

Aristizza Romanescu - A Glimpse from a Legendary Life

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Abstract: Romanian theatrical art encountered many obstacles in its natural development, due to the evolution of the international political situation in the region, as well as the internal one. The history of the Romanian theater included several stages of development, but in each one, the drive and will to level up came from exceptional personalities in this field. They often made enormous sacrifices, willingly giving up everything they had most dearly for art. The subject of this study is the greatest actress of Romanian theater from the second half of the 19th century, Aristizza Romanescu. It was created on the basis of archival documents kept in the Special Collections' fonds of the National Library of Romania and of information published over time. We can follow little Aristizza Romanescu, born into a family of famous actors, takes her first steps in life in an enviable artistic atmosphere, makes her debut on stage, accepting her destiny, with everything an artist's life can offer: good and bad. On her way, she meets protectors and mentors, who recognize her extraordinary talent and immense capacity for work, offering her the opportunity to study abroad with the world's greatest masters, chiseling her artistic form with which she will fascinate the public upon her return to Romania. The documentary material, indicated in quotations and footnotes, allows us to record the most important moments of her professional evolution, inseparably intertwined with her human dimension, having a direct correspondence with the events that were taking place in the Romanian society at that time and also reflecting them.

Keywords: Aristizza Romanescu, The Romanian Theater, The Romanian School of Realistic Interpretation, Romanian Art, Romanian Culture, Romanian Cinematography

1. Introduction

The evolution of the performing arts in the Romanian Countries is closely related to the fall of the native rulers (1714)¹ and their replacement by the Phanariot rulers. The frequent foreign military campaigns on the territory of the two Romanian principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), with all the dire consequences they caused in everyday life, led to a situation where for Romanians "the hopes of cultural and artistic achievement seemed more vague than ever" [1]. The atmosphere that was established was "anachronistic, of intrigue and laziness" [1], "the nobles longing, drooping in the fluff of the couches..." [1], "the alphabet was Cyrillic, the school was Hellenic and the soul of the lower classes was wretched" [2]. However, after a century of deeply unfortunate Phanariot administration, "a generation of new

beginnings and achievements is rising, a generation full of audacious ancestral personality" [1], and Aristizza Romanescu is a worthy descendant of her predecessors.

2. Short History of the Romanian Theater

In order to better understand the situation, we believe that a brief presentation of the existing conditions is needed. Thus, until the official establishment of theaters in the two Romanian principalities, in the most important urban centers the performances were only sporadic, initiated by foreign groups, "partly made up of circus performers" [2]. The situation began to change, with the appearance of performances in the Romanian language and by Romanian troupes, initially in Iasi, starting in 1816, in Bucharest (1825), and then in Craiova (after the The Revolution of 1848).

¹ The dethronement and decapitation in Constantinople of the last ruler of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu (August 15, 1714)

From the appearance of Romanian troupes and theaters in the first half of the 19th century to the recognition of the Romanian theater on international stages starting at the end of the 19th century, it was a long and sinuous and difficult road. Romanian theatre, in its history, has gone through several stages. According to some researchers, the first stage corresponds to the period between 1816-1852, when the first and clumsy steps in the Romanian theater were made. The second stage, between the years 1852-1877, is considered to be an era of “true heroism” [2], and in which “the autochthonous element, which asserts its individuality, is formed” [2]. The third stage took place between the years 1877-1909 and is considered an “era of flourishing and leveling of the Romanian theater with that of the West” [3].

All these stages, however, were carried out by passionate, talented, enthusiastic people, who were capable of doing things considered impossible, and at the same time being subject to any errors and especially, to the greatest human suffering possible. They were perceived as deities and magicians on stage by the crowds who adored them, being effectively enchanted by their playing. This was all happening in a world where there were no other means of mass communication than the stage, the press of the time and the first rudimentary transmissions through radio waves, and the real impact of a theater performance can only be guessed. In that period, through their actions, the actors caused major changes in the collective mentality, but, for the most part, they left the stage of this world too often sick and helpless, forgotten in great poverty. In Romania, one of these people was Aristizza Romanescu - an exceptional artist, with great temperament and sophistication, merging with her roles and with an unsurpassed Romanian diction [2].

