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**TRAVELLING THROUGH THE COMPOSITIONAL UNIVERSE
OF VASILE SPĂTĂRELU**

Vasile Spătărelu was the catalyst of the contemporary school of composition in Iași (Romania). The musician has constantly asserted himself in the creative domain, approaching all musical genres. He was a composer of lyrical substance, gifted with a rich musical fantasy and a freedom of associative ideas. He had a lyrical nature that inhibited him to give into the mirage of experimental ways that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.

With a sensitivity and attraction for poetry, the composer Vasile Spătărelu looked within himself for inspiration, exploring his inner self of emotions. Covering over 46 years of creative work, Vasile Spătărelu's music shines through its sincerity and not through the richness or length of its forms of

representation. His intelligence, his musical culture amplified by an exceptional melodic sensitivity and imagination, led to the creation of a work that undoubtedly found its place in the history of music. Beyond the inherent perishability there is his art, which propelled him as a man of great culture, a composer who skillfully and serenely handled polymorphic techniques of writing. As a poet of harmony, with post-bartokian and post-enescian resonances, Vasile Spătărelu highlighted the substance of the musical symbol, developing the poetical sensibility of contemporary Romanian music.

Key words: Vasile Spătărelu, contemporary Romanian music, B. Bartok, G. Enescu.

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**ПУТЕШЕСТВИЕ ПО ВСЕЛЕННОЙ
КОМПОЗИТОРА ВАСИЛЕ СПЭТЭРЕЛУ**

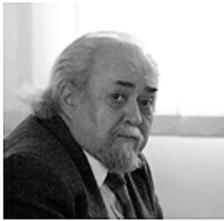
Творчество Василе Спэтэрелу послужило катализатором развития современной композиторской школы в Яссах (Румыния). Как композитор он проявил себя практически во всех музыкальных жанрах. Его произведения насыщены особым лиризмом, творческий почерк композитора отличает неистощимая музыкальная фантазия, рождающая у слушателя длинный ряд образных ассоциаций. Глубоко лиричная по своей природе музыка Спэтэрелу не поддавалась влиянию притягательной силы экспериментальных приемов, появившихся в 1960-х и 1970-х годах. Чувствительный, тонко воспринимающий поэзию композитор Василе Спэтэрелу углубленно исследовал свое внутреннее «я», воплощая в музыке весь спектр собственных переживаний. Творческое наследие Спэтэрелу, охватывающее

более чем 46-летний период его жизни, отличается не столько богатством и масштабностью форм, сколько искреннее сияние самих музыкальных образов. Композитор, обладающий высокой музыкальной культурой, особым отношением к мелодике, богатым воображением, виртуозно владеющий разнообразными техниками письма, создал произведения, вошедшие в копилку мировой истории музыки. В его сочинениях активно используется музыкальная символика, в гармонии присутствуют аллюзии на музыку Б. Бартока и Дж. Энеску, в мелодике настойчиво развивается идея поэтической чувственности современной румынской музыки.

Ключевые слова: Василе Спэтэрелу, современная румынская музыка, Б. Барток, Дж. Энеску.

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1. Introduction



Vasile Spătărelu was born on April 21st, 1938 in Tâmba, in a modest family, who had no interest in professional music. He began his musical training at the age of 13, in a music school, from where he entered the *Ciprian Porumbescu*

Conservatory in București. Between 1957–1963 he studied composition with Anatol Vieru, who had come with a strong knowledge from Moscow, being a pupil of Aram Khachaturian. Anatol Vieru made him understand that the act of creation is not a process that emerges spontaneously from emotion with easiness, but a methodical act that comes from rationalizing, organizing and connecting the affective impulses with his rich imagination. During his student years, Vasile Spătărelu assimilated the rules of rigorous writing, mastered the way that melodic lines can interfold within themselves, analyzed and interpreted in his own way the secrets of musical architecture, following constantly the expanding of his intellectual universe through deciphering the poetical meanings of structures.

