

# “Lenin in Swaddling Clothes”: A Critique of the Ideological Conflict Between Socialist State Policy and Christian Music in Cold War Romania

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On April 11, 1924, the monarchic government of Romania decreed, through the so-called “Gheorghe Mărzescu” law, that the political practice of Communism was subversive to the national cause and therefore illegal. Until the ban was lifted in 1944, the government imprisoned members of the Romanian Communist Party (Constantiniu 2002:309). To raise funds for their incarcerated comrades while avoiding official detection, groups of activists belonging to Red Assistance International (*Ajutorul Roșu Internațional*) adapted certain winter caroling practices of the Christian Orthodox Church. Instead of singing star songs (*cântece de stea*) or Christmas carols (*colinde*) and carrying staffs bearing the star of Bethlehem with the image of the infant Jesus in swaddling clothes, the activists sang altered texts that urged listeners to contribute money to the cause of the working class and carried staffs decorated with a five-pointed star emblazoned with Lenin’s image (Cernea, Rădulescu, and Pinteau 1964:124–25).<sup>1</sup>

Example 1 illustrates how the verses of a popular Christian star song, “The star is rising on high” (“*Steaua sus răsare*”), were changed to promote the activists’ revolutionary platform. Rather than depicting the “great joy” and abundance of the Magi’s gifts, the text used by the Communists focuses on harsh economic conditions and on the need for workers to unite under the leadership of their perceived “savior,” Lenin. Examples 1a and 1b show the transformation of this traditional carol into a declaration of Communist principles. Thus, the Romanian Communists of the 1930s began a paradoxical, inwardly-conflicting practice—using Christian carols to support their atheistic political movement—that would continue, in various forms, throughout the Cold War era.

Although researchers have studied thousands of Romanian Christmas melodies,<sup>2</sup> few studies consider the genre both as a source of national heritage and as a heavily-censored art form in Romanian culture. Moreover, previous scholarship has tended to exclude analysis of the socio-political contexts in which the music was and is performed.<sup>3</sup> Both within Romania and internationally, this genre played an important role in Romanian Communist Party propaganda. In this essay, I investigate how the official Communist ideology appears to have sharply contradicted the realities of state practices

regarding music based on Christian themes. I focus on Romanian Christmas songs as a case study through which the course of this unlikely relationship may be brought to light and better understood.

Before addressing the nature of this ideological conflict, I would first like to briefly introduce the distinctive features of carols or winter solstice songs (*colinde*) and star songs (*cântece de stea*), explaining how this music came to be considered emblematic of “Romanian-ness,” or *specificul românesc*. *Colinde*, a term often used to refer to Romanian Christmas carols in general, consist of repetitive melodies punctuated by contrasting refrains. They are typically performed from Christmas Eve to Epiphany by groups organized according to age or gender. In villages, the groups usually begin caroling in front of the house of the local priest before proceeding to other homes, while in cities, carolers visit friends and family members and, more so in recent years, sing at public institutions such as radio and television stations and schools; in exchange for their singing, carolers receive gifts of food, drink, and/or money from their hosts. In some villages, *colinde* melodies are sung antiphonally by two or three groups, or are accompanied by percussive instruments, such as double-headed drums (*dube*) and friction drums (*buhai*). Men masked as “old man Christmas” (*Moș Crăciun*) with large bells (*tălăngi*) tied around their waists announce the coming of the carolers along the village streets (fig. 1).

*Colinde* are sometimes translated as “carols,” since they proclaim and celebrate the birth of Christ, or as “winter solstice songs,” due to the music’s association with winter solstice rites that predated the widespread acceptance of Orthodox Christianity in the fourth century A.D.<sup>4</sup> Star songs are generally believed to have a more recent, 200-year-old history, and are based almost entirely on religious themes, without refrains. They have often been used by the Orthodox Church for religious education, and are performed by groups of children or youths who represent the Magi and carry a staff with the star of Bethlehem from one dwelling to another (fig. 2).

As carolers travel throughout a particular community, they often change *colinde* texts to include the names of their hosts, singing blessings of prosperity, joy, and health addressed specifically to their listeners. Rather than reflecting the reality of the hosts’ everyday lives, these texts present an idyllic world in which listeners themselves are depicted as brave, affluent, attractive, and empowered heroes (Caraman [1933] 1983:171), transformed through the “experience of the sacred,” which is ushered in through the musical performance (Marian-Bălășa 2000:18). The wishes, blessings, and portrayals of mankind’s ultimate potential, which are expressed through *colinde*, belong to “a higher world in which we would like to be,” in the words of Romanian philosopher and ethnologist Ovidiu Papadima (Moanță 2002:65). This

Figure 1. Men dressed as “Old Man Christmas” (*Moș Crăciun*), in the village of Marga, western Romania, 2002 (collection of the author).

