

# CONCERNING SERGIU CELIBIDACHE'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF MUSIC

Teodora Baltasiu

## Rezumat

*Cu privire la fenomenologia muzicală a lui Sergiu Celibidache*

*Lucrarea prezentată își propune să ajungă la un subiect extins și complex, dar care nu lipsește din viața vreunui muzician dedicat, materialul de analiză fiind teoria și filosofia dirijorului Sergiu Celibidache despre muzică. Ideile fundamentale, comprimate și aranjate în stilul unei prelegeri, sunt extrase și transmise din singurul discurs înregistrat din viața sa, care a avut loc la Aula Magna a Universității Ludwig-Maximilian, la 21 iunie 1985, la Munchen. Deși se știe că, de-a lungul carierei sale, dirijorul a dezvoltat cu o grijă impresionantă teoriile sale despre practica fenomenologiei muzicale, niciun alt eseu nu a fost anterior înregistrat sau publicat pe deplin. Acest lucru fiind datorat temerii sale de a rupe realitatea reală a gândului în afară, prin alterarea esenței sale cu metode superficiale care nu acoperă reprezentarea adevărată a acestuia. Textul din care se colectează ideile despre predarea fenomenologiei muzicale a fost publicat mai întâi în 2001 de către Gundolf Lehmann și apoi reprodus într-o ediție nouă în 2012 de către o editură românească.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Sergiu Celibidache, fenomenologie, conferință, Munchen, muzică.

## Abstract

*The presented paper proposes to reach an extended and complex subject, but not lacking from the lives of any dedicated musician, the analysis material being the theory and philosophy of the conductor Sergiu Celibidache upon music. The fundamental ideas, compressed and arranged in the style of a lecture, are extracted and passed on from the one recorded speech of his life, which took place in the Aula Magna of the University of Ludwig-Maximilian on June 21st, 1985, in Munich. Although it is known*

*that, along his career, the conductor developed with impressive care his theories about the practice of phenomenology of music, no other essay has been previously fully recorded or published. This being because of his fear of tearing the true reality of the thought apart, by altering its essence with superficial methods which do not cover the truthful representation of it. The text from which the ideas are gathered in present time about the teaching of the phenomenology of music had been published first in 2001 by Gundolf Lehmhaus, and later reproduced in a new edition in 2012, by a Romanian publishing house.*

**Keywords:** Sergiu Celibidache, phenomenology, lecture, Munchen, music.

## **Introduction**

Sergiu Celibidache put his mark on the musical world as an important conductor, cultivating and fostering his unique style around Europe, especially Germany, Austria and France.

Born in the county of Moldavia, Romania in 1912, Celibidache left to study in Bucharest, Paris and then Berlin, where he achieved the career and the extraordinary technique that he is well known for. Early in his life, he began receiving the best education a young musician and artist could hope for. Eager to be aware and trully know music in all of its aspects, he pursued the menthorship of great mathematics, philosophy, piano and composition professors of that time – unfortunately, a not so common act among artists nowadays, as any arts student could confirm.

In hope of making this subject and its author dependable, one must have the following information: from 1945 to 1952, Celibidache was principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic and later on he colabored with radio orchestras in Stockholm, Stuttgart and Paris. As an addition to

his career as a conductor, he had numerous faculty positions as a pedagogue, especially in his Berlin period, where he put into lectures all his ideas about phenomenology, philosophy and theory of music. Although his classes weren't recorded – due to his idea that the preservation of thought must not be overwhelmed by the verbal representation of it, some of the theories were only written down and passed on through students and other professors<sup>1</sup>.

With this research, I do not wish to take music performance or the understanding of it down to an extreme path, which would be quite easy to do. Extreme meaning, an override idea letting itself fall out of the straight line that it was born into. We could argue here that music cannot be put into straight lines, and spoken so it does sound wrong. But music, like all sciences, is exact as well as infinite, our minds might just have to adapt to its already cristalized paradigms, thus being able to express it as close to its reality as possible.

Regarding this paper, it is a mere reflection of phenomenology, put into the realm of music. The approach is not that of the concepts and ideas of great phenomenologists, but of those of musicians (as performers mostly). It is about a bridge built so subtle and elegant between to sciences that when explained it gives the revelation of the clear process connecting sound and its perceiver, on the heavily researched level of the subconscious.

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<sup>1</sup> Sergiu Celibidache, *Despre fenomenologia muzicală*, România, Editura Spandugino, 2012.

