



CNCS and CNCS International Research Conversation

‘The New Romanian Operetta’ of the Fifties: An Instrument in the Building of Socialism’

CNCS and CNCS International cordially invite you to a research conversation given by Professor Valentina Sandu-Dediu (National University of Music Bucharest and the New Europe College Bucharest) and respondents Patrick Zuk, James Koranyi and Yundi Guo.

The event takes place online and in-person in the Birley Room of Hatfield College, Durham, from 3 to 4.30 pm on Wednesday 13 March 2024.

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Abstract

If we now look back at the "obsessive (sixth) decade" (a phrase adopted by post-1990 historiography, which has brought order to the facts and realities of the period), the analysis of the operetta genre remains a stimulating case study. Communist censorship left nothing to chance, not even academic music and even less light music, which had become a suitable propaganda tool. Operetta was not only meant to entertain (which was its original purpose, devoid of moral principles, when it focused on the "comedy of bourgeois love"); it was meant to reflect the new reality in the 1950s, depicted in bright colors. Despite all the influences of Viennese operetta and American jazz (which were closely followed and fiercely criticized), Romanian operetta had to preserve its national character at all costs, drawing inspiration from folk music, following the Soviet model.

However, my presentation will also include links to the 19th century, as the origins of the operetta genre can be found there (in vaudeville and the creations of Austrian musicians who settled in the Romanian principalities). I will also focus on the composer Ciprian Porumbescu (1853-1883), a figure reformulated and glorified by musicology during communism. Romanian cinema and musicology after 1950 portrayed Ciprian Porumbescu lovingly and with romantic enthusiasm, and moreover, the young composer, who had written the operetta *Crai nou* (*New Moon*) in 1881, became in his turn (some seven decades later) the protagonist of a new socialist operetta *Let Me Sing* by Gherase Dendrino (1954).

Valentina Sandu-Dediu

After graduating in piano and musicology from the Bucharest Conservatory (now the National University of Music - NUMB) in 1990, Professor Valentina Sandu-Dediu turned to two main areas of research in the following decades: one interdisciplinary, in which she studied aspects of musical stylistics and rhetoric and proposed a definition of mannerism in musical culture, and another in which she studied the history of post-war music in communist Romania and the ideologies that determined it. The first category of interests led to a dissertation defended at NUMB and published in 1997 (*Stylistic and Symbolic Hypostases of Mannerism in Music*), as well as to a series of articles

and books, for which the author received various research fellowships at the New Europe College, Institute for Advanced Study Bucharest (1996-1997, 2008), and at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (2000). The other direction in which Professor Sandu-Dediu is active involves reassessing and reformulating the history of post-war Romanian music: see *Romanian Music between 1944-2000*, printed in Bucharest in 2002, with a German version in 2006 (Pfau, Saarbrücken). The most recent publication along this path consists of two volumes entitled *New Histories of Romanian Music* (Bucharest, 2020), edited by Professor Sandu-Dediu and Nicolae Gheorghişă. Professor Sandu-Dediu received the Prize of the Romanian Academy of Sciences in 1997, the Prize of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences in 2008, as well as numerous prizes from the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania (1999, 2010, 2014, 2017, 2020). Since 2014 she is rector of New Europe College Bucharest, Institute of Advanced Study.

Dr Yundi Guo

Yundi completed her PhD programme in History in 2023. Her PhD project investigated the complexities and contradictions of German Democratic Republic society by focusing on the practices of German classical music heritage in the GDR and the GDR's trans-bloc cultural exchange with Britain. Situating the controversy surrounding the 1978 East German production of *Madame Butterfly* in a transnational context, Yundi's recent publication 'Butterfly over the Wall: Herz's *Madame Butterfly* (1978) and its journey from the Komische Oper to the Welsh National Opera' discusses how artists, organisers, and critics used elite culture to contest political legitimacy within the larger ideological framework of the Cold War. She shows that citizens on both sides of the Iron Curtain effectively used state resources to build transnational platforms for advancing their individual agendas, and that cultural exchanges allowed East German artists to gain an international reputation, which they could use as leverage to bargain for greater career freedom. Her research interests include orchestras and opera companies in the GDR, Anglo-GDR classical music diplomacy, and East German classical musicians' trans-bloc mobility.

James Koranyi

James Koranyi is an Associate Professor in Modern Cultural European History at Durham University. He is a cultural historian of east-central Europe and his work covers the German minorities of east-central Europe, memory cultures, and travel writing in the Carpathians. He is co-editor of the journal [European History Quarterly](#). His book, [Migrating Memories: Romanian Germans in Modern Europe](#) (Cambridge: CUP, 2021) charts the story of German speakers in Romania in modern Europe. He has also published on travel guides, on travel writing in the Carpathians, and has co-edited a book with Emily Hanscam [Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and the Political Present in East-Central Europe](#) (DeGruyter, 2022). He is currently writing a book on *New Europeans in the Carpathians, 1860s-1920s*.

Professor Patrick

Patrick Zuk is Director (Arts and Humanities) of the Institute of Advanced Study and Professor of Russian Cultural Studies and Music at Durham University. His publications include *Nikolay Myaskovsky: A Composer and His Times*, which won a CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title award for 2022, and the co-edited collection (with Marina Frolova-Walker) *Russian Music Since 1917*, which was issued in the Proceedings of the British Academy series published by Oxford University Press. His research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the British Academy, and the Wellcome Trust. He is currently writing a monograph exploring the role of traumatic experience in shaping the styles and aesthetic orientations of musical modernism. In Epiphany 2024, he is co-leading a major interdisciplinary project 'Understanding Offence: (De)limiting the Unsayable', which is sponsored by Durham University's Institute of Advanced Study and the British Academy. He has been awarded a two-year Leverhulme Research Fellowship commencing in May 2024 for his next project, 'The composer in the European imagination: 1830-1970'.