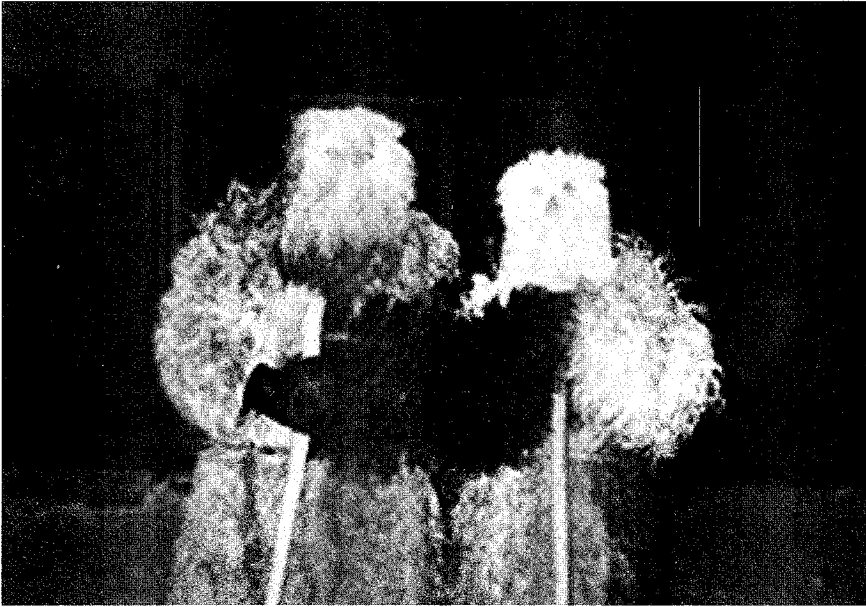
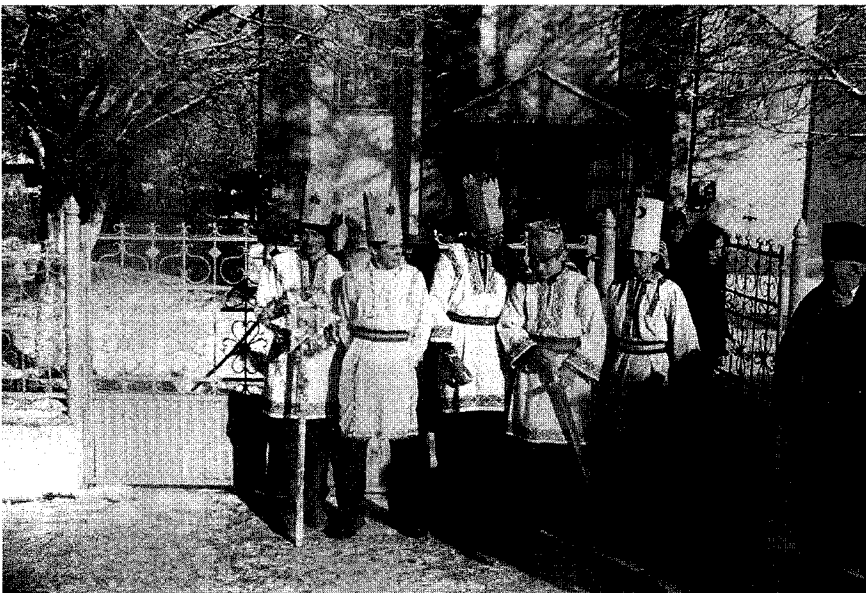


Figure 2. Young carolers dressed as Harod and the Magi, in the village of Marga, western Romania, 2002 (collection of the author). Note the six-pointed star of Bethlehem.



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**Example 1a.** “Steaua sus răsare” (“The star is rising on high”), a variant of the traditional star song, transcribed by the author from a performance by a boys’ caroling group in Marga, Romania, December 2003. The last line of each strophe is repeated.

♩ = ca. 156

*mf* Stea - ua sus ra - să - re Ca o tai - nă ma - re

Stea-ua stră-lu-ce - şte Ma-gi-lor ves-teş - te, Ma-gi-lor ves-teş-te.

Steaua sus răsare  
Ca o taină mare  
Steaua străluceşte  
Magilor vesteşte,

The star is rising on high  
Like a great mystery  
The star shines  
And proclaims to the Magi,

Că astăzi, Curata,  
Prea nevinovata  
Fecioara Maria  
Naşte pe Mesia.

That today, the Pure,  
Most innocent  
Virgin Mary  
Gives birth to the Messiah.

Magii cum zăriră  
Steaua, şi porniră  
Mergând după rază  
Pre Cristos să-L vază.

The Magi, when they sighted  
The Star, and started  
Following the ray of light  
To see the Christ.

Şi dacă sosiră  
Indată-L găsiră  
La Dânsul intrară  
Şi-I se închinară.

And when they arrived  
They immediately found Him  
Entered to see Him  
And knelt down before Him.

Cu daruri gătite  
Lui Cristos menite  
Luând fiecare  
Bucurie mare,

With gifts prepared  
Especially for Christ  
Partaking, each one  
In great joy,

Care bucurie  
Şi aici să fie  
De la tinereţe  
Pân' la bătrâneţe.

Which happiness  
May it also be here for you  
From youth  
To old age.

**Example 1b.** “Steaua muncitorească” (“The star of the working class”), (Cernea, Rădulescu, and Pintean, 1964:124), with the Communists’ textual changes shown in bold. The last two lines of each strophe are repeated, except for the final strophe.

Giusto  $\text{♩} = 156$

Stea-ua sus ră - sa - re Ca o tai - nă ma - re,  
Es - te stea-ua noas - tră, A cla - sei mun - ci - toa - re.  
Es - te stea-ua noas - tră, A cla - sei mun - ci - toa - re.

Steaua sus răsare  
Ca o taină mare,  
Este **steaua noastră**,  
A clasei muncitoare.

The star is rising on high  
Like a great mystery,  
It is our star,  
Of the working class.

Steaua strălucește  
Și lumii vestește  
Cum se mai trudește  
Cel care muncește.

The star shines  
And announces to the world  
How he keeps on striving  
The one who labors.

Steaua luminează  
Și adeverează  
Case oropsite,  
Bordeie prăpădite.

The star illuminates  
And confirms  
Poor houses,  
Wretched shacks.

Voi, de-aici din casă,  
Nu aveți la masă  
Pâine albă și cîrnați  
Cum au cei bogați.

You, here in this house,  
Don't have at your table  
White bread and sausages  
Like the rich people do.

Tineri, fețe supte,  
Care vor să lupte,  
Fete muncitoare  
Zac în închisoare.

Young people with drawn faces,  
Who want to fight,  
Girls who work  
Lie in jails.

Afară, șomerii  
Dorm în frigul serii;  
Ieri, nici azi, nici mâine  
Ei nu au de piine.  
Patronul te fură  
Șeful te injură  
Și fără dreptate  
Te rupe, te bate.

Outside, the unemployed  
Sleep in the cold of the evening,  
Yesterday, not today, not tomorrow  
They don't have money for bread.  
The owner steals from you  
The boss swears at you  
And unjustly  
He breaks you, he beats you.

Dacă vreți să-nvingeți,  
Rindurile stringeți,  
Muncitori uniți-vă!  
Muncitori uniți-vă!

If you want to prevail,  
Gather your ranks,  
Workers, unite!  
Workers, unite!

utopian, transcendent vision of the world would come to play an important role in the appropriation of the songs by Communist authorities.