2. The Professor

In 1963, Vasile Spătărelu visited Iași, a city with which he fell in love with and never left until the end of his life. His academic career began at *George Enescu* Conservatory, where he occupied at first the position of preparatory for the disciplines of counterpoint and musical forms. In 1971 he became the head of a newly established compositional class, that developed in time into a school of musical composition, with a unique style that is different from that of Bucharest or Cluj. In teaching, he always followed his intuition, which never failed him. He never had any musical prejudices and that's why he was very irked by the austere rules of music theory. His unconventional way of teaching (cultivated by his master, Anatol Vieru), left the students with a great freedom in choosing the ways in which they could express themselves. Also, his analytical nature made him adapt his tutoring methods for the temperament and character of every student. The

Professor offered his students the chance to master the art of authentic musical construction that was based on empirical processes, and was built up from emotion and thought. Vasile Spătărelu taught a wide range of disciplines: counterpoint and fugue, analysis of musical forms, principles of orchestration, harmony, arrangements of choral music and composition. He was a complete and talented musician that always searched to improve himself and to help students to reach their full musical potential. In the midst of the effervescence of emerging the new school of composition in Iași, maestro Spătărelu was its core. His academic ascension was notable over the years; he went from: preparatory assistant professor (1963–1967), assistant professor (1967–1973), lecturer (1973–1979), associate professor (1979–1991), to professor (1991–2005).

Even though Vasile Spătărelu's pupils were permanently searching to express themselves in an innovative musical language, they were also aware that quality music is always born from intertwining tradition with modernity. But his teachings broadened beyond the composition classroom and reached all the young minds of students that had the privilege to have him as a professor on any discipline. They all learned how to organize their musical ideas and write them in their own style, integrating the poetics of music with the inflexible principles of musical construction, in an eloquent language.

In addition to the academic activity, Vasile Spătărelu held significant positions in the artistic life of Iași: Dean of the Faculty of Music and Arts at *George Enescu* Conservatory (1984–1990), Dean of the Faculty of Composition, Musicology, Conducting, Musical Pedagogy and Theatre from *George Enescu* Academy of Arts (1991–1995), secretary of the Iași Branch of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists (1976–2005), and later he was a member of the Board of Directors as the same Union (1981–2005), vice-president of the Commission Architecture-Arts of the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (1994–2005).

The national recognition of Vasile Spătărelu's work on improving the Romanian musical life,

came also from his activities as a conductor and coordinator of classical musical events. He was one of the first members of musicians that established the *Musical Holidays at Piatra Neamț Festival* (1973–1990), a project that has now international recognition, a kind of Darmstadt of the Romanian musical context, one of the few spaces of freedom of expression during the communist regime. Also, he was a member of the Board of Organization of the *Romanian Music Festival* in Iași (1973–1979).

In November of 2002, he received the academic title of Doctor of Music at *Gheorghe Dima Music Academy* from Cluj-Napoca. It was a milestone for Romanian music, because it seems like it was the first doctorate music composition that was presented in Romania. His thesis named *Meditations on Enescu – A creative project focusing at the configuration of musical thought as a synthesis between tradition and contemporary* was written under the guidance of Romanian musicologist, professor PhD Valentin Timaru.

3. The Composer

Vasile Spătărelu's early compositions were written in the 1960s, when a restless young generation of musicians rebelled against the conformity of the musical language and pushed the Romanian musical compositional conceptions into the international avant-garde. But, in those chaotic times of searching and creating new paths in music, Spătărelu preferred simplicity because he was aware that the works of a creator must be connected to his reality. He had a lyrical nature that inhibited him to give into the mirage of experimental ways that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, even though he knew how to use the contemporary musical style. Although he wasn't a sustainer of the avant-garde, he wasn't against it; he had his own musical language.

3.1. Chamber music

Vasile Spătărelu was a master of chamber music; he excelled in his symmetry and clear construction of melodic lines, that were composed on classical pillars of musical structures. In the three *String Quartets* (*Quartet no. 1*, 1961; *Quartet no. 2*, 1974; *Quartet no. 3*, 1982), we recognize the Enescian melodist, mixed with the neoclassical thinker in the large and small forms. *The Piano Sonata* (which was written in his years of studying), has a musical development that keeps the traditional form of the Classical period (fast-slow-fast) with a tonal-modal principle of harmony, embellished in chromaticism and touching the border between tonality and atonality. *The Sonata for cello solo* and the *Four Contrasts for Violin and Piano* have the same advanced musical language, grounded into

the spirit of traditional Romanian music, avoiding superficial folklore inspiration.

