

The Cultural Prelude to Bessarabia's Union with Romania

ION NEGREI



A symphony orchestra put together and conducted by GEORGE ENESCU during the refuge in Iași (the First World War). SOURCE: ANDREI TUDOR, **George Enescu: Viața în imagini** (Bucharest, 1961).

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THE POLITICAL activities for the preparation of the Union of 27 March 1918 were supported by cultural events of downright historic importance. The cultural revival that the Bessarabian Romanians were experiencing at the beginning of 1918 was compared by the publicist George Tofan with a clear rain over a droughty soil. “On the dry soil of Bessarabia”—the *România Nouă* journalist noted—“a beneficent rain has been falling, one of those rains that have the divine gift of turning a grim wasteland into a charming garden: it is the rain of national culture, after which everything that has been dry and withered is revived and starts a new life.” In other words, in the winter and spring of 1918, Bessarabia was experiencing a recovery of its ethnic identity, a rebirth of the national consciousness of a people “whose soul had lived in darkness and cold for a whole century.”²¹

The First Tours of the Iași National Theatre in Kishinev

ON 23 January 1918, at the invitation of the Făclia Cultural Enlightenment Society (the president of which, teacher Vasile Țanțu, was at that moment also the leader of the Moldovan Bloc in the Country Council), in Kishinev arrived, for their first tour in Bessarabia, the troupe of the Iași National Theatre, headed by their director, writer Mihail Sadoveanu.²

The Iași troupe made their debut in Kishinev on 24 January 1918, a memorable and remarkable day in the history of the Romanian nation and of its Moldovan branch. This debut day had not been chosen by accident. On that day, Romanians celebrated the 59th anniversary of the union of the Romanian Principalities. Additionally, on that day the deputies in the Country Council had also scheduled the meeting of the Bessarabian legislature, which would proclaim the independence of the Moldovan Democratic Republic. According to the agenda, the meeting of the Country Council was opened on the evening of 23 January 1918, was carried out amid great enthusiasm, and concluded after midnight, on 24 January. The declaration of independence, unanimously adopted, represented the official historical document through which the Moldovan Democratic Republic was definitively breaking away from Russia,³ under whose domination it had been for more than one hundred years. Bessarabia's Parliament motivated their important decision as follows:

Brought together by the blood spilt under the flag of revolution, we have shown our unflinching desire to live in a union with the republics that were established on the lands of the former Russian Empire, to create together the Russian Federative Democratic Republic.

But the times are changing, and the political circumstances today are completely adverse to the creation of this union. The Democratic Republic of Ukraine, our neighbor on the other side of the Dniester, has proclaimed its independence, and so we have broken away from Russia and the republics established on its former territories.

Under such circumstances, and in strong connection with the people's will, we are forced to proclaim the free, fully fledged, unsubjugated Moldovan Democratic Republic, which has the right to decide its own fate in the future...⁴

The meeting of the Country Council on 23–24 January 1918 concluded amid rapturous applause, slogans were chanted in support of the decisions made, while deputies carried Ion Inculeț, president of the Country Council, in their arms. A general state of euphoria engulfed the entire audience. By the decisions made, Bessarabia was finally breaking away from its former master, and was trying to shape its own historical destiny. “At sunrise, we will see great celebrations

in the streets of our city. And on this special day, we have proclaimed our independence!”⁵—solemnly declared from the tribune of the Country Council, early on the historic day of 24 January 1918, Pantelimon Erhan, minister of Public Instruction, who had presented in the meeting the report on the declaration of independence.

