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ELECTRECORD, CULTURAL POLICY AND THE PHONOGRAPHIC INDUSTRY IN SOCIALIST ROMANIA (1965-1989)

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS: Music industry, Nation-building, Cultural policy, Phonogram, Romania

This dissertation explores the relationship between music, cultural policy, and the phonographic industry in communist Romania between 1965 and 1989. The main object is the state-owned record company *Electrecord*, the only of its kind during the analyzed period. On the one hand, I aim to identify the production phases, from the initial selection of artists and repertoire to be released, to the distribution and selling of phonograms, and analyze which political decisions influenced this process and to what extent. On the other hand, I will consider which musical genres were encouraged or censored by the company and on what grounds. With its 88-year history, *Electrecord* became a crucial institution to understand the history of recorded music in Romania, playing a fundamental role in many critical moments of social, economic, and political transformation. The company's participation in the state's cultural politics also offers an interesting case study on the relationship between music and nation-building but also on the mediation between economic, political and cultural aspects in the phonogram production process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSEC	Council for Socialist Education and Culture
MISC	Music Industries in Small Countries
RCP	Romanian Communist Party
RSRB	Romanian Society for Radio Broadcasting
SCAC	Socialist Council for Arts and Culture
SRR	Socialist Republic of Romania
UCMR	Union of Composers and Musicians of Romania
UCY	Union of Communist Youth

INTRODUCTION

A.1. Object, fields of inquiry and hypothesis

“[...] I believe that such freedom did not even exist in the West. We were an island of freedom within communism, a Western Island. Us, the guys from the studio of Electrecord, a team of twelve people.”¹

This dissertation explores the relationship between the state-defined cultural policy and the phonographic industry in the Socialist Republic of Romania between 1965 and 1989. It is an ethnomusicological study that aims to disclose the cultural policy and political values ingrained in music, by analyzing the records produced by the sole record company and phonogram producer in the country – *Electrecord* – during Nicolae Ceaușescu's (b.1918-d.1989) communist regime².

Firstly, the hypothesis that I aim to test through a structuralist approach is that *Electrecord* was a key state political instrument in creating an image of the nation both inside its borders and beyond. This idea suggests that music, as a cultural product of the phonographic industry, was instrumental in producing specific ideological meanings. In this sense, I will explore if and to what extent the company became an essential part of the institutional apparatus that created, regulated, and implemented cultural policy.

Secondly, and following a political economy approach, I also hypothesise that *Electrecord* acted as a mediator between the state, cultural brokers, and audiences, being constantly involved in the creation and negotiation of state cultural policy that affected the music produced in the country. Preliminary research of the relevant literature on this topic suggests that the company, apart from applying a rigid

¹ Gheorghe Grosaru, former sound engineer at Electrecord, personal conversation. Translation in English by the author.

² Nicolae Ceaușescu served as the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 until 1989, when he was overthrown and killed in the so-called “Romanian Revolution”.

copyright process, also adapted its practices and editing plans according to the audience's preferences and the dynamics of transnational cultural flows, sometimes privileging economic interests above cultural and political ones. Furthermore, through the recording and production technology that it acquired from other countries, *Electrecord* had a privileged position to influence the development and implementation of cultural policy and musical genres/ styles to be recorded.

A.1.a. Cultural policy, nation-building and the phonographic industry

The concept of “cultural policy” can be understood as a set of initiatives of institutional support defined by public or private organizations, with the purpose of stimulating and guiding symbolic material or immaterial practices pertaining to a particular society or group (Castelo-Branco, 2008, Nery, 2010). It can be used to obtain a consensus for a certain social or political order, or for a social transformation initiative (Coelho, 1997: 293). Cultural policy is the ground on which culture and power are negotiated in a distinct institutional framework (Costa, 1997: 1) and, according to Bourdieu, a thorough understanding of cultural goods and practices can only be achieved by analyzing the institutional framework which authorizes, enables, empowers, and legitimizes their existence (Bourdieu, 1993: 10). With these premises in mind, I aim to answer the following questions:

- What was the institutional framework that created, implemented, and regulated the cultural policy applied in Romania during Ceaușescu's communist regime?
- Were there any international agreements, conventions or models that influenced Romania's cultural policy?
- To what extent was cultural policy reflected in *Electrecord*'s practices and editorial plans?
- Was *Electrecord* a ground for negotiation between official cultural policy and the demand of the consumers and, if yes, to what extent?

One of the paradigms on which cultural policy is legitimized is the need to obtain an ideological framework for national (re)construction under a new political regime (Coelho, 1997: 294). This paradigm supports the concept of “cultural nationalism”, which I employ for the purpose of analyzing the questions listed above. Historian John Hutchinson differentiates cultural and political nationalist movements, claiming that the former “typically precede or accompany political nationalism and take the form of ethnohistorical ‘revivals’ that promote a national language, literature and arts, educational activities, and economic self-help” (Hutchinson, 2013: 75). Furthermore, cultural nationalism is “concerned with the meaning and the identity of the nation as a distinctive moral community” (ibidem.: 76), instead of a political-led nationalism.

By relating these ideas to the Romanian case before 1989 – a single-party communist regime with a centralized industry and control over all aspects of society – the study of cultural policy must take into account, on the one hand, the values promoted by RCP (Romanian Communist Party) and its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu (his role in designing state cultural policy is detailed in chapter II “Historical Contextualization”). On the other hand, in regards to musical commodities and practices, it is fundamental to analyze the decisions taken by the institutions in charge of the cultural domain, such as the Ministry of Culture (until 1971), the Council of Socialist Culture and Education (after 1971) and its subordinate departments, – the Direction of Music, the Direction of Mass Culture and Education and the Direction for the Problems of Cultural and Educational Activities of the Cohabitant Nationalities – and the Propaganda Division of the Central Committee of the RCP. Taking these two aspects into account, I aim to answer the following questions:

- What was the role of cultural policy and music in defining a “Romanian identity”?

- Was there a clear music policy? What was the relation between music policy and the regime's ideology? Is there a relation between the nation-building process and the music policy?

By studying the different facets of *Electrecord's* activity in relation to the

cultural policy of Ceaușescu's communist regime, I aim to understand if the company was instrumentalized by political entities for nation-building premises, and if so, how was this reflected in musical practices and phonogram editing.

One of the fields of application of cultural policy is represented by the cultural industries, related to the so-called “mass culture” or “popular culture” – its production, diffusion and consumption (Costa, 1997: 2). “Cultural industries”, as defined by Adorno, refer to those institutions “which employ the characteristic modes of production and organization of industrial corporations to produce and disseminate symbols in the form of cultural goods and services, generally, though not exclusively, as commodities” (Garnham 1987: 25, cited in Shuker, 2001: 28). Cultural industries have been associated with capitalism, due to the corporate nature of the institutions that produce mass culture and their pursuit of maximum profit and market expansion. They include various industries such as film, performing arts, literature, radio broadcasting, music etc.

The music industries are part of the cultural industries due to their large corporate nature and the high output of products (Stratton, 1983: 145). They represent a system of links between the music makers and the audience, in which regulative and gate-keeping decisions are made by record companies, mainly based on economic factors, such as profit and loss. Record companies can be seen as “institutions of diffusion and consecration” of symbolic goods, in Bourdieu's terminology, as they are usually involved in all aspects of management, production, distribution and sale of recorded music and they are “based on a relation to culture which is also a relation to the economy and the market” (Bourdieu, 1993: 84).

If we regard the phonographic industry as a system of links, the most important element in this system is the phonogram (Malm, Wallis, 1984: 5). Phonograms are “non-material” goods embodying a “live, one-of-a-kind performance and/or unique set of ideas as opposed to goods ‘serving more obvious utilitarian needs” (Malm, Wallis, 1992: 14) and have been included by the UNESCO general conference in Nairobi (1976) in the concept of culture (Malm, Wallis, 1984: 72). Peter Manuel correlates the advent of *mass media* – phonograms included – with the process of

urbanization and the emergence of modern social classes in the general context of late modernity (Manuel, 2001). It is worth underlining the distinction made by Stratton between the product and the medium: “the supposed massification effect of non-interaction media, such as radio and television, is associated with what is taken to be a homogenization of the product which those media disseminate” (Stratton, 1983: 143). This distinction is helpful to understand the relationship of the artist with the record company and with the audience. The product, which is the music; and the medium, which is the phonogram, play different roles in this relationship and have an influence on the status of the artist.

Music industries in communist countries have certain particularities and Peter Manuel underlines the resistance to multinational record companies but also the low quality of the products in this context:

“The performance of socialist popular music industries under state ownership has been generally mixed. On the one hand, popular musics under socialism avoid most of the negative features of commercialism, including the link to corporate sponsorship and consumerism, the fetishism of stars and fashions and the deforming pressures exerted on musicians by the market. At the same time, most communist countries – which were underdeveloped to begin with – have been unable to devote adequate financial resources to entertainment industries and related sectors such as consumer electronics. Bureaucratic inefficiency and authoritarian cultural policies have exacerbated problems of creative innovation and material production” (Manuel, 2001).

The duality posed, on one hand, by the particularities of state-owned music industries in communist countries and, on the other hand, the capitalist structure of the music industries – constantly in pursuit of profit and market expansion – represents one of the main tenets of my research.

Malm and Wallis examine music industries as a system of demand-reward relationships, affected by several constraints: technology (the machines that are available); economy (financial resources); and organization (human and cultural resources and structures, including legislation) (Malm, Wallis, 1992: 18). I will use this conceptual framework to answer the following questions:

- What was the configuration of the music industries in Romania? What was the place of *Electrecord* in this configuration?

- What were the stages of production and the institutions/companies involved in the process? What was the technology used by *Electrecord*?

- Which musical genres and artists were promoted, adapted and censored by the company? Who were the gatekeepers, decision-makers, and censors in the selection process of the repertoire to be edited and released? What were the criteria on which these choices were based?

- What was *Electrecord*'s relation with music industries from other countries, especially the so-called “socialist” ones?

At last, it should be noted that the theoretical structure on which the research questions have been raised is designed according to Marco Roque de Freitas’ book on what he coined as the “sonorous construction of Mozambique”, which explores a similar topic within a single-party Marxist-Leninist context (Freitas, 2020).

A.2. Brief historical contextualization

Romania is a south-eastern European country with a total area of 238,397 square kilometers and 19.4 million inhabitants (as of 2019)³. It shares land borders with Bulgaria to the south, Ukraine to the north, Hungary to the west, Serbia to the southwest, and Moldova to the east and has its opening to the Black Sea in the southeast. The country's current borders were established following the end of World War II, through the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, when Europe was divided between Western and Eastern political spheres of influence. As the Soviet Union took control of most countries in Eastern Europe, Romania became one of its satellite states, with a one-party communist rule.

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/10186/10990320/RO-RO.pdf>, accessed 30.03.2021

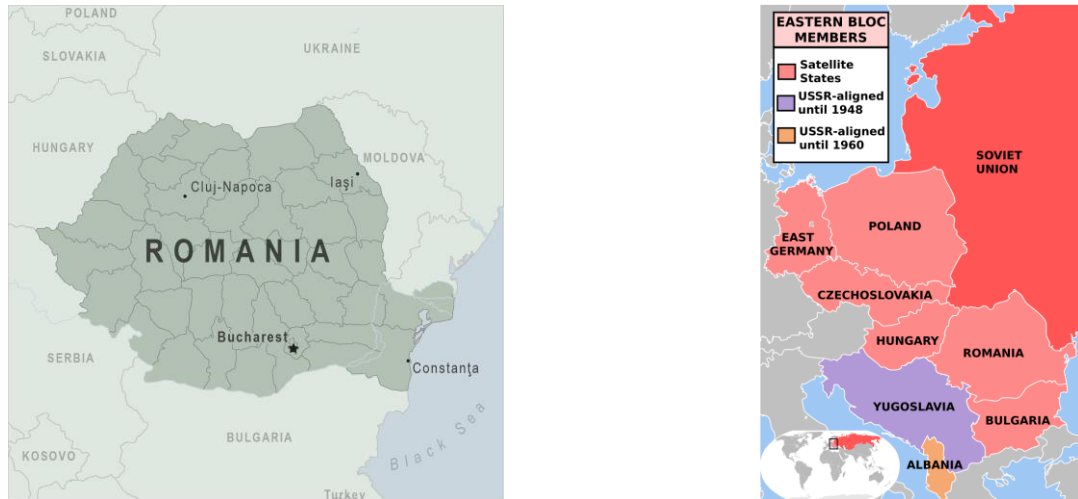


Image A1 – Romania today (left) and the Eastern European Communist Bloc after WWII (right)

During the 42 years of communism, Romania had two leaders: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, from 1948-1965 and Nicolae Ceaușescu, from 1965-1989. The first period, under ruler Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, was marked by the soviet occupation, which had the primary objective of consolidating its power. A series of transformations took place at all levels, following the model of the Soviet Union: the market driven economy became centralized, as the private property was abolished and all means of production were nationalized; a process of heavy industrialization was set in motion (Deletant, 2019: 66); freedom of speech was reduced and censorship was drastically applied; social realism was imposed in art and literature (Crotty, 2014: 156), which became subordinate to the new doctrine, as cultural activity was regarded as a key instrument for building a new society based on the “new man”⁴. It is in this context that *Electrecord* was nationalized in 1948 and merged with the studios and production equipment left behind by Columbia Records. Also, the company's equipment and technology were subsequently upgraded.

After Stalin's death in 1953, a process known as “de-Stalinization” was set in motion in the Soviet Union and its satellite states. In this context, Romania gained

⁴ See chapter II “Historical Contextualization” for more details;

control of its national industrial processes and signed many trade agreements with Western European countries in order to gain further economic independence from Moscow. The opening to the West also allowed for cultural exchange and as early as 1959, *Electrecord* has begun to edit a compilation titled “Melodies from all over the World”, featuring foxtrot and samba songs⁵.

In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu became the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and changed the name of the country from the Popular Republic of Romania to the Socialist Republic of Romania. He strengthened the country’s autonomy in relation to the USSR by continuing Dej’s policies of openness to the West and a period of relative freedom and prosperity – dubbed the “Thaw era” – begun. In 1971, after the release of Ceausescu’s “July Theses”, the regime imposed clear directions for art, literature and press, which were to serve the people and the ideals of communism. Western influences were condemned and the country entered a period marked by a so-called “neo-Stalinism”, due to the similar restrictive nature of the regime. During the following years, the regime continued its internal restrictive policies and gradually became more isolated from Western economic partners. Because of this, the 1980s were marked by poverty, and by harsh censorship directives. In December 1989, anti-government demonstrations reached Bucharest and became known as the Romanian Revolution. It was the only violent toppling of a communist administration: Ceaușescu and his wife Elena were captured and executed by a firing squad on December 25th, 1989.

A.3. Methods and techniques

This dissertation is primarily a qualitative study, based on methods related to the ethnography of the past (Bohlman, 1996, McCollum and Hebert, 2014). The data was mainly collected through interviews, by consulting historical documents, magazine and newspaper articles, biographies and autobiographies, documentaries,

⁵ Various – Melodii Din Toată Lumea, EDE 041 (1959): <https://www.discogs.com/master/706386-Variou-Melodii-Din-Toată-Lumea>

statistics, and phonogram analysis (including liner notes). As some interviews were conducted over the phone and since a considerable amount of information was collected from the internet and via emails, this ethnography also falls under the definition of “virtual fieldwork” (Cooley, Meizel, Syed, 2008: 91). For instance, some magazines and newspapers were consulted online, as well as most of the laws relevant to my research. The website *Discogs.com* was the main source for the study of *Electrecord*’s catalogue as it has the most complete database of the company’s releases. The proposed historical narrative is informed by ethnomusicological readings and popular music studies perspectives, considering the political and social context of the country and the technological innovations in relation to the development of the international phonographic industry.

Firstly, I have conducted interviews with ten people that have worked for, or collaborated with *Electrecord*: Cornelia Andreescu – the current director of *Electrecord*, former artistic director, sound engineer and producer of the company; Paul Enigarescu, artistic director of *Electrecord* (1989-1990), sound engineer at Radio Romania and at concerts and festivals organized by the Council of Socialist Culture and Education, musical director and member of the jury at the “Mamaia Festival” (before 1990); Gheorghe Grosaru, sound engineer at *Electrecord* (1979-1995); Speranța Rădulescu, ethnomusicologist, member of the Folklore Committee at *Electrecord*, member of the jury at the “Cântarea României Festival” (Song of Romania); Mircea Stănică, manager of the cassette duplication department and sound recording studio (1983-1986); Ion Frațilă, mastering/transferring engineer for *Electrecord* (1980-1996); Cristian Madolciu, Romanian musician, founding member of the band FFN (1971), and member of the “Super Group Electrecord”; Teodor Isaru, current musical director of the company; Aneta Stan, a folklore singer; and Octavian Ursulescu, music journalist and critic, musical advisor of *Electrecord* up until 1990.

The interviews were semi-structured, without a fixed questionnaire, although adapted to the competence of the different collaborators. These interviews had two main objectives: on the one hand, to identify the production process, decision-makers, technological means, organization of the company and political intervention in its activity; on the other hand, to validate previously gathered information and confirm

the interviewees' answers. For these purposes, a few questions were addressed to more than one collaborator, depending on their field of expertise (for example, the questions related to the studio equipment were addressed to all sound engineers). Furthermore, I confronted some collaborators with statements from previous interviews. This was helpful in shedding light on different events or practices of the company from different angles and better understanding who were the decision-makers and gatekeepers. All collaborators agreed to have their statements recorded and all quotes were directly transcribed from the original audio files and were translated by myself into English, unless stated otherwise.

One can argue that the relatively small number of interviewees can make their statements open to validation, even though the accuracy of the data was thoroughly verified. In truth, it would be desirable to interview more musicians from different genres and other members of the committees that *Electrecord* formed for the assessment of the quality and content of its recorded music. Indeed, more perspectives would be necessary to better understand the practices of the company in relation to other music industries and to cultural politics. Still, considering that most former employees and collaborators passed away and that this investigation was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching more key people for this case study proved to be a challenge.

The historical documents were accessed in the National Archives of Romania, the archive of the Ministry of Culture, the Library of the Romanian Academy, the archive of the Romanian Broadcasting Society and on the internet. This documentation includes law decrees and regulations, organization plans, official dispositions, reports, notes and observations, editorial plans, institutional letters, agreements etc. I have also consulted music-related articles (reviews, charts, news etc.) from Romanian magazines and newspapers, such as *Contemporanul* ⁶,

⁶ Journal for culture, politics, and science, founded in 1881.

*Saptamana*⁷, *Flăcara*⁸, and *Scanteia*⁹, the main publications with music-related articles, critiques, and charts, and also from foreign publications such as *Gramophone*, *Billboard* and *Jazz Forum*. For example, Romanian music journalist Octavian Ursulescu (b. 1947) was a correspondent of *Billboard Magazine* and *Jazz Forum* in which he frequently signed articles about the national music industries and reported about sales charts, concerts of foreign artists in Romania, phonogram releases and many more. The citations from these sources, the lyrics and discs liner notes have been translated into English by me unless stated otherwise.

Relevant information was also found in biographies and autobiographies of musicians, which provide important details about the social and political context of their activity and even about *Electrecord*. For example, guitarist and composer Ilie Stepan wrote both about the equipment of the record company and about its censorship practices (Mihăieș, 2008). As some of these details are known only by the participants in a certain event, they are not considered as representing historical truths, but rather analyzed in accordance with the speaker's social status, political affiliation, family connections, gender, ethnicity etc. For example, a rock and a folklore musician can provide different accounts of the same event. The same is valid for the perspectives of a musician that had certain privileges, such as the son of a party member, versus one that was the son of a schoolteacher, for example.

Finally, audio recordings were analyzed to understand how certain aspects of the production process (recording technology, mixing, and mastering techniques, materials used in manufacturing, etc.) were reflected in the final product. For example, by listening to some folklore recordings made under the supervision of one of the sound engineers at *Electrecord*, a signature sound can be identified in the vocal doubling technique that he used, which created a particular and recognizable chorus effect. Additionally, by comparing the audio quality of some *Electrecord* releases with

⁷ Newspaper founded in 1907, focusing on Bucharest's cultural scene.

⁸ Journal for politics, arts, and culture, founded in 1911.

⁹ Communist propaganda newspaper, published illegally between 1931-1940 and legalized in 1944. Covered political, cultural, social matters.

the quality of phonograms edited in the same period by other record companies, important details about the materials used in the manufacturing process have surfaced.

A.4. Motivation and relevance

Firstly, this research is motivated by the lack of in-depth studies on the phonographic industry in Eastern Europe during the Communist regimes. Information about the recording and production process, organization, distribution, gatekeepers, and links with the transnational music industries is scarce or completely lacking in this context. For instance, in their transnational MISC Project¹⁰, Wallis and Malm have not included any countries belonging to the Eastern European socialist bloc due to the “special problems of analysis” posed by the links between the state-run music industries and transnational ones (Wallis & Malm, 1984: xv). Hence, they exposed a gap in scholarly research that was, at the time, yet to be filled.

If we were to answer Timothy Rice's question: “How do people historically construct, socially maintain, and individually create and experience music?” (Rice 1987: 473), it is fundamental to cover this information void and produce knowledge about the company's history. In-depth studies of the processes involved in the mass production and selling of music in this context would shed light on the current and even future state of the music industries in Eastern Europe, how they affect music activity and, in turn, how they are affected by the state-defined cultural policy. Furthermore, as I will reveal in this study, such an endeavour brings forth issues of access to information, archival practices, power relations and cultural politics.

Secondly, this study is driven by the lack of information and research on the phonographic industry in relation to cultural policy in Romania during the communist regime. The state-owned record company *Electrecord*, which is still in activity today but striving to survive, has released all Romanian music from 1948 until 1990. It has become a fundamental institution in the history of recorded music in Romania, through the density of the repertoire and musicians it recorded, and through the way

¹⁰ Music Industries in Small Countries was a three-year research project that aimed to analyze the music industries in twelve countries from four continents. The European countries included were Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway.

that its history has overlapped the history of the country in key moments of social, economic and political transformation. However, information about its history, production process, technology, and links with the transnational music industries is surprisingly scarce. As to my knowledge, no comprehensive study, book or article exists on this topic.

Thirdly, the sound archives of *Electrecord*, which can be considered an important slice of the history of Romanian immaterial heritage, are off-limits for scholars or students wanting to develop research, which raises fundamental issues about archive democratization, as put forward by Derrida: “effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.” (Derrida 1996: 4). The lack of access to information poses urgent questions on how this archive has been managed and preserved. As Anthony Seeger noted, if properly archived for the ages, these recordings will endure and therefore have the potential to elicit change in innumerable ways:

“No one can predict the ways their collections will be used. Some will become one of the building blocks of cultural and political movements; some will bring alive the voice of a legendary ancestor for an individual; some will stimulate budding musicians, some will soothe the pain of exile, and some will be used for restudies of primary data that may revolutionize approaches to world music” (Seeger, 1986: 264).

This dissertation attempts to fill in the highlighted gaps, leading the way towards further studies on this topic from different perspectives. The value of this dissertation also lies in its ability to contribute to the conversation about archival practices, power relations and access to information with the Romanian case. Cloonan and Frith advocated the value of academic research in the music industries matters for its “ability to take the long historical view, to make comparisons, to provide a proper sense of context” (Cloonan & Frith, 2011: 462). By providing a historical view of the phonographic industry in relation to cultural policy in Romania during the communist regime, the present study adds new ideas to the interdisciplinary dialogue about politics, music, and expressive culture in general, while highlighting two interconnected contexts of musical activity: the music industries and cultural policy.

A.5. Challenges and ethical issues

Since this study covers a topic that, in the Romanian soil, is yet to be explored in ethnomusicological scholarship, the primary challenge was the lack of reliable information: *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 8* briefly mentions *Electrecord* and its importance in the dissemination of music in Romania during the Communist regime; *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music* has no entry on Romania, *Electrecord* or any other record company from the former Soviet bloc; the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 1* has entries on *Supraphon* in former Czechoslovakia, *Balkanton* in Bulgaria, *Melodiya* in the USSR, *MHV* in Hungary, but not on the Romanian record company. Also, a search on *JSTOR*, *Grove Music Online*, and the journals *Popular Music* and *Ethnomusicology* provides little or no information on the phonographic industry in Romania during the Communist regime.