Meditations on Enescu is a work for piano written in 1981, to commemorate the centenary of Enescu's birth. Each piece that's in the suite (*Preludium*, *Choral Interrupted*, *Interlude*, *Echoes of Dance* and *Epilogue*), paints different images that reflect distinctive states of meditation. Even though the composer uses constant changes of rhythm, melody and harmony, the unity is maintained by reiterating the same melodic lines and motives. The simplicity of the music mirrors the maturity and wisdom of his compositional thinking, reminding us of the moldavian Orpheus. The work was distinguished with the Romanian Academy Prize, captivating the audience with a music full of poetry that has the nuances and the inventiveness of Enescian influences.

Passionate about literature, it became one of his inspirations which he used with utmost respect in his chamber vocal music. For example, he based his pieces of lied on works written by Romanian poets such as Tudor Arghezi (*Inscripție*¹, 1968), George Bacovia (*Pastel*, 1967), Nichita Stănescu (*Scurtă baladă*², *Joc cu avioane*³, *Joc de seară*⁴, 1978), Mihai Eminescu (*Somnoroase pășărele*⁵, 2000), Lucian Blaga (*Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii*⁶, 1985), Tristan Tzara (*Moartea lui Guillaume Apollinaire*⁷, 1995), Mihai Dragomir (*Cântec vechi*⁸, 1987), Ana Blandiana (*Joc*⁹, 1987). *Cinci poeme pentru Tanka*¹⁰ (penta-verses for baritone and piano) awarded him the *Orion* prize for creation at the *Ionel Perlea National Festival of Interpretation of Lied*, the 9th edition (2000).

As a writer of lyrics, with a sensitivity and attraction for poetry, the composer Vasile Spătărelu looked within himself for inspiration, exploring his inner self of emotions, that were more depressing than optimistic, more obscure than lighthearted, more intuitive than pragmatical. Nostalgia, meditation and confession were states of thought that facilitated the expression of the lyrical self, that bent and transformed the musical time according to his own desire. In his works for voice and piano we can see that the composer went beyond the written words, and through his music he intensified the

¹ *Inscription*

² *Short Ballade*

³ *Airplane Game*

⁴ *Evening Game*

⁵ *Sleeping Birds*

⁶ *I don't crush the worlds flowers and wonders*

⁷ *The death of Guillaume Apollinaire*

⁸ *Old song*

⁹ *Game*

¹⁰ *Five Poems for Tanka*

poetical meaning of the text, while enhancing the atmosphere and finding new expressive demeanors.

3.2. Choral music

In the creation of any artist and also of any composer there is a preferred zone where the soul of the musician feels at large and can manifest itself entirely. The composer Vasile Spătăreanu felt best in the vocal musical areas, especially the choral ones. His inclination towards vocal music, especially towards the collective expression of vocal music, that is choral music, it derives from his way of being, humane and kind. It is an element of music that you can only experience through vocal music. The connection between sound and word has the meritorious trait of representing the link of Spătăreanu's music with the ethereal universe of poetry. This apothegmatic representation of sound that is captured in these small forms, presents the conflicting challenge of using with restraint the musical means, while also conferring an impressive musical expression.

When maestro Spătăreanu would have turned seventy years old (April 21th, 2008), there was a commemoration in which twenty-six of his choral creations were gathered in a collection and published in Iași. The *summum* of his choral creation is illustrated by assembling this collection and the musical work named *Variațiuni pe tema Ciuleandrei*¹¹. They fully express the all-encompassing universe of Vasile Spătăreanu's *Ars Choralis*, with contextual hypostases and various means of realization, the harmonic-polyphonic complexity representing the ideal way of emphasizing the semantic valences extracted from the poetic text.