Indeed, in the early morning of Wednesday, 24 January 1918, the city of Kishinev was prepared to celebrate the union of the Romanian Principalities, which became organically intertwined with the Moldovan Republic’s Independence Day. Buildings all over the city were decorated with tricolor national flags. Since it was a working day, the authorities suspended the activities in institutions, schools, commercial units, etc. The festivities started with a solemn religious service at the city’s Cathedral, officiated by Archbishop Anastasius, assisted by a group of 24 priests. Members of the Government and Parliament of the Moldovan Republic, Romanian officers, as well as inhabitants of the city and of the neighboring settlements also participated. At the end of the religious service, Archbishop Anastasius (of Russian nationality) delivered a speech in which he saluted the allied states, Romania and its army, which had come to help Bessarabia. Further on, the crowds watched the joint military parade of Moldovan and Romanian soldiers; the parade was welcomed by General Ernest Broșteanu, commander of the 11th Division. As the troops were marching through the central square of the city, six planes made a flyby, an action that gave a spectacular note to the entire celebration.⁶ At noon, on the occasion of the Principalities’ Union Day, General Ernest Broșteanu hosted a reception in honor of the Moldovan Republic’s authorities and of the communal organizations. The major topic of the public discourses given in those days was the idea of uniting all the Romanian principalities with the Kingdom of Romania. The subject was present in the interventions of the speakers participating in the reception. If President Ion Inculeț spoke about that topic in a more euphemistic manner, the other orators—Pan Halippa, Daniel Ciugureanu, Ion Pelivan, Teodor Neaga, and others—were more outspoken, and Pavel Gore, president of the Cultural Society of the Romanians in Bessarabia, concluded his speech by shouting “Long live the Union!”⁷ At the end of the reception, the participants went out on the streets and danced the *Union Hora*. The *România Nouă* newspaper (it was under this name that the former *Ardealul* gazette, edited by the Transylvanian Onisifor Ghibu, would be released as of 24 January 1918) wrote: “Everybody was elated; they could only see how the dreams of our predecessors and even our own dreams are becoming a reality. From this moment on, our people has clearly started their unification work.”⁸

Mihail Sadoveanu, director of the Iași National Theatre, who had participated in the festivities, described in insightful words the completely enthusiastic

atmosphere reigning over Kishinev that day: “Greetings are made at the Casino [the Hall of the Gentry Assembly in Kishinev, where the reception was held]. Warm speeches are delivered. Then, suddenly, everybody goes out. The orchestra sing the *Union Hora*, and brothers from Bessarabia and Romania and the other countries of the Romanian people take their hands, and, in rows, amid cheers, start the fraternity dance. The enthusiasm is indescribable. No one has expected this. The *hora* of our secular aspirations expands under the clear skies of Kishinev, and everywhere around me all I see are smiling faces and tears of joy.”⁹ Then, in the same hall, a “literary gathering was held, where poems were read, and the Moldovan choir sang Romanian patriotic and national songs.”¹⁰

The last cultural manifestations on the day of 24 January 1918 were performed by the actors of the Iași National Theatre, who had arrived in Kishinev. In the evening, the spectators admired the extraordinary acting skills of the maestros of the Romanian theatre in the drama *Fântâna Blanduziei* (The fountain of Bandusia) written by Vasile Alecsandri.

The next day, 25 January, another literary gathering was held, where the great writer Mihail Sadoveanu read before a numerous audience several excerpts from Ion Creangă’s work,¹¹ and in the evening they performed the play *Răzvan și Vidra* (Răzvan and Vidra), written by B. P. Hasdeu, “a famous Bessarabian Moldovan writer,” as he was presented on the posters released the day before the play. At the end of the evening, in front of all participants—spectators and artists—Vasile Țanțu, president of the Făclia Cultural Society, read a thank you letter for the shows presented, which expressed the hope of the Bessarabian Romanians “of one day being all Romanians and of creating all together a new Romania.” In his memoirs, Pan Halippa, who participated in the events, mentioned that, as a sign of gratitude, “the artists received a beautiful crown of laurels, made of silver, as well as an impressive thank you letter.”¹² The letter was then given to Mihail Sadoveanu, the director of the Iași National Theatre. Vasile Țanțu’s message was received with great enthusiasm by the participants, as he was several times interrupted by applause and cheering: “Long live Greater Romania! Long live New Romania!” After the end of the show and of the expressions of gratitude, the enlivened public asked the military orchestra to perform the anthem *Deșteaptă-te, române!* (Awaken, Romanian!). Complying with the request, the orchestra performed the anthem, and the audience stood up for the song of the 1848 revolutionaries. Reflecting upon that memorable event, the *România Nouă* newspaper emphasized the excerpt from the letter read by Vasile Țanțu, which stated that the Romanians in Bessarabia had expressed their hope that their province would be “a part of the new Romania of tomorrow,” and that for them “today there is no boundary left, and over the Dniester River there is no other bridge to cross than the one that helps their half a million brothers, who have also awakened to a national life.”¹³