The history of *Electrecord* is yet to be written or thoroughly documented, as only a handful of articles and studies have attempted to gather the information, which is, at times, unreliable¹¹. Moreover, validating the accuracy of the collected data was challenging. For example, Claudiu Oancea incorrectly cites an article from *Flăcara* magazine about *Electrecord*, which, it seems, never existed (Oancea, 2017: 171).

The current director of the company claims that documents such as the organizational charts, sales figures, job descriptions, documentation on equipment acquisition, internal rules, official decisions (editorial policy, increase/decrease of phonogram manufacturing etc.), general workers registers (of employees, equipment etc.) have not been archived, and contracts with employees and artists or deals with other record companies abroad cannot be accessed due to clauses of confidentiality¹². Furthermore, there is no official complete and up-to-date catalogue made public by

¹¹ For instance, the year that the company was founded is not agreed upon, as some sources mention 1932 and others 1933; the entry on *Grove Music Online* on composer Mihai Moldovan mentions him as director of *Electrecord* during 1968-1969, however all the other consulted sources mention him merely as a producer.

¹² Personal conversation with Cornelia Andreescu.

the company, and only a few printed catalogues can be found in different sources, which represent a small part of the complete audio library. The lack of documents and statistics makes it difficult to gather reliable quantitative data. However, I have managed to obtain information that is reliable, although admittedly incomplete. Difficulties in the gathering for quantitative data related to the phonographic industry have been underlined many years ago by Wallis and Malm in their MISC study (Wallis, Malm, 1984: 24) and by Pekka Gronow in a paper prepared for IASA (Gronow, 1983). As this dissertation demonstrates, this problem persists.

The company does not hold the status of archive creator and keeper; therefore, it does not fall under the law nr. 16/1996, which regulates which documents are considered of historical importance¹³. Also, because presently it is not a public institution, it does not fall under the regulations of the law of access to information, which grants access to any person to information of “public interest”¹⁴. However, the audio library is the property of the Ministry of Culture and is considered a national patrimony, although under the exclusive administration and exploitation of *Electrecord*¹⁵. There are other institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture or the National Archives that do keep historical documents related to *Electrecord* which are available for research. Yet, a large portion of the documentation is missing from these archives as well, especially those dating from the last decade of communism (1980-1990).

Information is also scarce in other institutions with which the record company has collaborated: the Romanian Society for Broadcasting, for example, holds documents related to the collaboration with the record company from 1948 until 1960, and a couple of pages dating from 1991, which rests outside the period that this investigation focuses upon (1965-1989); the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania (UCMR) – the society in charge of collecting payments to the original songwriters, composers, and music publishers – does not hold any record of the

¹³ Law nr. 16/1996 regarding National Archives.

¹⁴ Law nr. 544/2001 regarding free access to information of public interest.

¹⁵ According to the HG 346/13.05.1991.

relation it had with the record company. In order to obtain as much information as possible, I have contacted other record companies that have collaborated with *Electrecord*, such as *Supraphon* in former Czechoslovakia and *Deutsche Grammophon* in Germany. I had no success with this initiative as my requests were met with negative replies. The blunt, unmotivated refusals were foreseen in a way, especially if one considers the tenuous relationship between ethnomusicology and the phonographic industry: in most cases, scholars have criticized the profit-oriented practices of the music business, highlighting issues of authorship, cultural imperialism, appropriation or questioning the categorization of music for marketing purposes, just to name a few examples (Malm 1992; Stokes 2004).

Another challenge is represented by my own subjectivity in interpreting the collected data. Although I am Romanian, I was born just a few months before the fall of communism, and therefore I have not experienced life in that context firsthand. Therefore, I rely on documents, articles, oral histories and audio recordings in an attempt to outline the context of my research topic as best as I can. I would go so far as stating that this historical research “at home” became an excursion into the culture of the “other”, which creates a paradox difficult to cope with. Subjectivity is one of the chief problems when studying history, as was brought to the forefront by A. Seeger: “History is the subjective understanding of the past from the perspective of the present” (Seeger, 1993: 23). I have addressed this challenge by discussing the contents of this dissertation with the people that I have interviewed (historians, ethnomusicologists and former employees of *Electrecord*) before making the final corrections.

A.6. Thesis structure

The introduction of this thesis set the ground for the research project by defining its object, the fields of inquiry and determining its main questions and hypothesis. The object and field of inquiry comprise the cultural policy and the phonographic industry in Romania between 1965 and 1989. The hypothesis and main questions revolve around the idea that the sole record company, *Electrecord*, was a key instrument in the institutional apparatus that created and implemented official cultural policy. Questions about the production process, technology and organization of the company are also set forth, in addition to the description of the social and political context, most notably the construction of socialism with its inherent "new society" as a fundamental nation-building trope.

Chapter 1, "State of the Art", is divided into four parts and highlights the ideas forwarded by scholars relevant to my research. The first part presents the main approaches taken in academic research on the study of music and cultural policy, mediated by the music industries. The second part focuses on the existing literature on cultural policy and the phonographic industry in the socialist bloc of Eastern Europe, emphasizing similarities between Romania and other countries during the communist regime. The third part is comprised of a literature review on nation-building and its symbols, with an accent on the place of music for the enactment of national identities. The fourth part comprises a global analysis of these topics in Ethnomusicology and also focuses on similar contexts to that of my research.

Chapter 2, "Historical contextualization", is a detailed account of the political, economic, and social features of Nicolae Ceaușescu's 24 years of rule and its influence on the music industries in Romania. Thus, the institutional framework of culture, music policy and legislation are analyzed. Furthermore, I discuss the musician's status, illustrating the particularities of both the representatives of official culture and the ones that represent a "counterculture" movement. Going beyond the national context, I also take into consideration many international events, technological developments, agreements, and institutions that affected the phonographic industry in Romania. Lastly, I describe the configuration of the music industries in the country.

Chapter 3 focuses on the phonographic industry, represented by the state-owned record company and sheds light on its organization and the production processes and techniques applied. By revealing the organizational chart and the stages of the production process I also identify the decision-makers, gatekeepers and censors in the company. Furthermore, since *Electrecord* was in charge of all the production stages, from the decision to manufacturing and distribution, I discuss the relation between the economic, political and cultural motivations in making the final publication decisions.

Chapter 4 is an analysis based on the hypothesis advanced in the introductory part of the thesis. Firstly, by examining the editorial policy and the external factors that influenced it, I determine both the degree of autonomy of the record company and its role in the institutional apparatus that designed and implemented cultural policy. The discussions initiated in chapter 3 on the decision-makers and the political influence on the editorial policy are further developed in order to identify the censors of the record company. Secondly, the direct influence of *Electrecord's* practices on music is thoroughly analyzed both by providing audio examples and by interpreting how the company produced value and meaning to its releases.

The conclusion of this dissertation relates the hypothesis and research questions with the analysis of *Electrecord's* editorial policy and state-defined cultural policy, while acknowledging new perspectives for future studies on this topic.

I. STATE OF THE ART

I.1. Music industries and cultural policy

The relationship between music and cultural policy, mediated by the music industries, has become an important subject in the Social Sciences and Humanities since the 1970s. The processes of globalization, technological advances in the music industries and the transnational flows of cultural commodities were the driving forces of government initiatives related to music activity, which, in turn, created a fertile research territory in the fields of Ethnomusicology, Popular Music Studies, Cultural Studies and Media Studies. The comprehension of music in these contexts is driven by themes that arise from the demand of the post-modern condition, such as gender issues, social identities, and globalization processes. According to Ramon Pelinski (1997): “Current Ethnomusicology, far from fearing dialogue with these ideas, is based on them to produce new problems, in which music, besides seeking its identity in sound characteristics, symbolizes political and cultural thoughts and practices of our time”¹⁶. Indeed, the approaches presented in the following lines reveal many tenets of this perspective.

The interest in this topic is driven, on the one hand, by the need to understand the significance of music in a world fraught with power relations: Guilbault's study on the politics of calypso in Trinidad and Tobago is based on the assertion that “the orientation of a music industry cannot be presented as a matter of pure choice (aesthetic or otherwise), but must be recognized as embodied in power relations, historical contingencies and ad hoc circumstances” (Guilbault, 2002: 192). On the other hand, scholars have become increasingly engaged in the formulation of music policy: Frith and Cloonan reveal that the “academic interest in these issues can't be disentangled from our own political engagement with the (Scottish) music policy-

¹⁶ “La etnomusicología actual, lejos de temer el diálogo con estas ideas, se nutre de ellas para articular nuevos problemas, en los que la música, más allá de buscar su identidad en rasgos sónicos, simboliza pensamientos y prácticas políticas, sociales y culturales de nuestro tiempo”. Ramon Pelinski, “¿Qué es etnomusicología?” in *Actas del III Congreso de la Sociedad ibérica de Etnomusicología: Benicàssim, Villa Elisa*, 23-25 de Mayo de 1997 / coord. por Ramón Pelinski, Vicent Torrent Centelles, 1998, p. 35-56

making process” (Frith, Cloonan, 2008: 189) and invite for a scholarly approach as a matter of “both institutional pragmatism (popular music policy makers are now a significant source of research funding) and research practice (what better way of understanding how policy making works than to engage with it?)” (ibidem.: 190).

The paths that were taken by scholars in the study of music and cultural policy follow specific political trajectories, which have been identified by Simon Frith and Martin Cloonan:

“From cultural policy to cultural industries policy, from treating popular music as a matter of social or cultural concern to treating the popular music industry as a matter of economic concern, from devising policies to counter the local effects of international commerce to devising policies to embed local practices within the world marketplace” (Frith, Cloonan, 2008: 189).

Thus, three main areas have been covered: (i) the discourses that sustain the creation and implementation of music policy, to reveal the implicit ideologies on which they are articulated (Guilbault, 2002, Askew, 2002, Shuker, 2013; Rădulescu, 2002, Corte-Real 2002); (ii) the national and international factors that influence music policy (Malm, Wallis, 1984; Harewood, 2008); and (iii) the effects of music policy on expressive modes and in their reception (Askew, 2002; Chikowero, 2014; Gilman, 2015; Guilbault, 2002, Rădulescu, 2002). The common basis of these approaches is the fact that cultural policy is nationally articulated, considering different ideologies, on what can be called *governance*. Peter Manuel differentiates two meanings of the term “ideology”, which can refer, in some cases, to a “set of meanings, values, aesthetics, expectations, socio-political attitudes, and ways of conceiving the self and society in a culture in a neutral sense”. Another, in my perspective more useful, is provided by Marxist thinking, which is often given a particular connotation, referring to the manner in which these sets of beliefs work to legitimize, naturalize, and maintain the dominant class's socioeconomic hegemony (Manuel, 2019: 59). Considering this connotation, this dissertation addresses mainly the first two approaches listed above, since the effects that music policy has on expressive modes and their reception are not thoroughly studied here.

The main questions that interest scholars that delve into this matter are: what kind of policies have governments applied or tried to enforce in the musical and

cultural domains? (Anderson, Mirchell, 1978; Malm, Wallis, 1984, 1992; Harewood, 2008; Askew, 2002) What are the objectives of music policy? (Frith, Cloonan, 2008; Harewood, 2008; McLeay, 2006; Garofalo, 1999; Askew 2002) How dynamic are such policies? And why and how do they change? (Malm, Wallis, 1992, Askew, 2002). As already seen in the introduction, my investigation is driven by the same questions, which have not yet been applied to the context and period of my dissertation.

Firstly, one predominant feature of music policy discourse has been the protection against a putative “nationless transnational music culture” (Malm, Wallis, 1984: xiv). In this regard, music is used by the political powers to shape general ideas on what constitutes national culture and, implicitly, what are the boundaries and characteristics of a given ‘nation’ in relation to its “national culture”. This idea is connected to social processes academically grouped within the concept of “identity”. In their MISC study, Malm and Wallis uncovered a common trait of the function and use of music in “small countries”, which was its use as a symbol of “national identity” (ibidem.: 14) and thus highlighting the nationalistic idiom that dominates modern forms of folklore music (ibidem.: 15). Maria de São José Côte Real also discusses this aspect regarding the *Política do Espírito* (politics of the spirit) in Portugal during the regime of Salazar, revealing that the policy had the goals of promoting the “image of a new nation through a systematic mechanism of ‘spiritual’ propaganda” and of constructing a “national consciousness” (Corte Real, 2002: 229). As we will later see, these ideas had a strong reverberation in the context of Romanian folklore developed during the communist regime.

Susan Harewood also researched the relationship between music policy, calypso and soca performance, and the formation of Barbadian national identities (Harewood, 2008). She does so by analyzing the discourses related to different cultural domains in relation to the state-defined cultural policy, and by tracking the changes in these initiatives and their implementation in the former English colony of Barbados from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Harewood makes a compelling case for the importance of examining performance as part of the analysis of music policy. Similarly, Kelly Askew highlights the necessity of comprehending performances produced specifically

for an audience and the more private performative form when studying the transformation of national cultures and imaginaries (Askew, 2002). Through a “performative understanding of power”, she analyzes Swahili music performances and cultural policy in Tanzania and concludes that national cultures and imaginaries must be viewed as processes rather than products, as they are in permanent change. Askew's book is an essential account of the relationship between cultural policy and music in a socialist regime and illustrates a lot of similarities with the Romanian case. By applying these ideas to the Romanian case, in the next chapters, I will analyze and describe how the studio performances (during the recordings for *Electrecord*), were in most cases aligned to the standards established by the State for public performances. By doing so, I will also reveal the role that *Electrecord* had in enforcing state-defined music policy.

Roy Shuker also examines the relationship between New Zealand's local music and cultural identity, focusing on two notable musical styles: Kiwi 'garage' rock and urban Polynesian music (local rap, reggae, and hip-hop-inflected music) (Shuker, 2008). His study offers an accurate example of how international musical genres have been adopted by local artists and become cultural signifiers, national symbols supported by government decisions. This is also valid for some genres in Romania, especially after the 1971 “July Theses” (see chapter II.2.b), when folklore-inspired musical and lyrical themes have been adapted to rock, jazz, and pop music. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I will analyze how *Electrecord* attributed meaning and value to some of its music releases as cultural signifiers and national symbols.

Secondly, doubling the protectionist feature of music policy discourse is the economic argument for sustaining domestic music production. The cultural and economic aspects are inextricably linked in the discourses on music policy, which acts as a shield against music globalization, often believed to be also mediated by the music industries. Thus, the importance of the 'culture industries' to the world economy has also resulted in a great number of studies that focus on the interconnectivity between cultural policy and the music industries. For instance, Colin McLeay uncovers the cultural-economic duality in the discourse of the Australian government regarding its engagement with the music industries, emphasizing “the contribution that the creative

industries make to identity, community and economy” (McLeay, 2008: 99). Notions of nationality, such as “Australian rock music’s appeal to national consciousness”, were used to legitimize the implementation and enforcement of legislation and regulation (ibidem.: 97). Nevertheless, in addition to the cultural rhetoric, the moving force for the government's regulatory policies was “an interest in increasing the export potential of locally produced music” (ibidem.: 100). On a different note, Moses Chikowero's study of music policy in post-colonial Zimbabwe provides a rather unique approach, as it highlights the effects of the lack of coherent music or cultural policy regarding the music industries (Chikowero, 2014). He offers acute insights into how the government's failure to design and implement a consistent music policy negatively impacted not only local music scenes but also some Zimbabweans’ sense of identity, self-worth, and economic status. The duality posed by cultural and economic arguments that sustain state-defined cultural policy is also valid in the case of Romania during the communist regime. Similarly, the state-owned record company also balanced the two aspects in decision-making regarding its editorial policy and releases. The discourses of Ceaușescu and official documents related to initiatives in the cultural domains are presented in chapter II, while the extent to which *Electrecord* balanced the cultural and economic reasoning to the production decisions is analyzed in chapters III and IV.

Most of the studies cited above have pointed out the importance of studying national music policy beyond the borders of the nation-state. In this regard, some case studies explore the relationship between international, national, and local decision-makers, revealing that choices taken at a national level are shaped by international factors – agreements, conventions, organizations, and strategies of transnational record corporations (Malm, Wallis: 1984; Harewood: 2008; Shuker: 2013). Malm and Wallis approach their MISC study from this broader perspective, which also motivates the absence of “small countries” from the Eastern European Socialist Bloc: “the indirect links between the state-run music industry in these countries and the transnational music industry pose very special problems of analysis” (Malm, Wallis: 1984: xv). Similarly, Harewood demonstrates how international factors and national policy decisions about music in Barbados are interconnected. Her approach is twofold,

as she examines not only how national and international policy decisions affect the calypso/soca music industries and performance, but also how the latter affects the former (Harewood, 2008). The interconnectivity between transnational and national music industries, and between internationally and nationally defined policy, also applies to the study of cultural policy and music in Romania during the communist regime. In this dissertation, I aim to identify and address some of the aforementioned “special problems of analysis” signalled by Malm and Wallis, although there were, indeed, various barriers that condition the full understanding of the relations between the Romanian music industries and transnational ones (as already highlighted in section “Challenges and ethical issues”).

1.2. Cultural policy and the phonographic industries in the Eastern European Socialist Bloc

Case studies based in Eastern European Socialist regimes have contributed to this dialogue, taking the same multi-faced approach in a context where the music industries and cultural activity were generally controlled by the state. On one hand, scholars have studied how the music industries and other institutions responsible for the creation and regulation of cultural policy were instrumental in carrying out the ideological aspirations of the state. This issue has been mostly explored through the filter of counterculture, that is, through the musical genres and styles that the government did not approve of. Counterculture, in the communist regimes, has come to be mostly associated with rock, jazz, ska or punk, which were considered potentially harmful to the ruling principles. For example, Peter Barrer analyzed countercultural scenes in former Czechoslovakia, revealing how jazz and rock musicians avoided the official channels to create what he called an “oasis of freedom” (Barrer, 2006: 77). Tony Mitchell also examined the association of rock in Czechoslovakia before the Velvet Revolution, considering “notions of freedom, desire or pleasure associated with western capitalism”, widely seen as the only outlet for political opposition (Mitchell, 1992: 190). Gleb Tzipurski, in turn, offers an in-depth

examination of the methods used during the last years of Stalin's rule in the USSR to prohibit jazz (Tzipurski, 2016). On a contrary note, Szmere shows how rock in Hungary had slowly begun to be accepted as the “official culture” in the 1960s, as increasing numbers of singles and LPs were being released, rock bands were included in state-sponsored festivals and the radio started to broadcast programmes “specifically for young people” (Szmere, 1983: 123). The counterculture lens is useful in this case study as well, as it better clarifies the attitude of the regime towards certain genres or musicians. In chapter II.3, “Music institutions and the status of the musician”, I discuss how the support between some artists and the regime was mutual, while musicians that did not fall into the official cultural line were marginalized by the official musical outlets or even forced into exile.

The relation between power and music in communist regimes has also been uncovered through the examination of the cultural institutional apparatus. Gronow has explored the production and distribution processes of the record company *Melodya*, and the influence of Composer's Unions on the phonographic industry decision-makers (Gronow, 1975). Gronow and Daugavietis discuss radio and television in Latvia, showing how a singing competition that had a “reputation expressing nationalist feelings within the limits of Soviet censorship” turned into a venue for the Latvian independence movement (Gronow and Daugavietis, 2020: 270).

Recent case studies based in Romania during the communist regime follow the same research lines, as authors have examined the music and its political context considering issues such as censorship, cultural transnational networks and national ideology (Rădulescu, 2002; Oancea, 2017; Dobrescu, 2011; Pop, 2016; Fichter, 2011). Speranta Rădulescu's book “Peisaje Muzicale in Romania in secolul XX” is built upon the premise that “musics are always and everywhere under the influence of ideologies” (Rădulescu, 2002: 67), while briefly addressing many existing genres in Romania during the communist period in relation to political tenets. Michael Fichter's study of the countercultural movement developed in Romania between 1965 and 1975 uncovers the connection between elements of the “global youth movement with local cultural and political practices” arguing that scholarly avoidance of Ceaușescu's early period has “obscured the existence of an alternative culture and has led to an

unnuanced interpretation of Romania's postwar history" (Fischter, 2011: 567).

One can also observe that very few studies have dealt with the period between 1965 and 1989 – in which the cultural and political context has changed drastically under the same leader – focusing either on the last decade of communism, the first years of Ceaușescu's rule, or the period after the so-called "July theses" (1971)¹⁷. Furthermore, they mostly cover "reactionary" stances of complicity and resistance on the part of cultural producers, audiences and even journalists, and the effects of cultural policy on the music itself, often ignoring the industrial production and distribution processes. Richard Middleton drew attention to this gap, claiming that "even if the main contours of the history of the mass media and popular music are reasonably clear, much of the detail of the developments, and their implications and effects, is less so" (Middleton, Manuel 2001). My study aims to fill in this gap, firstly by covering the entire period of Ceaușescu's leadership and, secondly, by mapping out the production process and institutional framework of the Romanian music industries. The radical turn in cultural policy in 1971, makes it necessary to study this entire period and explore how the changes – political, cultural and economic – affected the phonographic industry, and informed music practices, cultural producers and audiences alike.

I.3. Nations, Nationalism and Nation-building

For Richard Taruskin a "nation" is defined by the "negotiation of the relationship between the political status of communities and the basis of their self-description, whether linguistic, ethnic (genetic/biological), religious, cultural or historical" (Taruskin, 2001). Taruskin's definition encompasses both the political and cultural aspects of this concept, a duality highlighted by Stuart Hall, which claims that "a nation is not only a political entity but something which produces meanings – a *system of cultural representation*. People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture" (Hall, 1992:

¹⁷ See chapter II.2.b. 1971-1989, the "July theses" and "Mangalia theses"

292). This duality is central to my case study because in the Socialist Republic of Romania (SRR) the phonogram was regarded as a means of disseminating culture, and also due to the fact that the sole record company in the country was subordinated to the political state apparatus that shaped and implemented the cultural policy.

Benedict Anderson approaches nations as “imagined communities”, arguing that they are constructed through discursive imagery, rather than being “real” sociological communities (Anderson, 1991: 4). Even though this view is contested by ethno-symbolists, to the fact that it does not consider the consequences of the creation of the nation (Smith, 2009: 13), Anderson's perspective allows me to focus on a top-down perspective, on the symbols and images manipulated by the political power and disseminated through phonograms. In this regard, I am moving the spotlight from print as the main means of disseminating images about the nation, to mass media and popular culture, following Edensor's critique of Anderson's theory: “Whilst the historical importance of print is important, it is curious that there is no reference to the multiple ways in which the nation is imagined in, for instance, music hall and theatre, popular music, festivities, architecture, fashion, spaces of congregation, and in a plenitude of embodied habits and performances, not to mention more parallel cultural forms such as television, film, radio and information technology” (Edensor, 2002: 7). Moreover, Edensor invests mass media with the central role in disseminating images about the nation (ibidem.: 141), a view shared by Turino, which also adds educational institutions at the heart of establishing “shared knowledge and experiences” on a mass scale (Turino, 2000: 199). Appadurai further develops Anderson's definition of the nation, highlighting the power of mass media to create “communities of sentiment” – that begin to “imagine and feel things together” – through the conditions it provides for collective reading, criticism, and pleasure (Appadurai, 1996: 8). *Electrecord*, as the sole record company and phonogram manufacturer in the country, was one of the pillars in creating and disseminating images about the nation – through sound and music, liner notes and record covers. The contribution of the company to the nation-building process is thoroughly discussed in chapters III and IV.

Approaching the nation as a group, sociologist Rogers Brubaker argues for a shift of perspective on such entities from “fixed and given”, to “variable and

contingent”, thus suggesting that groupness or nationness can be seen as an event, as something that “happens”, as a process rather than a final product (Brubaker, 2004: 12). This view is useful in my case study, as it considers the dynamics of the discursive imagery about the nation in the SRR and helps to approach the “nation” as a political and cultural project that is always in movement.