Perhaps not coincidentally, his choral creation began with a delicate emotional expression, the piece *Luna*¹² (1962) that revealed from the very beginning his imaginative, idyllic temperament. We find the same undulations in the piece *Peisaj natal*¹³ (1964), which combines two states of mind: on the one hand we have the static one, that is expressed through a homophonic language and on the other hand we have the flowing one, which strengthens the first state, by associating an imitative dynamic. The duality between the original instance and the reversed one serves the idea of ambiguity, of tense waiting. In the choral miniature *Țară*¹⁴ (1966), we can see how the simple and direct speech of the peasants is translated in music through pastoral tones and solemn accents. The homophonic language that

he uses in the work *Două cuvinte*¹⁵ (1969) reflects perfectly the soft and diffuse character of the musical development, through the delicate and distinct timbre of the female voices. In the choral poem *Revedere*¹⁶ (1971), which won the First Prize at *Mihai Eminescu National Poetry and Musical Creation Festival* happened in Iași, in 1972, we can find a sound area of divided multiple choir (a mix of 11 voices), with a scale accumulation of sonority that demands a polyphony of attacks. The choral piece *Luna roșie*¹⁷ (1985) reminds us of Gesualdo's harmonies, by the musical means that he uses to describe a deceitful silence of gazing upon the twilight.

Vasile Spătăreanu was a composer of lyrical musical substance that emanates through his feelings, aspirations and attitudes. This is demonstrated by his choral works in which the melody comes to the surface, clarifying the musical development. From the lyrics of a simple romance dedicated to his mother, *Crizanteme*¹⁸ (1980), to the established piece, *Floare albastră*¹⁹ (1982), the music reveals his true romantic nature, which he tries to hide without succeeding completely.

The poem *Dor de Bacovia*²⁰ (1985) came to be from an internalised contemplation, from anxieties and inner-explorations, from the need to understand and communicate through music. Its harmonic language proposes an imitative-canonical symmetry, with a certain tendency for heterophony, a moan of voices. The piece ends depressingly on the chord *d minor* that corresponds to the phrygian mode, but that only emphasizes the poetic feeling, the dreadfulness of everyday existence.

With the remarkable *Variațiuni pe tema Ciuleandrei* (1981) we enter the world of *ethno-jazz* in which the traditional melodic lines receive unexpected delienations and strange reflections, suggesting not only the quasi-sacral dance, but the detachment from the concept of provincial life and the transcendence to the lived irrational. The artistry of his choral writing echoes in the allusion of magical euphoria of this archaic traditional dance, through flamboyant sound effects. It is perhaps the most difficult work of his choral creation and a turning point for any choral ensemble.

In extension of his national thematic diversity, Vasile Spătăreanu showed a great receptivity to the artists of European culture. *Trei madrigale dramatice*²¹ (1978), based on the lyrics of J. L. Pacheco,

¹⁵ *Two words*

¹⁶ *Meeting again*

¹⁷ *Red Moon*

¹⁸ *Chrysanthemums*

¹⁹ *Blue Flower*

²⁰ *Longing for Bacovia*

²¹ *Three Dramatic Madrigals*

¹¹ *Variations on Ciuleandra theme*

¹² *The Moon*

¹³ *Native landscape*

¹⁴ *Country*

were composed after his interaction with the Spanish poetry. The polyphonic lines of this large composition, expand progressively throughout the three madrigals. The first work of the series (*Statuie*²²) starts from an ecstatic horizon of freezing the moment, of perpetuating a moment of grace, a singular and simple melodic line. In the second piece (*Au ucis*²³), he added a new sorrowful ostinato melodic line formed on reversed chromatic formula, to express the feeling of liberation. The last musical portrait (*Izbește soarele*²⁴) has conflicting meanings (musically and poetically), that are translated through a discontinuous melody that derives from the main theme and its inverted version.

Captivated by modern painting, Vasile Spătărelu was an admirer of the renowned painter Pablo Picasso. The choral poem *Omagiu lui Picasso*²⁵ (1974) was composed after Picasso's two cubist paintings – *Guernica* and *The Ladies of Avignon*. The famous sequence *Dies irae* is transformed by the composer into a *basso ostinato* of a small *passacaglia*, that is written in a neo-renaissance way. The profound substratum of the poetical text guides Vasile Spătărelu to elect for quoting a purely diatonic song with religious connotations, because any matter is subject to the passage of the time and the enlightenment of the being can only be achieved through sacrifice, through suffering.