As president of the Romanian Writers' Society, Mihail Sadoveanu, deeply touched by the warm welcome given to the Iași artists and by the greetings from the audience, addressed "to the Moldovan people in Bessarabia" a call from their brothers on this side of "Saint Stephen the Great's land," inviting them to unite with their mother country. In the *România Nouă* newspaper, the great wordsmith impressively described the pain and sorrow felt by the Romanian people after the seizure of the part of Moldavia located between the Prut and the Dniester rivers by the Russian Empire, on 16 May 1812:

More than a century ago, hostile circumstances separated us, and between us, brothers of the same blood, a dark wall rose. Only God knows how you managed to live, oppressed by the tsarist terror and darkness, with no liberty and no light. From our soul to yours nothing was able to cross over. We, free on our Romanian land, would sadly watch as our brothers from Bessarabia withered and died without being able to help them. . . . But the day of freedom has come. Over the cursed waters of the Prut River, a bridge has been built. The time has finally come for us to extend our hands and embrace one another. The time for fraternization, when brothers come together, is here. We were once together in the country of Saint Stephen the Great, we fought and suffered together for many centuries. Dear brothers, the time has come for the Moldovan people to know no boundaries in their love of our sweet language. Culture, language, and education now have to unite us for eternity, and we shall remain inseparable until the end of time.

Mihail Sadoveanu concluded his call with the immortal words: "Romanians from the four corners of the land, now or never, / Be united in the way you think, be united in the way you feel!"¹⁴

From a letter written by Mihail Sadoveanu to Onisifor Ghibu on 31 January 1918 we find out that, before leaving Kishinev after their first tour, the director of the Iași National Theatre agreed with Vasile Țanțu, the president of the Făclia Cultural Enlightenment Society, on "the organization of regular theatrical performances in Kishinev and Bessarabia." When he returned to Iași, Mihail Sadoveanu started the preparations for a new tour in Bessarabia, this time with the plays *Apus de soare* (Sundown) and *Răzvan și Vidra*. Moreover, he sent to Kishinev the music scores for the choirs that might perform in the plays *Cinel-Cinel* and *Baba Hârca* (The hag), which he intended to stage in Kishinev, "so that the choir there can learn them, and we shall only bring the actors."¹⁵

At the middle of February 1918, the drama troupe of the Iași National Theatre went back to Kishinev. This time, the plays were performed in the Theatre Hall of the Făclia Society, which had recently been inaugurated. On 13 February 1918, the actors of the Iași National Theatre performed the play

Răzvan și Vidra, based on the work of B. P. Hasdeu,¹⁶ while the following day they performed the drama in four acts *Apus de soare*, written by writer Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea, the cast of which included famous Romanian actors. The part of Stephen the Great was played by Constantin I. Notarra, one of the most important actors of the Romanian theatre. For the first time, the greatest and most celebrated prince of Moldavia, about whom only historical legends had been heard in Bessarabia, addressed the great-grandchildren and the great-great-grandchildren of the free Bessarabian peasants, obviously, from the stage. From their perspective, Stephen the Great was the embodiment of the most sacred icon of the Moldovan soul.