Romanian *colinde* and star songs are not simply festive Christmas carols in the sense of many Western European carols; rather, they possess a long-standing history of social, economic, spiritual, and political significance in Romanian culture. Understanding this historical background helps elucidate why this type of music was chosen for Communist propaganda, and why the Communist Party adapted Romanian Christmas music to their ideology rather than abolish the tradition altogether. The *colinda* is considered to occupy a sacred space within the history of Romania and has played a key role in considerations of Romanian ethnic, religious, and national identity. Described by cultural critics as “the sound of the Romanian soul” (Vulpescu 1999:102), “deeply rooted in the existence of our people,” and “the original stamp of our life” (Moanță 2002:65), these melodies are often believed to function not only as celebrations of Christ’s birth, but as signifiers of a uniquely Romanian art form—as symbols of national identity and the essence of what it is to be Romanian. This discourse on *colinde*, which can be traced to the romantic, nationalistic ideals that permeated Romanian culture during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is still employed in contemporary Romanian scholarship. For example, in a recent collection of *colinde*, folklorists Pamfil Bîlțiu and Gheorghe Pop (1996) suggest that the appearance of their anthology is justified by an intimate relationship between *colinde* and what they perceive to be “the Romanian soul,” encompassing all social groups, age categories, and a wide variety of life experiences. They associate *colinde* with the birth and “survival” of the Romanian nation:

The publication of a collection of *colinde* does not require special justifications. This is, first of all, due to the fact that, in any area of Romanian soil in which we might find ourselves, the *colinda* represents the deepest resonance of the soul of this people, which we find sounding in all circumstances of life. Only for this reason can we explain the existence of *colinde* for bitterness and troubles, those about war, those for laughter or for grudges. In the *colinda*, the soul of any age category has always resonated, since we find, well-represented, *colinde* for a child, for a young man, for the elderly. In the *colinda*, the souls of all social classes have sounded, since we encounter *colinde* for the rich man, for the “office” (mayor), for the priest, but also for the fisherman, for the hunter, the shepherd, the goldsmith, etc. The *colinda* is one of the most powerful symbols of our survival over time, since it is nothing other than a rich spiritual book, which was formed in accordance with the popular [folk] universe of thought and feeling. It is proven to us first of all through the cosmogonic *colinde* whose age is one and the same as that of the Romanian nation. (Bîlțiu and Pop 1996:5)<sup>5</sup>

Star songs also hold a significant place in Romanian culture through their connection with the Romanian Orthodox Church, of which the majority of Romanians were and continue to be members, and the development of ethno-religious nationalism during the nineteenth century. Church leaders were deeply involved in the struggles of the principalities to free themselves from foreign occupation, especially in Transylvania, where Magyarization threatened the rights of Romanian communities under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was through the united efforts of religious and political activists that the Romanian nation began to be envisioned and created:

The history of Romanian nationalism in the nineteenth century is indeed the history of these two trends coming together: the trend of emerging national sentiment, fortified by the abiding hold of religion, among the masses of the Romanian population; and the joining of hands between the religious and lay leaders of the Wallachs to propel the downtrodden masses toward a national state of their own, with a national church established in the Romanian capital (be it Bucharest or Iași) as the ultimate symbol of the union of nationalism and religion. (Gilberg 1989:332)

For these reasons, the historical identification of this music with important national, ethnic, and religious currents in Romanian society posed a challenging dilemma for Romania's Communist leaders, who took power at the conclusion of World War II. As they pursued a "top-down" offensive to create a Socialist state, leaders had to reconcile their aims for a scientifically atheist, industrial, and urban society with a culture that for centuries pursued a predominately Christian, rural, and agrarian way of life—and *colinde* and star songs were an outward expression and celebration of these aspects of Romanian life and emblems of Romanian nationalism. Even before the Communists' rise to power, their political ideology ran against the grain of the cultural and religious characteristics that had been in place for generations within Romania. The early Communist movement immediately lost favor in Romanian society since its leaders—who were often Bulgarian or Jewish—hailed from urban, alien ethnic backgrounds. Their backgrounds provoked suspicion among the peasant population that was already deeply stirred by populist and nationalist sentiment in the wake of the 1918 territorial expansions into Greater Romania. Consequently, prior to World War II, the Communist movement in Romania attracted, by most estimates, between 1,000 and 2,500 members out of approximately 15.5 million people, and was often identified with "foreign-ness" and with the unwelcome interference of the Soviet Union. In fact, it was only with such interference, once Romania was engulfed in the Soviet sphere of political influence in World War II, that the Communists were able to take control; this change was accompanied by the imposed Sovietization of everyday Romanian life, from obligatory

learning of the Russian language in schools, to the placement of Russian officials on the highest rungs of the political infrastructure.

During this period, Romanian Communist leaders attempted to balance their allegiance to the Soviets with the need to legitimize their regime within Romanian culture, and *colinde* and star songs with their deeply-rooted history and nationalistic nuances, became an important part of this balancing act. In this process of negotiation, leaders may have realized that to officially prohibit this music would have intensified the conflict between the atheistic state and the predominately Christian population, proving detrimental for the regime's constant quest for legitimacy. Some of their ambivalence towards religion may reflect Lenin's own writings on the subject. Lenin agreed with Frederick Engels that declaring an outright war on religion "was the best way to revive interest in religion and to prevent it from really dying out;" instead, Lenin recommended that "the workers' party should have the ability to work patiently at the task of organizing and educating the proletariat, which would lead to the dying out of religion, and not throw itself into the gamble of a political war on religion" (Lenin [1909] 1962:403–04). Lenin outlined the kind of approach that would be most in line with Marxist thought:

We must combat religion—that is the ABC of *all* materialism, and consequently of Marxism. But Marxism is not a materialism which has stopped at the ABC. Marxism goes further. It says: We must *know how* to combat religion, and in order to do so we must explain the source of faith and religion among the masses *in a materialist way*. The combating of religion cannot be confined to abstract ideological preaching, and it must not be reduced to such preaching. It must be linked up with the concrete practice of the class movement, which aims at eliminating the social roots of religion. (405)

Romania's Communist leadership did not officially declare war on religion by outlawing religious practices; it did, however, wage war against the "social roots" of religion. Although religion remained a constitutional right, with no legislation prohibiting citizens from exercising that right, the state was hostile towards religion, and employed two strategic approaches to limiting the church's influence. The first approach entailed the removal or imprisonment of religious leaders and the confiscation or destruction of monasteries and church schools. Then, beginning in 1962, when Romanian Communism acquired a nationalistic slant, the government adopted a second tactic: rather than being abolished altogether, the Orthodox Church was infiltrated by Communist agents and thus became a co-opted instrument of the state, a practice that could be seen most readily with respect to state-church relations in Russia, Romania, and Bulgaria (Ramet 1989:20–22).

