

NINUCA OȘANU POP – A LIFE DEDICATED TO MUSIC

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authored numerous articles, interviews, reviews and previews in the *Intermezzo* journal and in the *Făclia* newspaper. In October 2014 she started writing the music column of the *Steaua* cultural magazine. In the month of February this year she went on an Erasmus fellowship at the University of Cambridge, England and, during the summer, she undertook an Erasmus Traineeship at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Vienna.

ABSTRACT

In 2016, the academic community of Cluj-Napoca celebrated one of the foremost representatives of the Romanian piano school: Professor, Ph.D. Ninuca Oșanu Pop. Born in 1941 as the only daughter of Ana and Grigore Oșanu, Ninuca Pop attended the courses of the Secondary School of Music in Cluj and later those of the “Gheorghe Dima” Conservatory, from where she graduated in 1962, with a “Certificate of Merit”. Between 1962 and 2001, the eminent teacher carried out a prolific activity as a teacher, using her tact and competence to shape the future of dozens of students. In parallel, she was engaged in a rich artistic activity: concerts as soloist of different Philharmonic Orchestras, solo and chamber recitals. Ninuca Oșanu Pop has contributed valuable works to the world of music: *Elemente specifice scriiturii pianistice enesciene* [Specific Features of Enescu’s Piano Music] (doctoral thesis), *Antologia documentară Ana Voileanu-Nicoară* [Documentary Anthology Ana Voileanu-Nicoară], homage volume, *Sigismund Toduță: destăinuiri, documente, mărturii* [Sigismund Toduță: Confessions, Documents, Testimonies] (coordinator). Her remarkable teaching, artistic and musicological activity was highly appreciated and rewarded over time with numerous awards, diplomas and medals.

Keywords: Cluj piano school, Ninuca Oșanu Pop, anniversary, Alfred Cortot, Ecaterina Fotino-Negru

Over the course of its history, the “Gheorghe Dima” Academy of Music has gathered a galaxy of prominent personalities who have transformed its walls into a city of knowledge, and their work into an apostolic mission and a communion of ideals. The work of these light-bearing teachers has been beautifully reflected in the growth of generations of students who have in turn become great masters in their own right. One of these outstanding figures is pianist Ninuca Oșanu Pop, Professor Ph.D., whose extensive and fervent artistic and scientific activity has left an indelible mark on the piano school of the city of Cluj-Napoca. Her biography is a vivid reflection of values such as devotion, dedication and mastership. Celebrating the personality of this distinguished great lady of the Romanian piano music therefore becomes a heartfelt obligation.

Born in 1941 as the only daughter of Ana and Grigore Oșanu, Ninuca Pop started playing the piano at the age of six. She then attended the courses of the Secondary School of Music in Cluj and later those of the “Gheorghe Dima” Conservatory, from where she graduated in 1962, with a “Certificate of Merit”. After completing her undergraduate musical and piano studies under the guidance of the eminent teachers Ecaterina Herțegh, Ana Voileanu-Nicoară and Ecaterina Fotino-Negru, she undertook postgraduate studies in Bucharest, Budapest, Weimar and Siena (in 1970, with Professor Guido Agosti). Maestro Sigismund Toduță opened her eyes to the field of musicological research, inviting her to attend his famous courses, alongside the students of the Composition department. In a recommendation made in 1984, the Maestro wrote the following words about the young pianist: „Talent and perseverance, along with an insatiable want for knowledge and thirst for culture were harmoniously intertwined during the future musician’s formative years”. In the same document, the composer emphasizes the young pianist’s outstanding achievements in the performance of various musical genres and styles, as well „as her remarkable results in the field of teaching. [...] This brief overview of her artistic profile is complemented by high moral standards and a generous dedication to the progress of musical education”¹.

These qualities have been appreciated over time by many generations of students that she has mentored during her prolific career as a teacher. In 1962 she joined the teaching staff as an instructor at the Piano Department. This was also the year when Sigismund Toduță, one of the personalities who outlined the main directions of development of the higher musical education of Cluj-Napoca, took office as rector. The Maestro’s influence on the young pianist’s entire activity was profound, and his erudition and high demands guided her towards a new style of

¹ Sigismund Toduță, *Recomandare*, 1984.

work, marked by *seriousness, commitment and responsibility*. These are the attributes that have defined Ninuca Oșanu Pop's personality and the principles that have guided her since the beginning of her career. Working with passion and perseverance, she progressed through the academic hierarchy until she reached the rank of professor, in 1991. Throughout her nearly fifty years of teaching, she efficiently, tactfully and passionately shaped the future of dozens of students who currently work in Romania, in nine other European countries, in Mexico and in the United States of America, as performers and/or school or university teachers. The success of her teaching methods is reflected in the large number of students from her class – over twenty – who have won numerous awards at prestigious national and international competitions. Her courses in piano teaching methodology have always been a model of clarity and concision, enabling students to discover the secrets of masterful teaching.