The press in Bessarabia and the one in the Old Kingdom widely presented the tours of the Iași National Theatre in Kishinev. George Tofan, a journalist for the *România Nouă* newspaper, described those winter evenings as “historic days,” when on the stage of the Kishinev Theatre was presented, to a numerous audience, the historical drama *Apus de soare* by Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea, with Constantin I. Notarra masterfully playing Stephen the Great.¹⁷ The Bessarabian spectators had the opportunity to meet the great maestros of Romanian theatre, since in those years (1916–1918) the troupe of the Iași National Theatre also included famous artists from the Bucharest and Craiova National Theatres, who had fled from the war to the old capital of Moldavia. The actresses Aglaia Pruteanu and Olimpia Bârsan, the actors State Dragomir, Victor Antonescu, Miron Popovici, and Vasile Brezeanu, as well as other maestros of the Romanian theatre made an unforgettable impression on the Bessarabian audience.¹⁸ Even though many of the Bessarabian spectators were not yet familiar with the modern literary language in which Vasile Alecsandri’s and Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu’s plays had been written, the shows and the literary and artistic gatherings, with the participation of the actors from Iași and with Mihail Sadoveanu’s speech, deeply marked the Bessarabian consciousness, traumatized by the oppressive tsarist regime. Years later, when Pantelimon Halippa remembered those days, he wrote: “One may say that Bessarabia’s capital saw then a celebration that would never fade from our memory.”¹⁹

Apart from the laudatory appreciations, some newspapers also expressed rather reserved opinions. The author of the review published in the *Cuvânt moldovenesc* newspaper noted, among other things, that “the language in which *Fântâna Blanduziei* was written was too complicated for the Bessarabian spectator, while the play *Răzvan și Vidra* was more accessible.”²⁰ Some communication problems between actors and spectators were noticed by the writer Dumitru Iov, who, in 1919, wrote that the plays *Fântâna Blanduziei*, *Apus de soare* (with Nottara), and *Răzvan și Vidra*, performed the previous year, “did not impress those Bessarabians who did not have historical knowledge.”²¹

Towards the end of March 1918, a troupe of the Iași National Theatre went on a new tour in Bessarabia. On 20 March, they performed in Kishinev the musical comedy *Baba Hârca* by Matei Millo, and the comedy in one act *Doi surzi* (Two deaf men), while on 21 March they performed *Cinel-Cinel* and *Florin și Florica* (Florin and Florica) by Vasile Alecsandri. Then, the troupe continued their Bessarabian tour to Orhei, Soroca, and Bălți.²²

The situation of theatrical performances in Kishinev and Bessarabia was contradictory. If for one important segment of the spectators there was a problem of communication and a lack of knowledge about the Romanian history, literature, and culture, the Bessarabian elites did not find great satisfaction in a repertoire composed of “easy or obsolete plays,”²³ as an art reporter qualified them. Condemning such a way of treating the audience, the renowned Romanian actor, Ion Manolescu, argued: “It is wrong to believe that the people from Bessarabia, Bukovina, or Transylvania know nothing about theatre, and that we have to start with Alecsandri’s vaudevilles, which were fairly successful, but at their time.”²⁴ Indeed, in 1908–1910 and even earlier, the audience in Bessarabia had had the opportunity to see shows based on Vasile Alecsandri’s plays, performed by amateur artists led by Gheorghe Madan, an actor at the Bucharest National Theatre, and by troupes of Romanian artists who later travelled to Bessarabia, and who had those plays in their repertoires.²⁵ A superficial approach to the repertoire policy made some Bessarabians (and not only them) believe that Romania “did not have a theatre repertoire, or valuable artists,”²⁶ which was not at all true. The financial problems, which were undoubtedly present at a certain point, could not have been an impediment in the selection and to sending to Bessarabia of a troupe made up of the best artists, “with plays selected from the classical and modern Romanian repertoire.” The quote was taken from the correspondence published in the *Sfatul Țării* newspaper, which also underlined that “the taste for theatre is incredibly developed in Bessarabia, and the moral success will undoubtedly be the expected one.”²⁷

The Tour of the Iași Symphony Orchestra: George Enescu in Kishinev

THE BESSARABIANS’ skill and refined taste for musical culture was demonstrated on the occasion of the Iași Symphony Orchestra’s tour in Kishinev, led by maestro George Enescu. Invited to the Bessarabian capital by the Transylvanian Onisifor Ghibu, the Moldovan George Enescu, through his concerts, had the mission of proving to the Bessarabians, “both