Throughout these two periods, religious music was not officially



outlawed; instead, authorities relied on unofficial practices such as text adaptation, censorship, and propaganda-based education—practices that would have been in line with Lenin’s directive to attack religion at its “social roots.” The adaptation, appropriation, and censorship of this music by the Communist state was a part of a larger type of initiative which involved “the decisive alteration or destruction of values, structures, and behaviors which are perceived by a new elite as compromising or contributing to the actual or potential existence of alternative centers of power” (Jowitt 1971:7). Leading Romanian historian Vladimir Tismaneanu describes such a process in similar terms, for Communist parties of the region in general:

To achieve those goals of economic progress and modernization, the various East European Communist parties undertook a systematic destructive operation whose chief consequence was the suppression of the civil society. That was, indeed, the main purpose of totalitarian practice in this century: to annihilate the sources of human creativity, to separate individuals from one another while making them mutually inimical, and to replace collective bonds of solidarity and support with the supremacy of the party-state, acclaimed as omnipotent and omniscient. All previous associations and groups had to disappear. The values long held to be sacred—patriotism, family, national traditions—had to be redefined in the light of communist dogmas. An overhaul of each country’s cultural tradition and a revision of the moral postulates, including those derived from the European humanist tradition, were accomplished through the Marxist dogma of the class struggle. (1992:21)

In the case of *colinde* and star songs, these were methods through which the Communists attempted to insert their regime into the frame of historical and cultural inheritance represented by this music in Romanian society—a frame that suited Communism probably as comfortably as Lenin would have actually felt in swaddling clothes. Recognizing that these influential songs were emblematic of national heritage and helped to strengthen the social networks of religious organizations, the authorities seized this opportunity to appropriate the melodies and their traditions, to retain their social function as message carriers and community unifiers, but with a drastically different message.

We have already seen how texts of existing star songs were altered to fit the Communist agenda in the early years of the movement (exx. 1a and 1b). We have also seen the further practice of adaptation come into play shortly after World War II, when the Communist leadership prompted poets to create new verses to familiar carols, praising the economic and political advances of the Communist Party. In these new versions, which circulated in collections of Christmas repertoire and revolutionary songs sponsored by the Ministry for Public Education, the authors chose to retain some of the

repertoire's existing symbolic and metaphorical language, but reinterpreted within the new socio-political ideology, thus attempting to create a smooth transition from the Christian belief system to a Socialist one. Just as Communist officials co-opted the Orthodox Church and transformed it into an instrument of the state, so too did they seek to benefit from the emotional resonances and *specificul românesc* of *colinde* and star songs through their adaptation and appropriation.

One of the main advantages in the process of adapting star songs is that an important precedent had already paved the way for a new use of the repertoire's symbolic language: they substituted the Christian star of Bethlehem with the Bolshevik star, and the symbolic light of Christ as the "light of the world" with the "light of Socialism" emanating from the "East," here pointing to the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> In 1948, after the Communists took power, the Romanian Ministry of Education published another variant of the star song shown in example 1a, this time simply entitled "Cântec de stea" ("Star song," ex. 2), and set to a new, celebratory text (Ministerul Învățământului 1948:12). The new verses describe the star of "liberty and justice," presumably a reference to the Communist "liberation" of Romania from the Fascists, the star of freedom now reclaimed and protected by the new regime against future threats.

Continuing the theme of starlight as the "light" of Socialism, two of the most prevalent symbols belonging to the Christmas repertoire—images of light and prosperity—were frequently employed in descriptions of the idealized world of Romanian Communism. For instance, the star song, "Ziurel de zi" ("Dawn of day") from the same collection (1948), reinterprets the popular refrain "dawn of day," traditionally used to symbolize Christ's birth, as a symbol for the new era ushered in by the Romanian Communist Party—the "dawn" that would "rise into the hearts of ploughing men" and bring about abundance, a rich "summer harvest," and electric "lights in the village." Composed by Constantin Zamfir on verses by Victor Tulbure, the Communist version (ex. 3) comments on the caroling custom where children sing at dawn and awaken the community to celebrate the day of Christ's birth, but replaces the traditional interpretation by calling the "community" of Romania to celebrate the dawn of a new regime and the victory of the working class over the "rich landowners." The well-wishing formula, which is usually found at the conclusion of *colinde* and star songs, is not used in this example to wish a long, joyous life to the hosts of the carolers, but to the Romanian Republic and the Communist Party. In this way, the relationship between the carolers and their hosts is transformed from the celebration of a sacred event into a salute to the Communist Party's perceived accomplishments: "good bread," "full bowls," and the end of class struggles.

**Example 2.** “Cântec de stea” (“Star song”), (Ministerul Învățământului 1948:12). The last line of each strophe is repeated.

*Allegretto*

Stea-ua sus ră - sa - re Și-i stră-lu-ci - toa - re, Stea-ua li - ber -  
tă - ții E stea-ua drep - tă - ții, E stea-ua drep - tă - ții.

Steaua sus răsare  
Și-i strălucitoare,  
Steaua libertății  
E steaua dreptății.

The star is rising on high  
And it is shining brightly,  
The star of liberty  
It is the star of justice.

Noi am răslețit-o,  
Dar am regăsit-o,  
Fiindcă ori și unde  
Raza ei pătrunde.

We let it wander away,  
But we found it again,  
Since anywhere and everywhere  
Her ray penetrates.

Și lucirea-i trează  
Veșnic luminează:  
Dinspre Răsărit  
Pacea a venit.

And her awakened gleaming  
Glow on forever:  
From the East  
Peace has come.

De-acum niciodată  
Nu ne va fi luată  
Steaua regăsită  
Și de noi păzită.

From now on, never  
Will it be taken from us  
The star, recovered  
And by us safeguarded.

The symbol of light widely found in the new *colinde* and star songs on Socialist themes also became widely used in connection with Lenin (ex. 4), as is evident in the verses by Nina Cassian for Tiberiu Olah’s choral composition, *Lumina lui Lenin* (*The Light of Lenin*, Olah 1960:8–9).<sup>7</sup> The word “light” in this context seems to describe Lenin’s legacy as “inextinguishable,” as a continuing panacea and source of joy in the “dream” of Communism. Interestingly, Lenin is depicted in these verses almost as a Christ-like savior, one who has the power to make the entire age “stir” and grow young at the sound of his voice, to “cure pain” and heal “tens of nations.”

References to the light of the Bolshevik star also appeared in the construction of musical instruments during Communism. Felicia Diculescu,

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**Example 3.** “Ziurel de zi” (“Dawn of day”), melody by Constantin Zamfir, verses by Victor Tulbure (Ministerul Învățământului 1948:15).