For authors such as Breuilly (1993) and Gellner (1983), nationalism is a form of politics, associated with the “objectives of obtaining and using power” (Breuilly, 1993: 1) and political legitimacy. “Nationalism”, according to Anthony D. Smith, can be defined as “an ideological movement to attain and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members believe it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’” and is “inspired by an ideology and symbolism of the nation” (Smith, 2009: 61). Smith lists six aspects that make up the “core doctrine” of nationalism:

“(1) humanity is divided into nations, each with its own character, history and destiny; (2) the nation is the sole source of political power; (3) loyalty to the nation takes precedence over other loyalties; (4) to be free, human beings must belong to a nation; (5) nations require maximum autonomy and self-expression; (6) global peace and justice can only be built on the basis of a plurality of free nations.” (ibidem.)

As we will later see, these premises will be reflected in the nationalist discourse of the SRR, in turn, clarified by the speeches of Nicolae Ceaușescu, official documents and press articles.

Taking into consideration the Zimbabwean case, Turino claims that nationalism “emerges out of cosmopolitanism and, in turn, it functions to diffuse cosmopolitan ethics and practices among culturally distinct groups within the state's territory” (Turino, 2000: 13). I explore this perspective in my case study, as the drastic change in cultural policy in the SRR occurred after a period of cultural and economic openness to the West. Based on this assumption, Turino also identifies two paradoxes of nationalism, which nation-states should balance: the first, that “nation-states are dependent on cosmopolitanism, but are simultaneously threatened by it”, because of their need to exist on the international scene; the second, “nation-states celebrate and

are dependent on local distinctiveness, but they are simultaneously threatened by it”, which informs basic assumptions that distinctive cultural groups should have their own state (ibidem. 15). These paradoxes are very noticeable in the SRR case during Ceaușescu's regime and provide an interesting lens through which decisions and motivations regarding cultural policy can be analyzed.

“Nation-building” is defined by Turino as the “forging of national sentiment” and it “involves cultural and artistic domains, with language, music-dance, sports, food, religion, and clothing style often being central” (ibidem.: 14). The author distinguishes between *national sentiment* and *nationalism*, referring to the former as *patriotism* (ibidem.: 14). Steven Grosby also makes this distinction, although claiming that while patriotism does not reject differing conceptions of the nation held by members of the nation, nationalism seeks out a homogeneous vision of it (Grosby, 2005: 17). This distinction is important for the analysis of nation-building in SRR, as the official discourses of Ceaușescu frequently blamed minorities’ proto-nationalist movements while promoting Romanian patriotism.

Peter Sugar claims that the “modern” form of nationalism appeared in Eastern Europe, underlining the different meanings it acquired in comparison to its eighteenth-century Western origin: “basic expressions of nationalism such as a constitution, freedom, or republic acquired different meanings in more eastern areas of Europe” (Sugar, 1995: 8). Although scholars agree that the conditions for nationalist ideologies before WWII were not unique to Eastern Europe (Bollerup & Christensen, 1997; Kemp, 1999), they also acknowledge the particularities acquired under the communist regimes. Ernst Gellner, for instance, identified five stages in the development of nationalism in central and eastern Europe: (1) the rule of the Russian, Hapsburg, and Ottoman Empires; (2) the change of nationalism as a “self-evident principle of political legitimacy” during the nineteenth century; (3) the emergence of small states that were “appallingly fragile and feeble” between the world wars; (4) ethnic cleansing as an attempt to merge the political unit and the ethnicity of the population; and (5) “the attenuation of national feeling”, a stage which may be “part reality, part wish fulfilment” (Gellner, 1997:37-49). He contends that the antinationalist ideology of communism halted the historical process for Eastern Europe countries at, or before

the third stage. These stages are more or less valid in the case of Romania as well, a country that was part of all three empires listed by Gellner, in which nationalism emerged from the desire for independence and autonomy. The concepts discussed in this subchapter will be detailed and applied to the SRR in the following chapter, “Historical Contextualization”.

I.4. A global analysis of music, nationalism, and nation-building in Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicologists have often associated expressive culture with national processes. Martin Stokes has identified four main approaches in ethnomusicological studies on this theme: the first seeks to understand the contribution of music to the imaginary construction of nations, focusing, in particular, on the “invented” elements of national discourses and their relation to sonorous characteristics (genres, styles, among others), in similar fashion with Hobsbawm’s premises (Hobsbawm, 1989); the second explores the dynamics arising from the nation-building processes in post-colonial contexts, addressing the main cultural policy strategies which, in many cases, display deep ideological contradictions (Freitas, 2020; Chikowero, 2008); the third, is based on the notion of “national musics” – based on principles of “otherness” and incorporating difference as a structuring element of the modern nation, although always under the strict control of the State (Guilbault, 2002); the fourth approach emphasizes the importance of population movements within and beyond the borders of the nation-state, focusing, in particular, on the movement of expressive modes from rural to urban areas, taking into account, for example, how the “rural” is fantasized and used by the music industries for purposes of ideological manipulation (Stokes, 2001).

As a part of the “system of cultural representation” (following Hall, 1992), music plays a role in the development of nationalism and national identities, as well as the construction of “traditions” that, in turn, sustain national identities (Stokes, 1994, Askew 2002, Turino, 2000). According to Bohlman, “music is malleable in the service of the nation [...]. Music can narrate national myths and transform them into

nationalist histories. Music marks national borders, while at the same time mobilizing those wishing to cross or dismantle borders. Music enhances the sacred qualities of the nation [...]” (Bohlman, 2011: 5-6). To explore these ideas, Bohlman differentiates nationalist music from national music. He adds that “one of the chief differences between national and nationalist music is the fact that competition with the music of other nations plays only a secondary role in the formation of national music” (ibidem.: 62). This duality will be helpful for my study as it can shed light on the discourses surrounding different musical genres promoted by the state and *Electrecord*.

The emergence of European nations is often romanticized as related to the “discovery of the folk”, as “the collective actors of a nation and the culture they shared” (ibidem. 29). This notion constitutes a political tool in nation-building processes, as implied in its various facets: “recognizing the existence of the political folk or ‘people’ seemed to demand recognizing the presence of the musical folk or ‘people’” (Gelbart, 2007: 97). Consequently, and inspired by Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production (1993), some authors view folk music as a “cultural capital”, valued as a repository of the past shared culture, an element of continuity of a nation, associated with “tradition” and “authenticity” (Gelbart, 2007, Bohlman, 2011). Soros also highlights folk music as a “focus and inspiring source of modern national music” in Romania and Hungary in the 19th century (Soros, 1993: 193), while Porter asserts that during the same period songs and dances “came to have a more overtly regional and ideological role” in the context of the imperial constraints of Austria or Russia (Porter, 2000: 16).

Following WWII, the Communist regimes in the Eastern Bloc manipulated folk symbols to encode messages consistent with their ideology and policies, thus marking the passage from 'folklore' to 'folklorism'. According to Giurchescu, the difference between the two lies in the fact that the former cannot be controlled in comparison to the latter, which “results from strictly guided selection and transformation of folklore” (Giurchescu, 2001: 117). Consequently, folklorism was an important feature of cultural policy in this context, since music ensembles were specially created for staged performances, which were based on “homogeneity and synchronism, on self-control, and on the integration of the individual into the group”

(ibidem.: 114). These ideas apply to both communist and capitalist countries, as staged performances were both distinctively national while appealing to foreign audiences, tourists included (Wallis, Malm, 1984, Buchanan, 1995). Romania was no exception, with *Electrecord* as one of the main contributors to the standardization of Romanian folklore. As will be clarified in chapter IV, once groups recorded their songs in the studios of *Electrecord*, a similar transformation from “folklore” into “folklorism” would occur.

Thomas Turino uses the expression “musical nationalism” to move past the “folk” and “traditional” association, as he refers specifically to “musical styles, activities, and discourses that are explicitly part of nationalist political movements and programs” (Turino, 2000: 14). His approach to this concept is effective for separating the various reasons that underpin musical practices and allows for a wide analysis of various musical genres that contribute to nation-building processes. In his comparative study of music and nationalism in Europe, Philip Bohlman argues that no specific genre can be considered nationalist and focuses on how musicians represent their national identities in the songs they create or reproduce (Bohlman, 2011).

Popular music genres have also been included by authors in the study of music and nationalism, as they have come to strengthen group identity and be valued as cultural signifiers for nations (Manuel, 1987, Shuker, 2008, Rice, 2002, Guilbault, 2002), and have also been fused with folklore, motivated by the same discourses and official directives. Taking these perspectives into account, I am addressing the various musical genres that were edited by *Electrecord*, by analyzing which ones mainly were supported by the record company, which were less edited and what was the reasoning behind those decisions.

In this chapter, I have outlined the perspectives and research questions that inform my research on the cultural policy and the phonographic industry in the SRR. The leading theory that arises is that music contributes to the nation-building process and is employed by political powers to gain support and legitimacy on national and international levels. Although the most important role in this process has been

attributed to folklore, many authors have departed from this paradigm, demonstrating that all genres must be considered when exploring the relation between expressive modes, politics, and nation-building. This is also my perspective, as political directives in the SRR were reflected on many levels in the cultural and artistic fields, in all musical, literary, and theatrical genres.

These studies produced theories which have not yet been verified in the Romanian context. Firstly, although there are many studies on cultural policy in the SSR, very few cover the period between 1965-1989, in which the cultural, political, and economic dynamics pose thought-provoking insights. Secondly, as I have previously mentioned, the phonographic industry in the SRR is not thoroughly explored. Lastly, by putting together the previous two reasonings, the connection between cultural policy and the phonographic industry in the SRR is yet to be studied in Ethnomusicology. Although socialist regimes represent challenging contexts for some authors that delve into these matters – especially when trying to explore their relation to transnational contexts – other scholars have provided revealing answers to some of the questions that I also attempt to answer in this dissertation. Because of their similarities, and given the absence of studies on the Romanian case, they represent the theoretical basis for this analysis.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

The following chapter describes the characteristics of the socialist project in the SRR during the three periods that historians have identified within Ceausescu's regime, based on his internal and external politics. Within this framework, I will discuss the cultural policy and how it changed during these periods, the discourses that legitimized it, the motivations behind these political initiatives and their objectives. It will delve into many themes such as governmental and institutional censorship, especially after the 1971 "July Theses" were published. The final parts of this chapter address the configuration of the music industries in the SRR, with the aim of establishing *Electrecord's* place within this system, without neglecting other themes such as the status of the musician.

II.1. Building socialism

The socialist project in Romania followed the writings of Marx and Engels. One of its first objectives was the creation of an egalitarian society, in which class distinction would no longer exist. This aim was pursued, firstly, through the "equal liability of all to labor" (Marx, Engels, [1848] 2020: 56) and measures to reduce the economic gaps between rural areas and the cities. The reordering of agriculture and rural society, heavy industrialization and the correlation of the educational system to the requirements of the national industries has led to the development of the working class¹⁸, which has grown from 23.7% of the total population in 1956, to 39.9% in 1966 and to 54.3% in 1977 (Tismăneanu, 2006: 347). In addition, in 1968, the crimes of vagrancy¹⁹ and begging (a person who, having the ability to work, repeatedly appeals to the mercy of the public, asking for material help), were introduced into the Criminal Code²⁰.

¹⁸ For detailed graphics on the employment rate, economic investments and industrial development during 1950-1989, see Tismăneanu, 2006: 415-420

¹⁹ The act of a person who has no permanent residence or means of subsistence and who, although having the capacity to work, does not normally exercise an occupation or profession, or does not perform any other work for his maintenance

²⁰ Criminal Code, 1968, Art. 326, 327.

Secondly, massive waves of migration from the rural areas to the cities were set in motion during the 1950s and 1970s, as work force was needed for the major industrial centers. In 1948 the majority of the population - 12 million from a total of 16 million - lived in rural areas and it remained constant until the 1980s, when it decreased to approximately 10 million (Tismăneanu, 2006: 424). The urban population, on the other hand, grew constantly, from 5.9 million people in 1960 to 12.3 million in 1989²¹.

Thirdly, measures were taken for the facilitation of free education for all children in public schools and the combination of education with industrial production (Marx, Engels, [1848] 2020: 56). The communist regime placed great emphasis on the development of education, as school had an essential role in preparing the “new man”²², which, in the words Nicolae Ceaușescu, the General Secretary of the RCP, was “the man of the future, citizen with a superior capabilities, strong in his morality, culture and scientific vision of the world, capable of responding to the historical mission of creating a multilateral developed socialist society, of building communism” (Ceaușescu, 1971). The RCP, while concerned with the development and improvement of the means of production so as to provide the people with an abundance of material goods, attached special importance to the task of educating a new type of man and making him “politically and morally conscious” (ibidem). Cultural activities were at the forefront of the “revolutionary transformation” of the society, of the consciousness of the people on the path towards “new heights of progress and civilization of the nation” (ibidem.).

In conclusion, the construction of socialism in the SRR was a continuous process, which set in motion both the material production forces and the creative ones. The initiatives of the regime during Ceaușescu’s leadership were consistent with the theories of Marx and Engels and led to social, economic and cultural changes that became embedded in the activity of every institution and enterprise. *Electrecord* was

²¹ <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-9495456-urbanizarea-romaniei-cum-crescut-populatia-urbana-3-7-milioane-locuitori-1948-12-milioane-1989.htm>, accessed on 10.12.2021.

²² According to John McLeish, the soviet “new man” represents the competitive, skillful, working people, with a strong discipline, always engaged in the protection and construction of socialism (McLeish, 1975: 161).

one of the pillars used by the regime to disseminate the ideals of socialism and the accomplishments of the regime, as I will demonstrate in the last chapter.

II.2. Nation-building and nationalism in Romania

For more than 40 years of communist rule, the idea of a “Nation” and its adjacent symbols was used by the regime to legitimize its actions and policies. In 1965, when Ceaușescu became the general secretary of the RCP, the cultural and ideological restrictions of the Stalinist era (1922-1953) had slowly faded away as the new communist regime aimed to affirm its autonomy from Moscow and pursue its national-communist project²³. This tendency had been initiated a few years back by Gheorghiu-Dej (1901-1965), who opted for a “national manner” of building socialism, in proclaiming the ‘Nation’ as master symbol of the regime identity: “For a long time to come, the nation and the State will continue to be the basis of the development of socialist society. The development of the nation, the consolidation of the socialist State complies with the objective requirements of social life [...]” (Ceaușescu, cited in Verdery, 1991: 117).

National identity as a component of Romanian cultural policy did not emerge with the advent of socialism, but rather has a long history dating back to the mid-1700s²⁴. Until World War I, the current territory of the country was split between the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires. The nationalistic symbols created by the Communist regime were historically produced around the struggle of the Romanian people for independence. Because of its consideration of the nation's past, which included concerns of origin and identity, history was a critical tool in the creation and re-interpretations of these symbols. One central feature of the nationalistic discourse was the praise of indigenous values, as opposed to imported ones. This type of argument acted as a form of cultural protectionism, shielding local

²³ National communism may take one or both of two closely related forms: (i) some degree of freedom from Soviet control of the individual communist countries; (ii) some degree of distinctiveness of their political systems, their policies, and their ideologies. (Gordon Skilling, 1964: 314).

²⁴ For detailed a history of national ideology and cultural politics in Romania see Verdery, 1991 and Oldson, 1991.

cultural markets from the influx of foreign commodities and ideas. Once again, the indigenous values were established according to a selected “national patrimony” or “heritage” that was adapted to the new socialist reality. The peasantry – associated with the working class – was seen as the repository of the national spirit, which had entered a new phase of development with the advent of socialism (Tismăneanu, 2006: 399). This characteristic led to the creation of ‘neo-traditionalist’ or ‘neo-folkloric’ forms of art, in which folk inspiration prevailed but was adapted to reflect the achievements of the RCP (Preda, 2017: 180). In the final chapter I will discuss this form of art in regard to music, showing how the song’s lyrics and the liner notes of phonograms highlighted the indigenous values and the national heritage.

The national-communist program promoted by Ceaușescu pursued the creation of an ethnically homogeneous state through a policy of assimilation of the minorities, whose essence was best captured (in a sarcastic manner) by ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu: “In the Romanian Socialist State all the citizens had equal rights, what did it matter to which ethnic group they belonged?” (Rădulescu, 1996: 135). With this aim, any form of nationalism was officially condemned and “brotherhood between the cohabiting nationalities” was advocated in the struggle for the “common motherland's prosperity” (Ceaușescu, 1971: 9). Moreover, non-Romanians were gradually removed from key positions. This policy mostly targeted the Hungarian minority, by far the largest in the country. The gradual dismantling of the educational network taught in Hungarian, blocking, or limiting Hungarians’ access to certain professions and ethnic homogenization of Hungarian cities from Transylvania were important elements of this program (Tismăneanu, 2006: 527). This stance reveals one of the paradoxes of nationalism – as identified by Turino – which is discussed in the context of SSR in chapter I.3 of this dissertation.

The assimilation policy also affected the Roma minority. In the early 1970s, International agencies concerned about human rights including Helsinki Watch, observed that the official policy simply ignored the existence of Roma people, although the Romanian government officially announced that the “problem of minorities” was solved (ibidem.: 574). During the 1980s the word “Gypsy” was no longer allowed in print except in some articles signed by authors that were selected

for their political obedience (Rădulescu, 1996: 135). Banning the word was the regime's solution to hide many problems: the poor living conditions, general disobedience to the regime and high rates of unemployment in the nomad population – 32,7% for men and 48% for women (Tismăneanu, 2006: 575). The stance towards minorities is also revealed by the editorial policy of *Electrecord*, as the changes in the assimilation policy can be traced in the catalogues of the record company – number of releases of minorities music and their categorization – which will be analyzed in chapter IV.

II.3. Cultural policy and music in Romania between 1965-1989

Cultural policy during Ceaușescu's regime has suffered drastic changes. It is generally agreed that, during his 24-year rule, two main periods can be distinguished, based on cultural policy features, internal and external politics and the overall economic situation of the country: 1965-1971, known as the “Thaw era”, in which the regime opened up to the West both culturally and politically; and 1971-1989, marked by the 1971 “July Theses” and the 1983 “Mangalia Theses”, crucial documents to understand the state-defined cultural policy, characterized by a more strict state control. I will further discuss the characteristics of cultural policy in each of these periods and thus contextualize the political influence exerted on the cultural domains, with particular focus on music production.

II.3.a 1965-1971, the “Thaw” era

From the beginning of his rule, Ceaușescu's approach to cultural policy aimed, on the one hand, at gaining artists' support for his administration and, on the other, to condemning the previous ideological framework imposed by the Soviets. The new leader tolerated considerable domestic liberalization to accompany his more independent foreign policy, easing censorship and arguing for a diversification of styles in literature and arts (Preda, 2017). This was the beginning of the ‘thaw era’, a period of artistic creativity and relative social and political freedom, exalted by the

March 1966 cover of *Time* magazine, with the title 'Life under a relaxed Communism', next to the picture of Ceașescu²⁵.

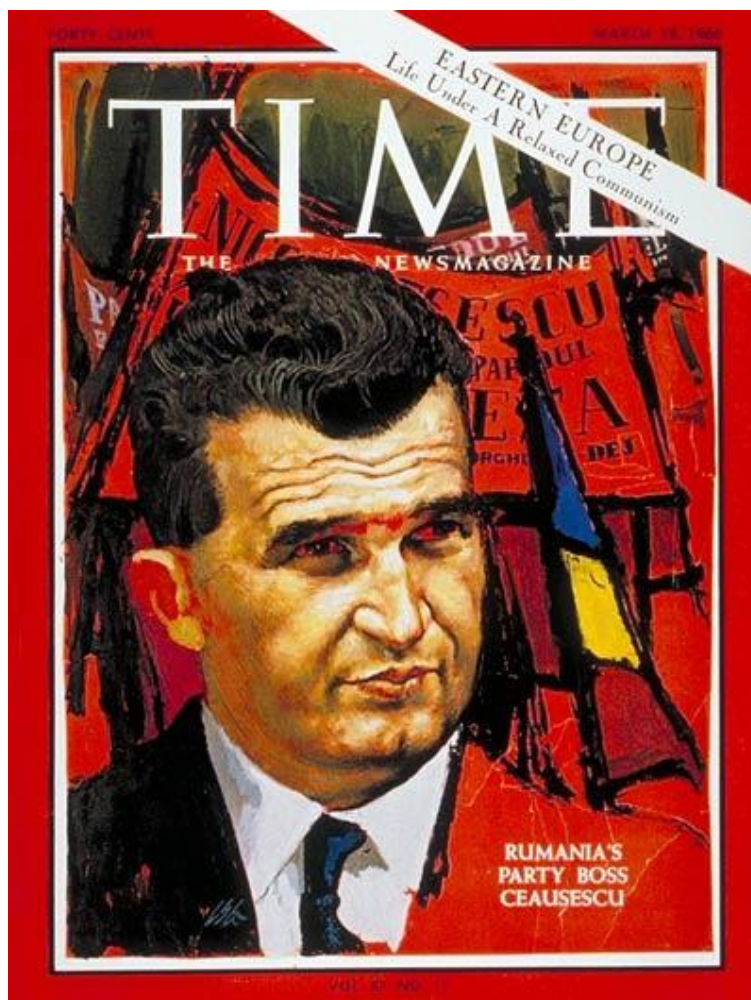


Image II.1 – Cover of Time Magazine no. 87, 8 March 1966

During this period, a lot of valuable publishing houses and cultural magazines were founded in numerous cities. Radio studios were created or further developed in the major cities and theatres, and philharmonic orchestras and opera houses functioned all over the country (Mihaiu, 2007). Instead of local folklore, classical symphonies, and mobilizing marches, radio stations began to air Italian, French, British, and American pop music. In addition to domestic and international politics, the broadcasts

²⁵ *Time*, no. 87, 8 March 1966.

covered a variety of subjects of interest on culture, music, sports, and human-interest stories, with a professional rigour governed by Western standards of journalism (Johnson & Parta, 2010: 206).

Furthermore, as the tourist industry went through a rapid growth, all the restaurants in Bucharest and in the major resorts were provided with jukeboxes that unrestrictedly offered selections of the latest Western pop music charts (Ionescu [quoting Pittiș] 2005: 46). Jazz, a previously prohibited term, and musical style, not only became legal but was also promoted in the mass media and thoroughly heard on discs and concerts. Many American artists and bands started touring Romania: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk, Sarah Vaughan, Dave Brubeck and so forth. Moreover, parties organized by school clubs, enterprises or universities hosted at least one live band playing English, French and Italian hit songs (Stratone, 2017: 45-46). Similarly, rock'n'roll music and the accompanying attitudes and lifestyles carved their way into the Romanian society. The Romanian communist regime considered Western counterculture (and its local sprouts) as anti-capitalist and anti-militarist, and rock'n'roll represented the music of the oppressed that supported this view and message (Dobrescu, 2011: 258). Moreover, mass-media was encouraged to “constructively analyze” the shortcomings of the society, to reveal its causes and search for new ways for improvement. Notwithstanding, mass-media was seen as means of disseminating party politics through the masses, by “educating them in the spirit of patriotism and socialist internationalism, in promoting the values of our culture national and universal culture”²⁶.

The thaw era represented a cultural and economic stance of de-Sovietization, seen as a return to the cultural and historical pre-soviet national patrimony and growing partnerships with Western powers. Romania started a phase of cooperation with Western industrialized countries, with West Germany, France, and the United States as Romania's most powerful partners (Zaman & Georgescu, 2018: 27). Bilateral

²⁶ Report of the Central Committee of the RCP regarding the activity of the Party in the period between the 8th and 9th Congresses of the RCP, in Ceaușescu, Nicolae, *România pe drumul desăvârșirii construcției socialiste: rapoarte, cuvântări, articole*, vol. I (București, Editura Politică, 1968), 73-74.

trade agreements, protocols, and cooperation contracts in different economic activities were signed and Romania started to import equipment and technology to advance its industrial sector. For example, through the Bonn-Bucharest trade agreement, in 1964 Romania hosted a \$10-million industrial show in Bucharest and ordered 12 phonographs from West-German manufacturers. These were sited at Romanian Black Sea resorts, catering to Western tourists²⁷. Moreover, Romania became the second country in the Eastern Bloc, after the Soviet Union, to establish diplomatic relations with West Germany when, on January 31st, 1967, an exchange of ambassadors between the two countries was made (Deletant, 2019: 255). It was in this context that *Electrecord* upgraded its equipment, and the first stereo recordings were made by the record company²⁸.