Moldovan and Russian, that we [Romanians] have great arts and artists, too.”²⁸ As such, at the end of March 1918 in Kishinev, which was famed as a musical city (having hosted a section of the Russian Imperial Music Society, a school of music, and two other musical programs), George Enescu, the great violinist, composer, and conductor, arrived on his first artistic tour in that part of the Romanian land. He came to Kishinev with a large group of musicians (the whole orchestra) “to make Bessarabia see that we have many good elements, not just one here and there.”²⁹

The *România Nouă* gazette made the following presentation of George Enescu: “The unrivalled artist who will conduct three great concerts in Kishinev is one of the most outstanding glories the Romanian people has had so far, . . . he is so famous and loved on the other side of the Prut River, but completely unknown in Bessarabia.”³⁰ Responsible for this was the oppressive tsarist regime. “For one hundred years the Prut River was such a mighty wall that it almost completely blocked the spiritual relations between the brothers of the same tongue. The Bessarabian Moldovans knew nothing of what was happening in the other Romanian territories; they did not know the great personalities of their people, they did not even know the ones who stood out from among them, like A. Donici, Al. Russo, B. P. Hasdeu, and others.”³¹

In the Great Hall of the Gentry Assembly in Kishinev, the symphony orchestra under the baton of maestro George Enescu performed three outstanding concerts. On 24 March 1918, George Enescu conducted the Iași Symphony Orchestra, having Nicu Caravia as piano soloist. They interpreted *Overture to Oberon* by Weber, *Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra* by Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 7* by Beethoven, and a piece by Saint-Saëns. The second symphonic concert directed by maestro Enescu was held on Sunday, 25 March 1918, with Flor Breviman and Socrate Barozzi as soloists. They interpreted *Carnival in Paris* by Svendsen, *Concerto in A Minor for Cello and Orchestra* by Klughardt, *Danse macabre* by Saint-Saëns, and *Symphony No. 5* by Beethoven. The public was awed by the performance of the orchestra and by the skill of the conductor. The third performance, the maestro’s solo concert on the tour, was held on 28 March 1918, one day after the enactment of the great act of the union of Bessarabia with Romania. Accompanied by the symphony orchestra directed by Jean Bobescu, maestro George Enescu played the violin and interpreted works from the repertoire of the great world composers. He also played Tchaikovsky’s and Saint-Saëns’ *Concertos*, and Lalo’s *Symphonie Espagnole*. The *România Nouă* journalist enthusiastically reported that the public “was completely mesmerized.” At the end of the concert, the audience, gripped by “boundless fervor,” burst into applause and standing ovations, calling Enescu back on stage over and over again, and throwing countless flowers at the feet of the “soul-conquering” maestro.³²

In an interview to the correspondent of the *România Nouă* newspaper, maestro Enescu confessed that in Kishinev he had found “a public full of enthusiasm and desirous of beautiful things, and that from their attitude a strong culture can be unfolded.”³³ The maestro was pleasantly impressed by the “numerous participation of Russians to his concerts.”³⁴ Asked to express his opinion about Russian music, Enescu mentioned that “the Russian musical school is good, better than the English one, and can be placed immediately after the French and the German ones. It is definitely more interesting than the Italian one.”³⁵ The connection made with the Russian artistic/musical public in Kishinev offered the maestro the opportunity to recall his 1909 concerts in Petrograd and Moscow. During that tour, his first one in Russia, Enescu was strangely touched by the unexpected attitude of the Russian audience towards the Romanian rhapsodies. “These rhapsodies, unknown to the Russians, appeared to them as something disrespectful in the classical program illustrated by musical celebrities, while the same rhapsodies made a huge impression in Paris and Berlin.”³⁶

Maestro Enescu appreciated that Bessarabia was “a jewel from all points of view,” he thought it was his duty to motivate his contemporaries “to assist with all their means in the awakening of the people to the cultural and artistic life, by doing to our Moldovan brothers all the good they’ve been deprived of for so long.”³⁷ Maestro Enescu’s generosity was indeed endless. The proceeds of the concerts performed in Kishinev were donated to the Transylvanian refugees in Bessarabia, to the orphans of the Moldovan soldiers killed in the war, and to the Făclia Cultural Enlightenment Society in Kishinev.