*Moderato*

Su - ie'n i - nimi de plu - gari Zi - u - rel de zi.  
În co - li - bă de ță - ran

Di - mi - neți cu stea - guri mari Zi - u - rel de zi!  
Cresc nă - deji ca spi - cu'n lan

Suie'n inimi de plugari, ziurel de zi!  
Dimineți cu steaguri mari, ziurel de zi!  
In colibă de țăran, ziurel de zi!  
Cresc nădeji ca spicu'n lan, ziurel de zi!  
Căci jandarmi nu ne mai bat, ziurel de zi!  
Și boerii au plecat, ziurel de zi!  
Muncitorii din uzini, ziurel de zi!  
Ne-au adus în sat lumini, ziurel de zi!  
Trageți roata de la car, ziurel de zi!  
Că gem verile'n hambar, ziurel de zi!  
Înc' o roată, înc'un bici, ziurel de zi!  
Că plăvanii sunt voinici, ziurel de zi!  
Spic de grâu cu bobul lin, ziurel de zi!  
Pâinea-i bună, blidu-i plin, ziurel de zi!  
Iar chiaburii unde sunt? Ziurel de zi!  
Pumnul nostru-i dârș și crunt, ziurel de zi!  
Către zorii cântători, ziurel de zi!  
Râd țărani și muncitori, ziurel de zi!  
Republica să'nflorească, ziurel de zi!  
Și Partidul să trăiască, ziurel de zi!

Rise into the hearts of ploughing men, dawn of day!  
Mornings with large flags, dawn of day!  
In the hut of the peasant, dawn of day!  
Hopes are growing like wheat in the field, dawn of day!  
For the police soldiers no longer beat us, dawn of day!  
And the boyars have left, dawn of day!  
The workers in the factories, dawn of day!  
Brought us lights in the village, dawn of day!  
Pull the wheel of the buggy, dawn of day!  
For the summer harvest groans in the barn, dawn of day!  
Another wheel, another whip, dawn of day!  
For the peasants are brawny, dawn of day!  
Wheat leaf with a smooth grain, dawn of day!  
The bread is good, the bowl is full, dawn of day!  
And the rich landowners, where are they? Dawn of day!  
Our fist is bold and brutal, dawn of day!  
Towards the morning, singers, dawn of day!  
Peasants and workers are laughing, dawn of day!  
May the Republic blossom, dawn of day!  
And long live the Party, dawn of day!

organologist at the Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, describes one such case from the 1980s, when Constantin Bucur created an instrument in the shape of a five-pointed star, constructed from twelve flutes and played by blowing air through one's mouth and nostrils (Diculescu 1998:97). The star was presented at the Sixth Annual National Festival Cântarea României (Song to Romania) with the letters R. S. R., which stand for *Republica Socialistă România* (The Socialist Republic of Romania), inscribed at its center. By constructing this star “multiflute” with the R. S. R. inscription in the center, Bucur was, perhaps unknowingly, implementing an idea which can be traced back fifty years earlier, when Socialist groups substituted the nativity scene with Lenin's image while caroling with the

**Example 4.** “Lumina lui Lenin” (“The Light of Lenin”), (Olah 1960:8–9), verses by Nina Cassian.

La glasul lui Lenin tot veacu-a tresăltat Și lumea batrână întineri deodată Crescură flamuri și zeci de neamuri Jugul l-au azvîrlit.	At the voice of Lenin the entire age was stirred And the old world suddenly grew young Raised were banners and tens of nations The yoke, they tossed away.
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Sub steagul, Sub steagul comunismului slăvit Sub steagul, sub steagul slăvit S-au înfrățit.	Under the flag, Under the flag of exalted communism, Under the flag, the exalted flag They became brothers.
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Lumina lui Lenin nestinsă arde-n veac Sădind bucuria, găsind durerii leac, Suind în vreme cîntări, poeme Un trai îmbelșugat	The light of Lenin, inextinguishable, burns throughout the age Sowing joy, finding a cure for pain, With time, lifting up songs, poems An abundant living.
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Sub steagul comunismului visat Sub steagul, sub steagul visat Vis minunat. Sub steagul lui Lenin.	Under the flag of the dreamed-of communism Under the flag, the dreamed-of flag Wonderful dream. Under the flag of Lenin.
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“star” of Bethlehem.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the tactic of adapting existing texts of *colinde* and star songs, the Romanian Communist government further attempted to insert itself into the cultural legacy of the Romanian people by sponsoring the creation of new works in these genres. During the Communist period, music was judged by the degree to which it supported the ideology of the regime. Government-appointed review boards employed an elaborate system of rewards and punishments to goad composers into writing music compatible with Socialist thought. For instance, in 1960 the Institute for Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest and the Central House for Popular Creation sponsored a national competition for the advancement of musical creations praising new life under Communism (“creația populară nouă”). Entries were judged according to “the criterion of artistic realization, ideological clarity and the folkloricity of their poetic structure” (Cernea and Coatu 1986:5). The sound of the music itself was irrelevant in this case; since competition organizers believed that those who composed the “new melodies” were most likely peasants who could not notate music, they only evaluated texts, such as this winning entry presented in example 5, “Dormi, gazdă, ori nu dormi” (“Are you sleeping, host, or not”), a new *colinda* on the subject of abundance and rebuilding due to Communism (Cernea, Nicolescu, and Brătulescu 1966:59).

Those judging this *colinda* may have recognized several well-known caroling formulae, such as the custom of waking up households to listen to the carols, and the image of two pigeons, which is frequently used to describe young lovers or a newly married couple building their “nest”—references that may have yielded high scores for the “folkloricity” criterion. However, since evaluators were also concerned with the ideological integrity of the song, they would have appreciated the shift from the traditional Christian references to Communist ones: rather than urging families to clean their homes and prepare themselves for the coming of Christ, they are called to prepare for new life under Communism. At the conclusion of the *colinda*, when carolers typically offer a blessing and wish for prosperity for their hosts, the author(s) reminded the reader that for the creation of this new life, the Communist Party expected people to work with even more energy and enthusiasm.<sup>9</sup>

Such ideologically-based evaluations also challenged the long-standing tradition of incorporating *colinde* and other types of religious music into choral and instrumental works. Composers who wished to continue drawing on religious elements devised various strategies in order to avoid being branded anti-Communist. Some diverted attention by choosing vague or abstract titles, as Alexandru Pașcanu did in his choral poem *Festum Hibernum: Ancient Cyclic Customs (Străvechi tradiții ciclice, 1979)*. He employed several tactics for masking his piece’s origins in carols such as fragmenting melodies and using nonsense syllables in place of the text. At the conclusion of the work, Pașcanu uses the vowel sound “a” for the melody of a widely known star song, “O what wondrous news” (“*O ce veste minunată*”). The omitted verses, which depict the nativity scene, are well-known in Romanian culture (ex. 6). Writing about the ideological censorship of sacred music in Romania, musicologist Valentina Sandu-Dediu notes that since review board members were usually chosen based on their allegiance to the state rather than on their musical aptitude, they tended to judge a score “by its cover,” or title, and may not have had the skills necessary to search the score itself for passages with religious overtones. While it was more likely for fellow musicians to point out the ideological “shortcomings” of another for personal gain within the politics of cultural production, a “general (beneficial) complicity concerning these types of practices” allowed some composers to escape official censure (2002:74).