During this period, many cultural agreements were signed, which boosted exchanges in the fields of education, science, technology, industry, performing and creative arts, sports, tourism and for cooperation in the fields of motion pictures, exhibits, books and publications, radio, and television²⁹. In 1968, the first student bar was opened in Bucharest. A writer from “Viața Studentească” (Student Life) magazine described it as a place with “low tables, discreet light, chewing gum and cigarettes, *Pepsi* and *Coca-Cola*, electronic games, billiards... plus a few hours of interesting discussions. That is why the bar appears as a response to the natural need to communicate, in order to exchange discordant ideas and opinions... in a relaxed atmosphere” (Barbu, 2006: 169). This example reveals the inextricable link between culture and economy, as Western culture and lifestyle were “imported” alongside Western products. This link is also exposed by the choices of *Electrecord*’s decision makers when it came to the repertoire released, and it is an important aspect of my analysis of the record company’s editorial policy (see chapter IV).

²⁷ “Romania Buys” in *Billboard*, Vol. 76, nr. 20, May 16, 1964, p. 45

²⁸ Stereo recordings were noted with “ST” in the catalogue and the first such title is “Miniaturi Simfonice” (Symphonic Miniatures), ST-ECE 0268 (1966): <https://www.discogs.com/release/10686306-Boccherini-Mozart-Ketelbey-Suppé-Schubert-Brahms-Orchestra-Simfonică-A-Radioteleviziunii-Iosif-Con>

²⁹ Romania-U.S. Cultural Agreement, 1964

Electrecord followed the Western musical trends that were tolerated in the country and, since 1965, it has begun editing the “Jazz Series”, which also featured the big band of Illinois University on the 7th volume, recorded after the band’s two-week tour in Romania³⁰. The record company also took advantage of the rock'n'roll outburst, seizing the opportunity to make a profit: bands such as The Playboys, The Federals and The Carrols were edited while local versions of English songs, played by newly formed Romanian rock'n'roll bands, such as “Sincron”, “Entuziaștii” and “Phoenix” were released. It is worth noting that up until 1971, when Romania adhered to GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), profits were further improved by the fact that *Electrecord* largely ignored international copyright laws and freely replicated or recreated pop hits produced by “capitalist” labels with local musicians (Dobrescu, 2011: 258).



Images II2 and II3 – After a two-week tour in Romania in October 1968, The University of Illinois Jazz Band recorded this disc in the studios of the Romanian Society for Broadcasting and Television.

³⁰ Orchestra De Jazz A Universității Din Illinois, Seria Jazz, Vol 7, EDD 1224 (1969): <https://www.discogs.com/release/4826401-Orchestra-De-Jazz-A-Universității-Din-Illinois-Dirijor-John-Garvey-Orchestra-De-Jazz-A-Universită>

II.3.b. 1971, the “July Theses” and the 1983 “Mangalia Theses”

As Nicolae Ceaușescu gradually assumed total control, as he became the sole architect of state policies including cultural policies for art, literature, and music. After he was named chief of the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee, his ideologue role was consolidated and his declarations became were transformed into official party documents (Preda, 2017: 142). Upon his return from a visit to North Korea, China, and North Vietnam in 1971, Ceaușescu published the ‘July theses’, a set of proposals for "the improvement of political and ideological activities, of the Marxist-Leninist education of party members and all the people of work" (Ceaușescu, 1971). The political core of the “July theses” was to consolidate the party’s political control and limit foreign influences. The documents marked a significant change in internal politics, with renewed emphasis on social realism³¹ and pressures on artists and intellectuals who failed to fall into line (Verdery, 1991: 107).

Mass culture became the focus of cultural policy and was the bedrock of official discourse: “This cultural policy is the expression of the great importance attached by the State to the dissemination of culture among the people at large and to the provision of conditions whereby they can have access to all forms of culture. Culture is present everywhere; it is no longer the prerogative of an élite, but the property of the people as a whole” (Dodu Bălan, 1975: 19). Consequently, music addressed to the masses – mass songs, patriotic music, mobilizing marches – was commissioned by the State on a regular basis, while both instrumental and vocal music became widely accessible. The general admittance to organized forms of musical activity, such as choirs, orchestras, folk ensembles, or light music groups, was rendered possible by the resources made available by the State and trade unions, including: many activities in cultural clubs and centres; the provision of musical instruments; teaching by qualified teachers; the printing and dissemination of suitable materials; and the organization of amateur musical competitions and festivals (ibidem.: 40-41). The cultural centres,

³¹ “Social realism is an art of the ideal – the Marxist ideal. It represents moral good in terms every man can understand, which means that its form is limited to photographic or naturalistic portrayal of man and his environment” (Sjeklocha, 1967: 36).

which occupied a key position in each commune found in every town, played a leading role in local cultural life. In addition to the groups in houses of culture in the towns, and cultural centres in the villages, people's art schools provided training for amateurs (approximately 12,000 in 1969/70), including stage directors, conductors of orchestras and choreographers (ibidem.:50). The amateur movement is further detailed in this chapter since it represents an important ground for cultural policy in the SRR (see chapter II.3).

One of the tasks of the theses was to outline adequate theoretical fundamentals for art and literature and define cultural policy. Special attention was given to cultural-educative and entertainment activities directed to the youth, especially students, which had to dissuade manifestations of “cosmopolitanism and different artistic fashions taken from the capitalist world” (Ceașescu, 1971: 13). Liberalization of cultural activity and social life was drastically limited, as artists and writers were assigned specific tasks: their creations had to “serve the people, the fatherland, the socialist society” (ibidem.: 14). A “firm political orientation” was called for in cultural and artistic publications, for “the promotion of militant socialist art and literature, and the fight against the disruption of creation from [...] socialist realities, from the large public of working people” (ibidem.: 15).

The turn in domestic politics posed various challenges to the regime, as the openness towards Western influences had already gained momentum. The RCP had to deal with issues deriving from a weaker party control over society and influences from the West in terms of culture and lifestyle. The theses condemned the attitude of praising all that was Western, called for use of “indigenous” resources on the path towards modernity and encouraged national production over imports (ibidem.: 16). Ceașescu had already underlined the rich heritage of musical creation “of the great anonymous popular artist” in 1968 and even evoked the way that Romanian birds have their own sound that composers should listen to³². Artists were urged to look for

³² Nicolae Ceașescu, “Cuvântare la Adunarea generală a compozitorilor și muzicologilor, 13 decembrie 1968” (“Discourse at the assembly of composers and musicians, December 13, 1968”). (București: Editura Politică, 1968), 13 (Ceașescu 1968b).

inspiration in the “marvelous treasure of ballads, doinas, Romanian round dance, choral and instrumental songs” and avoid “imitating or copying some currents or fashionable foreign schools” (ibidem.). Music represented a “driving wheel in the process of national self-assertion” and its origins in “Romanian folk art, of universally known originality and vitality” were underlined in official documents (Gheorghiu, 1973: 56). These features were reflected in the releases of bands such as Phoenix, which created a rock style influenced by national sources of inspiration, by adopting such themes as Romanian myths, ballads, and pre-Christian rituals³³. More bands and singers adapted folk songs to a rock aesthetic, with amplified guitars and drums, and started wearing national costumes in public appearances³⁴. It was also a period that choral and patriotic music increased in the repertoires of *Electrecord* and other musical institutions.

These theses represented a so-called “mini-cultural revolution”, which had deep effects at an institutional level. The Council for Socialist Education and Culture (CSEC) was formed, taking over the responsibilities of the State Committee for Arts and Culture (SCAC). The new body oversaw the guidance and control “in a unitary manner, of the entire cultural and educational activity that takes place in the Socialist Republic of Romania”³⁵, in order to “broaden the culture horizon of working people in towns and villages [...]” and develop “feelings of socialist patriotism among those who work, without distinction of nationality”³⁶. For these purposes the CSEC was assigned many responsibilities: the elaboration of the institutional cultural policy; the entire import and export of books, films, music records, and other cultural goods; application of the legal norms in units equipped with means of printing or multiplication (graphic, visual, audio), except for the Romanian Radio and

³³ Phoenix, “Mugur de Fluier”, STM-EDE 0968 (1974); “Cei ce ne-au dat nume”, STM-EDE 0754 (1972)

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lii-wdnQWVg>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m92VYJVEIS8>, accessed on 10.10.2021

³⁵ Decree nr. 442/1977 regarding the organization and functioning of the CSEC, Art.1.

³⁶ Ibidem., Art. 2.

Television³⁷. The state-owned record company was also incorporated in the institutions subordinated to the CSEC.

Radio, television, and publishing companies were asked to increase their contribution to ideological education and propaganda through their editorial content, while, for example, Ceaușescu strongly criticized many TV programmes because of its “Western imitations”. He was primarily targeting light music³⁸, since, in his opinion, the Romanian people was not sufficiently promoting their “creative ability”, further adding that in some cases “it was falsely presented” (Tiu, 2013: 115). Although Ceaușescu had already expressed his ideas on the role of literary and artistic criticism, press, radio and television as instruments of propaganda³⁹, his vision was only officially materialized by Law nr. 3/1974 on the press in the SRR, the first normative act of mass-media in the country's history. The press was defined as the “means through which the activity of public information carried out by any form of printing, recording, transmission and communication” materialized in “any forms of graphic, sound or visual printing or recording, intended and used as a means of expression and mass public information”⁴⁰. The law already reflects the regime's slide towards national communism as “media”, according to this document, contributed to “the love for the glorious traditions of the struggle of the working class, of the Romanian people for social justice, national freedom and progress” and had “an important educational role in the development of the socialist consciousness of the citizens, in the formation of the new man and in the multilateral affirmation of the human personality”⁴¹.

³⁷ Ibidem., Art. 3.

³⁸ In Romania, the concept of “muzica ușoară” (light music, *musique légère*, *musica ligeira* etc.) incorporated all popular music genres with Western origins: jazz, pop, rock, disco, blues, bossa-nova, etc., and the resulting fusions. This category appeared in Electrecord catalogues as well as in the press, mass-media and in the designation of some festivals, such as Mamaia or The Golden Stag (Cerbul de Aur). It was contrasted – initially in a depreciative manner - with folklore and traditional musics, opera, symphonic and choral music. For more information see Radulescu, 2002: 115.

³⁹ Nicolae Ceaușescu, “Cuvântare la Conferința pe țară a Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici, 19 aprilie 1968” (“Discourse at the national conference of the Romanian Artists’ Union, April 19, 1968”). (București: Editura Politică, 1968) (Ceaușescu 1968a).

⁴⁰ Law nr. 3/1974, “The law of press in the Socialist Republic of Romania”, Art. 5.

⁴¹ Ibidem., Art. 9.

Consequently, *Electrecord* was also targeted by this law as one of the instruments for building socialism and disseminating the national communist ideology.

Since the “July theses” only affected domestic politics, Ceaușescu’s foreign policy continued to be oriented towards Romania’s autonomy from the Soviet Union and a much broader cooperation with the West, which, for many scholars, represents an interesting paradox (Deletant, 2019). For instance, Romania was admitted to GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) in 1971 and, in the following year, it was accepted into the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Throughout the 1970s, Romania expanded its trade and cultural relations with the West to a greater degree than any other country in the East European Bloc. Moreover, the country’s trading position was strengthened when it acquired preferential trading status with the European Community in 1973 (ibidem.: 276).

The “July Theses” momentum and its aftermath coincided with UNESCO’s round tables and workings on cultural policy. The meetings on this subject had been organized since 1967 and addressed the “need for UNESCO to help member states to draw up a cultural policy”, as “there was not a prescribed cultural policy in all Member States, particularly the developing countries” (Toledo Silva, 2015: 9). For this purpose, UNESCO commissioned national surveys from member states, which would analyze the administrative and financial structures, the evolution of cultural needs, the relations between the cultural sector and the economic and technical system, define the “most effective” institutions for cultural activities and its main agents (e.g. artists, cultural leaders) (ibidem.). Romania published its UNESCO study in 1975 with the help of the CSEC, based on the “July Theses”, which were the catalyst in designing and defining cultural policy for the long run. The publication underlines the “national unity” and “common culture” of the Romanian people and the “desire to preserve and cultivate its identity as an important feature of its spiritual and cultural history” (Bălan, 1975: 9). Cultural policy in Romania was further explained as a means to preserve and enhance the cultural heritage but also to encourage innovation: “The desire to give expression to the cultural needs of society, to strike a balance between tradition and innovation and to co-ordinate within a single national structure the different aspects of the evolution of contemporary culture is one of the important factors in Romanian

cultural policy today” (ibidem.: 15). Moreover, cultural policy was designed around Ceaușescu's speeches, and it can be seen how official publications replicated his ideas:

“... we wish the Romanian people to be able to enjoy the best that thought, art and literature-past and present-have produced in any part of the world; we want to import literary and artistic productions, films and plays which are morally uplifting and conducive to the progress of our people, and which help to inculcate of spirit of humanism and mutual friendship. But it is the duty of society to take certain measures to prevent the entry into our country, alongside the good and the praiseworthy, of so-called works of art of doubtful content-books, films and plays in which crime, racism and brutality are condoned and which can poison the spirit and pollute the mind.” (Ceaușescu, cited by Bălan, 1975: 16)

During the 1970s, the problems of the music industries in “small countries” were discussed in a number of meetings of international bodies such as UNESCO, the International Music Council (IMC) and the International Society for Music Education (ISME) (Malm, Wallis: 18). The monopoly of big record companies, mostly from the West, represented the main concern. Malm and Wallis have identified the reasoning behind such concerns as “cultural activities related to one's own heritage, history and immediate environment play a vital role in enriching the quality of life for individuals, groups or nations as a whole” (ibidem.:19). One can confirm that the turn in cultural policy in Romania occurred in this wider context, as a response to the concerns outlined above, which were, in turn, institutionally legitimized by international organizations.

Considering the aforementioned context, the last decade of communism in Romania (1980-1989) meant total isolation from the Western world. Many agreements and conventions were broken, and imports were drastically reduced. The economic situation of the country worsened, as Ceaușescu aimed to pay the national foreign debt at the expense of the basic needs of the population. Since most internal production was exported, it became a struggle for most of the people to buy meat, flour, oil, fruits, which became heavily rationed. Electricity failures often occurred and heat in house holdings was scarce. In the 1980s restrictions on free expression persisted and pressures on artistic and literary expressions grew. The TV broadcast was reduced to 2 hours a day, the programmes were totally controlled by the government and included daily praises to the leader. The dynamic in cultural policy during Ceaușescu's leadership was reflected in the editorial policy of *Electrecord*.

Moreover, after 1980, the general economic and political isolation of the country also affected the quality of the phonograms manufactured by *Electrecord*, as the raw material was no longer imported but locally produced. These aspects will be detailed in chapter IV.

II.3.c. Censorship

Censorship was omnipresent during the communist regime, even though it varied considerably during Ceaușescu's rule. It was applied to many Romanian artistic and media domains such as the press, arts, and literature, with a focus on speech and text, but also concerning stylistic and aesthetic features. This was a main ideological and propagandistic instrument used for the guidance of “human spirit and thoughts” and for the education of the masses. Censorship during Ceaușescu's rule was mainly preventive and highly specialized (Deheleanu, 2015: 526). Different types of censors supervised publishing houses, film houses, audio recordings, theatres, philharmonics, operas, radio and television (Petcu, 2005: 87). Apart from literature, arts, press and mass media, the regime also targeted attitudes that were deemed as dangerous to the socialist order, such as “nationalism”, “cosmopolitanism”, or other forms of “bourgeois decadence” (Ceaușescu, 1971: 13).

During the mid-1960s, the ideas and fashion related to the “flower power” movement became widely spread within student environments. As the ‘thaw’ era was ending, the nonconformist nature of the movement did not go well with Romanian authorities, similar to what happened in the U.S.A. The regime became more concerned with fashion, as more boys appeared with long beards and hair, jeans and flared pants, cotton t-shirts with flower prints and numerous accessories. Girls wore tight blouses, long or short skirts and other accessories. For a short period, during the seventies, a hunt for “hippies” was carried out by the authorities, as police would patrol the streets around universities and high schools, concert venues or restaurants looking for “nonconformist” looking people. Depending on the situation, their hair was either cut on the spot by the police, or they were taken in the police car to a barber's shop while their clothes were cut with scissors (Stratone, 2019: 175). For

instance, for a band to appear on TV or in an important concert, boys were not allowed to have long hair or to shake their body and had to be dressed decently, in the “band's uniform”, in traditional shirts or suite, shirt and a tie. Blue jeans and t-shirts were not allowed as they were seen as expressions of “cosmopolitanism” (ibidem.).

In 1977 censorship was formally dismantled, although it only became more sophisticated and restrictive, as it was transferred from the Central Committee of the RCP to a multitude of institutions, companies and enterprises subordinated to the CSEC (Preda, 2017: 167). This change meant that the editors became responsible for censorship, as well as directors and coordinators of radio and TV programmes, which were guided by official documents and Ceaușescu's speeches (ibidem). The ‘decentralization’ of censorship also led to self-censorship, as everyone became aware of the limits imposed by the regime. Musician Bela Kamocsa explains this facet:

“They would censor us here and there, sometimes decisive other times moderate, but - very important - always providing evasive explanations. The aim was not only the ‘improvement’ of our work but also the inoculation of the idea that we were never on your own, that we were always being surveilled. Why? For us to censor ourselves” (Kamocsa, cited by Stratone, 2019: 56).

This proved to be a successful tactic for the regime, as artists, writers, editors and even academics adopted the habit of self-censorship. Cornelia Andreescu, former editor-in-chief at *Electrecord* provided an eloquent example of this practice, stating that they “already knew what works and what doesn't” regarding the editorial plan, and their own filter was applied before the repertoire was sent to the CSEC for approval⁴².

As it did not have any predefined criteria, censorship was especially robust on certain topics, such as sexuality, religion, economy, social life, and of political ideas, including lists of “forbidden words” that were constantly created and updated. The ban on words had the effect of distracting the reader or the listener from the realities they cover (Rădulescu, 1996: 134). For example, as soon as the ethnic minorities policy was gradually changed, the word “gypsy” was no longer allowed in print during

⁴² Interview with Cornelia Andreescu, current general manager and former editor-in-chief at Electrecord, Aug 2021.

the eighties. As noted by ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu, specialist of “lăutari” (mainly gypsy musicians) and their bands (tarafs): “As a person and research worker, I was, after all, brought up in the polluted climate of communist ideology and was, though unwillingly, marked by it. To me, there was no Gypsy question for a long time.” (ibidem.: 135). It was also the case with words such as “opinci” (traditional, laced-leather sandals worn by most Romanian peasants) – which was a symbol of the rural life and did not fit in the ‘revolutionary’ and industrialized ‘reality’ that the regime promoted. Other words, such as “angel”, “immortal”, “Christmas”, were also restricted because of their religious implications (Preda, 2017: 167). In the 1980s, the regime also tried to hide the effects of the economic crisis by banning some words that could generate “hostile comments”, such as: “dark”, “hungry”, “cold”, etc. Because of the ageing of the presidential couple, words like “old man” (“moș” in Romanian), “old woman” (baba) also became undesirable. In this context, the word “rock” was removed from the name of the second edition of a Club A Festival, being promptly renamed to “The National Pop, Folk and Jazz Music Festival” (Stratone, 2019: 159).

Music censorship ranged from bans on specific songs to the total prohibition of certain musical groups, sometimes with pressures on musicians to leave the country and not to return. The focus was on music with lyrics rather than instrumental music, even though stylistic features or certain musical genres were also affected by censorship. For Jazz was banned not only as an artistic expression but also as a term, and punk music was deemed unsuitable because its anti-authoritarian themes (ibidem.: 415). The lists of forbidden words and expressions were also applied to song lyrics, as one musician recalled: “We recorded two songs at Radio Bucharest, and Cristi (Minculescu, lead singer of the band Iris) had to change a part of the lyrics because the editors didn’t accept words like ‘clouded sky’ or ‘I’m sad and blue.’ In those times the sky was always clear, and nobody was sad or bitter.”⁴³ Another song by Iris, “Cine ma striga in noapte” (“Who is Calling Me into the Night,” 1981), was not released

⁴³ Gabi Nacu quoted in Alex Revenco, “Interdicții și cenzură,” Jurnalul Național, October 8, 2007: <https://jurnalul.ro/editie-de-colectie/iris-8-octombrie-2007/interdictii-si-cenzura-305026.html>, accessed on 2.03.2022

because it was considered too “depressing”⁴⁴.

The word hunt led lyricists and writers to create an encrypted language, using metaphors and indirect references, which were sometimes overlooked or misunderstood by censors. For example, the song “The Canary” by Phoenix, was a metaphor for the enclosed society and restrictions on freedom of expression:

<i>Canarul galben ca un galbenuş</i>	<i>The canary, yellow like a yolk</i>
<i>Cu pene moi şi ochii duşi</i>	<i>With soft feathers and eyes gone</i>
<i>Cânta de dupa sârmele de-argint</i>	<i>Was singing behind the silver-wires</i>
<i>Si viersu-i se pierdea în vânt</i>	<i>And its verse was fading in the wind</i>
<i>Deodată ochii trişti din cap tresar</i>	<i>Suddenly, the sad eyes awake</i>
<i>Si dă din aripi, dar în zadar</i>	<i>And it flaps its wings, but in vain</i>
<i>Lovind cu pieptul sârmele de argint</i>	<i>Hitting the silver wires with its chest</i>
<i>Cade în jos cu pieptul frânt</i>	<i>It falls down with its chest broken</i>
<i>Sărman canar, şi s-a părut</i>	<i>Poor canary, it seemed</i>
<i>Ca zărilor şi s-au deschis</i>	<i>That the horizon has opened for you</i>
<i>Dar n-a fost doar, decat un vis</i>	<i>But it was just a dream</i>
<i>Rănit tu ai căzut</i>	<i>Wounded you fell [...]</i>

The total ban of an artist or band meant that they were not allowed to sing in public anymore, to be aired on Radio or TV networks or appear in the press or on phonograms. This form of censorship was applied to anyone who fled the country, said or did something that could not be accepted by the regime. For instance, the rock group “Iris” was permanently banned in 1988, following two other temporarily bans in 1980 and 1982.⁴⁵ The rock bands “Phoenix” and “Sfinx” and jazz musician Jancsy Korossy were also removed from all outlets after fleeing the country. The rock bands were eliminated altogether from the Romanian rock music guide published in 1977 and 1979⁴⁶, and Jancsy Korossy was not included in the “Jazz Dictionary”, written in 1976 by Mihai Berindei.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Daniela Caraman Fotea, “Disco. Ghid rock” (Bucuresti, Editura Muzicala, 1977).

The censorship effects on *Electrecord*'s activity will be discussed in the final chapter. It will be useful to determine the degree of autonomy of the record company in relation to the CSEC and to identify who were the censors and their activities within the company. Furthermore, the dynamics between the decisions made for cultural or economic reasonings will hopefully be more apparent.

II.4. Music institutions and the musician's status

The "artist" during the communist regime was regarded as a "builder, a visionary, a fighter for a better spiritual life for his fellow citizens" (Gheorghiu, 1973: 58). The RCP prompted the development of a tighter relationship between artists and their working people since the material and the spiritual aspects of society were seen as interconnected and inseparable. The artist was seen as a creative force of the entire society, "the public itself seen in the position of an individuality happily gifted with expressive possibilities"⁴⁷, therefore it was necessary for his creations to contain the aspirations, feelings and thoughts of the entire society: "for the development of our nation, art and literature are called upon as expressions of the relentless efforts carried by the Romanian people in all areas of activity, showing the great accomplishments, enthusiasm, optimism and determination to move forward"⁴⁸. This view was a re-enactment of Stalin's theories about art and the role of the artist, as defined by him in 1939:

'A follower of Lenin cannot be just a specialist in his favourite science or art; he must also be a social and political worker taking a vital interest in the destinies of his country. He must be well acquainted with the laws of social development; he must be able to apply these laws and must actively participate in the political guidance of the country' (ibidem.: 44).

In other words, the artist was seen an "engineer of men's souls" – Stalin's favourite expression to characterize the artist in the Soviet society, which, in turn, Ceaușescu adapted to "engineer of men's consciousness". Music was regarded as an

⁴⁷ "Cultura socialista si educatia politica intr-o uniune inseparabila" ("Socialist culture and political education in an inseparable union"), in *Scanteia*, 1976, nr. 10650, p. 1.

