the jazz aesthetics, and not towards the harsher approach of rock music.

Interestingly, Costin Petrescu's use of jazz vocabulary on the drums is similar to the approach used by Deep Purple drummer Ian Paice in the early 1970s. In an interview I conducted with Ian Paice in 2022, he explained that his first musical influences came from big band, swing, and jazz music (Paice 2022). Their approach is also paralleled by Cream drummer Ginger Baker, who is quoted as saying he never played rock, but jazz (Baker 2019), and by Bill Bruford's remark: "We would rather be swinging here, rather than grooving." (Bruford 2019).

The compound meters chosen by composers Nicolae Covaci and Josef Kappl for the early Phoenix albums have their roots in various Romanian traditional customs, representing a conscious strategy to satisfy the cultural nationalist requirements of the July Theses while simultaneously pursuing progressive rock ambitions. The pieces on the

debut LP *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* are explicitly inspired by shepherding customs from Oaş and Maramureş in northern Romania, lamentations from various regions, and spring and winter customs from regions such as Banat and Suceava (Phoenix 1972).

Romanian folk music is notable for its use of asymmetric, or *aksak* rhythms, which combine short and long beats into additive sequences rather than following standard binary or ternary meters. As ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu theorized, *aksak* patterns are constructed from two unequal duration units (long and short), whose relative lengths produce a characteristic “limping” effect. These sequences are typically cyclic and odd in total count. Brăiloiu also exemplifies these groupings by using rhythmic combinations of durations such as 2+3, 3+2, 2+2+3, or 2+3+2 to illustrate examples of *aksak* rhythm (Brăiloiu 2009, 133–167).

The songs on *Cei ce ne-au dat nume* fall into the following meters: 6/4, 5/4, and 7/4 on “Introducere” (“Introduction”), 6/4 “Nunta” (“The Wedding”), 6/8 on “Păpărugă” (“Rain Song”), 7/4 on “Vara” (“Summer”), utilizing the asymmetrical meter common in Romanian folk dance music; and 4/4 on “Toamna” (“Autumn”), “Negru Vodă” and “Pseudo-morgana”.

Noteworthy throughout these recordings is Costin Petrescu’s jazz-tinged discourse and his use of the drum set not as a solo pretext, but as an accompanying instrument. The use of the hi-hat is particularly sophisticated in Petrescu’s playing. On “Introducere”, he executes rapid sixteenth notes while opening and closing the hi-hat unevenly, creating a constant texture that adds considerable rhythmic and timbral interest to what might otherwise be a straightforward rock beat.

On “Vara”, the prominence of the cowbell is increased in the audio mix, adding a bright, cutting timbre that evokes the bells worn by sheep in mountain pastures.

Other tracks on the debut album showcase different facets of Petrescu’s approach. “Iarna” (“Winter”) presents a shuffle rhythm; “Jocul caprelor” (“The Goats’ Dance”) prominently features tom-toms, with percussionist Valeriu Sepi literally playing goat bells as part of the arrangement (Phoenix 1972).

The influences of jazz music are most clearly present on the magnum opus “Negru Vodă”, a multi-section piece that ranks among

the finest achievements of Romanian progressive rock. In one section of this piece, Josef Kappl's bass guitar solo is accompanied almost exclusively on the hi-hat, in a swing manner with occasional random accents on the snare drum. Subsequently, Kappl and Petrescu engage in a dialogue clearly inspired by the improvisational exchanges common in jazz, with Petrescu creating drum fills made up of triplets across the entire range of the drum set, responding to and commenting on Kappl's bass lines in real time.

Regardless of the piece and the discourses of other band members, Petrescu's rhythmic approach reveals a certain predilection for rhythms and drum fills with swing elements, evidence of his inclination toward jazz music.