"For me all art's a combination of powers; art is nothing to me if it does not make contact between the creator and the perceiver on an unconscious level"<sup>2</sup>.

### The 1985 seminar

The seminar in question is the only complete record of Celibidache's teachings. Published for the first time in 2001, this work represents the anatomy of the conductor's thinking and his own specific principles. In this edition – translated and edited in 2012 from German to Romanian from the first draft, the work appears to be structured in three parts: the introduction, the pedagogical speech and the debate, ending with a series of reflections by other authors on the same subject.

In the introduction, written by Serge Celibidache – Celibidache's son and the president of the *Sergiu Celibidache Foundation*, are debated the main issues and their invariant solutions conceived by the author in the lecture in hand. All the ideas Sergiu Celibidache presents to his class might seem odd or certainly in need for further explanations that will eventually lead, at least, to a partial understanding of the subject. The subject itself is a very demanding matter, requiring the student to have a minimum knowledge in philosophy, music, acoustics and others.

The subject itself being a very demanding matter, it requires the student to have more than a minimum knowledge of philosophy and the many of its areas, music and acoustics.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Bernstein, Conductor. *This I Believe*, (E. Murrow, Interviewer) 1954, January.

In the first pages of the edition, Serge Celibidache explains why his father did not wish to make his essays known or publish any of his work, thereafter creating clear picture of the maestro's perspective on how the mind of an intelligent, conscious musician should work.

Working his way through his theories, any student, musician or artist would feel encouraged to deepen the truth revealed through music, ultimately reaching out to its prime purpose. The conductor was worried that the barrier of language would suppress any truthful 'living' of the sound and that it would alterate its essence. The whole seminar is about a state of consciousness and the art of learning and grasping it – making it an indulgence from the professor to the people that are willing to receive it.

Thus, the actual lecture starts with the following statement: “music is not ‘something’ that lets itself fully attained, through symbols or language conventions, simply unwinding a definition. Music does not correspond to any palpable form of existence. Music is not ‘something’, but only 'something' can become music – in restricted, unique conditions”<sup>3</sup>.

From the beginning, the professor is presenting a number of definitions that would help clarify his theories. Thereby, he opens his speech with a paragraph about how music could be put into words, with the early warning though that trying to do so could be a dangerous deed in the creative process.

In the attempts of describing the phenomenology of music, the professor keeps underlining the limitation of the meaning this

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<sup>3</sup> Sergiu Celibidache, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

science represents, that it would divide it in too many sections, making it lose its substance.

After putting into words the key definitions of the lecture, Celibidache goes to preparing two grounds of this first chapter – the objectification of the sound and the study of multiple manners, which accordingly, the sound has an unequivocal influence over the human conscience. With these two spaces of analysis in mind (Hartmann), he begins to build a structure around the meaning of sound: its foundation being equal and constant vibrations<sup>4</sup>.

As he continues, he explains that at the base of the “tone that constantly vibrates” stands the man, the being that had the right amount of mind and spirit to consciously discover and lift from raw matter the genesis of music.

*“Is music only a consequence of the sound?”<sup>5</sup>*

The feeling of sound gives the man, from the prehistorical one onwards, the power to explore this new environment of his. It allows the man a sense of stability and coherence that other things in his surrounding never do, thus driving it to achieve an ongoing identity, a never ending state that when touched, opens up the unseen of his reality. And so, the tone that always vibrates being discovered, Celibidache goes on to unravelling the theory of it.

Every movement that happens doesn’t happen alone, everything being connected and in line with each other, the vibrations and sounds and all that they give birth to. From this idea, he explains the sound which in English could be roughly

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

translated as: the mechanical process unto vibration (“desfășurarea întru vibrație”).

Giving the fact that music already exists and has a universe from which Man could ‘borrow’ it from, the sound could be associated with something having its own solar system, every tone with derivative extensions.

Coming next, we arrive at a very important point in the lecture, where the conductor talks about the relationship between Man and music, giving it a concise and clear definition - The essence of music is in the relationship between tone and Man, and the correspondence between the structure of the sound and the structure of the affective human universe. His argument on the matter is the existence of the ‘double appartenance’, in both music and Man, with the link that is ‘now’, connecting the past and future.

Everything said in the lecture gives a very anatomical view on the area in discussion, all ideas, as in music, are binded by simple yet strong concepts, forming each entity as it is on its own, but part of a very circular whole. Like cells, sound keeps together vibrations and music keeps feelings, mirroring all the time the human existence.