The traditional Romanian carol was treated by the composer Vasile Spătărelu with refinement and artistic craft, giving it the most diverse and unique harmonic-polyphonic styles, but keeping its modal structure and philosophical essence. We find in his creation two cycles composed for mixed choir: *Trei colinde laice*²⁶ (1967), with texts and songs taken from George Breazu's *Carols Collection* and *Colinde pentru Alexandru*²⁷ (1989), to which is added the carol *Sosit-a ziua cea sfântă*²⁸ (1984). The works are written in the large form of a theme with variations, in which the melodic line of the carol is developed as a *cantus firmus*. The tonal-modal synthesis makes seemingly opposable phenomena coexist: functional tonal type chords (including altered chords) with modal-geometric type chords based on interval symmetry; authentic relations with the plagal ones (the latter holding a significant share); tonal cadences shrouded in dissonances and surprise chromatisms with the cadence typologies promoting some chordal structures of obvious modal substance.

²² *Statue*

²³ *They killed*

²⁴ *Hit the sun*

²⁵ *Hommage to Picasso*

²⁶ *Three profane carols*

²⁷ *Carols for Alexander*

²⁸ *The Holy Day arrived*

3.3. Religious music

After the 1990s, when there were no more musical restrictions, Vasile Spătărelu approached the spiritual area of religious music; this orientation in his musical course was based on the education he had received from his parents. The compositions that correlate with this thematic sphere are: the prayer *Tatăl nostru*²⁹, for soprano and piano (1999), the hymn for mixed choir *Pentru Tine, Doamne*³⁰ (2003) and his swan song, *Jertfa Laudei – Litughia Psaltică în glasul al III-lea*³¹, an arrangement for two and three voices. Relinquishing one of his prerogatives (namely the melodic invention) in his last work, Vasile Spătărelu transformed the harmonic-polyphonic language without modifying the modal structures of the melody composed by the priest professor Florin Bucescu. The pedal, the ison, the canon and the simple imitation were the musical mechanisms with which he refined the melodic material, avoiding the use of an emphatic style, that has a character suitable especially for the choral creation dedicated to the concert hall, and less for singing in the liturgical space.

In other works are inserted allusions and ideas from the sphere of theological thinking, that are accentuating the feeling of living in a religious Christian spirit. For example, in the chorale piece *Chiot*³² (1999), which is a song about rebirth or resurrection, he introduces a series of contradictory feelings using a chromatic hexachord on g (with the augmented second between the 2nd and the 3rd step of the scale), fortified by flexible steps. The dramatic madrigal *Către*³³ (2001), that is dedicated to the memory of his beloved composition professor, has an overwhelming feeling of sadness and surrender, of acceptance that time passes through and over us. The work was awarded the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania Prize.

3.4. Symphonic music

Although Vasile Spătărelu was the master of miniature forms (being the supporter of the idea that essences are kept in small bottles), he also composed in the symphonic and vocal-symphonic genre. With their large developments, he established himself in this musical field through: *Simfonieta* (1965), *Inscripție*³⁴, a cantata for mezzo-soprano, women's choir and instrumental ensemble (1969), *Pro Patria*³⁵,

²⁹ *Our Father*

³⁰ *For You, Lord*

³¹ *The Sacrifice of Praise – The Psaltic Liturgy on third mode*

³² *Shout*

³³ *Towards*

³⁴ *Inscription*

³⁵ *Pro Motherland*

a cantata-poem (1979), *Sonanțe*³⁶ for clarinet and string orchestra (1985), *Poema finală*³⁷, a cantata for baritone, women's choir and orchestra (1992), *Pro Memoria*³⁸ for strings, brass wind instruments and percussion (1996) and *Epitaf 1989*³⁹ (*Meditații la Enescu III*⁴⁰, 2002).

This last creation was written for orchestra and was inspired by the political events from Romania in December 1989; it ended a series of three compositions entitled *Meditații la Enescu*, in which every piece approached a different musical genre (chamber instrumental music, chamber vocal music, symphonic music). Spătărelu's *Epitaph* is a symphonic poem with a dramatic character, an almost programmatic composition with a free development, which appeals to the specific succession of the suite genre. The assumed testimony of Enescu's influence in his works triggers the foundation of a modal musical language, borrowed from ancient times, a reflection of the Romanian spirituality. The references to Enescu's music comes from the prologue of *Oedipus* and *The Chamber Symphony*, by arranging one of the motifs of second part of the chamber work. These two new motifs become the impulses of the entire musical development. The final *Andante religioso* brings harmony and acceptance by arranging the Byzantine hymn *Peaceful light* (in eighth mode), a song that is sung at the evening service and which is accompanied by an archaic instrument with a deep connotation and an uninterrupted permanence in the Romanian spiritual approach: *Vesper Bell*.