The next album, *Mugur de fluier (Flute Bud; 1974)*, offers similar discourses in compound meters while expanding the band's sonic palette and conceptual ambitions. Most pieces remain in 4/4, but significant exceptions include "Mica țiganiadă" ("Little Gypsy Dance") in 5/8, "Muzica și muzichia" ("Music and Music") alternating between 4/4 and 7/8, and "Dansul codrilor" ("Dance of the Woods") alternating between 6/4 and 5/4 meters.

In addition to the traditional drum set, Costin Petrescu often uses percussion instruments for *Mugur de fluier*, especially bongos, bells, timpani, and handclaps (Phoenix 1974). This expansion of the percussive palette beyond the standard rock drum set can reflect musicians' desire to incorporate timbres associated with Romanian folk music.

In addition to performing unison passages with other instruments, Costin Petrescu displays a preference for triplet drum fills framed in 4/4 meter. These triplet fills become something of a trademark, creating a temporary sense of 3/4 or 12/8 superimposed over the underlying 4/4 pulse. Additionally, as in the previous album, when not using snare drum, bass drum, and hi-hat for rhythm construction, Petrescu utilizes tom-toms tuned as high as possible, accompanied by the hi-hat operated with the foot on each quarter note of the 4/4 time signature. This technique of using high-tuned toms creates a sound reminiscent of traditional drums while maintaining the power and projection of a rock drum set.

Throughout the first two Phoenix albums, the drum set is mixed below the level of other instruments, a production choice that may reflect either the relatively poor technology of Electrecord studios — Mihai Farcaș notes that in 1976, the drum set was captured with only two microphones; a severe limitation compared to the multi-mic techniques already standard in Western studios (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023), or Costin Petrescu's tendency to treat the instrument toward the more sensitive direction of jazz.

Phoenix: Ovidiu Lipan Țândărică and the drum set as a soloistic voice (1975)

The much more powerful drum sound on the next Phoenix record, *Cantafabule* (1975), seems to demonstrate that the subdued drum mix on earlier albums was indeed a matter of taste rather than technical necessity. *Cantafabule* represents the first and only album from the 1970s by Phoenix featuring Ovidiu Lipan in the drummer role. However, he would become imprinted in the collective mind as the *de facto* drummer of the band, both through his subsequent presence in concerts, studio albums, and compilations throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and due to his dramatic escape from Romania in 1977 alongside guitarist Nicu Covaci, bassist Josef Kappl, and guitarist Erlend Krauser (Covaci 1994, 427-432). The flight of Phoenix members to the West, hidden inside Marshall amplifiers placed in the trunk of a truck, became one of the most celebrated episodes in Romanian rock history, transforming the band into symbols of artistic freedom and resistance to Communist control.

Cantafabule also represents a complex creation both in terms of concept and regarding harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic parameters. Based on Romanian folklore and fairy tales, the double album showcases Phoenix at their most ambitious and accomplished, with intricate arrangements, sophisticated compositional techniques, and virtuosic performances from all band members. The success of *Cantafabule* is maintained by Ovidiu Lipan's volcanic interpretation, which emancipates the drum set into a role with pronounced solo tendencies, a clear departure from Costin Petrescu's more accompanimental approach on earlier Phoenix albums. Where Petrescu

approached the drum set as a jazz-influenced musician, supporting and enhancing the melodic instruments while maintaining rhythmic stability, Lipan conceived of the drums as a melodic and soloistic voice in their own right, constantly commenting on and interacting with other instruments.

The album's opening, accomplished through the song "Invocație" ("Invocation"), performed in 6/8 meter, immediately establishes this more aggressive approach. Ovidiu Lipan alternates between martial snare drum patterns, discourses on tom-toms (like his predecessor Costin Petrescu, but with greater volume and intensity), rhythms in which the hi-hat's sonority is emancipated, and dramatic unison passages performed with bass drum and cymbals, particularly on the repeated vocal phrase "să se ivească!" ("let it appear!"). Moreover, the tom-tom interventions often have pronounced solo tendencies, transforming what might be simple fills into miniature drum solos that draw attention to themselves as independent musical events. In addition to the traditional drum set, the presence of bells and gongs adds an almost ritualistic quality appropriate to the song's theme.