Constantin Noica describes beautifully a word that has the essence of Celibidache’s theory at heart, a short word that, as it binds other words together, it shows the focus of an idea so clearly – „<<throughout>> is the original state of being, always in motion, between several pols”<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Constantin Noica, [I] *Devenirea întru ființă. Încercare asupra filosofiei tradiționale. Tratat de ontologie [II] Scrisori despre logica lui Hermes*, studiu introductiv Sorin Lavric, București, Editura Humanitas, 1998, p. 220.

In a more mathematical approach, Celibidache explains the splitting of a harmonic, the octave, into several smaller structures, until it reaches the original state of silence – this being the purpose of the experiment. You can divide into two, three, getting along the way other intervals and learning they're own structure and names, all until the human perception cannot hear any longer<sup>7</sup>, although the sound there may still exist. All being connected, all having the same core where which all gravitates. Thus, we may understand the concept of „throughout”.

Sliding from one to another, he continues his lecture with defining the human spirit. With its big contribution to the process of transcendence, Celibidache makes it into two aspects of its function: one is that it is, through its nature, able to intentionally point itself outwards; the other is that it excludes anything that cannot be correlated, that cannot be compatible. The ontological essence of the human spirit is called, in Sanskrit *ekagrata*, and in English *onepointedness*.

The conductor now arrives at a point that he could give this practice a name: ‘reducing’. This process of coagulating the information in hand, refining it to the point of eliminating all duality, has nothing to do with ‘integration’. ‘Reducing’ is the movement of putting together all parts to make a whole.

This process can only be perceived, explains the professor, through transcendence.

Going from concept to concept, Celibidache reaches the problem of consciousness, where he finds that in opposite

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<sup>7</sup> W. Furtwaengler, *Concerning Music*. (L. J. Lawrence, Trans.) Westport, Connecticut, USA, Greenwood Press Publishers, 1977, p. 25.

to European philosophy (from Brentano, Husserl's professor) the consciousness cannot be 'consciousness of something' for it to be in its purest state.

Therefore, unconditional, absolute and powerful being cannot be explained in a row of words, it can only be felt.

As a higher concept, this is something we might call an Idea – merely a description of a kind of process of concentration within the world of *reality*<sup>8</sup>.

This part of the seminar is, more or less, the most deepened into the science of phenomenology, thing that gives the students a wide and complex picture of how music can and should be approached.

Going back to what the sound is and that only one sound cannot constitute music, Celibidache shows how the temporal dimension functions between each tone. These calculations are made upon the correct acknowledgement of time between tones and the tone itself, therefore the audio material – consecutive sounds plus the contrast between them, can be fulfilled through the temporal space. This theory cannot be practiced when it comes to two identical sounds. Although the second one is exactly the same, the first one has been perceived as different, leaving a particular mark, so it leaves an already prelucrated time field for the next sound to grow – *in music there are no repetitions*.

With the previous statement, we can look upon Beethoven's fifth Symphony with new eyes, for example. Celibidache assures his class that the repetition in the work is an illusion, having the gift of uplifting especially because the

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<sup>8</sup> W. Furtwaengler, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

apparent image is not the musical reality, because it is not a repetition.

Like the relations between sounds and vibrations, the relationship between instrumentists in an orchestra can be described the same as well. Having to reach a point of unity, a sense of wholeness is easier when knowing how to put in practice the *onepointedness* that the professor talked about earlier.

“The spirit has to diminish the multitude” – in other words, the common goal has to bring together all the parts into unity. Every plurality projected as a whole, the fruit of every unique *conclusio* is the direct potential of the human spirit.

To bring closer the understanding of this idea, Celibidache quotes Husserl, saying: “*every act of the conscious being, however singular, is not isolated, but it necessarily involves a never-ending horizon of inactual values that accomplish a function together*”.

Bringing his class further into phenomenology and logic, the conductor repeats in another way how the sound has its purpose unto time. How a musical articulation represents a process of expansion and compression, how its right to existence in time depends on contrarities. The binding point of this process being called ‘culminating point’ in music.

From analyzing the space between sounds from a temporal view, Celibidache raises the question of what is ‘tempo’. He describes the phenomenon as a condition that the reduction of the phenomenology of sounds needs for it to take place. And because now we know that tempo is a condition, and a singular one, it cannot be bigger or smaller and it has little to do with the physical time. One explanation could be

that it is wrong to say that a multitude (a bigger musical passage for example) needs more tempo than a smaller one for it to be reduced (musically fulfilled), thus making the mistake of confusing the tempo with speed. “Tempo isn’t speed; tempo is nothing. But, there is a condition for a series of sound appearances to be embraced into a unity”<sup>9</sup>.