3. Family and Living Environment



Figure 1. Aristizza Romanescu – portrait [4].

Aristizza Romanescu (née Dimitriade) was born in Craiova, on December 24, 1854, in a family of actors par excellence: the family of the actor Costache Dimitriade and the tragedian Paulina Stavrescu, from Târgu-Jiu.

She was the second-child of the family and the younger sister of Mircea Dimitriade [5]. Shortly after her birth, in her first year of life, Aristizza Dimitriade’s mother died.

Her father Costache Dimitriade comes from Bucharest to Craiova for the first time [6] in the fall of 1850, together with the troupe led by Costache Mihăileanu and Costache

Caragiale², and “he is appointed stage manager” [7].

Endowed with immense talent, during his career, Costache Dimitriade mostly played “the roles of intriguers and tyrants. Equipped with a beautiful baritone voice and with a special talent [he played] “The devil’s bagpipe” and “The ugly of the village”, national vaudevilles with texts by Eugeniu Carada” [2].



Figure 2. Costache Dimitriade [4].

After several peregrinations abroad, in 1848 he returned to the country and joined “the band of amateurs of C. Caragiale and C. Mihăileanu who gave performances in the Slătineanu hall in Bucharest” [7].

The theater troupe of C. Caragiale and C. Mihăileanu was the first troupe to come from Bucharest to Craiova, and its performances were not without adventures and fun, the account of which introduces us to the theatrical atmosphere of those years. Thus, in the absence of a theater, the shows were performed in one of the halls of the local High School, on stage, in addition to other plays; “Baba Hârca” by Matei Millo was performed. During the show, “actresses dressed as devils came on stage” [7], and the Greek bishop from Craiova “gets very angry and curses the actors” [7] so “the performances stopped” [7]. But the local boyars put hand in hand and using the labor force of the prisoners, in “the place of Vlădoianu” [7], the first Theater in Craiova was built. The theater operated in this location, lead by the new director Theodor Theodorini, until December 1855, when it burned down [6]. A few years later, disagreements began between the two artists Theodor Theodorini and Costachi Dimitriade, the latter left the band and went to Bucharest [6].

In 1851, the band director C. Mihăileanu hired the Stavrescu sisters, for the 1851-1852 season [3]. In these circumstances, Aristizza Romanescu’s parents met and the Theodorini-Dimitriade-Stavrescu theatrical dynasty was gradually formed [5]³.

The Stavrescu sisters, members of the famous Stavrescu theatrical clan from Târgu-Jiu, Paulina (Polixenia, the future Dimitriade), Maria (in her second marriage – Theodorini, the mother of the famous international singer Elena Theodorini

2 Costache Caragiale was the uncle of the famous dramatic author Ion Luca Caragiale.

3 The author of the volume states that the representatives of this dynasty, especially through the descendants will dominate the Romanian theatrical scene „from the middle of the 19th century until the first two decades of the next” [5].

and nicknamed “Filomela of Oltenia” [5]), Raluca, “an artist of extraordinary dramatic power [6] (married to actor Ion Vlădescu, brother of Alexandru Vlădescu, future husband of actress Fany Tardini) were from Târgu-Jiu.



Figure 3. Ion Vlădescu and Raluca Stavrescu [4].

As an artist, Costache Dimitriade was one of the outstanding personalities of the Romanian theater in the 19th century, “a famous actor... quite well-known playwright and concessionaire on August 16, 1866, of the Great Theater in Bucharest” [5], creator of an acting school [6]. In the 1866-1867 season, he was director of the Great Theater in Bucharest. And creator of the Artists’ Union with Mihail Pascaly [5]. “Paralyzed and sick with nerves” [7] he officially retired from the theater in 1879.