⁴⁸ "Cultura si arta – medelatori ai omului nou" (Culture and art – shapers of the new man"), in *Scanteia*, 1976, May 8, nr. 10484: 3

integral part of the socialist project, taking the role of “embellishing the thoughts and feelings of the people, of enhancing their vital force, of helping them distinguish between authentic beauty and fake one”⁴⁹. It was supposed to be inspired by the ideals of the RCP and aimed at educating and modelling the people in the spirit of “socialist patriotism” and “revolutionary goals”⁵⁰. The Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania (UCMR) became one of the main institutions in charge of implementing and supervising those principles – that is the ethical Code of the communist – on music. Through its activity, it aimed at increasing the political responsibility of musical creation and the active involvement of its members in the social and ideological aspects of the country⁵¹. This meant the careful selection of the repertoire of theatres and operas, symphonic orchestras, and choral ensembles, to reflect themes inspired by the communist reality. Thus, one of the main sources of inspiration for all musical genres, from choral music to “light music”, was to be found in “folklore”, in turn often highlighted as proof of the Romanians' unity and continuity in time and space, as the bearer of Romanian spirituality.

The composer was urged to actively participate in the political life of the country, to be a “composer-citizen, who praises work, sings the beauty of the Romanian land, friendship, kindness, youth and love”⁵². Through articles, public discourses and documents, musicians were advised to create songs that praised the nation, that would be an expression of the “dignity and pride for the accomplishments of socialism”, and that would reflect the enthusiasm and “thirst for knowledge” of the Romanian people⁵³. Such compositions were encouraged and rewarded, for example, in song lyrics presented at the National Festival for Light Music “Mamaia”: “Sweet

⁴⁹ Temistocle Popa, “Omul si cantecele vremii noastre” (“Man and the songs of our times”), in *Scanteia*, 1976, December 8, nr. 10391: 1

⁵⁰ Vasile Tomescu, secretary of the Composer’s Union Party organization, “Pentru o creatie muzicala animata de spirit revolutionar” (For a musical creation driven by revolutionary spirit”), in *Scanteia*, 1976, March 1976, nr. 10437: 1

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ “Concursul national de muzica usoara – Mamaia 1976” (The national light music contest – Mamaia 1976”) in *Scanteia*, 1976, February 12, nr. 10412: 5

Romania”, “To Your Beauty”, “I Love You, My Country”, “Always on this Land”, “My Love, the Ancestral Land” etc. In this context the artist had to accept and guide himself by the immutable law of criticism and self-criticism, in which he knew what to create and what not to create. In other words, as seen in the last section, he had to become his own personal censor.

The communist regime in Romania followed a system of punishments and rewards, therefore anyone who followed the guidelines of the RCP would be offered material and financial gains, better positions within the working field etc., while the ones that didn't were pressured, imprisoned, or forced to leave the country (Preda, 2017: 165). In this regard, folklore singers had the most privileged economic and social status, as if a “star” system was created within this field: they were actually the best-selling artists of *Electrecord*, promoted heavily in the press and mass media and were often in the graces of the presidential couple. The case of singer Irina Loghin is illustrative of the system of rewards and punishments created by the communist regime. In 1967, she received the Order of Cultural Merit Class IV, and a year later, Nicolae Ceaușescu declared her Soloist no. 1 in the country. From then on and for fifteen years, she was present at most presidential receptions. However, in 1985, she was forbidden to appear in public and removed from the mass media because she had allegedly sung lyrics that depicted sexual themes of the Romanian peasants⁵⁴. *Electrecord* also followed this interdiction and did not release the album recorded the year before. Benone Sinulescu, which was also a favourite of the Ceaușescu couple, recalls the benefits of pleasing the leaders and working with the regime:

“And because I was so liked, when I went on the road I would take and get supplies from the County Council. I remember one year there was an onion crisis [...]. Well, it wasn't for me. I had it from the president of a County Council who gave me onions for a year. That's also how I got my colour TV and fridge. If I wanted something, I would call the party and it would be worked out. And they also needed me to come and sing or write songs to the 'beloved leader'”⁵⁵.

Moreover, such artists were exempt, even from declaring their profits and paying

⁵⁴ <https://www.viva.ro/vedete-si-evenimente/stiri/irina-loghin-revelioane-Ceaușescu-benone-sinulescu-2685976>, accessed on 3.03.2022

⁵⁵ <https://evz.ro/benone-sinulescu-era-preferatul-familiei-Ceaușescu-ce-l-puneau-sa-cante-la-toate-petrecerile-lor.html>, accessed on 03.03.2022

income taxes, according to folklore singer Ion Lăceanu: “We were paid 20 dollars a day, that was the daily allowance in the years of communism, and from dedications we made about 2,500 dollars, maximum 3,000 dollars. No one asked us anything about this money when returning to the country”⁵⁶.

The privileged status also applied to the members of the UCMR who composed patriotic music, mobilizing marches and songs that praised the leader. For example, in 1968, the State Committee for Culture and Art offered composer Sabin Drăgoi the amount of 10.000 Lei for the composition of an opera. The amount was just an advance intended to “stimulate the preoccupation of composers for operas with patriotic content”⁵⁷. This was a rather substantial amount, about 10 times higher than the average salary of that time⁵⁸. With the purpose of stimulating the composers in this direction, competitions for composers were organized and the prize in money ranged from 15.000 Lei to 7000 Lei⁵⁹.

Another category of artists that benefited from certain privileges included musicians that were appreciated abroad. They benefited from certain freedoms that would have not been possible otherwise: the freedom to travel to other countries and make contracts with international record companies, promoters, and managers; tax exemptions; freedom of expression and speech, although to a certain point. If they would upset the regime with certain actions or words, the punishment was not so harsh. Pan flute player Gheorghe Zamfir had a top ten single in the U.K. charts in 1976 (“Eté d’amour”) and composed the soundtrack for films such as “Once Upon a Time in America”, with Ennio Morricone, or “Karate Kid”. In 1982 he dedicated a concert to God, a “mistake” that would lead the communist authorities to pressure him

⁵⁶ <https://www.impact.ro/cati-bani-facea-benone-sinulescu-in-america-ion-laceanu-suma-asta-era-doar-din-dedicatii-exclusiv-264543.html>, accessed on 03.03.2022.

⁵⁷ State Committee for Culture and Art, the Musical Direction, Note 10219/1969.

⁵⁸ According to <https://www.analizeeconomice.ro/2015/07/productivitatea-si-salariile-inainte-si.html>, accessed 03.03.2022.

⁵⁹ Regulation of a “Musical creation competition”, organized to celebrate the 50th year of RCP, 1970.

into exile⁶⁰. Even so, *Electrecord* continued to release and license his albums, and he was not totally forbidden in the mass-media and the press.

All the institutions listed above were financed from the State budget and conductors, soloists, choir and orchestra members were staff paid members. The salary was established according to professional classes and grades, varying from 1 to 6 and according to the years spent in the working area⁶¹. A vocal soloist working at the Romanian opera with 20 years of activity received a salary of 4000 Lei, almost 4 times the average salary, corresponding to professional class 1, grade 4⁶². The maximum salary, corresponding to professional class 1, grade 6, was 4400 Lei⁶³. Depending on the specifics of their artistic work, some artists could retire earlier than other workers: opera singers could retire at 45 years old (women) and 50 (men), wind instrument musicians at 50, choir members and other musicians at 50 (women) and 45 (men). The law also allowed that – at the request of the institution – retired artists could continue their activity for half of their salary, keeping their pension as well⁶⁴.

Alongside professional musicians, the “amateur movement” was comprised of artists that were not employed by one of the state musical institutions and did not graduate at a musical conservatory⁶⁵. They were students, workers in factories, state institutions, or peasants without a higher education. Anyone who wanted to perform or record music had to apply for a freelancer permit. The State Office for Artistic Tours organized courses and competitions to offer permits to freelancer musicians, which were required at bars and restaurants all over the country. The allowances granted by the permits were established according to the copyright legislation and

⁶⁰ <https://www.radioromaniacultural.ro/portret-gheorghe-zamfir-cel-mai-important-interpret-la-nai-din-toate-timpurile-un-rebel-care-a-metamorfozat-sunetul/>, accessed 04.03.2022.

⁶¹ Decision 218/1970.

⁶² Bucharest Romanian Opera, communication nr. 442/16.04.1970.

⁶³ Request of Herlea Nicolae for a salary raise, nr. 1422/5.05.1970.

⁶⁴ “Musical Life in Romania”, pp. 2-3, archive nr 135/1970.

⁶⁵ The designation “amateur” is by no means reflective of the artist's skills. Many musicians included in the category of ‘amateurs’ were considered some of the best musicians in the country and were offered permanent contracts in the country or abroad, with musical institutions, orchestras, or restaurants.

depended directly on the professional grades attributed to the musician⁶⁶. These varied between 50 and 200 Lei, amount which for musicians with the maximum professional grade and a permanent contract with a restaurant, easily surpassed the salary of a director (Stratone, 2019: 42).

Most of “light music” singers and musicians, had risen from the ranks of amateurs and some of the most famous rock bands (Phoenix, Sfinx, Progressive TM, Iris etc.), pop and folk singers (Mircea Florian, Maricela Saftiuc, Tudor Gheorghe, Aura Urziceanu etc.) and folklore musicians were products of the amateur movement and infrastructure. The path to professionalization or even stardom was provided by the conditions created by the State: schools where they could study, culture houses and clubs where they could perform and competitions and festivals where they could be noticed by professionals and mass media. Competitions and festivals were the launching ramps for amateurs to the wider public, as many musicians obtained recording contracts, concert deals, money prizes and wide media coverage if they stood out at such events. Cover bands formed by students had the chance to obtain contracts in other countries, on cruise ships, with luxury bars or restaurants in Romania, or be employed by the orchestras of state musical institutions. Most of the time, these bands accompanied established singers in their shows or tours. These contracts provided a good salary, therefore few bands in this category were interested in creating their own repertoire (Stratone, 2019: 40). Another advantage of many amateur bands was that they could skip the 'patriotic work' and activities such as cleaning the workplace, cleaning the streets, harvesting the crop, washing dirty potatoes etc. (ibidem.: 36).

Folklore performers started their careers in the same way as all other amateur artists, in houses of culture and often taking classes in People's Schools of Art. From then on, they could join ensembles from state institutions and make a breakthrough in their careers. This was a major step forward in any folklore performer's career, as the ensembles went on tour and often recorded for *Electrecord*. Therefore, they could afford a decent living. The most famous and appreciated ones enjoyed an even better

⁶⁶ According to Decree 321/1956, regarding copyright.

economic status and were financially independent of the ensembles or institutions that employed them due to the concerts and private events they performed at. For instance, singer Ion Dolănescu studied at the People's School of Art in Targoviste and made his debut at 18 at the house of culture in the same town. After he became part of the "Ciocarlia" Ensemble, he became known at a national level as one of the most prolific folklore singers of Romania.

The status of musicians would be improved if they had their music edited by *Electrecord*, not because of the financial earnings resulted from sales, but because of the symbolic capital that they would acquire.

II.5. The configuration of the music industries

The music industries in Romania were homogeneous, in the sense that they were controlled by the State and were dependent on political directives and state-centralized cultural policy. In this context, it is debatable if the plural 'industries' accurately reflect their common scope and homogeneous nature – provided by official directives that treated the entire cultural-educational apparatus as means to an end. However, I will employ the plural to highlight the degree of autonomy of the music industries in relation to each other but also to State control. The degree of autonomy was mostly evident in unofficial culture and informal (sometimes illegal) means of dissemination (piracy, phonogram imports, radio stations from abroad). Music journalist George Stanca highlights the official/unofficial dichotomy and degree of autonomy of some industries relating how certain songs became “unofficial hits” – without being officially approved and disseminated by the state-controlled mass media – after being played at small concerts and student gatherings⁶⁷. The degree of autonomy of the phonographic industry will be further discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation.

The music industries included the music education institutions, concerts and festivals, the phonographic industry, the musical press and music media. The music

⁶⁷ George Stanca, "The status of the 'hit' song", in *Flăcara*, Nr. 72, June 1972, p. 26.

institutional system created by the State aimed to provide a controlled environment for the development and dissemination of music. Firstly, this was reflected in the guidelines and objectives that targeted music activity previously detailed in this chapter, and by the fact that the State sponsored all musical institutions: musical theatres, opera theatres, symphonic and philharmonic orchestras, folklore music and dance ensembles, music conservatories, the people's schools of art etc. Secondly, all the institutions in this system were linked and cooperated with each other. Apart from the State Committee for Art and Culture (SCAC)/Council for Socialist Culture and Education (CSCE), the repertoires were validated by the Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania (UCMR)⁶⁸. The members of the UCMR were also in charge with the creation of the repertoire performed and taught in the musical institutions, mainly patriotic and political songs commissioned by the State⁶⁹. UCMR also had an important role in educating the public, especially the youth, and promoting Romanian music, with notable initiatives such as: the establishment of musical clubs in factories and houses of culture, in which musical lessons and concerts were organized; the participation as a judge at musical competitions and festivals; organization of conferences in universities, houses of culture and youth clubs; participation in the organization of the festivals “George Enescu” and “Cerbul de Aur”⁷⁰. For some of these initiatives, the Union was in constant collaboration with student associations and the Union of the Communist Youth (UCT).

The UCT and student associations were in charge with the organization and establishment of the light music clubs in the country. Their clubs were hubs for listening to music on discs, getting information from the musical press, debating, and singing⁷¹. Usually, they were the starting point for many amateur musicians and

⁶⁸ Founded in 1920 as the Society of Romanian Composers, with the objectives of helping the development of the Romanian music production, promoting the printing and execution of the works, defending the copyrights of its members and, finally, to deal with any issue that would affect the Romanian music or musicians. In 1948 the institution changed its name to the current Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania, having the same objectives.

⁶⁹ Ion Dumitrescu, “Music and the spiritual requirements of our socialist society”, in *Muzica*, No. 4(233), April 1972, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Octavian Ursulescu, “Youth clubs” in *Saptamana*, Nr. 5, May 1970, p. 10.

singers and numerous bands were in this context. The RCP authorities considered the youth an important resource in building socialism cultural activities were at the forefront of the endeavour to model the youth according to the requirements of the “new society”⁷².

The press, mass media and the sole record company were also financed by the State. Musical articles and critique were featured in all the newspapers and magazines, while some of them included musical charts and phonogram reviews. Alongside *Electrecord*, Radio and Television networks were the main mediums for music dissemination, and were subordinated directly to the RCP. In this case the UCMR was also the body that approved the repertoire of these institutions. The importance of the UCMR in the music institutional system is captured by journalist George Stanca: “Electrecord works with safe names, already famous, but the Radio and Television could do more in this sense, without great financial risks. For this to happen, however, the authoritarian intervention of another forum is needed, in the hands of which many destinies lie – the UCMR”⁷³. Radio and Television networks also organized and broadcasted concerts and festivals. Additionally, the Romanian Society for Radio Broadcasting (RSRB) recorded many of the bands that played live on its Radio networks before *Electrecord* did so. Thus, the record company often edited artists, songs and live concerts recorded by the RSRB⁷⁴.

The facts presented in this historical contextualization are reflected in *Electrecord*’s editorial policy, production process and releases. Firstly, the record company was instrumental in the regime’s pursuit for creating a “new society” and a “new man”. The three measures that were implemented in this process – listed at the beginning of this chapter – were immortalized by recordings made by *Electrecord* and the Romanian Society for Broadcasting and Television. The “accomplishments” of the regime – such as the reordering of agriculture and rural society and heavy

⁷² Vasile Tomescu, “Music and the spiritual evolution of our youth” in *Muzica*, No. 4(221), April 1971, p. 4.

⁷³ George Stanca, “A few words about pop music”, in *Flăcara*, Nr. 72, June 1972, p. 25.

⁷⁴ Interview with Cornelia Andreescu, current general manager and former editor-in-chief at *Electrecord* (August 2021).

industrialization – are revealed in songs of all genres with lyrics that depict the “new reality”. Moreover, the instrumental arrangements of folklore songs – most of the times bearing the signature of only a few conductors and composers – also led to a standardization and homogenization of styles which reflected the pursuit for an equal society and the state policy of assimilation of the minorities. As we will see in chapter four, *Electrecord* contributed to the creation and dissemination of such symbols while ensuring, through its daily reproduction, that all Romanians were trailing their lives towards the same goal – the enactment of the “new man”.

Secondly, the changes arisen in state-defined cultural policy during Ceaușescu’s regime have been mirrored by the record company’s editorial policy. The ‘Thaw era’ (1965-1971) was immortalized by the jazz and rock’n’roll releases – often in English – and, overall, by the permissive policy and mild censorship in regard to certain Western influences. The period between the ‘July theses’ (1971) and the fall of communism (1989) affected not only the record company’s editorial policy (as fewer and fewer songs in English were edited and the percentage of folklore releases increased), but also created a strict system of control and censorship in which *Electrecord* played a strategic role. Furthermore, as the economic situation of the country worsened and the political control of all social and cultural domains increased, the audio quality of the phonograms manufactured by the record company decreased. These issues will be analyzed in the following two chapters.

III. ELECTRECORD: ORGANIZATION AND PRODUCTION PROCESS

This chapter aims to provide essential information on the organizational structure, the production processes as well as the technology employed by *Electrecord*. Alongside other relevant dimensions, I will explore the following questions: which departments were involved in the production process? How were the company employees recruited and trained? From where was the equipment acquired? What was the company's relation to international companies?

III.1. Organizational structure

Electrecord was part of the Poligraphic and Editorial Center (Centrala Editoriale si Poligrafica)⁷⁵, alongside all the publishing and printing houses, and was organized according to the principle of concentration of production in large economic units⁷⁶, being responsible for all the stages in the phonogram production process. Furthermore, between 1969 and 1984, it also became the sole institution that oversaw the phonogram import-export activities⁷⁷.

The record company was divided into two main areas of activity: recording and manufacturing. The recording studio was also the main office and included all activities related to the initial production phases: production planning and decision, recording, editing and release decisions. After the recording stage, the master tapes were sent from the studio to the pressing plant, where phonograms were pressed and mass produced. Thus, *Electrecord* integrated all production stages, from the initial

⁷⁵ The socialist industry was organized in Industrial Centers, subordinated directly to the government. These were superstructures that incorporated many enterprises and institutions and were divided according to specific industrial domains. For example, the Industrial Editorial and Poligraphic Center encompassed all the book publishers and printing houses, libraries, the written press, etc.

⁷⁶ Law nr. 5/1978 regarding the organization and management of the socialist state units, as well as their functioning based on the workers' self-management and the economic-financial self-management.

⁷⁷ Decision nr 2215/1969 regarding some measures for the improvement of the editorial activity, Art. 7; Decree No. 442/1977 on the organization and functioning of the Council of Culture and Socialist Education, Art. 3.

concept to the final product. Since there is no official organizational chart available, I have attempted to create one with the help of my interviewees (Diagram 1). This is probably still incomplete, as I surely have not uncovered the details concerning the activity of financial/sales or the archiving departments. However, Gheorghe Grosaru (sound engineer), Paul Enigarescu (artistic director), Mircea Stănică (cassette section chief) and Teodor Isaru (current musical director) have validated this organizational chart as representative of the company's organigram.

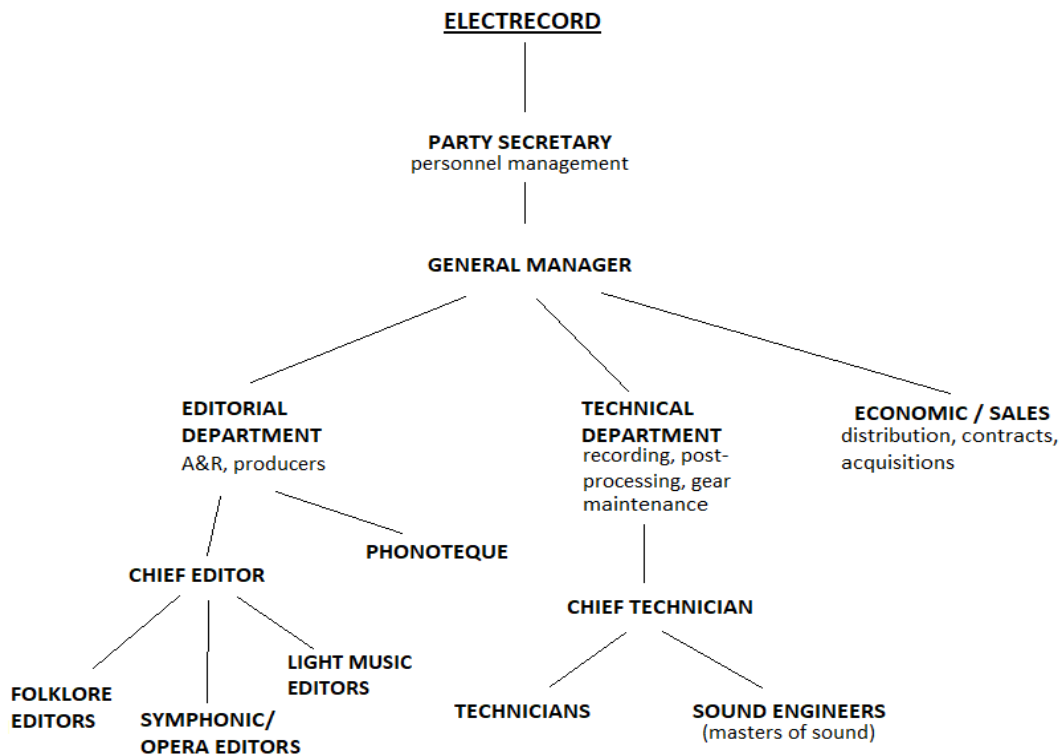


Diagram III.1. Electrecord organizational chart.

The editorial department covered all A&R and producing activities, being divided according to each musical genre: folklore, light music (jazz, rock, pop, etc.), symphonic and opera, and lastly, spoken word. The editors – mainly composers, conductors, ethnomusicologists, musicologists, and journalists – oversaw the discovery and selection the artists and repertoire. According to Cornelia Andreescu,

former editor-in-chief and current general manager of the company, editors at *Electrecord* were very well connected to the musical scene, constantly being informed about emerging artists from sources such as newspapers and magazines, concerts, festivals, radio, and television⁷⁸. The company also received recommendations from different people in the music field, as music journalist Octavian Ursulescu recalls: “as I was a household name with radio and TV shows, permanent columns in the prestigious weekly 'The Contemporary' (Contemporanul), the daily newspaper 'The Spark of Youth' (Scanteia Tineretului) and numerous other publications, my recommendations were taken into account, so discs that were not necessarily in accordance with the official editorial line could be edited”⁷⁹. In the case of folklore, one source of information was also the *Archive of the National Folklore Institute*, where field recordings made by ethnomusicologists and ethnologists were kept⁸⁰.

The technical department included engineers and technicians from both the recording studio and the pressing plant. In the recording studio, the technicians had the tasks of preparing the set before a recording (arranging microphones, connecting cables, etc.) and making backup copies of the master tapes after the recording was completed. The sound engineers – designated 'masters of sound' (different from the designation used in Radio and Television, “musical director”) – were generally specialized in one musical genre. The company also employed sound engineers from other institutions for specific recordings. For example, Paul Enigarescu – sound engineer at the Romanian Society for Broadcasting and Television at that time – was brought in by *Electrecord* due to his experience with live recordings, while making of the album “Various - Club A”⁸¹.

⁷⁸ Cornelia Andreescu, interview for *Electronicbeats.ro*: <https://www.electronicbeats.ro/povestea-casei-de-discuri-romanesti-electrecord/>, accessed on 12.12.2021.

⁷⁹ Interview with Octavian Ursulescu, music journalist, TV and Radio presenter, adviser of *Electrecord* before 1989. December 2021

⁸⁰ Stela Nachi, former folklore editor, interview for *Adevarul.ro*, <https://ziarimm.ro/maramuresul-la-casa-de-discuri-electrecord-interviu-cu-prof-stela-nachi/>, accessed on 02.02.2022

⁸¹ Interview with Paul Enigarescu regarding Cat. no. ST-EDE 01912, recorded live in concert and released on Apr 13, 1981: <https://www.discogs.com/release/2434892-Various-Club-A>

Since there were no learning courses for sound engineers in Romania, the skills required were acquired through practice with other experienced sound engineers that eventually changed to other responsibilities within the company: Cornelia Andreescu initially was in charge of editing and later became a sound engineer of symphonic music by learning the profession from the previous two sound engineers⁸²; similarly, Gheorghe Grosaru was a technician before becoming a sound engineer, after 8 years of apprenticeship with one of Romania's most prolific recording and mixing engineers, Theodor Negrescu⁸³.

