

Dragoș Andrei Cantea and His ‘Universe’

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Dragoș Andrei Cantea is a Romanian concert pianist and artistic director. He received his PhD from the “George Enescu” National University of Arts in Iași (2020) and became an alumnus of the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo (2021), after attending an advanced Master’s degree. He is the co-founder and artistic director of Classix Festival, an interdisciplinary event with a focus on arts, businesses, local authorities and strengthening diplomatic relations. He regularly performs in important venues in the United Kingdom, the Nordic and Baltic countries, Romania, Italy and Switzerland¹.

The present interview was given by Dragoș Andrei Cantea on June 16th, 2021.

¹ For more details regarding Dragoș Andrei Cantea’s professional activity, see <https://dragoscantea.com/>.



Photo 1. Dragoș Andrei Cantea

Photo credit: Andrei Popa (The Phope), Classix Festival, Iași, 2020

1. How has music come into your life and why did you choose to play the piano and not another instrument? How would you define music in only one word?

Music was introduced to me as a family ambition – to have an artist in the house. Shortly after that, it grew on me naturally after a significant logistical and financial sacrifice from my folks by purchasing a piano to encourage me to practise.

Piano was my choice simply because of Cartoon Network – I fell in love with the elegance of Bugs Bunny or Tom and Jerry when in front of the keyboard. Then, after meeting Ioana

Stănescu, it became clear that this was a path I would like to walk on...

Music in one word? Universe...

2. Among your mentors one could mention great artists and pedagogues such as Håvard Gimse in Oslo, Kathryn Stott in Manchester, or Ioana Stănescu and Dan Prelipcean from the “George Enescu” National University of Arts in Iași. In your opinion, how should the relationship mentor-disciple develop after one’s graduation?

Like any relationship, I think it should run its natural course. All the names you have mentioned played a crucial role in my career – from how I walk on stage to how I talk, how I write my artistic research, how I control my nerves, how I tackle certain works or passages, how I practise, how I choose fingerings, and so many other things that sum up my whole artistic personality today at 29 years of age.

I would say that the most important aspect of these relationships is that they don’t stop after graduation – they are really there for the rest of my life. I will always need a lesson before I perform a new concerto, I will always need those critical ears to avoid being biased. So, it’s comforting to know that they all are a phone call away to meet even on stage!

3. In which way has the advanced Master’s degree, recently earned at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo after attending the classes of Kathryn Stott and Håvard Gimse, changed your views concerning a musician’s life and career?

My experience at the Norwegian Academy of Music was quite broad, as I had the chance to develop many other abilities

and skills apart from performing. Cultural diplomacy became a significant asset of my studies and thanks to people like Andreas Sønning I managed to “practise” the inter-sectorial skill set between arts, authorities and businesses, which led to a new path of artistic directorship. I believe that an interdisciplinary mindset is crucial in our everchanging industry.

4. How did you feel in the position of curator of the celebration of 100 years of diplomatic relations between Norway and Romania in Oslo (2017)? What other events to mark this centennial as well as Romania’s Great Union Centennial the following year took place in Norway?

Back in 2017, for me it was something new and exciting. I would say I was lucky to be at the right time and at the right place to grasp these opportunities. It felt special to be able to promote Romania’s cultural heritage in Norway in a non-nationalistic way. I did not want it to come out as an exclusive artistic statement, hence I focused on a bilateral programme in both celebrations. After the main events, other small productions followed – either at diplomatic gatherings or productions as part of other European events at Oslo’s Gamle Logen².

5. You are the co-founder and artistic director of Classix Festival, a very innovative and successful festival since its first edition (Iași, 16-22 February 2020), and at the same time an important contribution to the cultural exchange between Norway and Romania. What are your views concerning innovation in art?

² Gamle Logen is a music venue and concert hall in Oslo.