Ovidiu Lipan uses the vocal pauses of lead vocalist Mircea Baniciu to perform drum fills on tom-toms and unison triplet passages with guitar and voice, on lyrics such as "al tău nume întreg, erai și ești" ("your full name, you were and are"), present in the song "Delfinul, dulce dulful nostru" ("The Dolphin, Our Sweet Dolphin"). This approach to drumming, in which the drummer actively listens and reacts to vocal phrasing, represents a sophisticated level of musical interaction reminiscent of the interplay in jazz music. While the rhythmic accompaniment of "Uciderea balaurului" ("The Slaying of the Dragon") is realized through a shuffle rhythm, "Știma casei" ("The Lady of the House") presents accompaniment on bongos, showcasing the integration of Latin percussion into Romanian progressive rock. Ovidiu Lipan's predilection for drum fills performed in every breathing moment of the voice can be sensed throughout "Pasărea calandrinon" ("Calandrinon Bird"), where the exclusively instrumental moments are accompanied with snare drum and tom-toms in a constant alternation of 6/4 and 3/4 meters.

Based on his presence on a single 1970s progressive rock album, several characteristics of Ovidiu's discourse can be highlighted: frequent

use of drum set passages in unison with the rhythms of vocal, electric guitar, bass guitar, or electric piano lines; construction of rhythms exclusively on tom-toms, creating a more primal sound; execution of triplet breaks frequently framed in 4/4 meter; constant performance in the *forte* register without significant intensity changes, maintaining a high energy level throughout; solo tendencies throughout the accompaniment, treating even ostensibly accompanimental passages as opportunities for rhythmic invention; and predilection for cymbal-based accompaniment.

Sfinx: Mihai Cernea and folkloric progressive rock experimentation

Positioned at the border between folkloric inspiration and Western language elements, the Bucharest band Sfinx (Sphinx) released the album *Zalmoxe* in 1979, a concept album inspired by the story of the Dacian god of the same name. Coming relatively late in the decade, *Zalmoxe* benefited from the earlier experiments of Phoenix, synthesizing folkloric and Western progressive elements with considerable sophistication. The album's Dacian theme was particularly astute politically, as references to Romania's pre-Roman Dacian heritage fit perfectly with dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's promotion of protochronism — the theory that Romanian culture pre-dated and influenced other European cultures (Țăranu 2025, 2) — while simultaneously providing mythological and mystical content suitable for progressive rock.

Pieces such as “Ursitoarele” (“The Fates”) or “Blana de urs” (“Bearskin”) showcase drummer Mihai Cernea accompanying in unison with the rhythmic motifs of the electric and bass guitars, either on hi-hat or with the help of the bass drum or tom-toms. This unison approach, by now a well-established feature of Romanian progressive rock drumming, demonstrates how specific technical strategies became shared vocabulary across the scene. Likewise, like Costin Petrescu, Ovidiu Lipan, and Mihai Farcaș before him, Cernea predominantly uses tom-toms in the accompaniment of the song “Peștera” (“The Cave”). Cernea often gives the drum set discourse a solo tint, maintaining the quasi-soloistic approach pioneered by Ovidiu Lipan on *Cantafabule*. However, Cernea does not display Petrescu's jazz-inspired drumming or Ovidiu Lipan's

soloistic flair. His more subdued style enhances Sfinx's intricate arrangements while also delivering distinctly archaic tones on tracks like "Peștera" ("The Cave"), which features tom-toms and unconventional time signatures, including the use of 7/4 meter.

**Progresiv TM: Embracing improvisation and interplay –
Mihai Farcaș and Hely Moszbrucker**

While Phoenix found common ground between progressive rock and the music of archaic Romanian customs in compound meters derived from folklore, Progresiv TM from Timișoara drew their influences more directly from the Western zone, releasing the album *Dreptul de a visa* (*The Right to Dream*) in 1976, with the lineup of Ilie Stepan, Hely Moszbrucker, Mihai Farcaș, Gheorghe Toz, and Ladislau Herdina (Progresiv TM 1976). Their music showed less obvious debt to Romanian folklore than Phoenix, instead embracing the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic language of British progressive rock more directly.