The Communist leadership also employed an important rhetorical strategy with respect to the artistic creation of musical works, which portrayed their call for new, Socialist compositions as emanating from a “desire of the masses,” rather than from a state campaign for legitimacy. At the Romanian Composers’ Conference organized on December 12–14, 1963, for instance,

**Example 5.** “Dormi, gazdă, ori nu dormi” (“Are you sleeping, host, or not”) (Collected by Olea Valer Petra, Țelna village, Hunedoara region, from informant I. Haba in 1960; Cernea, Nicolescu, and Brătulescu 1966:59).

Dormi, gazdă, ori nu dormi,  
 Că vă vin colindători!  
 Ia sculați-vă cu toți,  
 Treziți și vecini de-ai voșt',  
 Ficiori de-ai voșt' și fete mari,  
 Muncitori și cărturari.  
 Să-și descrețească frunțile  
 Și să curețe curțile  
 Cu cornul cătrînelor  
 Cu gurguiul cizmelor.  
 Îs curate? Nu te uiți?  
 Da ce curți-s aceste curți?  
 Cu casele tencuite,  
 Și-năuntru văruițe,  
 Ușile nezăvorite,  
 Camerele cu de toate,  
 Iar în virfurile lor  
 Steag de partid și tricolor;  
 Joacă și doi porumbei,  
 Albi și tare sprintenei.  
 Și jucară ce jucară,  
 Se luară de zburară,  
 Jos spre mare se lăsară,  
 Apa-n aripi ei luară,  
 Rubinele-n ghericele,  
 Veniră-napoi cu ele  
 Și la cer se ridicară,  
 Rubinelele lăsară,  
 În flori se prefăcură  
 Și apa cînd o lăsară  
 Tare mi le parfumară.  
 Toate-s ca să-nvesealească  
 Astă casă tinerească,  
 Crescută în zori cu rouă  
 De viața asta nouă;  
 Sub steagul Partidului  
 Ce ne-ndeamnă-n viitor  
 Să muncim cu mai mult spor.

Are you sleeping, host, or not,  
 For the carolers are coming to you!  
 Come on and wake up, all of you,  
 Wake up, also, your neighbors,  
 Your young men and big girls,  
 Workers and scholars.  
 To unwrinkle their brows  
 And clean their yards  
 With the corner of their aprons  
 With the tips of their boots.  
 Are they clean? Won't you look?  
 But whose courtyards are these?  
 With the plastered houses,  
 And whitewashed inside,  
 Doors unlocked,  
 Pantries full of everything,  
 And at their peaks  
 The flag of the party and three-colored;  
 Also, dancing, are two pigeons,  
 White and very lively.  
 And dancing what they danced,  
 They took to flight,  
 Releasing themselves down towards the sea,  
 Water in their wings they took,  
 Little rubies in their little claws,  
 They came back with them  
 And rose up to the sky,  
 Letting go of the rubies,  
 They were transformed into flowers.  
 And when they released the water  
 Strongly they were perfumed  
 All these are meant to bring joy  
 To this youthful house,  
 Grown at dawn with dew  
 From this new life;  
 Under the flag of the Party  
 That spurs us, in the future,  
 To work with greater zeal.

the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, with the State Council and Council of Ministers, addressed the gathering by stating:

The cultural revolution of our country has made the treasures of art and culture widely accessible, continually developing the spiritual desires of the

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**Example 6.** Excerpt from Alexandru Pașcanu's *Festum Hibernum: Ancient Cyclic Customs* (*Străvechi tradiții ciclice* 1979:23), mm. 191–201, and verses from the traditional star song “O ce veste minunată” (“O what wondrous news”).

**16**  
Maestoso (ca. ♩ = 84)

The musical score consists of five staves. The vocal staves are Soprano (I and II), Alto, Tenor, and Bass (I and II). The basso continuo is labeled 'Camp.'. The tempo is 'Maestoso' with a metronome marking of approximately 84 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score includes dynamics such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte), and performance instructions like 'in rilievo' and 'ord.' (ordinario). The lyrics are provided in both Romanian and English.

O ce veste minunată  
In Vitleem ni s-arată  
Că a născut prunc,  
Prunc din duhul Sfânt,  
Fecioara Maria.

Că la Vitleem Maria,  
Săvârșind călătoria,  
În sărac locaș  
Lângă acel oraș,  
A născut pre Mesia.

O what wondrous news  
In Bethlehem it is revealed to us  
That she bore an infant,  
An infant from the Holy Spirit,  
The Virgin Mary.

That in Bethlehem, Maria,  
Having finished the journey,  
In a poor place  
Close to that city,  
Gave birth to the Messiah.



masses. From the creators of music, the working people are today awaiting works of high artistic value in which to find again the image of the times in which they live, the victorious fight of the new against the old, the joy of life, their fiery patriotism, the entire spiritual universe of the construction of socialism—the inexhaustible source of inspiration for any artist. (Brîncuși and Călinoiu 1965:13)<sup>10</sup>

In the abovementioned volume, music historians Petre Brîncuși and Nicolae Călinoiu (1965:261) identified composers who produced new works for the advancement of Socialism by honoring them with the title “artist of the people” (*artist al poporului*). Considered to be a group apart from “the masses,” composers were expected to believe that by aligning their creative output with the ideology of the state, they were truly serving “the people,” the imagined masses who, according to state authorities, expected art to reflect the “spiritual universe” of Socialism, the joyful “times” in which they supposedly lived.