During his almost week-long stay in Kishinev, the maestro had enough time to understand the artistic and musical realities of the city. Therefore, Enescu outlined a project of cultural construction for Bessarabia. He thought it was mandatory to establish a national conservatory in Kishinev, which, in his opinion, would be “of great artistic and national importance.” The local musical potential allowed for the accomplishment of that project. “The musical school here can grow into an outstanding music conservatory,” the maestro contended. In Kishinev, he found sufficient musical talent to set up a symphony orchestra. His project of cultural construction also foresaw the establishment in Kishinev of a university and of a Romanian arts museum.³⁸

When he returned to Iași, maestro Enescu shared with the *Teatrul de mâine* newspaper his impressions on the Kishinev tour, as well as his plan of cultural construction for Bessarabia. He said: “I would like to create there [in Kishinev] not only a Music Society, but also a Conservatory and a permanent Opera, with a well-organized orchestra, but this requires a lot of funds. This, however, has to be done as soon as possible, because, apart from the formal union that was

enacted [Bessarabia's union with Romania, voted by the Country Council on 27 March 1918], there is also a need for a spiritual union to show our Bessarabian brothers that here, in Romania, we have a well-defined culture."³⁹ Involved in the polemics on the Bessarabians' level of cultural knowledge, which was unfolding at that moment in Iași and in other Romanian cultural centers, Enescu thought it would be appropriate to mention that "the Bessarabian audience has always known how to appreciate the symphonic concerts at their real value. The people there are mostly cultivated. That is why they are very demanding, and we sent them fiddlers, dancers, and operetta artists with *Baba Hârca*, which made our Bessarabian brothers think we are more old-fashioned than they are. Our concerts, therefore, have provided great contrast and were quite well-appreciated."⁴⁰

In their turn, the Bessarabians highly valued Enescu's presence in Kishinev. "Enescu's presence in Bessarabia"—the *România Nouă* journalist wrote—"is of a defining cultural importance, magnified by the circumstances in which it occurred. Through the brilliance of his incomparable art, which language is too poor to describe, words too ordinary and timeworn, and the pen of the commoner too helpless, he has done more for the awakening and strengthening of our people than years of insistent propaganda."⁴¹

A GAINST THE backdrop of the democratic movements in Russia after the revolution of February 1917, the process of political emancipation carried out by the Bessarabian Romanians in 1917–1918 was supported by an ample movement of national revival and recovery of the ethnic identity. The cultural revival in the Bessarabian area was stimulated when Bessarabia (the Moldovan Democratic Republic) proclaimed, on 24 January 1918, its political independence following the vote in the Country Council, an event which opened new national and cultural horizons. In this new political context, the national cultural organizations, otherwise very modest, that existed in the area between the Prut and the Dniester rivers were supported by cultural institutions from Romania. The shows presented in Kishinev by the Iași National Theatre in the months of January and February 1918, as well as the concerts held before the Bessarabian audience by the Iași Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of maestro George Enescu in March 1918—on the same days when the Country Council voted for the declaration of unification of Bessarabia with Romania—represented a first occasion for the Bessarabian public to become familiar with the authentic Romanian cultural values from which they had been alienated during the century of tsarist occupation.