As a person, Aristizza Romanescu's father was a special character, with a thrilling life. According to some information, he was “a man with a truly romantic destiny, a pilgrim through England, Spain - where he works as a marler, Portugal and Italy - where he made his debut as an actor in a circus troupe” [5]. According to others, who provide more details, Costache Dimitriade ran away from home at the age of 10 with “the director of a circus troupe” [7], after an attempt to be integrated into an educational institution, he ran away again and worked as a sailor “traveling several countries and learning several languages” [7], after which he worked as a translator in Athens, then “commercial traveller, through Marsilia, Paris, London” [7]. He also managed to be involved in the Ploiesti Revolution of 1871, “he was arrested and put on trial, but acquitted by Târgoviște jurors” [2].

His daughter Aristizza Romanescu described him as follows: “Small in stature, thin, perfect diction, piercing eyes, hoarse voice, like Novelli's. Cultured. Polyglot. Unsurpassed lyricist. He played with such enthusiasm that many considered this a defect. Detail artist. On stage, he didn't only take care of himself, but of everyone who surrounded him. Great “metteur-en-scène”. He also plays well the drawing room comedy,... and the farcical comedy,... and the big dramas” [7].

Costache Dimitriade, like many other great artists of that period, had a tragic death, he was “found, after three weeks of absence from the theater, drowned in the waters of Dâmbovița” [5]. After “suffering from illness” for five years, in January 1885, he threw himself into Dâmbovița [7].

The mother of the actress, Paulina (Polixena), “who does not show artistic skills” [6], after marrying Costache

Dimitriade, left the theater, devoting herself to her family, but in 1854 she died.

Aristizza ends up in the care of the family of actors of her aunt Maria, married to the great actor Theodor Theodorini, who comes to the Theater in Craiova in the season of 1853-1854, i.e. shortly before the birth of Aristizza Dimitriade, as “artistic director and actor” [3].



Figure 4. Theodor Theodorini [4].



Figure 5. Maria Theodorini [4].

Theodor Theodorini, who ends up managing the Theater in Craiova, was an artist and a consummate professional, “a man endowed with superior intelligence and good common sense. Possessing a vast culture, in all directions, not only in dramatic art, he was among the few actors in that era who contributed to the study of roles the multiple knowledge he had” [6].

He had a thorough training, and with a high theatrical culture, “he visited London, Berlin, Rome and studied theater in Italy, with Modena, being a colleague of Salvini and Rossi” [3], “he had made a long trip to Paris where he met all the great artists of the time” [6].

Theodorini's 20-year directorship was extremely beneficial, Craiova's theatrical life receiving new impulses became effervescent: “Translations were played, melodramas and original plays were preferred. The original pieces were received by the public with great interest. Those with a national theme were especially preferred... The theater was doing admirably, all the more so since Teodorini had managed to ensure an annual subsidy from the City Hall. New methods were introduced in the interpretation of the roles, stage accessories were improved, the band acquired valuable elements, so this era under the leadership of Teodorini marked a beautiful page in the cultural life of Craiova” [6].

4. Studies, Debut and the First Steps in Theater

Aristizza studied in Craiova, initially at the Normal School, then, between 1866 and 1869, attended the Central School, at a French boarding school for girls in the same city, from which she graduated in 1870 [7].



Figure 6. Aristizza Romanescu in her youth [3].

And, “at the school celebration, she plays theater interpreting Costa Diva from “Norma” and the great aria from the opera “Robert the Devil” [7].

Being part of such a family where parents, all uncles, all aunts, friends, acquaintances were more or less famous actors of the Romanian theater, Aristizza, together with her cousins Maria Vlădicescu, Elena and Aura Theodorini “received a solid artistic education in childhood” [5].

In 1875, her uncle Theodor Theodorini dies at the age of 54, after two years earlier, in 1873, he fell ill while playing on the stage of the Iasi Theater: “he was struck by madness, for which reason the audience who did not know what's the matter, they were whistling him” [3]. The great actor, whose name will be known by the future National Theater in Craiova, was admitted to the Marcuța sanatorium, then to a sanatorium in Vienna [3], but to no avail.