3.5. Stage music

Vasile Spătărelu orchestrated music for different theatrical plays: *The Twelfth Night* by W. Shakespeare, *Iașii în carnaval*⁴¹ by V. Alecsandri, *The Cherry Orchard* by P. Chekhov, *Împărăția Ozanei*⁴², a pantomime after I. Creangă, *Nunta din Perugia*⁴³ by Al. Kirițescu. *The brevis suite* is also composed after a stage music in the Baroque style.

The most important work dedicated to the stage is the musical comedy *The Pretentious Young Ladies*, adapted by Dimitrie Tăbăcaru and Anda Tăbăcaru, after Molière's play with the same title. Composed in 1985, it was dedicated to professor and musicologist Mihail Cozmei. The premiere took place in the same year, during *The Musical Holidays* at Piatra Neamț.

The only opera of Vasile Spătărelu (in one act) reanimates the satirical atmosphere of the farce by using the means of *commedia dell'arte*, caricaturing parvenitism, a socio-moral phenomenon that exists regardless of the era. The five characters, the female choir and the orchestral apparatus concentrated in the chamber formula (a string quintet of 4+3+2+1+1, with one instrumentist at each wind section: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, tuba and an impressive number of percussion instruments) proposes a postmodern music, formed in a stylistic conception that employs songs and motifs that are «fished» from various places and times, the playful allure and various flirtations distinguishing intonations signed by illustrious composers, from baroque to rock music. The sound environment serves the idea of theater with music, thus creating those *rappresentazione di anima e di corpo*, as well as the buff genre initiated by Pergolesi.

Singers say the prose, they sing and dance; the choreographic moments are also diversified, displaying the imprint of stylized dances (graceful-gallant *minuet* or even *rock and roll*). The virtuosity of his coloured way of thinking proves an ample and subtle use of the device that is the modern orchestra, with its asymmetries and timbral completion. The hilarity of language and situations is permanently accompanied by the instrumental comic, whereas the idea of caricature is represented through various sound effects such as *glissando* (on the trombone and tuba) or a fast *tremolo* near the bridge on the string group. Effervescent and optimistic, *The Pretentious Young Ladies* show is a provocation for any servant of the lyrical art and a delight for any musical lover. Through this opus, the composer exposed his true dramatic qualities and compositional virtues, developing a logical musical action filled with passion and originality.

4. Conclusions

A composer that wrote in an expanded area of genres, Spătărelu was not seduced and misled by the musical styles with pretensions of modernity. His intelligence, his musical culture amplified by an exceptional melodic sensitivity and imagination, led to the creation of a work that undoubtedly found its place in the history of music. Future generations of musicians will be able to enjoy his opuses, because beyond the inherent perishability there is his art, his musical creation, which propelled him as a man of great culture, a prominent figure of Romanian culture, a composer who skillfully and serenely handled polymorphic techniques of writing. Covering over 46 years of creative work, Vasile Spătărelu's music shines through its sincerity and not through the richness or length of its forms of representation. It seems that *Non multam sed*

³⁶ *Sonants*

³⁷ *The Final Poem*

³⁸ *Pro Memory*

³⁹ *Epitaph 1989*

⁴⁰ *Meditation to Enescu III*

⁴¹ *Iași in Carnival*

⁴² *The Kingdom of Ozana*

⁴³ *Wedding in Perugia*

multum has been one of his guiding principles. A poet of harmony, with post-bartokian and post-enesian resonances, Vasile Spătărelu extended the meaning of metaphor, highlighting the substance of the musical symbol. The lyricism of his music was sometimes transfigured, aligning itself with the dramatic, a result a philosophical approach to the human condition.

On the morning of March 24th 2005, in full creative activity (because he had not retired from

teaching), the composer and professor Vasile Spătărelu died, leaving behind a vivid, enduring memory, represented by his artistic creation and the formation of many generations of musicians who have established themselves nationally and internationally. Even though he had been suffering from heart and gout disease for a long time, his departure surprised the academic and musical world, leaving unfulfilled plans, a huge gap among those close to him.

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