Notes

1. *România Nouă* (Kishinev), no. 60, 31 March 1918, apud Onisifor Ghibu, *Oameni între oameni: Amintiri* (Bucharest, 1990), 370.
2. *Sfatul Țării* (Kishinev), no. 17, 23 January 1918.
3. Ion Negrei, "Proclamarea independenței Republicii Democratice Moldovenești," *Cugetul: Revistă de istorie și cultură* (Kishinev) 3 (March 1998): 77–81.
4. Ștefan Ciobanu, *Unirea Basarabiei: Studiu și documente la mișcarea națională din Basarabia în anii 1917–1918* (Kishinev, 1993), 198.
5. *Sfatul Țării*, no. 19, 26 January 1918.
6. Ibid.
7. Ion Negrei, "Cronica zilei de 24 ianuarie 1918, la Chișinău," *Destin românesc: Revistă de istorie și cultură* 4 (15), 3 (61) (2009): 12–26.
8. *România Nouă*, no. 9, 27 January 1918, apud Onisifor Ghibu, *Pe baricadele vieții: În Basarabia revoluționară (1917–1918): Amintiri* (Kishinev, 1992), 519–520.
9. *România* (Iași), no. 330, 31 January 1918, apud Ghibu, *Oameni între oameni*, 161–162.
10. *Cuvânt moldovenesc* (Kishinev), no. 11 (326), 31 January 1918.
11. Ibid.
12. *Viața Basarabiei* (Kishinev) 4 (1942): 1–6.
13. *România Nouă*, no. 10, 30 January 1918.
14. Ibid., no. 11, 1 February 1918, apud Ghibu, *Pe baricadele vieții*, 523–524.
15. Ghibu, *Oameni între oameni*, 162.
16. *Sfatul Țării*, no. 33, 13 February 1918.
17. *România Nouă*, no. 23, 16 February 1918.
18. Leonid Cemortan, *Teatrul Național din Chișinău (1920–1935): Schiță istorică* (Kishinev, 2000), 12.
19. *Viața Basarabiei* 4 (1942): 1–6.
20. *Cuvânt moldovenesc*, 31 January 1918, apud Cemortan, 275.
21. *Rampa*, 19 July 1919, apud Cemortan, 275.
22. *România Nouă*, no. 58, 29 March 1918.
23. *Sfatul Țării*, 19 October 1919.
24. *Rampa*, 27 January 1919, apud Cemortan, 275.
25. Teodor Burada, *Istoria teatrului în Moldova* (Bucharest, 1975), 842; Aurelian Dănilă, *Opera din Chișinău: Privire retrospectivă* (Kishinev, 2005), 10.
26. *Sfatul Țării*, 19 October 1919.
27. Ibid.
28. Dănilă, 14.
29. Ibid.
30. *România Nouă*, no. 52, 23 March 1918.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., no. 59, 30 March 1918.
33. Ion Mateiu, *Renașterea Basarabiei: Pagini din lupta pentru unitatea națională* (Bucharest, 1921), 103.
34. Ibid., 104.

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 105.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 104–105.
39. *Teatrul de mâine*, 18 April 1918, apud Dănilă, 16.
40. Ibid.
41. *România Nouă*, no. 59, 30 March 1918.

Abstract

The Cultural Prelude to Bessarabia's Union with Romania

In the context of the democratic movements in Russia after the revolution of February 1917, the process of political emancipation carried out by the Bessarabian Romanians in 1917–1918 was supported by an ample movement of national revival and recovery of the ethnic identity. The cultural revival in the Bessarabian area was stimulated when Bessarabia (the Moldovan Democratic Republic) proclaimed, on 24 January 1918, its political independence following the vote in the Country Council, an event which opened new national and cultural horizons. In this new political context, the national cultural organizations, otherwise very modest, that existed in the area between the Prut and the Dniester rivers were supported by cultural institutions from Romania. The shows presented in Kishinev by the Iași National Theatre in the months of January and February 1918, as well as the concerts held before the Bessarabian audience by the Iași Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of maestro George Enescu in March 1918—on the same days when the Country Council voted for the declaration of unification of Bessarabia with Romania—represented a first occasion for the Bessarabian public to become familiar with the authentic Romanian cultural values from which they had been alienated during the century of tsarist occupation.

Keywords

Kishinev, Iași National Theatre, Mihail Sadoveanu, Iași Symphony Orchestra, George Enescu, 1918