

IULIA ȚIBULSCHI'S RECOGNITION ON THE CONCERT STAGE: EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PROMOVAREA IULIEI ȚIBULSCHI PE SCENELE CONCERTISTICE: EVALUARE ȘI RECOMANDĂRI

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This article provides an assessment of the recognition Iulia Țibulschi's music has received. Performance trends of Iulia Țibulschi's music are analyzed in the context of scholarship regarding the promotion of music by women composers in the classical genre. Iulia Țibulschi's music, like that of many other women composers, faces considerable barriers entering the professional composition field. In conclusion some suggestions for next steps in raising the visibility and popularity of her works are provided, especially focused on the methods for concert programming.

Keywords: Iulia Țibulschi, women composers, representation, symbolic association networks

Acest articol oferă o evaluare a recunoașterii de care s-a bucurat muzica Iuliei Țibulschi. Tendințele de interpretare a muzicii Iuliei Țibulschi sunt analizate în contextul studiilor privind promovarea muzicii compozitoarelor din genul clasic. Muzica Iuliei Țibulschi, la fel ca și cea a multora alora compozitoare, se confruntă cu obstacole considerabile în accesarea domeniului compoziției profesionale. În concluzii sunt oferite câteva sugestii privind pașii următori pentru creșterea vizibilității și popularității operelor sale, accentuându-se în special metodele de programare a concertelor.

Cuvinte-cheie: Iulia Țibulschi, compozitoare, reprezentare, rețele de asocieri simbolice

Introduction

Moldovan composer Iulia Țibulschi was a major member of the classical music scene in Chișinău in the latter half of the 20th century. She worked as a professor of music at the conservatory, was involved in the publishing of the first editions of much of the local music, and was active as a composer of music for choir and solo voice [1]. As it is a goal of the author to promote her compositional output in Moldova and abroad, what follows is an assessment of the recognition Iulia Țibulschi's music has received. As a baseline, this essay assumes the reader shares the author's goal of promoting Iulia Țibulschi's music on the recital stage. Historic and current performance trends of Iulia Țibulschi's music are analyzed in the context of scholarship regarding the promotion of music by women composers in the classical genre. Suggestions are then provided for next steps in raising the visibility and popularity of Iulia Țibulschi's works, especially focused on the methods for concert programming.

Biography

Iulia Țibulschi is well known throughout Moldova as a composer of vocal music, especially of songs for children. She was born in 1933 in Leova, where she began her first compositional experiments: writing songs for games she played with her friends. She remembers her childhood years as very turbulent: filled with war, famine and frequent regime changes [2]. Her formal music education began in 1950 at the "Ștefan Neaga" secondary music school in Chișinău and continued in 1955 at

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the “N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov” Conservatory in present day St. Petersburg. She studied musicology, focusing on elements of folklore in the works of Frederic Chopin and Karol Szymanowski [3]. Iulia Țibulschi returned to Chișinău in 1960 and became a professor at the “Gavriil Musicescu” Institute of Art, where she taught classes in harmony, music history and piano improvisation [2]. The 1970s saw Iulia Țibulschi shift her focus from teaching toward work as an academic researcher, editor and composer. During this time her academic writing continued to focus on Polish folklore, especially in works by Szymanowski [4 p.176].

The bulk of Iulia Țibulschi’s compositional output is from the 70s and 80s, arising from the collaboration with the poet Grigore Vieru. During this time period her songs were met with great success, receiving frequent air time on the radio and television, and being sung as a part of school curriculums [5 p. 161]. Iulia Țibulschi speaks about being also warmly received in Italy when performing piano improvisations, but her lasting success has generally been limited to Moldova and the surrounding regions [2]. Although her music has since fallen into relative obscurity, she still bears the awards she received for it, including the title of Honored Artist of Moldova and a 1995 UNESCO prize for the best choral composition for mixed choir for *Cântec de leagăn*.

Barriers Faced By Women Composers

The local success that Iulia Țibulschi experienced, though certainly not unheard of for a woman in the late 20th century, is notable. Even today it seems to be very difficult for women composers to break into the classical music world, which is still largely dominated by men from Western Europe and Russia. The 2024 report from Donne - Women in Music provides an especially straightforward assessment of the current situation, synthesizing concert programming data from over one hundred major symphony orchestras worldwide. The report shows that, of pieces scheduled for the 2023-24 season, only 7.5% were composed by women. Further, this very limited representation actually constitutes a decrease from that recorded in the 2022 report. On the other hand, music composed by the top ten male composers on the list represents over 30% of scheduled pieces—a slight increase from the previous report [6].

The minimal change (and undeniable regression) in diverse representation between seasons speaks to the steep uphill battle for anyone working to promote music composed by women. Although these statistics apply only to orchestral programming, they reflect trends in performance culture that also apply to the recital stage. Fortunately for promoters of Iulia Țibulschi’s work, the vocal recital as a performance medium offers much greater flexibility than the symphony orchestra. Much fewer people are involved in putting on a vocal recital, both in reference to the quantity of performers themselves, as well as the quantity of people in charge of making programming and administrative decisions.

Of course, no one person in the current classical music industry is to blame for the lack of women represented. The roots of the current situation extend back into history, compounding in effect to create a formidable wall separating many historical women from the possibility of having composed music in our modern standard repertoire. Women were often banned or dissuaded from music education, making it difficult to acquire the theoretical skills required to write any sort of major work. Access to patronage and publication was similarly limited for historical women composers which, in turn limited the chance that their works would be presented to a large audience or receive repeat performances. Finally, for works that surmounted these barriers, many women found that the critical reception of their works focused more on their gender than the music itself, with reviews often categorizing works as either too feminine to deserve recognition or too masculine to be a good composition by a woman [7].