The editors and sound engineers were generally recruited from other institutions according to their skills and studies. Paul Enigarescu, a graduate of the Musical Conservatory in Bucharest, worked as a sound engineer for the Romanian Broadcasting and Television Society, as a musical director and member of the jury at the "Mamaia" Festival, before becoming the artistic director of *Electrecord* in 1989⁸⁴; Cornelia Andreescu studied at the Music Conservatory in Bucharest and was a singer in the Madrigal Choir before becoming one of the symphonic music editors, in 1974⁸⁵; and sound engineer Theodor Negrescu was a junior sound engineer at Radio Romania in 1953, before moving to *Electrecord*⁸⁶.

As the educational system in Romania was designed in correlation with the industries' requirements, all graduating students were distributed to different companies, institutions and factories, according to their skills. During the 1970's, when the plans to build a new pressing plant were completed, the Polygraphic College in Bucharest formed two classes to provide formation related to the phonographic manufacturing process. Some of the teachers of these classes were employees of the record company, such as Grigore Petreanu, former general director. Accordingly, after

⁸² Interview with Cornelia Andreescu.

⁸³ Interview with Gheorghe Grosaru.

⁸⁴ Interview with Paul Enigarescu.

⁸⁵ Ibidem. 82

⁸⁶ Theodor Negrescu biography on <https://music.metason.net/artistinfo?name=Theodor%20Negrescu>, accessed on 10.01.2022.

graduating, they were distributed to various departments and sections within *Electrecord*, working as electro acousticians in the recording studio or technicians in the pressing plant⁸⁷.

During the Romanian communist regime, all enterprises and institutions had a Party secretary and *Electrecord* was no exception. The Party secretary was the head of personnel and had no expertise in any area related to the activity of *Electrecord*. She was in charge with overlooking the decisions made within the company (editorial policy, equipment acquisition etc.), its economic situation and the behaviour of the employees: “She had a word to say in regard to everything [...]. The Party was concerned with everything: good behaviour, how you dressed, talking nicely to people, your activity, and commitment to the workplace. But the most important thing was not to talk badly about the RCP”⁸⁸. She had the power to sanction any inappropriate behaviour, as former *Electrecord* technician and sound engineer Gheorghe Grosaru recalls: “I was not allowed to appear on phonograms from ‘84 to ‘89. The discs were made by me, but no one appeared on the cover. The tapes in the *phonotheque* have my signature, but the editing part doesn't. Because I did not clap my hands at Otopeni once and didn't shout "Ceaușescu, peace!". I couldn't, I had my hands and mouth clenched. And I was punished by the Party secretary with the lack of credit on the discs. I was accused of having a bourgeois attitude...”⁸⁹.

The sales/economic department was in charge with the distribution of phonograms, the assessment and control of the production costs, the approval of the budget for equipment acquisition, the salaries of the employees, the definition of the cost of phonograms, licensing contracts, conventions with other institutions and sales reports for copyright payment. This department was also important in deciding the number of phonograms that were edited and distributed, according to market requests.

⁸⁷ Interviews with Gheorghe Grosaru and Ion Fratila, graduates of the *Electrecord* classes at the Polygraphic College.

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

⁸⁹ Interview with Gheorghe Grosaru.

III.2. Production process and technology

In this section I will present the stages of the phonogram production, from production decision to distribution, and the technology used in this process. As *Electrecord* was the only phonogram manufacturer and record company in the country, it incorporated studio activities and manufacturing processes. The main production phases are as follows: 1. production planning and decision, 2. recording, 3. manufacturing the phonogram and 4. distribution⁹⁰.

III.2.a Production planning and decision

The production planning and decision implied various gatekeepers and decision-makers such as the editorial and sales departments, the general manager and the Party secretary, the members of the approval committee and, ultimately, the State Committee for Arts and Culture⁹¹, which, in 1971, changed its designation to Council for Socialist Culture and Education (CSEC).

The editors were the initial decision-makers since they made the initial selection of artists and repertoire. Thus, the editors were the first in a series of many gatekeepers (the discussion on the gatekeepers of the record company is detailed in Chapter IV). The filters in this selection stage were set according to well-established criteria. The first one was popularity: artists and bands that stood out at festivals, appeared on TV, were frequently played on the radio, and appeared in the musical charts, were automatically proposed for the editorial plan. More than one example confirms these criteria: a famous rock band in Romania, *Rosu si Negru*, caught the attention of the record company when they won the second prize at the “Club A Festival” and made an appearance with the Iasi Philharmonic in the same year, thus releasing their first EP after ten years of activity (Stratone, 2017: 202). Similarly, the rock band *Progresiv*

⁹⁰ The production process is analyzed according to the different phases in phonogram operations outlined by Malm & Wallis (1984), pp. 50-57.

⁹¹ According to Decision no. 457/1968 for the application of Law no. 27/1967 on the organization and functioning of the State Committee for Culture and Art and of the local committees of culture and art, Art. 2.

TM made its phonographic debut after several appearances at the Romanian National Television, one of which was on 1974's New Year's Eve (ibidem.: 212); folklore editor Stela Nachi recalls how singer Dominica Trop was invited to record for *Electrecord* after she was recommended to her by a TV host⁹².

The next step in the production planning and decision stage was the validation of the artists and repertoire by an advisory committee formed by the CSEC at the request of *Electrecord* before the recording stage. The committee included 4 or 5 people including ethnomusicologists, folklorists, journalists, composers, conductors, and well-established artists, depending on the musical genre, and had the task of listening to the proposals of the editorial department and deciding what should be recorded or not. The committee was formed mostly for upcoming artists and would evaluate many factors such as the lyrics, the vocal and instrumental qualities of the musicians. During the 1980s, one mandatory request was to sing in Romanian, while eliminating from the catalogue all foreign songs interpreted by Romanian artists⁹³. In regards to folklore, the most important criteria was that the artists should effectively represent their geographical or cultural area: "Every singer, no matter if he was an established one or a beginner, had to present a repertoire from his region – this was reasonable because the peasant from Oltenia could never sing properly a song from Dobrogea, that was clear. [...] This was our role: we knew the regional styles – which are very different across the country"⁹⁴.

III.2.b. Recording

The recording process would take place in the two permanent studios of the company, in concert halls or during live concerts. Due to its limited space, the "Tomis" studio was used mainly for recording small bands, quartets, or chamber orchestras.

⁹² Stela Nachi for *Adevarul.ro*: <https://ziarmm.ro/maramuresul-la-casa-de-discuri-electrecord-interviu-cu-prof-stela-nachi/>, accessed on 02.02.2022.

⁹³ Interview with ethnomusicologist and member of the folklore committee, Speranta Rădulescu.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

The “Marble Hall”, located in the “House of the Spark” (Casa Scanteii), was used only for symphonic recordings, as it could accommodate big orchestras. Recordings were also made at the Romanian Athenaeum and the Palace Hall in Bucharest, philharmonic halls, athenaeums throughout the country and cultural centres. Some recordings were made by *Electrecord* in the studios of the House of Radio Broadcasting (Casa Radiodifuziunii), according to the contractual agreements between the record company and the Romanian Society for Broadcasting and Television⁹⁵.

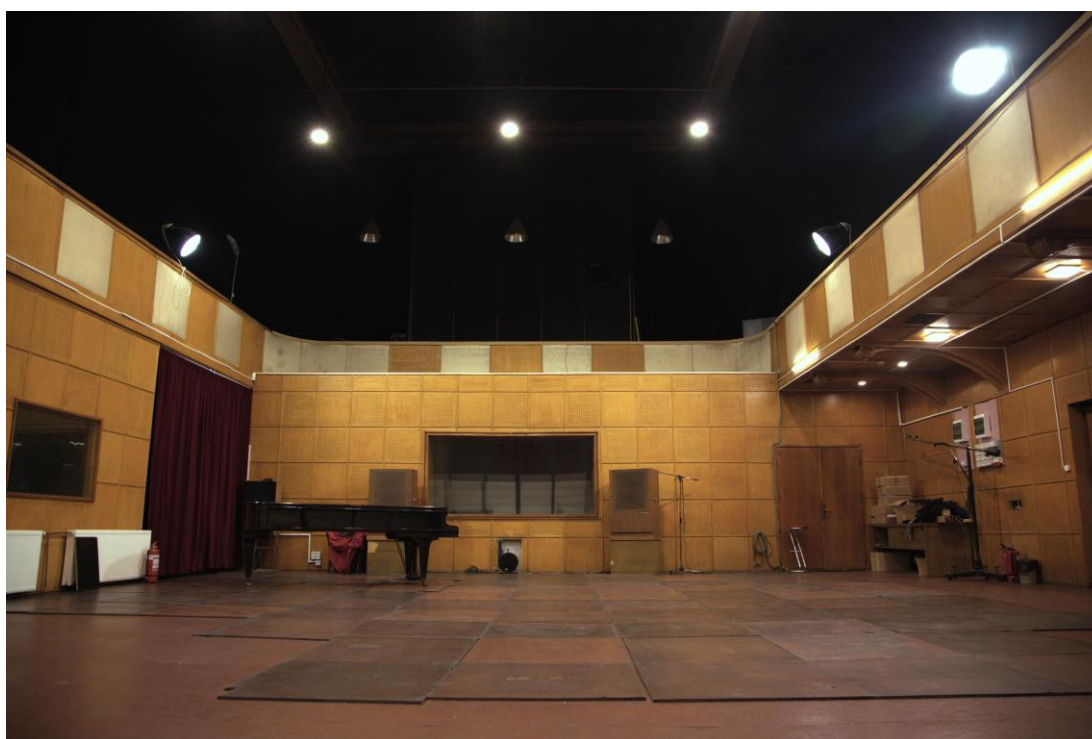


Image III.2 – Electrecord’s “Tomis” studio

Recordings were made by the technical and artistic personnel, which included sound engineers, technicians, editors and producers. The dynamic between the actors involved in this process was determined by their specific responsibility: the sound

⁹⁵ According to the 1960 Convention between the two institutions, Art 6, the Romanian Society for Broadcasting and Television charged Electrecord 750 Lei for the use of its studios.

engineers made decisions in matters of sound caption (microphone positioning, sound effects, volume etc.) with the help of the technicians, musicians, editors, producers, and conductors (in the case of orchestras); the technicians oversaw the recording set-up (arrange the microphones, instruments, cables etc.). For symphonic music recordings, the editor was the “musical supervisor”, alongside the conductor, making sure that the music sheet was being followed, the instruments were in tune etc. This dynamic was not always permanent, as sometimes the sound engineer would instruct musicians on how to sing according to their stylistic and aesthetic preferences. This was the case with most of the folklore recordings made by one specific sound engineer, according to Speranța Rădulescu: “The roughness in the voice was not accepted, he had his own aesthetic criteria. They had to sing as clean as possible, so he would tell them 'do this, do that'...”⁹⁶. However, there were also situations when the musicians had the last word when it came to sound effects, as singer-songwriter Nicolae Covaci recalls:

“In 1968, during the making of our first disc at *Electrecord* – there is a distorted guitar in one of the songs – the sound engineer came rushing in to tell me that the guitar was too loud, and it became distorted. Of course, I knew it. This was my intention when setting up the volumes and effects. In the end, because he didn't like it, he sent in another sound engineer and left”⁹⁷.

The technology used by *Electrecord* during 1965-1989 in the recording studio is not thoroughly documented, as no acquisition documents or official inventories exist. However, the sound engineers, technicians and artists interviewed for this research have provided information about existing equipment. Some information can also be found in the *Billboard* and *Gramophone* magazines. According to William Mann, in 1967, the Romanian record company had BASF tape recorders and “EMI recording technology”. The journalist criticized the “bad balance” of some stereo recordings, claiming that “voices are too near the microphone and the orchestra too distant”, also highlighting the poor quality of some discs, which carried high surface

⁹⁶ Interview with Speranța Rădulescu.

⁹⁷ Nicolae Covaci in “Integrala Phoenix Part I - The 60's”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfWsTskDrsc>, accessed 12.09.2021.

noise and had distortion in comparison to releases from foreign record companies⁹⁸. In the period between 1970 and 1980, the company upgraded its studio equipment and the technological apparatus used in the pressing plant. The equipment was purchased exclusively from abroad, namely: 8-track Neve consoles in the “Tomis” studio and 16-track in the “Marble Hall”, produced and imported from the UK; AKG, Shure, Electrovoice and Ampex microphones imported from Austria and the USA, and Neumann microphones were acquired during the 60s from Germany; 4-track Electrosound, 8-track Studer and 16-track STM tape recorders were imported from China, Switzerland and Hungary; and BASF, AGFA and ORWO tapes were imported from Germany⁹⁹.

The recording studio had only a cimbalom, a piano, a vertical bass and a reverb effect¹⁰⁰, therefore, most of the time, musicians would bring their own effects and instruments, amplifiers or synthesizers. Regarding the recording equipment, the technical department was constantly up to date with the latest technology on the market and had subscriptions to industry magazines and catalogues from other countries. The final decision on equipment acquisition was taken by the general manager and chief engineer and was also discussed with the economic department and the Party secretary before being sent for approval.

After the recording was completed and the backup copies made, two committees were formed for the validation of the master tape in terms of technical and artistic points of view. The committees usually included the same members that approved the repertoire. The aspects analyzed at this stage by the committees were the musical arrangements, artistic interpretation and the quality of the recording. This was an important test for novice sound engineers, according to Gheorghe Grosaru: “If you

⁹⁸ William Mann, “Records from Rumania” in *Grammophone Magazine*, no 57 (1967), pp. 2-3

⁹⁹ Information provided and confirmed by former sound engineer Gheorghe Grosaru, artistic director Paul Enigarescu, mastering engineer Ion Fratila, cassette manager Mircea Stanica, sound engineer/editor/editor-in-chief and current general manager Cornelia Andreescu and musician Cristian Madolciu and Ilie Stepan. Also, some information can also be found in *Billboard* articles signed by journalist and advisor of the record company, Octavian Ursulescu.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Mircea Stanica.

did not pass these committees two times in a row, especially if you were a beginner, as I was [...] no one worked with you anymore, you were finished.”¹⁰¹. Therefore, the advisory committee validated the repertoire twice during the production process.

The final step in the production planning and decision stage was to send the recordings to the SCAC/CSEC, which then decided if they could move on to manufacturing and distribution. Details about this step are provided in the following subchapter and in Chapter 4, where I will delve into *Electrecord*’s editorial policy.

III.2.c Post-processing and phonogram manufacture

After the recordings were approved by the CSEC, the master tapes were sent to the factory for the manufacturing stages. The factory was divided into the following sections: master/transferring, electroplating, vinyl pressing, cassette manufacturing, equipment maintenance and repairing, typography and phonoteque. It also included a service facility that produced small parts for some of the machines and a cassette production line. The first stop of the magnetic tape was the mastering and transferring section, where the mastering/transferring engineer applied low-pass and compression filters to the tape and transferred it onto a master foil. This process took place in a small room, which was equipped with a Studer tape machine, an Ortofon mastering console, a Neumann cutting system and JBL monitors. The initial process has been described by mastering engineer Ion Frațilă: “Basically, the tape was put on a tape machine, passed through the mastering console and then the sound was sent to a system that engraved it on a disc [...]. After making the transfer on the disc, I would check the grooves on the microscope, to see if any imperfections had occurred, if they were too deep or too shallow.”¹⁰²

The foil then went to the electroplating section, where it was chemically treated,

¹⁰¹ Interview with Gheorghe Grosaru.

¹⁰² Interview with Ion Fratila, mastering/transferring engineer from 1982 up to 1996, appearing on phonogrames as NI, shortcut from his nickname ‘Ninel’. The stages in the manufacturing process were described and validated also by cassette section manager Mircea Stanica and current general manager Cornelia Andreescu.

and plated with silver and copper in order to obtain a solid matrix plate that would endure thousands of pressings. The foils on which the initial transfer was made were imported from Germany and the USA and at the price of 20-25 dollars each, according to Ion Frațilă, therefore the price of a matrix was 40-50 dollars (as it was made from 2 foils – side A, side B)¹⁰³. The vinyl discs were pressed on material imported from Germany, a process that lasted until the 1980s, when a plastic factory was constructed in Romania. The source of plastic proved to be crucial in the audio quality of the final product, which decreased significantly once the import was stopped and Romanian materials were used: “The sound on phonograms was also related to the materials that were used in the manufacturing process. That's why the discs of that time had more crackle and background noise, compared to the ones in the West. As Romanian materials were used, the plastic deformed over time. But the magnetic tapes were flawless”¹⁰⁴. However, Cornelia Andreescu disagrees, claiming that the bad quality of the discs was a fact only until the Plastic Factory – which eventually created a production line especially for *Electrecord* – and managed to adjust its production to the company's needs¹⁰⁵. The quality of the vinyl records was also related to the thickness of the discs and due to the political directive of lowering the costs of production, which was applied to all Romanian industries in the 1980s. In the end, this change may have contributed to the decrease in audio quality.

III.3. Electrecord's international policy

The Romanian record company was connected to both capitalist and other socialist countries across the globe through commercial contracts and agreements, international conventions, experience exchanges and participation in international events. The link of *Electrecord* with other socialist countries was Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), an economic organization that provided a common

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Gheorghe Grosaru. This opinion is also shared by Mircea Stanica, former manager of the cassette section, and Ion Fratila.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Cornelia Andreescu.

market to socialist countries¹⁰⁶. This was the main marketplace for Romanian phonograms, which were exported as finished products – in comparison to Western countries which mostly requested the master tapes in order to produce their own phonograms. The export of phonograms and master tape exchanges were incentives for the improvements in the quality of the recordings and the phonograms. For example, before the new pressing plant was built during the 1970s, the Romanian company outsourced the pressing production due to technological limitations, “in order to provide better quality products to our partners in the West”: since *Electrecord* did not have a stereo transferring machine, the Bulgarian pressing plant *Balkanton* was contracted to press 15 discs of classical music¹⁰⁷.

It was through licensing and master tape exchanges that *Electrecord* expanded its market share in Western countries. That same channel also guaranteed that foreign artists could be introduced on the Romanian market. *Electrecord* had licensing deals with record companies from the UK (Polydor, RCA), France, (Dees, Disques Déesse, Pate Marconi, Music for Pleasure, International Shows, Orlando International Shows, Ocora), USA (Monitor Records, Black Panther, CBS), Netherlands (EMI Bovema BV, Vertigo, CNR), Italy (Stop Records, Clan Celentano, Cetra, CBS Sugar S.p.A.), Federal Republic of Germany (Deutsche Grammophon, Divina, Delta Music, Ariola, Eterna, Amiga, Pandora), Switzerland (Disques Cellier), Czechoslovakia (Supraphon, Opus), Portugal (Portugalsom), Canada (Select), Spain (Acropol), just to name a few¹⁰⁸. Licensing deals to Western countries implied that the Romanian company would send the master tapes, not the finished discs, because of the high costs of acquiring phonograms made in Romania, but also because of their lower quality, which did not meet Western standards.

¹⁰⁶ The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was an economic organization (1949-1991) led by the Soviet Union that included Eastern Bloc countries as well as a number of socialist states throughout the world. For more information see: Michael C. Kaser, *Comecon: Integration problems of the planned economies* (Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹⁰⁷ Document no. 30.833/24.02.1971: Letter from *Electrecord* to the State Committee for Culture and Art regarding the outsourcing of the pressing of 15 symphonic music discs to *Balkanton* (Bulgarian pressing plant).

¹⁰⁸ This list was made by researching the catalogue of *Electrecord* and articles in the music magazines *Billboard*, *Flăcara* and *Saptamana*.

Some of the artists and bands edited by *Electrecord* through licenses were Mahalia Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, Dalida, Rising Sound, Riccardo Del Turco, Tony Willé, Bachelor Of Hearts, Vitesse, Nini Rosso, Lucia Altieri, Salvo, Adriano Celentano, Danny Mirror & The Jordanares, The Tumbleweeds, Middle Of The Road etc. It is worth noting that famous bands and artists such as Michael Jackson, Pink Floyd, Queen, Bee Gees etc., were not licensed by *Electrecord*, although some of them were frequently played on regional and national radio networks and in seaside discos, topped the charts in magazines such as “Saptamana”, “Tribuna”, “Orizont”, “Cronica”, and were even seen on television up until 1980¹⁰⁹. However, the company released local versions of international hits, sung in English by Romanian artists. The deals with the owners of the copyrights of these songs were not made available to me by the company.

Most *Electrecord* national music licensed internationally was instrumental folklore, with panflute musician Gheorghe Zamfir, cimbalom player Toni Iordache, taragot player Dumitru Farcas, violonist Ion Dragoi, being amongst the most sought-after Romanian artists. Classical music, such as George Enescu's 'Rhapsodies' and 'Romanian Tangos', the 'Bizantin Oratory' by Paul Constantinescu, the piano music of Valentin Lipatti, opera singers Elena Cernei and Nicolae Herlea and conductor George Georgescu's works have all been licensed in many countries abroad¹¹⁰. Only a few Romanian rock bands and pop singers have been edited under license in Germany and Czechoslovakia, thus representing the rare cases of music sung in the Romanian language released abroad.

¹⁰⁹ Octavian Ursulescu in “Billboard”, 8 Sept 1979, Vol. 91, nr. 36, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Octavian Ursulescu in “Billboard”, 24 January 1976, Vol. 88, nr. 4, p. M-8.



Images III.3 and III.4 – Mondial Und Das Electrecord-Orchester (1972), LP of Romanian rock’n’roll band “Mondial”, licensed by Electrecord to German label Amiga.

One of the most important links to the capitalist world was the Marché International du Disque et de l'Édition Musicale (MIDEM), an annual trade show which was (and still is) organized in Cannes, France, since 1967. This is the leading international business event for the music ecosystem, as musicians, producers, agents, managers, lawyers, executives, entrepreneurs, and journalists from around the globe regularly attend the event. In a 1968 article in *Billboard* magazine, Mike Hannesey underlines an important “side effect” of MIDEM, regarding the opportunity it provided for the development of trade between Eastern European countries – deemed as “a vast potential market” – and the Western World, after Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary had announced their participation¹¹¹. The event facilitated the exchange of products and royalty agreements and represented an important cultural and commercial gain for *Electrecord* as it provided the main platform for the record company to sell licenses in Europe, America and Asia. Other such events were the Romanian Record Decade, held in Moscow and its counterpart, the Russian Record Decade held in Romania, where distribution deals were arranged. A plan to organize a conference of the socialist music industries was also put forward by the Bulgarian *Balkanton*, where issues regarding repertoire policies, recording and

¹¹¹ Mike Hannesey in “*Billboard*”, 20 January 1969, Vol. 81, nr. 3, p. 24

manufacturing technologies, propaganda, distribution, and export were to be discussed, however, there is no evidence that the event took place¹¹².

Electrecord's connections to other countries were also a result of foreign political affairs, with initiatives such as the Cultural Collaboration Plans between Romania and other states providing the context for both magnetic tapes and personnel exchanges. Such mutual agreements had commercial and cultural objectives; however commercial benefits were at times sacrificed in favour of cultural ones. Official communications between Cartimex, the Romanian export institution, and the Romanian Economic Agency in Madrid regarding phonogram exchanges with Spain are revealing in this sense, as Romania accepted less profitable terms: “although the solution proposed by the Spanish companies might not seem satisfactory from a commercial stance, we believe it can contribute to a better popularization of Romanian music in Spain”¹¹³.

Finally, personnel exchanges between the Romanian record company and foreign ones were initiated for learning and documentation purposes, especially before the new pressing plant was built and the technical classes at the Polygraphic College were formed. These exchanges focused mainly on the technical aspects of phonogram production, such as sound engineering, electroplating, quality control, and general technological and organizational features. A report made by a chief mechanical engineer of *Electrecord* after a visit to the *Deutsche Schallplatten* pressing plant provides very detailed information about each step of the manufacturing process, materials, equipment and their origins, the number of employees and their responsibilities, chemical formulas, procedures in case of production failure, production quotas and standards etc., and concludes with recommendations for the improvement of the production process of the Romanian record company¹¹⁴.