*Prof. Ph.D. Ninuca Oșanu Pop
Anniversary Recital, March 30, 2016, "Gheorghe Dima" Academy of Music
Photo: Sorin Văcar*

Since her earliest years of apprenticeship in the art of piano playing, Ninuca Oșanu Pop has been a constant and conspicuous presence in the musical life of the city of Cluj-Napoca. Her pianistic debut in 1949 paved the way for her participation in numerous school productions, until in 1953 she became soloist in

the orchestra of the Middle School of Music directed by Professor Mihai Guttman, performing works by Haydn, Mozart, Bach and Beethoven. Her piano performances were rewarded with Diplomas of Honour at the annual "Republican Festivals" held in Bucharest between 1956 and 1960, and in 1961 she was among the winners of the "George Enescu" National Competition. Between 1964 and 1988 she gave numerous concerts as a soloist of several State Philharmonic Orchestras, working with conductors such as Emil Simon, Mircea Cristescu, Remus Georgescu, Viktor Dubrovski (U.S.S.R.), Eugen Pricope, Acél Ervin, Jan Hugo Huss, Eliodor Rău, Alexandru Munteanu and many others, in sixteen Romanian cities, receiving great appreciation from public and media alike.

A memorable moment was the world première of Sigismund Toduță's *Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra*, performed by the Cluj-Napoca Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Emil Simon on October 1, 1987, in the opening concert of the "Cluj Musical Autumn" Festival. The event was received with great acclaim in the press of the time. Alexandru Pașcanu, who had attended the concert, wrote:

Here, the soloist, Ninuca Oșanu Pop, deserves great admiration for the difficult exam passed "con brio" first for having understood and adhered to the spiritual content of the Concerto, and secondly for the control of her fingers. A sober, profoundly restrained and unostentatious pianist, she delivered a flawless performance of the score, totally devoid of theatricality, focused solely on bringing out the musical line.¹

Ninuca Oșanu Pop has been an active participant in the Conservatory's concert seasons, performing both as a soloist and in different chamber ensembles, in collaboration with colleagues from the Piano Department or from other departments. In her *piano recitals*, besides the traditional repertoire, she has shown a special interest in promoting the Romanian piano music, as is proven by the numerous recitals devoted exclusively to the works of George Enescu (1975), held in Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Piatra Neamț, by the Sigismund Toduță recital that she gave in Cluj-Napoca (1999) and by an impressive list of première performances.

From her *chamber music* repertoire we mention the complete Sonatas for Flute and Piano by J. S. Bach and G. Fr. Händel (1965-1966), performed with flutist Gavril Costea, the Enescu recital performed in collaboration with violinist Casiu Barbu (1975) and the Sonatas for Piano and Violin by Ludwig van Beethoven, performed with Ladislau Kiss (1977). The chamber music programs included mostly works from the Classical and Romantic repertoire – two pianos,

¹ Alexandru Pașcanu, *Un ethos inconfundabil*, in: „Tribuna”, the *Muzica* column, Issue 1621, January 14, 1988.

piano trio and quartet –, performed in collaboration with Nina Panieva Sebesi, Voichița Tiniș, Victoria Nicolae, Liviu Vancea, Petre Baci, Ilse L. Herbert, in Cluj-Napoca and in other Romanian cities. The pianist expanded her performance palette with the lied accompaniments performed in the recitals and recordings made with Ion Budoiu, Iulian Jurja, Alexandru Fărcaș, Edith Simon, Ana Rusu, Liliana Bizineche, Ramona Coman and many others.

As a student of the eminent teacher Ecaterina Fotino-Negru, a graduate of the École Normale de Musique in Paris, Alfred Cortot's class, Ninuca Oșanu received the technical and musical guidance offered by this prestigious school. The French composers were given due attention. Thus, in addition to the works of Debussy and Ravel, which she had learned during the class, her repertoire started to include works studied independently, such as the Cycle of *Preludes* and *Oiseaux exotiques* for solo piano and wind ensemble by Olivier Messiaen, and the *Sonata No. 2* by André Jolivet, performed in première in Cluj-Napoca. On the occasion of his visit to the "Gheorghe Dima" Academy of Music, composer André Jolivet expressed his appreciation of the performer, in an autograph given on the first page of the score:

A mille Ninouka Oșanu, avec tous mes compliments pour sa si musicale interprétation de cette Sonate, avec mon amicale gratitude.

As a member of the "Ars Nova" contemporary music ensemble conducted by composer and conductor Cornel Țăranu, she has participated in its intense concert activity ever since its foundation (1968), performing in concerts, national and international festivals, recordings for the Romanian Radio Society and CDs, in Romania and in eight other European countries.

The pianist's repertoire includes an impressive number of works: over 420 titles encompassing the works of 151 composers. Of the 106 first performances presented to the public, half were absolute world premières.