I believe the classical music scene is everchanging. What worked 50 years ago will not necessarily work today. The level of professional musicians is outstanding, and the number of amateur musicians is growing in every corner of the world.

There is no place to hide and after the explosion of the world wide web, there has always been a struggle between the conservative way of presenting music and all sorts of experiments.

Not every innovative display of art is a success, maybe quite the opposite. However, based on the global diversity, a sincere approach to our ideas and the adherence to a specific value set will guarantee at some point that we will have an audience that we can address with our art.

6. In Norway you have performed or arranged works by important Romanian composers such as George Enescu, Constantin Silvestri, Ion Voicu, Paul Constantinescu, Ciprian Porumbescu, Grigoraş Dinicu. You have also performed works by the Norwegian composers Edvard Grieg and Eyvind Alnæs. In which way could Romanian-Norwegian cultural relations further strengthen in the future?

It is inspiring to observe how many similarities there are in our musical history. The way that Grieg collected folk tunes in Norway resembles Enescu's addiction to Romanian traditions.

Of course, these were implemented with very different musical languages, based on their later influences, but by simply listening to the Violin Sonatas of both composers we can understand their passion for their own heritage. This mutual passion can establish a fantastic groundwork for future artistic and cultural celebrations. I can only dream right now about an interdisciplinary production with George Enescu and Mihai Eminescu versus Edvard Grieg and Henrik Ibsen.

Romania has the honour of hosting the European Capital of Culture in 2023 in the beautiful city of Timișoara, while Norway follows the year after with Bodø. Plenty of possibilities to make these bilateral dreams a reality...

7. In the social media you introduce yourself as a “concert pianist & culture enthusiast”. How important is enthusiasm in an artist’s career nowadays?

I think it’s about a sum of qualities. For instance, a culture enthusiast without technical skills or without patience might have quite a struggle to build a sustainable career.

8. How could you carry out your artistic activities in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic? In which way did you have to reinvent yourself so as to get through this period?

Of course, switching my activities to the online environment was the obvious solution. I had to lecture, teach, and perform in front of nothing but cameras and screens. I got the job done, but it conveyed a somewhat meaningless experience. The digital world plays an active role in the arts – in contemporary music, in concert productions, in galleries, museums, cinematography. However, when exhibited or performed, the artistic product reaches its true value only by being experienced in person: in the concert hall, opera, cinema, museum...

9. After spending several years in Norway, what are some of the lessons that you have learnt in various fields and would like to share with us?

The model of academia was a huge lesson for me, in the way the curriculum is student-oriented. The diversity of elective courses in the vocational field is something to keep an eye on.

Also, important lessons in logistics and investment of resources (both financial and timewise). A brilliant model that is really admirable is how local authorities match the private support to organisations that develop projects in the arts and sports. It is a joint effort for national identity.

Last but not least, I acquired plenty of gastronomic expertise, from *pinnekjøtt* to *fårikål*³.

10. The second edition of Classix Festival (Iași, 14-18 March 2021) was a new remarkable event organized with high-class quality in very difficult times given the uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. What does Classix Festival mean to you and how important is it for you to continue organizing it in your hometown, Iași?

Classix is a sample of my vision towards the development of the artistic sector in Romania. The success it had with its first two editions is directly related to the interdisciplinary approach I want to follow. Teaming up with Patricia Butucel created a solid foundation to something that can turn into a proper phenomenon of classical music in the region.

Choosing Iași as the starting place of that adventure was mainly a subjective, yet inspired decision. However, the future of Classix can be itinerant, based on the joint efforts and availability of private and public sectors.

³ *Pinnekjøtt* and *fårikål* are traditional Norwegian dishes.

Thank you very much for accepting to give this interview and for all your efforts to create bridges between Romania and other countries.

References

“Dragoş Cantea”, <https://dragoscantea.com>, retrieved on 1 June 2021.

“Classix Festival”, <https://www.classixfestival.ro/>, retrieved on June 1st, 2021.