His wife and Aristizza Romanescu's aunt, Maria, officially takes over the management of the theater, being helped in this matter by her niece, Aristizza: “...in 1872 we see her helping her aunt in managing the direction” [6]. In addition to theater management issues [6], she was in charge of the institution's correspondence [7].



Figure 7. Aristizza Romanescu in the role of Juliet [8].

She made her theater debut in Craiova, at the age of 16, in 1872, in the play “16 years ago”, and her presence on stage

was a real and unexpected success: “The Craiova troupe was in a big trouble, it lacked an ingenue. An appeal was immediately made to the director's niece, Aristizza, who received the proposal with great dismay, considering it something odious to appear on stage” [6].



Figure 8. Aristizza Romanescu in the role of Ofelia [6].

Nevertheless, “she played a role in travesty, and not without great efforts she was able to bring the debut to a successful end” [6]; “the success, which is true, was enormous, encouragement came from everywhere, the young girl who had recently left school, could not get used to the idea of becoming an actress” [6].

In the 1872-1873 season, Aristizza Romanescu played on the stage of the Theater in Craiova, and in the summer of 1873, together with a theater troupe, she went to Severin, after which she arrived in Iași, where she joined Millo-Dimitriade's (her father's) troupe.

5. Protectors and Mentors: Smaranda Merișescu, Ion Ghica, Queen Elisabeta

In Iași, however, the young woman's protector was Smaranda Merișescu, an actress of the National Theater in Iași: “[...] even though I had my father and my aunt Stavreasca by my side - Merișeasca was also my protector” [5].

Smaranda Merișescu's involvement in Aristizza Romanescu's early career, the help and protection she gave her were extremely important in the development of the young and talented actress.

Smaranda Merișescu, known in theatrical circles as “Ms. Smaranda”, being one of “the most important actors” [9], played on the stage in Iași even before the official opening of the Romanian Theater in Iași⁴ (January 1, 1841), then with Raluca Stavrescu, one of Aristizza Romanescu's aunts. Among the many roles played by “Lady Smaranda” is the famous role of Madame Chirița. The press of the time, through “Curierul de Iași”, no. 131, dated November 29, 1872, mentioned that “Ms. Merișescu was admirable in the role of Madame Chirița, where she distinguished herself with an originality and a mastery truly worthy of all praise” [9], in the play with the same name by Vasile Alecsandri. The play

⁴ The Romanian Theater will later become the National Theater in Iași.

was performed with great success in the 1872-1873 season.



Figure 9. Smaranda Merișescu [9].

With the help of Smaranda Merișescu, who was in full professional effervescence, she debuted in 1873. At the same time, Aristizza Romanescu was employed and was an official member, along with Smaranda Merișescu, Raluca Stavrescu and his father Constantin Dimitriadu, of the “band staff” [9] from the 1873-1874 season held under the direction of lawyer Teodor Aslan. Aristizza's debut in Iași takes place in the play “Salamandra's Ship”, a vaudeville comedy in 4 acts, on October 11, 1873.

The audience is quite unimpressed by her presence on stage: “At the debut, the impression on audience...mediocre”. “Pretty good... sweet”, these were the epithets” [7].

However, in terms of the roles played by her, they were “...mostly, roles of ingénues and maids”, after which she got to interpret the role of Paquita in “Don Juan de Marana”, “which had seven representatives in a row” [7].

During the same season, she plays the role of the Dauphin alongside her father who plays the role of the king in the French play “Louis XI”, and the public opinion was that “The Dauphin was charming”, “Ms. Romaneasca was a real Dauphin” [9].

Between 1874 and 1877, the new Bucharest Dramatic Society was established, headed by the writer, politician and member of the Romanian Academy, Ion Ghica [9]. During these years, Aristizza plays in Bucharest, where she is “called an associate”, after signing here in 1877, the first real contract in her life [5]. She also plays minor, insignificant roles in the province, and the period is described by Aristizza Romanescu as “a life of misery, even more bitter” [7], with her being part of traveling bands that roamed the whole country offering shows, in order to survive.