Although this theory, when broke down, makes sense, a lot of other authors and musicians contradict it, perhaps, unknowingly. Most conceive time, musical time and tempo, as a relative entity, a concept that hardly finds a solid function, nor in science or music<sup>10</sup>.

Returning, “the act of thinking and the musical act are manifesting, are materializing, both in the time and space continuum. Corresponding to their essence, though, they are simultaneously a-temporal.”<sup>11</sup>.

Close to the end of his speech, the conductor begins to ask the class, why phenomenology? How does it help and can it give the musician a better or easier path to go on? The answer to all this was of course ‘no’, “phenomenology cannot be a cure for talented, but ill musicians, or for healthy, but tone-deaf tenors”. This science is always there to be acknowledged by those who find music, and stay loyal to its divine nature.

## The philosophy

Accentuating certain keywords from this seminar we can easily spend our entire lives learning each of them and

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<sup>9</sup> Sergiu Celibidache, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> M. G. Henriques, *The (Well) Informed Piano*, University Press of America, 2014, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Sergiu Celibidache, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

their interconnections, Celibidache uses his own theory of 'reducing' and succeeds to delivering a whole philosophy to his class in about an hour. Probably making yet another point about the perception of time. Introducing no less than three heavy but essential sciences, the conductor brings the very life into the material with which musicians make a living.

He explores from the core up the process of becoming and entering our most divine state as Men, he teaches his students to indulge in taking time with music and what it takes to make it truthful and full of substance.

### *The definitions*

Celibidache already established the ground points of music and how they function to make the artistic mechanism work, so to make his teachings clear, we remember them one by one as they're explained by the author.

What is Phenomenology? *It is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first persons point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object.*

This brief paragraph about the science of phenomenology is the liaison holding each of Celibidache's concepts throughout the entire lecture.

What is the Phenomenology of Music? *Through phenomenology, the existence becomes human, and that because, for it to be realised and noticed, it has to be an ideatic existence throughout consciousness. From this point forward, the musical act, as a fact, and conscious expression gets his full value and the only possible and authentic notion.*

What is Sound? *It is movement, it is vibration. raw substantial matter: a bow, air mass or metal. We know that everything is movement, so if sound is movement, what differentiates the sound, that could become music, from other movements? His unique and irreplaceable structure that holds on its base: constant and equal vibrations. For a specific amount of time, the same number of vibrations: this is the essence of the musical tone.*

Definition in definition, Celibidache has developed a crystalized way of distributing significance in every single word and sentence, leaving no major subject untouched.

With these explanations we can roughly understand, with what the limits of language allow, the infinite layers of our art, making every musician responsible and, eventually, guilty for its own probable ignorance.

### **The necessity**

As every working man knows his domain, more or less, every human knows its condition, every citizen its nationality and so on, we can agree that every "subject" has its own 'birth' – a certain core from which it takes its roots.

Comparing all science to nature, and thus finding meaning much easily, we can implement a set of rules that may guide us into understanding them and their role. Creating an open and undulated field of thoughts and opportunities makes our professional environment grow and nurture its outcomes, as they are many in the musical life.

I consider and I hope that this paper is a plea for acknowledging the need of allocating oneself through all layers of one's discipline. The phenomenology of music is an element of philosophy and a very important segment of music

(the consciousness of it), that could be further divided, reaching the same point that I have when researching for articles and books on the matter - why haven't I been thought about this in University?

This, the phenomenology of music, is a 'practical' theory that should be used by musicians and men of arts and culture as a seed to their instrumental/artistic technique. It is a nutritious device which gives both creativity and musical intelligence a boost. It is a tool that was gravely missed in my academic studies.

My goal here would not be to praise a single man's work on the subject, but to attain the insight that I need to make this science a viable path for music students, at least. I yearn for the possibility to choose to learn a discipline that could make music itself more accessible, although it might not seem like it, phenomenology gives just the right amount of questions and instructions in balance to keep one on one's trail to any achievement. With the correct emotional and mental filter, phenomenology could be the connection between human and nature, as Pascal was describing the perception of reality as interrelations between God, nature and men (as a circle, with a core)<sup>12</sup>, the essence of the phenomenology of music, as a concept and at a much smaller scale, is the link that keeps the musician, sound and its consciousness related.

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<sup>12</sup> B. Pascal , *Pensees*, 1670.

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