An innovation in Romanian rock music was the simultaneous performance of pieces on two drum sets, operated by Mihai Farcaș and Hely Moszbrucker (Mihai Farcaș, personal communication, 2023). This unusual configuration created a massively powerful rhythmic foundation while also allowing for complex polyrhythmic interactions between the two drummers.

Among the compositional and interpretive characteristics of the album are the presence of rhythmic unison passages between the drum sets and the rhythmic motifs of the bass guitar, electric guitar, or flute on pieces such as "Omul e valul" ("Man is the Wave"), "Rușinea soarelui" ("The Shame of the Sun"), and the album's title track "Dreptul de a visa / Poetul devenirii noastre" ("The Right to Dream / The Poet of Our Becoming").

Mihai Farcaș's and Hely Moszbrucker's drum kits are mixed in stereo, although there is no verifiable information about which drummer plays which kit. A striking example of their interplay occurs on "Rușinea Sorelui" ("The Shame of the Sun"): the drum set in the left channel maintains a 4/4 groove using hi-hat and bass drum, while the right-channel kit accompanies solely with cymbal bells. Later in the

track, the right-channel drummer occasionally emphasizes the first beat with the crash cymbals, while the left-channel drummer continues a 4/4 backbeat. Moreover, during the spoken-word section of "Odată doar vei răsări" ("Once You Will Rise"), the right-channel drummer performs an improvisational accompaniment on the cymbal bells, while the left-channel drummer maintains a steady 4/4 backbeat on the hi-hat and with snare rimshots. On the song "Nimeni nu e singur" ("No One is Alone"), only one drummer mixed in stereo plays the rhythmic accompaniment. Due to the uneven balance of instruments in the audio mix, particularly the relatively low volume of the drums, some of these rhythmic characteristics can be difficult to discern or may be partially obscured in the recording.

The album also features accompaniments on cymbals or bongos on tracks such as "Clepsidra" ("Hourglass"), "Va cădea o stea" ("A Star Will Fall"), and "Odată doar vei răsări" ("Once You Will Rise"); extended solo moments, frequent triplet drum fills on tom-toms framed in 4/4 meter (a technique shared with both Phoenix drummers, Ovidiu Lipan and Costin Petrescu); and improvisational moments.

Common features of Costin Petrescu, Ovidiu Lipan, Mihai Farcaș, and Mihai Cernea

The interpretive and compositional features of percussionists Costin Petrescu, Ovidiu Lipan, Mihai Farcaș, and Mihai Cernea, despite their individual stylistic differences, can be synthesized into a set of common characteristics that define Romanian progressive rock drumming in the 1970s. These shared features suggest not merely coincidental similarities but rather the emergence of a distinctive national style shaped by common constraints, influences, and creative solutions.

One defining characteristic is the extensive use of the hi-hat, crash and ride cymbals as primary accompaniment voices rather than as mere timekeeping devices. Equally important is the construction of rhythms exclusively on tom-toms, with the purpose of recreating archaic sonorities, which became a distinctive marker of Romanian progressive rock. By avoiding the snare drum and emphasizing the deeper, more resonant tones of tom-toms, drummers evoked the sound of traditional drums without actually abandoning their rock drum sets. Musicians also

made use of a wide spectrum of percussion instruments, including bells, gongs, woodblocks, cowbells, and especially bongos expanded the timbral palette available to Romanian progressive rock drummers. Moreover, the performance of triplet breaks, typically framed in 4/4 meter, became an ubiquitous feature across all Romanian progressive rock drummers.

Another feature is the creation of discourses with solo tendencies, particularly evident in the work of Ovidiu Lipan. This represented a move toward treating the drum set as a melodic voice rather than purely as a rhythmic foundation.