In the light of these compounding barriers, musicologist Maria Citron urges all those involved in programming “to go beyond our basic impulse that assumes that if a piece has not survived it is automatically unworthy of consideration for serious performance and study” [7 p. 112]. Iulia Țibulschi

crossed many of these barriers, receiving an enviable music education and publishing multiple collections of her songs. On the other hand, that she wrote almost exclusively for children seems to have limited the long-term success of her songs, even though they hold up to well-respected examples of the art song genre in text setting and piano-vocal collaboration.

As musicians and educators work to add music composed by women to the list of standard repertoires, it is undeniable that some difficult decisions will need to be made. After all, the gaping holes in concert programs and curriculums are figurative, referring to the lack of representation. Literally speaking, schedules and bank accounts are often pushed to the limit for performances of music by composers already part of the canon. In order to include music by women to the list, some music by men will inevitably need to be sidelined. Although the addition of music by women to the canon remains both musically and politically controversial, there is already an established precedent for inclusion in the canon that supports the inclusion of women composers at the expense of men composers. A common goal in both curriculum and concert planning is to help students and audiences connect with the historical context the music was composed in. "Simply disregarding the glaring omission of female figures would...be to our students a great disservice, in failing to adequately address and bring to the forefront a major part of music and modern society" [8 p. 20]. Adding music composed by women to the canon not only serves to improve gender representation, but actually improves the historical accuracy of the canon.

Suggestions for Action

The barriers facing women composers, including Iulia Țibulschi, mainly center around difficulties in entering a deeply entrenched tradition that offers little flexibility for newcomers. As there is much less of a historical precedent for women's participation in classical composition, they have an especially difficult time breaking into the field in a lasting way. In Iulia Țibulschi's case, although her music was widely performed in the 70s and 80s, modern performances are generally limited to primary education classrooms. Laura Braden's research into symbolic association networks can help clarify the reasons behind this especial difficulty new and unknown composers face, as well as provide ideas for how to improve the situation.

Braden explains that, "Reputation grows and evolves through contact; therefore, performances, as points of contact, likely develop a composer's reputation for the musicians and audience, as well as the field and larger culture. When musicians and audiences encounter a composer in performance, they likely will encounter the composer in conjunction with another composer. Since people reflexively associate that which is encountered together and reputation is contingent on one's embedded social network, networks created through performance should have a significant effect on a composer's reputation and cultural recognition" [9 p. 198].

For composers without an established reputation this means that the way to develop a reputation is not just to perform their music, but to perform it in ways that connect them to already established networks of other composers. The benefit to a lesser known composer of pairing their music with well-known music seems to correlate with the size of the network it connects them to. In other words, what seems to be the most valuable factor is establishing for the audience a connection between the unknown and the canonical works. Conversely, simply placing some unknown piece alongside a well-known piece reportedly had a negative effect on the reputation of the unknown piece [9].

The most fruitful approach, then, will likely be to pair unknown composers with famous composers with whom they have a legitimate connection. Resources like the "Top 10" list from the 2024 Donne report can serve as valuable tools when searching for composers to leverage for the creation of symbolic association networks. Another useful tool for creating these networks can be providing a historical context within which audience members can understand the piece. Just like the connections formed with a well-known composer, these connections make it more likely the audience will

interact with the music as something worth remembering [10]. Braden further recommends avoiding themed or tokenized concerts, as these isolate the composers from the web of established networks, rarely creating lasting impressions on audience members [11]. Generally speaking, the most useful programming for the promotion of unknown composers integrates their works into conventional symbolic association networks.

Conclusion

These general recommendations for advancing the reputation of unknown women composers can provide a valuable roadmap for supporters of Iulia Țibulschi's music. A recent performance tour of her songs was valuable in promoting her compositional output. This recital paired Iulia Țibulschi's songs with songs by Zara Levina and was presented in four locations across Moldova [12]. The fact that this concert was shared with many students across Moldova in the context of a serious recital is a very positive step. While such additional concerts would certainly prove valuable in promoting Iulia Țibulschi's work, there are further steps to take that would render future recitals even more beneficial.

Based on the recommendations made by Braden, Iulia Țibulschi's song repertoire should be presented in ways that connect it to larger symbolic association networks. Rather than pairing her songs with songs by another little known woman composer, her songs should be paired with songs written by an established composer. Especially optimal choices would be music by Chopin, Bach or Mozart: composers from whom Iulia Țibulschi drew particular musical inspiration [2]. Additionally, these future concerts should keep Iulia Țibulschi's historical context in focus, connecting her temporally to other composers or notable events. These concerts should avoid promoting her work using only its unique qualities (i.e. music by a woman, music by a Moldovan) and focus on the merits of her work in the context it was created in. Finally, researchers can support this work by pursuing further research into the life and work of Iulia Țibulschi. The sources cited in this paper represent the bulk of material engaging with Iulia Țibulschi's oeuvre; as such, further scholarship is needed to connect Iulia Țibulschi to the larger web of classical music scholarship.

Already in planning stages for January 2027 there is a concert that fits all these qualities. Iulia Țibulschi's songs will be paired with songs by Chopin and Szymanowski, presented in their historical context and accompanied by a documentary that brings together archival research and interviews. As Iulia Țibulschi's supporters continue to program her music, relying on the recommendations compiled in this article will provide a path toward the most efficient promotion of her music.

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