A musician with multiple interests, Ninuca Oșanu Pop has paid particular attention to the development of new piano textbooks and methods for the teaching of music and piano playing to children:

– Olga Suceava: *Abecedar muzical* [Musical ABC]¹, whose beneficial effects on generations of children did not take long to appear;

– Carola Grindea și elevii săi: *Ne compunem propria muzică* [Carola Grindea and Her Pupils: We Make Our Own Music]²;

¹ Olga Suceava, *Abecedar muzical*, Imago Publishing House, Sibiu, 1996. Preface by Prof. Ninuca Oșanu Pop.

² Carola Grindea și elevii săi: *Ne compunem propria muzică*, Arpeggione Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1998. Afterword by Prof. Ninuca Oșanu Pop.

– Maria Jidav – *ABC pentru pian* [ABC for Piano]¹.

By writing the afterwords to these piano methods, which reflected the results of long and successful teaching careers, the distinguished professor praised their authors' ingenuity and emphasized the importance of these new piano method books in expanding the choice options and in stimulating the exchange of ideas, providing valuable assistance to piano teachers as well as to the parents who want to participate in the supervision of their children.

In the field of scientific research, worth mentioning are the carefully documented and thoroughly prepared communications presented at the annual *Sessions* of the teachers from the Conservatory and at other national and international Symposia, followed by their publication in specialized journals, under the auspices of the Cluj-Napoca and Iași Conservatories, the UNESCO commission and EMS Munich. Added to these are the numerous articles, interviews and radio and TV shows in which she has tirelessly promoted the institution's many and varied activities.

In 2002, the eminent professor obtained the Ph.D. title in Cluj-Napoca, under the supervision of Academician, Professor Ph.D. Cornel Țăranu, with a high-quality and original thesis that integrated her entire didactic and artistic vision: *Elemente specifice scriiturii pianistice enesciene* [Specific Features of Enescu's Piano Music], which was published the following year by the MediaMusica Publishing House in Cluj-Napoca. Among her works of an exceptional musicological value, we mention: *Antologia documentară Ana Voileanu-Nicoară*² and the volume of homage *Sigismund Toduță: destăinuiri, documente, mărturii*³.

For over a quarter of a century, Ninuca Oșanu Pop selflessly served in a number of senior positions, thereby contributing to the strengthening of the institution's prestige. She was successively *Dean* of the Faculty of Performance and Singing (1979-1984), *Rector* of the "Gheorghe Dima" Conservatory (1984-1990) and *Head* of the Piano Department (1990-2004). While ensuring the smooth functioning of the educational process, she also organized the artistic seasons (1979-1990), supported the promotion of young students in concerts and competitions and initiated numerous musical events that would propel them in their artistic careers. Of these, the most important one was the organization, beginning with December 1985, of the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Performance Competition. While in the

¹ Maria Jidav, *ABC pentru pian*, MediaMusica Publishing House, Academia de Muzică "Gheorghe Dima", Cluj-Napoca, 1999. Afterword by Prof. Ninuca Oșanu Pop.

² Ninuca Oșanu Pop, *Antologia documentară Ana Voileanu-Nicoară*, MediaMusica Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2005.

³ Ninuca Oșanu Pop (coordinator), *Sigismund Toduță: destăinuiri, documente, mărturii* Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2008.

beginning it was organized at an inter-county level, it has currently become an international competition that attracts young talents from all over the world.

In 1991, Ninuca Oșanu Pop was one of the founding members of the "Sigismund Toduță" Foundation, where she served as *President* between 2001 and 2011. In this capacity she initiated a variety of projects designed for the preservation and dissemination of the composer's heritage: annual symposia, the publication of communications in *Studii toduțiene* (2004), the publication of the composer's complete lieder and solo piano works (Arpeggione Publishing House), conferences, concerts, competitions and scholarships for students. The 100th anniversary of the great composer's birth (2008) was a major event attended by top soloists and musical ensembles from Cluj-Napoca. In March 2016, Associate Professor Ph.D. Ecaterina Banciu, in her capacity as President of the "Sigismund Toduță" Foundation, awarded Professor Ninuca Oșanu Pop with the *Diploma of Honour* in recognition of her piano career and her research and coordination work on Sigismund Toduță's oeuvre.

Beginning with 1971, her outstanding artistic, pedagogical and musicological career has been greatly appreciated and rewarded with several awards, diplomas and medals, among which we will only mention a few:

- *The Medal for Distinction in Labour conferred by the State Council* – 1971;
- *The Title of "Honorary Citizen of the City of Cluj-Napoca"* – 1994;
- *The Order "Merit for Education in Rank of Commander"* – 2004;
- *The Diploma: Honour for Cluj*, awarded by the Cluj-Napoca County Prefecture – 2015.

Her remarkable pedagogical qualities, coupled with her artistic and musicological career, her rich cultural and musical background, her active involvement in the destiny of the Academy of Music and her significant contribution to the establishment and recognition of the higher musical education of Cluj-Napoca have earned Professor Ninuca Oșanu Pop our respect and appreciation, all the more so as for countless generations of musicians she has been a model to whom we will always bow in reverence.

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