The frequent recourse to execution of rhythmic unison passages with various instruments of the band became perhaps the most characteristic feature of Romanian progressive rock drumming. These unison passages demonstrated the tight ensemble coordination and created dramatic moments of unified rhythmic energy.

The emancipation of the hi-hat through constant closing and opening and execution of various subdivisions, particularly evident in Costin Petrescu's work but present across most Romanian drummers, created a fluid, dynamic approach to hi-hat playing closer to jazz than to rock. This sophisticated hi-hat work added considerable rhythmic and timbral interest to accompaniments that might otherwise have been straightforward, transforming the hi-hat from a simple timekeeping device into an expressive musical voice.

Finally, the use of various compound meters and their frequent alternation stands as the most obvious link between Romanian progressive rock and its folkloric sources. The meters of 5/8, 6/4, 6/8, 7/4, and 7/8, common in Romanian folk music, became defining features of bands like Phoenix. The facility with which Romanian drummers navigated these meters suggests both the influence of folk music in their cultural environment and the benefits of learning rhythmic concepts intuitively.

Ovidiu Lipan and Costin Petrescu: a complicated relationship with the Communist Party in the 1970s

While drummers' creative choices under Communist rule in Romania often took the form of instrument construction and rhythmic

experimentation, they also involved devising strategies for artistic survival within an increasingly hostile environment. Paradoxically, despite the apparent success of bands such as Phoenix and Progresiv TM, many drummers were compelled to seek opportunities to leave the country, sometimes at the risk of their lives.

In a 2022 television interview with Romanian journalist Denise Rifai, Ovidiu Lipan notes that Phoenix's decision to wear long hair and beards aligned with the traditional imagery of Romanian *haidouks*. Ironically, long hair was also a defining aesthetic of their Western counterparts, such as Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tull. This suggests that Phoenix effectively semi-camouflaged their Western-inspired image by consciously—or unconsciously—adopting the appearance of traditional Romanian figures, thereby also conforming to the Party's expectations (Lipan 2022, 33:00-34:05).

In the same interview, Lipan also remarks on the relatively liberal cultural climate of Romania in the late 1960s and early 1970s, highlighting the prevalence of parties, alcohol consumption, and the inclusion of Western music in bands' repertoires, including songs by The Rolling Stones (Lipan 2022, 29:30-32:33). Moreover, Lipan explains that although the Communist Party initially tolerated the band's success, even a single "wrong word" in Phoenix's repertoire could have triggered unwanted unrest among the youth (Lipan 2022, 36:40-37:00). He also recounts attempting to use Nicu Ceaușescu (Nicolae Ceaușescu's son) as a contact to obtain a visa, an effort that ultimately proved unsuccessful (Lipan 2022, 37:00-37:11). Ultimately, led by Phoenix leader Nicu Covaci, Ovidiu Lipan (along with band members Erlend Krauser and Josef Kappl) fled Romania for Germany in June 1977, hidden inside Marshall amplifiers (Covaci 1994, 427–432). In an interview I conducted with bass player Josef Kappl in 2023, he described the yoga position Covaci taught the band members to adopt inside the amplifiers, as well as Lipan's panicked reaction that nearly led to their discovery (Josef Kappl, personal communication, 2023). After returning to Romania in the 1990s, Lipan released several world-music-oriented recordings, including *Visul Toboșarului (The Drummer's Dream)* and later songs influenced by Macedonian music, such as "Margareta", in 2002. None of these projects achieved the same level of success as Phoenix in the 1970s.

In an interview with Romanian newspaper *Adevărul* published in 2022, Phoenix drummer Costin Petrescu also mentions his decision to leave Communist Romania, noting his passion for architecture and other music styles such as jazz and contemporary music (Petrescu 2022). He states:

I went on several tours in different countries with the band Hyperion. One of the concerts took place in Lisbon, and in Paris I had some architect friends who suggested that I stay. And it was the right decision. I was able to do what I enjoy: architecture. It was a surprise: in 1984 I didn't even know how a drafting plotter or a photocopier worked, but there I learned all the ins and outs of the profession. Gradually, I moved up the ranks quite quickly. At two or three architectural firms I became a project manager, and I had the chance to work on some fairly important projects (Petrescu 2022, author's translation).