Given the aforementioned descriptive account of the production process,

¹¹² Document no. 33.835/1.08.1970: Letter from Balkanton to Electrecord.

¹¹³ Communication between Cartimex and the Romanian Economic Agency in Madrid, 24.04.1969.

¹¹⁴ Activity report of Caloenescu Stefan, 26 pages, 1970.

technology and organizational chart of *Electrecord*, one can conclude that the production process was very similar to most international record companies, apart from the particularities provided by the horizontal integration of all stages of production (from the decision to manufacturing and distribution) and also by the political and economic context of the country. Some of the aspects described here will be further expanded in the next chapter, where I will detail the company's editorial policy and degree of autonomy.

IV. ELECTRECORD: EDITORIAL POLICY AND CATALOGUE ANALYSIS

Electrecord's editorial policy was primarily guided by the objectives of the company, which were “the dissemination, popularization, preservation of creative styles from all the time periods; the creation, over the years, of the golden corpus of Romanian culture, so that any researcher can make contact with the values of creation, in music, poetry, theatre, from the beginning to the present”¹¹⁵, and also the enrichment of its repertoire with the “valuable universal creations in the interpretation of our best soloists and illustrative Romanian bands”¹¹⁶.

The editorial choices were directly affected by State cultural policy as the company was subordinated to the CSEC, the State body that supervised and coordinated the cultural activity in the country. The CSEC had attributions in the elaboration of the repertoire policy of its subordinated institutions and was guided by the programmes of the RCP¹¹⁷ and the state-defined cultural policy. However, as we will later see, the record company also had a degree of autonomy in this regard.

According to Bourdieu, the degree of autonomy of a specific realm of activity – in this case, phonogram production and dissemination – is defined by its “ability to reject external determinants and obey only the specific logic of the field, governed by specific forms of symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1993: 11). By applying this logic to *Electrecord*, we must consider the prevailed external determinants, to what extent were they rejected by the company, and what was the specific logic of the field and the forms of capital that governed it. The first external determinant in the editorial plan was represented by the guidelines of State cultural policy, including censorship. The second one was provided by the sales market forces, which were directly linked to the public's musical preferences. In the following lines, I will analyze these external

¹¹⁵ Smaranda Oteanu, “Discul romanesc in confruntare cu exigentele educative” (The Romanian disc in confrontation with the educational exigencies) in *Scanteia*, 1976, nr. 10 390, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ Letter sent by Electrecord to the Music Direction of the SCAC alongside the editorial plan of 1971.

¹¹⁷ Decree nr. 442/1977 regarding the functioning and organization of the CSEC, Art. 1

determinants and to what degree the state-owned record company rejected them. Another objective of this chapter is to explore the ways in which *Electrecord* acted as an artistic mediator and how it acquired and used its “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1989).

IV.1. Editorial policy and political features

IV.1.a. Folklore

Folklore was a central instrument for demonstrating to the rest of the world that the Romanian nation was a distinct entity, with a distinct language, a shared historical past, and a shared worldview and way of life (Giurchescu, 2001: 115). The Communist regime in Romania sought legitimacy through standardized and pompous symbols created through folklore manipulation (ibidem, 116). One such symbol was represented by the folklore orchestras created following the Soviet model of Igor Moiseyev¹¹⁸, which could include more than 20 musicians. The orchestras had multiple symbolic advantages for the communist regime: they created an optimistic and heroic sound; the musicians were led by one conductor – symbolic of the one party rule; they played in unison, synchronized, guided by a pre-written sheet – symbolic of the Romanian people, which shared the same convictions and was guided by the same principles; the orchestra beautified the music of the folk – that is, it got rid of imperfections associated with the peasantry (Rădulescu, 2002: 85). All mass media and state institutions contributed to the development of such symbols and “standardization of folklore”. Through the editorial policy and recording practices, the state record company was instrumental in the creation of such symbols, as noted by ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu: “There were several institutions that had this objective: the Radio Orchestra, the orchestras – usually of the State Television; all the counties had an official folklore ensemble that functioned according to the principles of folklorization borrowed from the Soviets. So, standardization happened in several ways, in several sources, *Electrecord* being one of them, but being one of the

¹¹⁸ For an analysis of Igor Moiseyev's influence on the development of the professional state folk ensemble, see Anthony Shay, "Parallel Traditions: State Folk Dance Ensembles and Folk Dance" in "The Field" in *Dance Research Journal* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 29-56

champions”¹¹⁹.

One of the ways in which the record company played its part in the “manipulation” of folklore was the contribution of sound engineer Vasile Sibana to standardize the sound of folklore releases from the 1970s until the late 90s. According to Speranța Rădulescu, he had the final word in regard to the aesthetic of folklore recordings, actively pursuing a clean, polished sound and providing indications to musicians on how to sing: “Everything sounded the same. He would instruct the musicians, ‘you do this, you do that...’ [...]. Theoretically, the folk know what to sing, and how to do it. There is no need for instructions, they know best. But no, Sibana knew better than anyone, so he guided them to play clean, rhythmically; he cared for the measures!”¹²⁰. Furthermore, for the recording sessions, he only chose musicians from Bucharest or the surrounding areas, which meant that the specificities of each folkloric style were lost. The majority of Sibana’s recordings from 1975 until the late 1980s are made with the orchestras of Paraschiv Oprea and George Vancu – conductors and arrangers of the official folklore ensemble of the Romanian Society for Broadcasting. This fact sustains the ‘sameness’ that ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu highlighted in *Electrecord*’s folklore recordings. It also reveals how the record company and official state institutions ensembles worked together in folklore’s standardization process.

Another characteristic of *Electrecord*’s folklore recordings is provided by the chorus effect used by Vasile Sibana on vocals. This effect implied the doubling of the vocal track and was a way to hide certain vocal imperfections. For this purpose, Sibana also recorded the voice of a better singer on the second track and overdubbed it with the voice of the main artist that appeared on the disc, as former artistic director Paul Enigarescu explains:

“He was really working on doing many voice dubbings. This was not done on radio recordings. He would record two channels of the same vocal line, he had the patience to make them perfectly synchronous, for the voice to have more presence. That’s why Irina Loghin, for example, worked only with Sibana. When she could no longer do the dubbing, he had a girl who would come and record the

¹¹⁹ Interview with Speranța Rădulescu, ethnomusicologist and member of the folklore advisory committee at *Electrecord*.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*.

same vocal line as Irina and often this girl's voice covered that of Irina because it sounded better. That was the technique."¹²¹

This technique was used in many recordings, and it can be clearly heard on Irina Loghin's album "Mugurel de primăvara"¹²², or on Benone Sinulescu's song "Un bujor si-o garofiță"¹²³. Vasile Sibana's practices were supported by the artistic director, which claims that the songs were more "pleasant to the ear" and that the sound engineer acted according to the "common sense of the man who knows music". In contrast with ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu's opinion, he suggests that the musicians needed instructions as they were not homogeneous: "each one of them had its own tonality, they were not coordinated, it was a total chaos"¹²⁴.

As stated in previous chapters, the category folklore accounted for the highest share of the releases edited by *Electrecord*, especially after the 'July Theses' of 1971: while in 1965 the catalogue included 152 titles of folklore music (24%) – being outnumbered only by the category of symphonic, chamber music and opera (153 titles), in 1973 the number increased to 429 folklore releases (40%)¹²⁵. This category included traditional folk songs and "songs about the new life"/"new folklore" whose lyrics dealt with the achievements of the communist regime¹²⁶.

Even though folklore and 'new folklore' were not synonymous¹²⁷, they were included in the same category in the catalogues of *Electrecord*: muzica populara (popular music). Thus, two main approaches can be identified regarding the releases within this category: the first was the release of compilations of 'new folklore'

¹²¹ Interview with Paul Enigarescu, artistic director at Electrecord between 1989 and 1992.

¹²² Irina Loghin, "Mugurel de Primavara", ST-EPE 02149 (1982): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYNzNvBLidE&t=3s>

¹²³ Benone Sinulescu, "Un bujor si-o garofita", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YggytU4Ckwo>

¹²⁴ Ibidem. 121.

¹²⁵ Electrecord Catalogues, 1965 and 1973. Spoken word releases not taken into account.

¹²⁶ For further information on folklorism and folklore, see Anca Giurchescu, "The Power of Dance and Its Social and Political Uses", in Yearbook for Traditional Music, Vol. 33. (2001), p. 117.

¹²⁷ Unlike folklore, the "new folklore" was a product of the regime, with lyrics composed by individual authors, which praised the achievements of the RCP. It also eliminated any reference to christianity and an entire musical genre was forbidden: Christmas carols.

including several singers and groups, among whom one or two famous, which were included to add value to certain releases and thus make them more commercially appealing to the public. This editorial strategy was even more important in the case of ‘new folklore’, as the political motivation – the cultivation of patriotic feelings – was as important as the commercial one (Ceașescu, 1971). For example, the LP “Various - Țară Nouă, Cîntec Nou” (New Country, New Song)¹²⁸ consists of songs interpreted by famous folklore singers at that time, including Ion Dolănescu, Benone Sinulescu and Irina Loghin, and contains such titles as “My country, a proud garden”, “Proud is my country”, “Romania, Romania”. These songs praised the beauty of the country, its natural riches, the happiness and enthusiasm of the people and the socialist achievements: “As with me, other young men take out the gold from your valleys” (Romania, Romania), a direct reference to the working men in the mining industry, one of the most prolific during the communist years in Romania: “proud is the country of its possessions: factories and fields” (Proud is the country).

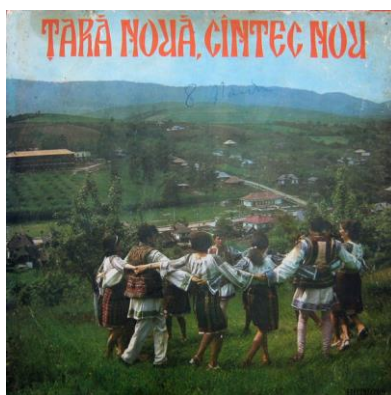


Image IV.1 – LP cover of “Various - Țară Nouă, Cîntec Nou” (1976).

The second approach was the release of solo albums by famous folklore performers, which included one ‘new folklore’ track. One such example is the album “I want peace, I want peace”, by singer Ion Dolănescu¹²⁹. The “peace” topic was omnipresent in the discourses of the RCP since large “popular assemblies” were frequently convened to support world peace, in which people were obliged to

¹²⁸ Various, “Țara Noua, Cantec Nou”, EPE 01172 (1976): <https://www.discogs.com/release/4660130-Variou-%C8%9Aar%C4%83-Nou%C4%83-C%C3%AEntec-Nou> .

¹²⁹ Ion Dolănescu, “Eu Vreau Pace, Eu Vreau Pace”, STC 00174, 1982.

<https://www.discogs.com/release/12911689-Ion-Dol%C4%83nescu-Eu-Vreau-Pace-Eu-Vreau-Pace>

participate. Moreover, art and culture were requested to educate people in the spirit of “fellowship with people throughout the world who are engaged in the struggle for peace, sovereignty and independence” (Dodu Bălan, 1975: 20). These themes and their references represented concrete actions in the pursuit of creating the “new man” through music.

Composers and lyricists of “new folklore” were not credited on *Electrecord* releases. The songs were supposedly orally transmitted from generation to generation while their original composer was 'unknown', in most times romanticized as the “people”¹³⁰. This strategy was in line with the symbolic role attributed to folklore by the communist regime in Romania, which was “to bridge past and present, to reinforce the concept of permanence, to symbolize the unitary character of the nation, and to demonstrate its artistic qualities” (Giurchescu, 2001: 116). Similarly, the members of small folklore ensembles (tarafs) were not mentioned in the records. For instance, on one album by the fiddler Ion Petre's Stoican, the 14-piece band was credited only as a “People's Orchestra” (Orchestra Populara) rather than by their participants name¹³¹.



Image IV.2 – Ion Petre Stoican, "Muzică Lautărească" (1983), backcover. It can be seen that the orchestra is credited as “Orchestra Populară” (People’s Orchestra) and not all the names of the musicians appear.

¹³⁰ Interview with Speranta Rădulescu, ethnomusicologist.

¹³¹ Ion Petre Stoican, "Muzică Lautărească", ST-EPE 02166 (1983), <https://www.discogs.com/release/7272548-Ion-Petre-Stoican-Muzic%C4%83-L%C4%83ut%C4%83reasc%C4%83>.

IV.1.b. The music of minorities

One of the official directives was to release the music of minorities, as revealed by an official document published by CSEC: “The examination of the proposals reveals the almost total absence, this year, of Romanian composers of Hungarian and German nationality. [...] After discussing with the management of *Electrecord*, we received assurances that this situation will be taken care of”¹³². This directive reflected one of the principles of the cultural policy: the cultivation of a feeling of “fellowship” and “fraternity” among the “cohabiting nationalities”, which “fought for the growth of the common motherland – Romania” (Ceașescu, 1971: 9). Even though the official position of the regime was against any form of nationalism, this stance was directed towards minorities, which aimed to integrate or assimilate them into a “single Romanian culture”, as revealed in Romania's study on its cultural policy, published by UNESCO: “One of the most characteristic features of musical life in Romania today is the active participation of Hungarian and German musicians and of musicians belonging to other national groups living in Romania in the building up of a single Romanian musical culture” (Dodu Bălan, 1975: 41). This statement reveals the paradoxes of nationalism identified by Thomas Turino (2000), discussed in chapter I.3. On one hand, the regime used ethnic distinctiveness to project an image of a cosmopolitan State to the international scene. On the other hand, the regime also felt threatened by the proto-nationalist movements of some minorities, especially Hungarians who contested the historical region of Transylvania as part of Romania.

In 1965 the catalogue of the company included 28 titles of Hungarian, German, Serbian, Turkish, Greek, Jewish, Gypsy and, interestingly, Cuban and Chilean, which accounted for approximately 4,76% of the total music releases¹³³. These releases featured Romanian musicians belonging to these minorities, and artists from other countries. In 1968, the number of titles increased to 57 (5,65% of music releases) and included Bulgarian and Macedonian music, apart from the already mentioned

¹³² “Note in regards to the editorial plan of 1971 of the record company *Electrecord*”, Musical Direction of CCES, 10018/08.01.1971

¹³³ “Catalog de Discuri” (Disc Catalogue), 3rd Edition, *Electrecord*, 1965

minorities¹³⁴. In 1973, the catalogue included 54 titles, 5.05% of the total music releases, and included Hungarian, German, Turkish and Serbian and Macedonian music¹³⁵.

IV.1.c. Religious music and references

The record company did not accept religious music or any lyrical reference to spirituality, a stance dictated by communist principles. According to Karl Marx, religion results from oppressive and exploitative social conditions and becomes unnecessary when these conditions cease to exist (Rainer, 2002). In the case of *Electrecord*'s releases, this was valid only for phonograms released in Romania and was not the case with the ones available exclusively for export¹³⁶. For instance, the most prestigious choir in the country, the Madrigal Chamber Choir, was not allowed to sing or release Christmas carols in Romania due to their religious connotation, as one singer explained: "Madrigal had pieces, as we used to say, for export, which were exported, which we sang only abroad, and music that we sang only in Romania." (Pieslak, 2011: 233). Nevertheless, Romanian authorities allowed the choir to sing carols and other religious songs in concerts abroad as they also profited from the prestige of the ensemble¹³⁷. The State's double standard regarding Madrigal's spiritual music repertoire is evident in the choir's recordings of Romanian carols, which were sold globally, although illegal in Romania.

Following its success at an early music festival in Poland in 1967, the ensemble decided to record Romanian carols in one of the studios of *Electrecord*. The recording was completed but could not be marketed in Romania due to the religious nature of the music. With the help of a Romanian orthodox priest who worked for the Christian

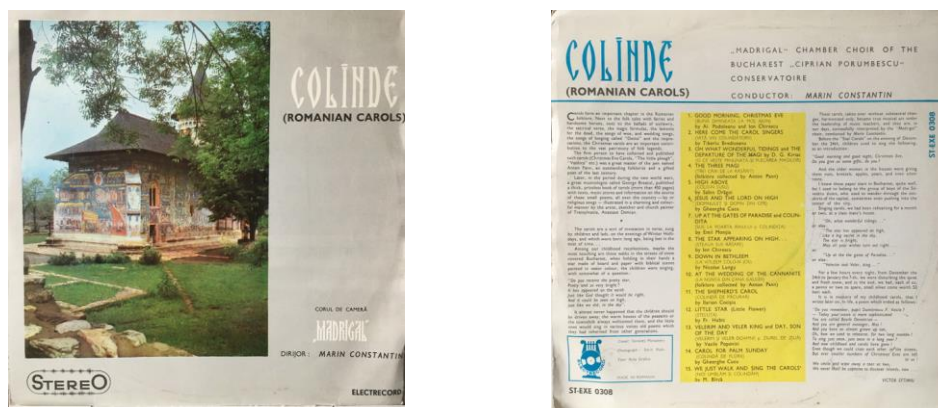
¹³⁴ "Catalog de Discuri" (Disc Catalogue), 4th Edition, Electrecord, 1968

¹³⁵ "Catalog de Discuri" (Disc Catalogue), Electrecord, 1973

¹³⁶ The catalogues include some titles that were available in "special conditions exclusively for export", marked with the symbol *). On a contrary note, some releases were for the national market only and were marked with the symbol **).

¹³⁷ For an analysis of the way in which the Romanian regime profited from the international prestige of the choir see Sabina Păuța Pieslak, "Romania's Madrigal Choir and the Politics of Prestige" in *Journal of Musicological Research*, 26:2-3, 215-240.

Orthodox Archbishopric of the USA and Canada, the master tape was taken to the USA without official permission for the LP to be produced and released. However, the company contracted to edit the LP needed *Electrecord*'s approval to reproduce the material, so the choir's conductor contacted the director of the Romanian company, Teodor Cartis. The priest stated that the director was "a man with excellent intentions, who, when hearing that it was a matter of dollars, found the argument through which to convince the superior forums for the release of the disc", which was approved with the condition that it only be marketed abroad (ibidem.: 234)¹³⁸. During the 1980s, The choir's conductor received a new proposition for recording an LP from a Romanian musician in California. The choir recorded the album without the approval of the CSEC and, as a result, *Electrecord* confiscated the master tape, which was not released until 1990¹³⁹.



Images IV.3 and IV.4 – Madrigal Chamber Choir, "Romanian Carols" (1967). The liner notes are only in English, as the LP was intended for export only.

Similar religious connotations were the reasons behind the record company's refusal to release the jazz album "Creation Suite" (Creatiunea) by Harry Tavitian and

¹³⁸ Madrigal Chamber Choir, "Romanian Carols", ST-EXE 0308 (1967) <https://www.discogs.com/master/383210-Corul-De-Camer%C4%83-Madrigal-Al-Conservatorului-Ciprian-Porumbescu-Dirijor-Marin-Constantin-Colinde-Rom> .

¹³⁹ Corul Madrigal, "Astăzi S-a Născut Hristos (Colinde Și Cântări De Crăciun)", ST-EXE 03807 (1990): <https://www.discogs.com/release/4061950-Corul-de-camer%C4%83-Madrigal-Dirijor-Marin-Constantin-Ast%C4%83zi-S-a-N%C4%83scut-Hristos-Colinde-%C8%98i-C%C3%AEnt%C4%83ri> .

Corneliu Stroe. In 1988, the album was recorded live in concert; however, it was not released by *Electrecord* because of its title, which the company considered related to creationism, “the idea of God, to mysticism”¹⁴⁰. In this case, the title was the problem, not the music. The artist was advised to change it; however, due to his refusal, the LP was released in 1991, after the fall of the communist regime¹⁴¹.

IV.1.d. Censorship

“We weren't doing anything by ourselves; we were constantly communicating with them (CSEC)”, says Cornelia Andreescu, currently the general manager of the record company¹⁴². The editorial plan was always sent for approval to the CSEC, which was in charge of censoring the texts or, more rarely, the instrumentals. Nevertheless, *Electrecord* had its censors. When censorship was officially dissolved in 1977, in truth it was decentralised while a more complex system took its place: this activity was transferred to institutions and enterprises subordinated to the CSEC and editors, artistic and general directors became the first censors, being guided by Ceaușescu's speeches and the Party's directives (Preda, 2017: 167). Thus, censorship became internalized, and the record company also had a big influence on defining which artworks, music or lyrics could appear on the final product.

The lyrics were sent to *Electrecord* before the recording and were verified by the advisory committee, which validated the proposals for the editorial plan. In addition, editors were also part of the internal censorship system. They were aware of the official forbidden words and themes lists, as Cornelia Andreescu confirms: “We already knew what worked and what didn't”¹⁴³. When asked if *Electrecord* had its censors, the interviewees that worked for the company before 1989 claimed that it

¹⁴⁰ Harry Tavitian, interview with Mihai Plamadeala, 17.07.2006, <http://www.muzicisifaze.com/interviu.php?id=21>, accessed on 10.03.2022.

¹⁴¹ Harry Tavitian, Corneliu Stroe "Creation Suite / Creațiunea", ST-EDE 038961991 (1991): <https://www.discogs.com/master/540094-Harry-Tavitian-Corneliu-Stroe-Creation-Suite-Crea%C8%9Biunea>.

¹⁴² Interview with Cornelia Andreescu, general manager and former editor-in-chief

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

didn't. However, their statements and the ones of artists suggest otherwise: “The censorship was practically only in the hands of the CSEC. But an editor already knew certain things that weren't supposed to appear and discussed them (with the artists) from the beginning”, said Cornelia Andreescu, a statement which reinforces the idea of self-censorship¹⁴⁴. As already referred, Harry Tavitian specified that *Electrecord* decided not to release his album “Creațiunea/Creation Suite” in 1988 due to the title's link to “God and mysticism”¹⁴⁵. Similarly, Rodion Rosca, leader of the band Rodion GA, claims that the record company changed the words to the song “Satul de rouă” (The Village Made of Dew) because of the mystical connotation: the word “purify” from the lyrics “My soul comes to you/So you may purify and forgive it”, was replaced by “welcome” (Oancea, 2017: 178).

In other cases, unexpectedly daring lyrics were accepted. For example, the song ‘Protest’, by the band Metrock, included lyrics such as “I want to know why some people look at me/ Because I have a long hair and a beard, 'cause this is how I look best”¹⁴⁶. Moreover, the song also features an intense, hard rock-style guitar solo. One hypothesis that explains the acceptance of this song is that it also speaks against war and promotes peace, a theme that was in tune with the regime’s stance.



Images IV.5 and IV.6 – Metrock, “Castelul de nisip” (1982).

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵ Harry Tavitian, interview with Mihai Plamadeala, 17.07.2006, <http://www.muzicisifaze.com/interviu.php?id=21>, accessed on 10.03.2022

¹⁴⁶ Metrock “Castelul De Nisip” (Sandcastle), ST-EDE 02077, 1982: <https://www.discogs.com/release/1490617-Metrock-Castelul-De-Nisip>.

The record company also censored music when it did not meet the official standards. For example, Paul Enigărescu, former artistic director, refused to edit and release some tapes proposed by ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu because they did not meet the standards of polished and clean traditional music¹⁴⁷. Similarly, composer and producer Adrian Enescu could not release any jazz, rock fusion and electronic music at *Electrecord* after the departure of artistic director Daniela Caraman Fotea – which supported certain genres and releases which otherwise were not accepted by the regime (details in subchapter IV.3.)¹⁴⁸.

The record company also directed censorship towards the artworks. Paul Enigărescu recalled a quarrel with composer Adrian Enescu about the cover of an album, which was considered “too sexy”. Eventually, he accepted to have the daring photo printed on the back cover, with the acceptance of the CSEC¹⁴⁹. Vasile Sirli, former general director of the company also recalls how he refused a photo of a female singer because she “looked like Christ on the cross”, eventually accepting another posture¹⁵⁰.



Images IV.7 and IV.8 – (Left) Loredana Groza – *Un buchet de trandafiri* (1989), back cover. This image was deemed “too sexy” to be on the front cover. (Right) Romica Puceanu (1982), cover accepted after the refusal of a photo from the same photo shoot, in which she supposedly resembled “Christ on the cross”.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Paul Enigărescu, artistic director between 1989 – 1992.