Censorship and propaganda-based adaptation and education acquired even more importance in the Communist Party’s efforts to underline its legitimacy in the historical course of Romanian culture once Nicolae Ceaușescu took power in 1965. Ceaușescu viewed himself—and wished to be portrayed by others—as a heroic leader who would guide Romania to greatness, in the lineage of Stephen the Great and Michael the Brave. As Katherine Verdery explains,

Not only Ceaușescu’s speeches but all manner of newspaper articles, for example, included lengthy references to Romanian history. These nearly always presented that history as an endless sequence of male heroes, strung out one after another, almost like a series of ‘begats,’ and producing the impression of the nation as a temporally deep patrilineage. (1996:70)

His cultural revolution, modeled on that of China during the 1970s, involved thousands of musicians and artists who glorified Ceaușescu through their art. Even kindergartners performed in musical shows and ballets in honor of Ceaușescu, as can be seen in figures 3 and 4, through Communist youth organizations such as *Pionierii* (the Pioneers) and *Șoimii* (the Falcons).

Under Ceaușescu, *colinde* were prohibited from public performance within Romania while simultaneously utilized as symbols of Romanian achievement, history, and religious tolerance through the international tours of the Romanian National Chamber Choir, Madrigal. This *a cappella* choir was founded in affiliation with the Academy of Music in Bucharest by professor and conductor Marin Constantin in 1963, the same year as Romania’s proclamation of economic independence from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance or Comecon, a system of economic alliances

Figure 3. Kindergarten ballet, Iași, Romania, ca. 1981 (collection of the author).



that included the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and East Germany (1950–1990).

Its international concerts were part of a massive, state-sponsored campaign that aimed to represent Romania as a progressive and tolerant nation in order to promote trade with the West and support Romania's economic plans in defiance of Moscow, especially after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968). The wide discrepancy between Romania's foreign and domestic policies regarding the performance and commercialization of *colinde* was partly due to the economic advantages of marketing Madrigal recordings to the Romanian diaspora in such countries as the United States and Canada. The government harbored a second, more important reason for the discrepancy. After the declaration of Romanian economic independence from the Comecon in 1963, Romania started to pursue relations with developed Western nations such as Italy and West Germany. From 1960 to 1975, for example, Romania's trade with the USSR dropped from 40.1% to 18.6% (-53.6%), and, conversely, trade with western, developed industrial nations rose from 21.6% to 37.3% (+42.1%) (King 1979:163). This shift entailed a delicate balancing act: while internal control of religious expression and the pursuit of rational, scientific, and atheistic Socialism within Romania remained important in order to avoid losing alliances within the political sphere of the Soviet Union and the ultimate risk of Soviet invasion, the Romanian government had much to gain by representing itself as

Figure 4. Kindergarten choir, Iași, Romania, ca. 1981 (collection of the author).



religiously tolerant to its potential western trading partners.

This trend seems to correlate with the geographic distribution of Madrigal's concerts during the Cold War, since the Romanian state organized Madrigal's performances not only in Communist countries, but also in non-Communist nations where a positive representation of Romania's image could potentially lead to cultural alliances or be translated into economic advantages. During this period, for example, the choir performed only three tours in the Soviet Union versus four in the United States; most tours visited countries with which Romania pursued intensified economic relations, such as Italy, East and West Germany, and France. *Colinde* and star songs—a staple of Madrigal's repertoire—were performed year-round on the choir's international tours.

Within Romania, however, public performance of this music was strictly censored, and in many cases, prohibited. Although the Madrigal Choir's *colinde* recordings were marketed in the United States, Canada, and Europe, they were illegal in Romania, and broadcasts of the music back into Romania through the BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe were heavily distorted by the government's static-producing stations, known as *bruiiaj*. State leaders, on the other hand, were able to order recordings for their own enjoyment; Ceaușescu even invited Madrigal to serenade him with *colinde* at Christmastime, thus suggesting that the Communist leader himself may have held contradictory attitudes about the music. Writing immediately

prior to the 1989 Revolution, historian Trond Gilberg notes that many such contradictions in the cultural life of Communist Romania can be traced to Ceaușescu's "own ambivalence on the subject of religion and ideology," since from one perspective he had faith "in the feasibility of creating the 'new Socialist man and woman' through ideological indoctrination," while at the same time he acknowledged "the enduring importance of religion for the masses and the need to enlist church leaders in his quest for personal and regime legitimacy" (Gilberg 1989:342).

Other attempts to gain legitimacy involved education, where, rather than being officially eliminated from school curricula, *colinde* were altered in order to praise the supreme leader and his cult of personality. Refrains that mentioned Jesus Christ or other Christian references were replaced with more general, non-religious phrases, and the protagonists of Christian stories were erased in favor of Communist ones. Describing her experiences in Transylvania in December 1979, Verdery remembers a ten-year-old girl who requested a Christmas carol from her aunt for her school assignment. The old Transylvanian woman began to sing a traditional *colinda*:

We shepherds three are on our way  
To Bethlehem this holy day  
With gifts for Jesus Christ our King  
O joy! Our Lady, joy we sing.

The niece interrupted after the first verse, explaining, "Comrade Teacher said we shouldn't have any of those with religion in them. Sing one without religion" (Verdery 1983:74). As if by reflex, her aunt sang the melody again, with new lyrics:

We shepherds three are on our way  
To Bucharest this holiday  
Gifts to Comrade Ceaușescu we bring.  
O joy! Our happy joy we sing. (1983:74)

In this instance, the central figure of Christ in swaddling clothes is not replaced with Lenin, but with Ceaușescu, whom the state-controlled media would increasingly portray as a demi-god. Through interviews and oral histories, I found that many people did not take such propaganda seriously, especially Communist versions of *colinde*, since the cultural legacy of the music was already deeply rooted in Romanian society. Also, the discrepancy between the idealized world portrayed in Communist propaganda and the reality of poverty and repression in everyday life provoked sarcasm rather than adulation. Along with other cultural forms of political indoctrination, the substitutions of the spiritual verses of *colinde* with the Communist Party's

slogans were not effective tools for convincing the population of the regime's legitimacy, given the severe everyday realities of terror tactics and economic shortage that ultimately undermined Ceaușescu's campaign. Contrary to the designs of the Communist state, *colinde* began to be identified as forbidden fruit and as symbols of freedom from the regime. Perhaps cognizant of this fact, the National Salvation Front, which seized control of the television station in Bucharest during the 1989 revolution, broadcast *colinde* and star songs sung by the Madrigal choir, including the aforementioned, "O what wondrous news," to celebrate hopes for a liberated future—along with images of the Ceaușescus, who had been executed, perhaps not coincidentally, on Christmas Day, 1989. Once again, *colinde* and star songs framed the dawn of another era in Romanian history, which reunited the rightful owner with his swaddling clothes and returned the songs to their publicly acknowledged status as emblems of revolution and rebirth. Considering this repertoire's history within Romanian political life, it may not be surprising to see that these songs continue to hold an important place in Romanian national consciousness and culture.