Two points are worth noting. First, Ovidiu Lipan's willingness to risk his life appears to have stemmed from a desire for artistic freedom and frustration with the limitations imposed by the Communist Party, whereas Costin Petrescu's decision to leave Romania seems to have been motivated more by a practical wish to pursue architecture.

Second, neither of these drummers achieved notable success abroad. Despite the technical complexity of the music performed by bands such as Phoenix, their limited international impact suggests that factors beyond skill were decisive. According to an interview given by Ovidiu Lipan to Romanian journalist Denise Rifai, language barriers further complicated their efforts to establish themselves professionally outside Romania (Lipan 2022, 39:20-39:37). These observations underscore that skill alone did not guarantee success outside Romania; institutional access and social connections were essential in determining professional outcomes.

Conclusions

The drummers of Romanian progressive rock in the 1970s navigated a uniquely challenging musical and political landscape, producing work that was simultaneously inventive, technically sophisticated, and rooted in local culture. Confronted with limited

access to formal musical education, scarce and low-quality instruments, and the pervasive ideological pressures of the Ceaușescu regime, musicians such as Costin Petrescu, Ovidiu Lipan, Mihai Farcaș, and Mihai Cernea developed a distinctive drumming vocabulary that combined improvisation, folkloric rhythmic patterns, and influences from Western rock and jazz drummers.

Their creative solutions, ranging from constructing or modifying instruments to integrating complex compound meters and timbres derived from folk music, demonstrate that artistic innovation under censorship can yield novel musical languages. The analysis of Phoenix, Sfinx, and Progresiv TM reveals that these drummers were not only technically adaptive but also strategically savvy, aligning their artistic goals with the ideological frameworks of the Socialist Republic of Romania. In some cases, this involved subtle forms of camouflage, such as Phoenix adopting the visual markers of traditional haidouks or deploying complex time signatures to satisfy both personal choices and political imperatives.

Yet, even when bands achieved apparent domestic success, the broader political constraints limited their capacity to translate that success internationally. Lipan's dramatic escape in 1977 and Petrescu's emigration highlight different trajectories shaped by contrasting motivations such as artistic freedom versus professional pragmatism, while their subsequent careers underscore the difficulty of negotiating foreign cultural landscapes, where language barriers and limited access to networks impeded international recognition.

Taken together, these findings illustrate the interplay between technical skill, creativity, and socio-political context in the formation of Romanian progressive rock drumming. The drummers' work in the 1970s exemplifies how musicians operating under restrictive regimes can generate original, sophisticated musical languages that engage with both local traditions and global musical currents. At the same time, the limitations they faced abroad remind us that artistic innovation alone is insufficient to guarantee transnational success. Ultimately, the careers of these drummers illuminate both the resilience of creative practice under authoritarianism and the complex ways in which music mediates between local identity, political constraint, and the global artistic sphere.

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SUMMARY

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The drummers of 1970s progressive rock in The Socialist Republic of Romania: creative solutions under censorship

This research analyzes the evolution, musical language and creative solutions of drummers in Romanian progressive rock during the 1970s, a period defined by the syncretism between indigenous folkloric influences and Western rock aesthetics. Based on interviews conducted with drummers Mihai Farcaș (Progresiv TM) and Costin Petrescu (Phoenix), combined with musical analysis of representative albums, the study identifies common characteristics of drummers who embraced the genre in the 1970s: autodidacticism, improvisation in instrument construction, use of compound meters derived from traditional Romanian music, and influences from Western drummers. The study contextualizes these developments within the broader rock movement and examines how political pressures paradoxically fostered creative solutions. Such solutions encompassed not only musical innovations in rhythm and meter, but also physical ingenuity in instrument construction and ideological strategies to navigate censorship and, ultimately, escape Romania.