¹⁴⁸ Adrian Enescu for “Muzici si Faze”: <https://www.muzicisifaze.com/interviu.php?id=28>, accessed 11.03.2022 .

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem. 147.

¹⁵⁰ Vasile Sirli, interview with Mihai Zgondoiu: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VToNcRLxE_o .

IV.2. Business vs. culture

The editorial policy of the record company was governed both by commercial and cultural principles. While the commercial reasoning was connected to the marketplace and sales, the cultural aspect was strongly linked to politics. These two tenets were at times in contradiction. Consequently, *Electrecord* was in a particular position of reconciling business and culture, financial independence and politics, which is best reflected in the editorial policy. The sales department was also involved in the production planning process by providing data about the best-selling artists and records. This data represented a central factor in deciding on future releases and their circulation. Therefore, every three months before the final version of the editorial plan was decided, sales representatives would collect sales figures to keep up with the audience's preferences¹⁵¹.

This economic principle was dictated by a law that regulates the organisation and functioning of state enterprises, which specifies that “the plans are elaborated based on economic contracts that ensure the certainty of supply and sale” and that “the strengthening of the economic and financial self-management imposes on all enterprises the obligation to cover their production and circulation expenses, to obtain benefits from which to ensure their own development and to contribute to the general development of the society”¹⁵².

On the one hand, this practice reveals the commercial nature of *Electrecord's* decision-making process, in which financial gain was always considered. In an article published in “Muzica” Magazine, the publication of UCMR, the author criticises the small number of symphonic and choral releases in comparison to folklore or “light music” and tries to find the reasons behind their disproportionate numbers. He reports on a conversation with the editor-in-chief of *Electrecord*, which uncovers the economic principles of the editorial policy: “I found out thus, with astonishment, that in the end, the production of the Romanian disc is related to the preferences of the

¹⁵¹ According to Cornelia Andreescu and Paul Enigarescu.

¹⁵² Law nr. 5/1978 regarding the organization and management of the socialist state units, as well as their functioning based on the workers' self-management and the economic-financial self-management.

sellers in the speciality stores: ‘we cannot manufacture any disc, regardless of its cultural value, unless we have firm orders from the retailers. This organizational directive subordinates our work to the demands of trade’¹⁵³. Therefore it can be seen that the record company was first and foremost an economical state enterprise, which abided by the same laws that regulated industrial organization.

On the other hand, it was generally agreed that phonograms represent a means to disseminate and preserve culture, as stated in the objectives of the company, and were regarded as educational instruments. Therefore, the editorial policy of *Electrecord* was also designed to educate the public, meet cultural needs, and contribute to the general development of society. This meant that discs that weren’t necessarily commercial successes also had to be edited. For example, symphonic music was one of the niches that retailers were compelled to buy from the record company, as the current general manager recalls: “We would urge all retailers to buy 2, 3 discs of symphonic music because it needed to penetrate. Symphonic music had to be present everywhere because it was considered an act of culture”¹⁵⁴. Even though symphonic, choral and opera discs were edited in small numbers in comparison to other genres, the objective in this musical area was to edit the music of all Romanian composers on disc.

The duality represented by the commercial nature and educational objectives of the company reveals its position as a ground for negotiation between the audience's preference and principles dictated by political and economic reasons. This position was made possible by the company’s role as an artistic mediator and also by its forms of symbolic capital, which contributed to the degree of autonomy discussed in the initial sections of this chapter. In the following subchapter I will detail how *Electrecord* acquired its forms of symbolic capital and how it produced meaning and value to its products, acting as an artistic mediator.

¹⁵³ Claudiu Negulescu, “Unele probleme ale repertoriului si difuzarii muzicii romanesti pe discuri Electrecord” (Some problems of the repertoire and the diffusion of the Romanian music on Electrecord discs) in *Muzica* 1970 nr. 7, p. 19.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Cornelia Andreescu, current general manager, former editor-in-chief.

IV.3. Artistic mediation and “symbolic capital”

Symbolic capital is defined by Pierre Bourdieu as “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (1989: 17). Therefore, despite appearing in his work alongside other forms of capital—economic, cultural, and social—symbolic capital should not be thought of as a distinct kind of capital, but rather as the legitimated, acknowledged form of the other capitals. Following his premises on the cultural production field, *Electrecord* was an artistic mediator, producing meaning and value to creative products (Bourdieu, 1993: 11). The company was one of many mediators that sustained the system of belief that constitutes the cultural field, alongside other institutions, and agents, such as TV and Radio networks, music journalism and the UCMR. As I have shown in the previous subchapters, the record company was subordinated to political power and had a degree of autonomy that placed it in a dominant cultural field position. Thus, one can say that *Electrecord* was a mediator between artists and the audience, but also between the institutionalised political power and the artists. This position was based on the symbolic and economic capital of the company and its gatekeeping role. Therefore, one may ask how did *Electrecord* acquire and used its symbolic capital? And to what extent did the company act as a gatekeeper?

Electrecord acted as a gatekeeper on many levels, since key positions within the company provided the possibility for independent decision making regarding the editorial plan. The first gatekeeper was the editorial department, which had the task of finding and proposing the artists and repertoire. The criteria were dependent on the musical genre. For rock or jazz musicians’ popularity was an essential factor: TV appearances, Radio plays, festival participation, concerts across the country, press articles, interviews, positive reviews, and the presence in the charts were all considered by the editors. However, even if the popularity criteria were met, a band or an artist could still not be accepted on the initial proposal list for various reasons. For example, although the jazz and rock fusion band Magic had many original tracks in the charts of the most renowned magazines, were heavily air played on national radio networks, toured extensively across the country, appeared on television and had

contracts with sea-side restaurants, due to unknown reasons, *Electrecord* edited only three of their songs on the compilation albums “Pop music bands”, volume 1 and 2 (Stratone, 2019: 81). Furthermore, one band from Cluj, Kappa, allegedly refused to pay a bribe to one of *Electrecord's* editors and for that reason was never given the opportunity to record a song: “We recorded the songs ‘I need you’ and ‘Moonlight’ at Radio Romania, which reached the first place in the chart of the magazine ‘Săptămîna’, an 1980’s magazine. We really wanted to appear at least on one side of the disc at *Electrecord*, but we were clearly told how much money (bribes) they wanted for this”¹⁵⁵. Speranța Rădulescu also confirmed this practice, in regard to folklore editors¹⁵⁶, and Paul Enigarescu, in regard to editor-in-chief Daniela Caraman Fotea: “there were about three ugly complaints made against her because she demanded big bribes to edit their discs”¹⁵⁷. Another reason for the refusal of certain proposals was personal taste. Former artistic director Paul Enigarescu revealed that he turned down folklore proposals coming from ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu: “she came to me with some tapes – with some of these authentic bands. They were totally out of tune”¹⁵⁸.

On the other hand, some artists had the chance to have their music released by *Electrecord* only in specific circumstances. Many artists credit former artistic director Daniela Caraman Fotea as the “gate opener” for genres that were typically not accepted beforehand or after she stopped working for the company. Electronic music composer Adrian Enescu provides a revealing statement in this regard:

“Mrs Fotea then moved to *Electrecord* and that is how I managed to get past the gates of this institution. Thus, Funky Synthesizer I & II were released, the first being a combination of electronic music, jazz-rock and progressive jazz, and the second, entirely electronic in the dance direction. I wanted to make a volume III, but after the departure of Mrs Fotea, it was impossible to release anything in this style at *Electrecord*”¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.clujulcultural.ro/exclusiv-clujenii-de-la-kappa-primul-album-derock-progresiv-dupa-30-de-ani/>, accessed: 11.03.2022.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Speranta Radulescu.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Paul Enigarescu.

¹⁵⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem, 148.

Singer-compser Alexandru Andries confirms her decisive role in the release of two of his albums: “Without her, the rock'n'roll discs, 'Despre Distanta' and 'Trei Oglinzi' would not have appeared on the market. She helped me with everything in her power for the approval of lyrics and graphics [...]”¹⁶⁰. These statements demonstrate that certain decisions were taken by key employees of the record company, based on subjective reasons, especially when it came to ‘light music’ releases.

The symbolic capital of the record company was firstly provided by its monopoly on phonogram production and secondly by the importance deposited by many artists on phonogram production. “We all wanted to have a release at Electrecord” stated FFN lead singer Cristian Madolciu¹⁶¹. The phonogram was a marketing instrument, a business card essential for singers and musicians of all genres. It attested to their existence and represented a physical link with the fans, as journalist Octavian Ursulescu explains:

“it was important for their image and for the fact that lovers of the genre were buying the records, they were coming to them for autographs, they were the unconditional admirers, it was very important for an artist. If you didn't have records, it meant that you didn't exist, that you don't have a repertoire, that you're not requested on the market...”¹⁶².

The importance of the phonogram for folklore artists was also underlined by ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu: “who wanted to do have a record? The singers who performed at weddings. Not only singers but also instrumentalists. But the singers were crazy for the record. They wanted to have a business card. They bought a lot of records, they offered them with dedications...”¹⁶³. Moreover, the phonogram was also used as a demo in the negotiation of contracts with restaurants, bars, or cruise ships from abroad.

Another form of symbolic capital was provided by the specialists in different

¹⁶⁰ <https://topromanesc.ro/daniela-caraman-fotea-ramane-coloana-de-sustinere-pentru-pentru-muzica-si-cuvantul-scris/>, accessed on 13.03.2022.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Cristian Madolciu, lead singer of the band FFN, member of the Electrecord Supergroup.

¹⁶² Written interview with Octavian Ursulescu, music journalist, Radio and TV host.

¹⁶³ Ibidem. 156.

domains working for or with the record company. The editorial department was comprised of ethnomusicologists (Stela Nachi, Tiberiu Alexandru), professional singers (Cornelia Andreescu), music critics and musicologists (Daniela Caraman Fotea, Daniela Roxana Gibescu), music professors (Silviana Sarcă), composers (Mihai Moldovan, Romeo Vanica) etc. The general directors of the company were also musical critics, conductors, and composers (Nestor Gheorghiu, Vasile Sirli, Teodor Cartis). Moreover, the advisory committee that validated the editorial plan included people outside of the company, such as ethnomusicologists, journalists, conductors, composers, and established artists (depending on the genre). The committee played a legitimizing role for the company's production decisions because it included music professionals, scholars, or members of the UCMR. Speranța Rădulescu, member of the folklore advisory committee, suggested that the validation stage was only symbolic, as the record company still had the final word: "most of Electrecord's production was folklore and they also needed a professional coverage, that is, a committee to say if these songs deserve to be on disc or not, if this singer deserves to be promoted or not, and so on. [...] To what extent our decisions were accountable, that I don't know, but my guess is that our job was mostly symbolic"¹⁶⁴. It can thus be said that through the members of the advisory committee, the record company gained symbolic capital and produced value for its releases. If the repertoire was selected and approved by such professionals, surely there would be no doubt regarding its high quality and 'authenticity'. In an article in "Muzica" magazine, the official publication of the UCMR, ethnomusicologist Tiberiu Alexandru underlines the authenticity of the folklore repertoire edited by the Electrecord and the high standards of the people that selected and approved it:

"The exigency of the national disc industry [...] results in increasingly valuable recordings of popular songs, of the highest authenticity. The repertoire that singers present for disc releases is chosen with good judgement and competence. More than once, a soloist, after having a few songs approved, is guided to collect, to learn others. He is given [...] advice and guidance. A reputed moldavian singer was sent home several times, until, finally, the material she presented was adequate for the release of a totally honorable disc"¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁵ Tiberiu Alexandru, *Valorificarea muzicii noastre populare* (The valorification of our popular music) in "Muzica", nr. 1 (267), Jan 1975, p. 3

Electrecord used its symbolic forms of capital to produce value and meaning to its releases. Several strategies can be identified in the symbolic production of music by the record company, which are related to market strategies as well. Firstly, new artists appeared on the B side of an EP, together with established artists on the A side. This strategy ensured the commercial appeal of the disc, by adding value to new artists or songs. It was also the case with ‘new folklore’ compilation albums, which were comprised of less-known singers and one or two famous ones. Similarly, on their first release, new bands were urged by the record company to include covers of famous songs. This was the case with the first release of the band Phoenix (45 Rpm EP, *Vremuri*, 1968), which contains two original tracks on one side and the songs “Lady Madonna” released by The Beatles just a few months prior, and “Friday on my mind” by Easybeats¹⁶⁶.



Images IV.9 and IV.10 – Phoenix, “Vremuri” (1968). Two original songs on the A side and two covers on the B side.

Value and meaning were also produced through the liner notes on the cover of

¹⁶⁶ Phoenix, “Vremuri”, EDC 10.006, (1968), <https://www.discogs.com/es/release/927437-Phoenix-Vremuri>.

the discs, which were written by music journalists, composers, or ethnomusicologists. Apart from information about the artists, musical genre, repertoire, the liner notes also suggested the value and meaning of the songs, with statements in Romanian such as:

“The celebrated musician Bela Bartok defined the Bihor songs as ‘the most wonderful folk music, deserving the admiration of all European music lovers’”¹⁶⁷;

“[...] ‘Those who gave us name’, which revamps a series of customs and aspirations of our ancestors, who gave us the name of a free people and who handed down to us a most precious gift: our ethnicity”¹⁶⁸;

“Phoenix [...] have realized an act of culture through the folklore inspiration [...], the clarity of the message – educational and patriotic – being very obvious”¹⁶⁹;

“rock music has imposed itself lately as an artistic phenomena, echoing the consciousness of an entire generation, this music that has become an ‘artistic good’ and the idiom of many places across the globe”¹⁷⁰;

“This succulent track [...] is an admirable crystallization of lyricism in its short, concise form, specific to the disco genre. It is part of the ‘long life’ repertoire, fixing its author amongst our light music composers that listeners can turn to anytime, with the certainty that they will be charmed”¹⁷¹.

It can be seen that the music's value and meaning are interconnected and produced by such phrases as “the most wonderful folk music”, “act of culture”, “admirable crystallization” etc. or through the “educational and patriotic message” that the music carries, its association with “our ancestors” (historical value, the meaning of carrier of heritage) and “our ethnicity” (value in strengthening an identity, the meaning of national essence) or the fact that it echoes “the consciousness of an entire generation” (value in the widespread of the genre or the expression of youth’s consciousness).

In short, these examples reveal how *Electrecord* acted as an artistic mediator

¹⁶⁷ Various, “Muzică Populară Transilvaneană” EPE 0108: <https://www.discogs.com/es/release/6673650-Various-Muzic%C4%83-Popular%C4%83-Transilvanean%C4%83> .

¹⁶⁸ Phoenix, “Ce i ce ne-au dat nume”, STM-EDE 0754, (1972), <https://www.discogs.com/es/release/883647-Phoenix-Cei-Ce-Ne-au-Dat-Nume> .

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁰ Various, “Club A”, ST-EDE 01912 (1981), <https://www.discogs.com/es/release/2434892-Various-Club-A>

¹⁷¹ Mișu Iancu, “... Și Cîntecele Mele - Melodii De Mișu Iancu”, ST-EDE 01636 (1980), <https://www.discogs.com/es/release/4029085-Mi%C8%99u-Iancu--%C8%98i-C%C3%AEntecele-Mele-Melodii-De-Mi%C8%99u-Iancu>

between the artists and the public. Meaning and value was produced mainly in two ways: through marketing strategies – such as associating new artists with already established ones on the same release – and also through the liner notes. Moreover, the “symbolic capital” of the company also strengthened the company’s role as an artistic mediator. This was made possible by the highly specialized collaborators and employers that participated in the production process and by the importance attributed to phonograms by artists. As *Electrecord* was the only record company and phonogram manufacturer in the country, the symbolic capital was guaranteed.

In this chapter I have also analyzed the company’s degree of autonomy in relation to external determinants such as the political directives and state defined cultural policy, economic factors, and the requests of transnational music industries. In this regard, I have explored the position of *Electrecord* as a ground for negotiation in designing and implementing official cultural policy related to music. On one hand, it can be concluded that the company was to a certain extent autonomous when it came to its editorial policy, as it had the power to decide what music to record and release, even before the approval of the CSEC and even if it wasn’t requested on the market (the case of classical music). On the other hand, the company was clearly subordinated to political directives as it applied communist principles (for example, by not releasing religious music) and the policies of the state (such as the assimilation policy, when it came to the music of minorities).

In conclusion, the “honour” or “prestige” of *Electrecord*, embodied in its symbolic capital, was earned via the conversion of other forms of capital, such as economic and cultural, and by the fact that the company was the sole responsible for the phonographic production in the country. The symbolic capital was used to sustain a certain degree of autonomy from external determinants and to legitimize the editorial decisions, both for the audience and the political power.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have analyzed the relationship between music and the state-defined cultural policy, as mediated by the phonographic industry in Romania, in a totalitarian socialist/communist regime, between 1965 and 1989. My research focused on the only record company in the country, Electrecord, which oversaw the entire phonogram production process, from production decision to distribution. Firstly, I have provided information about the organisational structure and the production process, revealing the stages it implied, the technology used, identified who were decision-makers and the main characteristics of the editorial policy. Secondly, I have determined the political, cultural, economic and social contexts during the company's activity, relating the national and international levels, taking into account many themes such as ideology, legislation, agreements and conventions, the institutional framework of culture, technological developments, and the configuration of the Romanian music industries.

The objectives of my dissertation are consistent with the research questions and hypothesis advanced in the introductory part. To begin with, I aimed to understand if there was a clear cultural policy directed toward music and I tried to understand its characteristics and goals, the means of implementation, its main changes over time and its results. I demonstrated that music was part of a broader cultural-educational project that was primordial in constructing socialism and modelling man's consciousness according to Marxist-Leninist principles. Between 1965 to 1989, cultural policy in Romania evolved from encouraging creative diversity and being relatively open to Western cultural influences until the 1970s, when it gradually started to become more nationalistic, strict and closed to transnational cultural flows. In this context, music was seen as a repository of the "national essence" of the Romanian people and a "driving wheel in the process of national self-assertion". Through folklore manipulation, the communist regime created nationalistic symbols that legitimised its actions and accompanied the nation-building process. Thus, specific tasks were attributed to musicians and music institutions: the enrichment of the national musical corpus through the return to indigenous forms of expression and

the realist representation of the achievements of the then-called “socialist society”. Consequently, forms of ethno-rock and ethno-jazz emerged during the 1970s. Other music addressed to “the masses” – mass songs, patriotic music, mobilizing marches – was commissioned by the State regularly.

By analysing *Electrecord*’s editorial policy features, I have demonstrated, on the one hand, that the record company was instrumental in the implementation of state cultural policy regarding music, as it was subordinated to the political institutions that coordinated the entire cultural-educational activity in the country. Firstly, this is reflected by releases commissioned by the state, such as patriotic, political music and ‘new folklore’, which praised the RCP, its leader, and the accomplishments of the communist regime. Secondly, the company was compelled to release music from minorities to contribute to the assimilation policy of the State, which had the purpose of creating a “single Romanian culture”. Thirdly, *Electrecord* applied official censorship guidelines, such as lists of forbidden words that did not accept references to mysticism or religion and removed artists that fled the country or did not fall within the official cultural line from the editorial plan. Lastly, the fact that folklore releases had the highest percentage in the editorial projects, gradually increasing over the years, reflects the importance attributed by the regime to this musical domain.

Electrecord was also a privileged vehicle for negotiating State cultural policy, having a degree of autonomy concerning external determinants, such as official directives and market forces. In some situations, the record company had its own censors and gatekeepers – editors, the artistic and general directors, and sound engineers – who decided whether certain artists, songs, or genres could be released. Furthermore, the advisory committee that validated the repertoire and final versions of the recordings also acted as a gatekeeper and censor. The official directives that guided the decisions taken within the company were, in some cases, very ambiguous and open to interpretation. Consequently, the degree of autonomy was provided by decisions based on personal taste and personal gains. Additionally, economic reasoning sometimes prevailed over the cultural and political one, as the editorial plans were constantly developed according to the market request. In this sense, it can

be said that *Electrecord* was a mediator between market forces and state politics as it balanced these aspects in its decisions and practices.

Indeed, the phonographic industry was a vital part of an integrated institutional system that created and disseminated music. I have illustrated that even though such a centralised system with shared cultural, political, and educational objectives, the plural ‘music industries’ is still valid due to the degree of autonomy that the phonographic industry possessed in relation to political control. Given the position that *Electrecord* occupied within the music industry, the company also acted as an artistic mediator, producing, and promoting a set of values and meanings through its releases. This was achieved through its “symbolic capital” in three circumstances: the monopoly on phonogram production; the importance that artists and the State bestowed on phonograms; and the academic profile of the collaborators and employees of the company. As seen beforehand, liner notes and marketing strategies also produced meaning and value.

Also, the record company was one of the main pillars in the institutional apparatus that disseminated and created nationalistic symbols through folklore “manipulation”. Alongside the folklore ensembles of the Radio and TV networks, each county had its orchestra, which contributed to creating a “clean” and “polished” folklore. The Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania also contributed to this process, as its members were commissioned to compose ‘new folklore’ or the so-called ‘songs about the new life’. *Electrecord*’s role in this mechanism is revealed, on the one hand, by the fact that most of its folklore releases from the 1970s and 80s feature two of the official orchestras of the Radio and Television networks, both from Bucharest. Through this practice, regional diversity was diminished, and standardisation became the norm. On the other hand, the examples of sound engineer Vasile Sibana and artistic director Paul Enigarescu – which did not accept any “imperfections” in folklore interpretation – highlight the company’s role in folklore manipulation. Hence, it can be concluded that *Electrecord* was instrumental in the State’s endeavour to create and disseminate the type of folklore that supposedly symbolised the nation’s unity and distinctiveness while simultaneously legitimising the communist regime and its accomplishments.

This dissertation is by no means a complete picture of the relationship between cultural policy and music mediated by the phonographic industry during the communist regime in Romania. Firstly, the lack of information and documents is a barrier to fully grasping the historical facts that affected this relation: contracts with artists, missing catalogues, licensing deals with foreign record companies, agreements with the Romanian Broadcasting Society and the Union of Composers and Musicologists in Romania, sales, and acquisition lists etc., are still to be found (if they still exist) and analyzed. Secondly, an in-depth understanding of the many facets of this object can only be achieved through the analysis of more perspectives, an endeavour that falls outside the limited space of an M.A. dissertation. For instance, individual agency and the influence of small musical communities on official cultural policy and the phonographic industry have not been considered here. Thirdly, a more detailed comparison with other countries, both capitalist and socialist, would provide a more accurate context for my research. Hence, this dissertation should not be seen as an end but as one step further in a long road toward understanding the complex historiography of music, cultural policy, and the phonographic industry in the Socialist Republic of Romania.

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INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE AUTHOR

Aneta Stan, folklore singer with 1 LP and 2 EPs released at Electrecord before 1989, conducted at her home in Bucharest on 17.01.2022;

Cornelia Andreescu, current general director of Electrecord, former editor, editor-in-chief and sound engineer of the company, conducted at Electrecord's Tomis Studio, Bucharest on 12.12.2021;

Cristian Madolciu, vocalist, founder of rock band FFN and member of the Electrecord Supergroup, conducted on WhatsApp on 15.07.2021

Gheorghe Grosaru, former technician and sound engineer of Electrecord, conducted over the phone on 24.07.2021

Ion Frațilă, mastering/transferring engineer for Electrecord, conducted over the phone on 10.11.2021

Mircea Stănică, manager of the cassette duplication department and sound recording studio of Electrecord, conducted over the phone on 4.11.2021

Octavian Ursulescu, music journalist and critic, musical advisor of *Electrecord* up until 1990, conducted via email on 2.02.2022

Paul Enigărescu, former artistic director of Electrecord (1989-1990), sound engineer at Radio Romania and at events organized by the Council of Socialist Culture and Education, musical director and member of the jury at the “Mamaia Festival” before 1989, conducted at Beans & Dots Coffe Shop, Bucharest, on 24.01.2022

Speranța Rădulescu, ethnomusicologist, member of the Folklore Committee at *Electrecord*, member of the jury at the “Cântarea României Festival” (Song of Romania), conducted at her home in Bucharest on 24.11.2021

Teodor Isaru, current musical director of Electrecord, conducted over the phone on 6.02.2022

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