My focus has been to consider the differences between the rigidity of state policies concerning Christian music during Communism and the actual practices of adaptation and appropriation of *colinde* and star songs. I have argued that this music served important roles in Communist propaganda precisely because the spiritual and national legacy of Romanian Christmas carols had already established deep roots in Romanian culture prior to the Communists' rise to power. Clearly, this repertoire invites other interpretations of the interplay between state ideology and Christian music in Romania, and valuable analyses could be approached from different perspectives. As informants become more comfortable in expressing their views with newfound freedom of speech, one could examine topics which, until recently, were impossible avenues for research. For instance, it would be interesting to document the ways in which *colinde* were sometimes used in protest against the government, a phenomenon on which little data is available (Schuursma 1987:20), or to document the historical reception of this music in more detail. In light of new opportunities for research in this region, which have appeared since the conclusion of the Cold War, I hope that what has been presented here will further scholarly interest and stimulate renewed consideration of this repertoire.

#### Notes

With the exception of Example 1a, which is transcribed from my fieldwork recordings of the caroling group in Marga, all musical examples have been reproduced as they appear in the origi-

nal sources. All text examples have been translated by the author, and where necessary, examples and figures have been reproduced with the kind permission of their respective publishers.

1. This Romanian collection and others from the Communist era were previously examined by ethnomusicologist and *colinda* specialist Marin Marian-Bălașa (1998).

2. These are currently housed in the Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest.

3. For noteworthy contributions to the study of *colinde* and other types of Romanian works censored during Communism, see Marian-Bălașa (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000), Rădulescu (2002), Sandu-Dediu (2002), and the volume *Sinteze* (Romanian Ministry of Culture 1997).

4. The exact period of Christianization continues to be debated. It has been argued that Christianity reached the Daco-Roman population and was practiced in hiding during the second and third centuries A.D. (Ionescu 1998).

5. "Publicarea unei colecții de colinde nu necesită explicații deosebite. Aceasta, mai întâi, pentru faptul că, în oricare zonă a pamântului românesc ne-am afla, colinda reprezintă cea mai adâncă vibrație a sufletului acestui neam și care o aflăm sincronizată la toate împrejurările vieții. Numai așa putem explica existența colindelor de amărăciune și necaz, cele de război, cele de răs, ori de pricină. În colindă a vibrat dintotdeauna sufletul oricărei categorii de vârstă, căci întâlnim bine reprezentate colinde la copil, la flăcău, la bătrâni. În colindă au vibrat sufletele tuturor categoriilor sociale, căci întâlnim colinde la om bogat, la 'birău' (primar), la preot, dar și la pescar, la vânător, la cioban, la meșterul aurar, etc. Colinda este unul dintre cele mai puternice însemne ale dăinuirii noastre prin vreme, ea nefiind decât o bogată carte de spirit, ce s-a alcătuit în acord cu universul popular de gândire și simțire. Ne-o dovedesc mai întâi colindele cosmogonice a căror vechime este de-o dată cu poporul român."

6. Along with the portrayal of Christ as the "light of the world," light symbolism in *colinde* has also been traced to pre-Christian traditions. In his discussion of the "frequency of 'solar' images in *colinde*," Vasile V. Filip asserts that "the survival of some elements from the cult of Mithra/Sol Invictus in Christmas traditions is beyond question," and that this "inheritance" may be observed even in church hymns, such as this Christmas trope, which depicts Christ as the rising Sun: "Thy birth, Christ, our God, rising for the world the light of knowledge, so that through it, those who worshipped the stars, learned from the star to genuflect before Thee, the Sun of justice, and to know Thee, the Dawn from on high, Lord, praise be to Thee!" ["Este neîndoielnică supraviețuirea unor elemente din cultul lui Mithra/Sol Invictus în datinile de Crăciun. În capitolul precedent am putut constata frecvența imaginilor 'solare' în colinde, ba chiar și unele elemente de raportare cultică la soare. Dar chiar și în textele religioase creștine, bisericești, găsim un atare deosebit de relevant regim imagistic. Să luăm ca exemplu doar cunoscutul tropar de Crăciun: 'Nașterea Tă Hristoase, Dumnezeuul nostru, răsărit-a lumii lumina cunoștinței, că întru dânsa cei ce slujeu stelelor, de la stea s-au învățat să se închine Ție, Soarelui dreptății, și să Te cunoască pe Tine, Răsăritul cel de sus, Doamne, mărire Ție!'" (Filip 1999:138)] For a detailed examination of the manner in which Romania's geographic location and climate have also contributed to the development of the sun's symbolism in the culture, see Ghinoiu (2004:147–48).

7. For an insightful discussion of this and other works on similar themes, see Crotty (2005).

8. Since the airduct of a flute is sometimes called *lumina* (the light), there may have been a connection in Bucur's creative process between the "lights" of the flutes' airducts and the Bolshevik star. Diclescu notes, however, that the "sonorous function" of the instrument "was sacrificed to the sake of its external shape" (Diclescu 1998:98), since she recalls that

the festival audience laughed at the unusual drone and blurred melody produced by Bucur's creation.

9. Those who created music on propaganda themes did not necessarily espouse the ideology on a personal level; composers were often forced to be "inspired" by Socialist ideas, and collaboration with the state occurred on many levels along the spectrum from coercion to opportunism.

10. "Revoluția culturală din țara noastră a făcut larg accesibile comorile artei și culturii, dezvoltând continuu cerințele spirituale ale maselor. De la creatorii de muzică, oamenii muncii așteaptă astăzi lucrări de înaltă valoare artistică în care să regăsească imaginea vremurilor pe care le trăiesc, lupta victorioasă a noului împotriva vechiului, bucuria de viață, patriotismul lor inflăcărat, întregul univers spiritual al constructorilor socialismului—sursă inepuizabilă de inspirație pentru orice artist."

11. The Comecon system of economic alliance, active from 1949 to 1991, included the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, East Germany (1950–1990), Mongolia (joined in 1962), Cuba (joined in 1972), Vietnam (joined in 1978), Albania (1949–1961), and Yugoslavia (occasional participant).

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