At that time, the season lasted around 5 months a year, from October-November to March-April, during which the actors, employed with a contract or not, had a relatively stable situation. The rest of the time, they usually formed groups of ad hoc actors, most of them “went on tours for months, in which they crossed the country from one end to the other of the country's provinces” [5]. To secure an income, this was usually the only way [5] to support their families. However, “this genuine transhumance practiced by

actors and bands constituted, in essence, an absolutely positive process for the Romanian culture” [5], because, thanks to the activity of these bands, “whole areas of the country - otherwise almost totally devoid of cultural (and not only cultural) contacts with the civilized world - suddenly came to life and began to participate in the exchange of cultural values, in other words aligning themselves with the spirit renewer of the age that had found them vegetating impassive” [5].

In the spring of 1877, Aristizza Romanescu was hired for a Tardini-Vladicescu band tour [7]. Ion Vlădicescu was her uncle from his previous marriage with Raluca Stavrescu, sister of Paulina Stavrescu, mother of Aristizza Romanescu. With this band, she reaches Ismail, where she “plays all summer” [7] and then goes to Galați, during the fall.

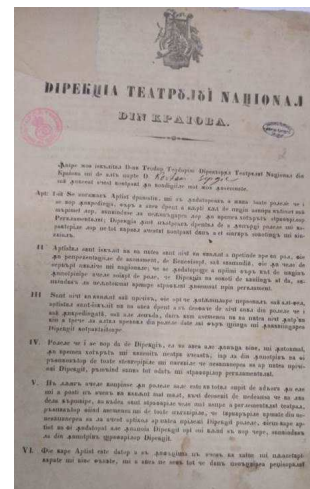


Figure 10. A contract concluded in 1855 [10].

Fany Tardini and Alexandru Vlădicescu give her a helping hand, while the rest of the family is silent, in the literal sense of the word. So is her aunt Maria Theodorini, in the house in which she grew up and who simply does not respond⁵ to Aristizza's desperate letters, while her father Costache Dimitriadu is completely overwhelmed by financial problems.



Figure 11. Alexandru Vlădicescu [4].

5 After the death of her husband, until finding alternative ways of financing, Maria Theodorini faced, for a period of time, great financial problems, because the subsidy for the maintenance of the theater was no longer granted by the Craiova City Hall.



Figure 12. Fany Tardini [4].

However, her father calls her to Bucharest, where he hires her at the National Theater, as soon as he has the opportunity.

6. Personal Life and Theatrical Career

As for Aristizza's personal life, it is known that she married quite early to the comic actor Ion Romanescu (Ion-Anghel Romanescu)[5], taking his name and becoming Aristizza Romanescu. After the divorce from him, she will keep the name "by which she began to be known" [7].

Ion Romanescu was part of the band "Dragulici et comp" [7] and played on the stages of the great Romanian theater centers: Iași, Craiova and Bucharest in the shows "The Children's Doctor", "Tigers from Bengal", "The daughter of the stalker", "Cezar Jirado", "Son of the Night", "The Heirs", "Leeches of the Village", etc. [7]. Although he performed comic roles, "for sentimental reasons, he hanged himself in the Gaiesti train station" [7].

Aristizza Romanescu's second marriage was with Mihail Manolescu, magistrate and brother of Grigore Manolescu, the famous artist [7].

The Manolescu brothers were the sons of Alexandru Manolescu and the grandsons of "Medelnicer⁶ Manole Bolintineanu" [7].



Figure 13. The Manolescu family: Mihail Manolescu, Aristizza Romanescu Manolescu, Grigore Manolescu, Anica Popescu Manolescu and an acquaintance of the family [4].

⁶ Medelnicer, dignity in the Romanian Principalities, member of the Royal Council.

The third marriage was with her magnificent stage partner, the dramatic actor Grigore Manolescu.



Figure 14. Aristizza Romanescu in the role of Ofelia [4].



Figure 15. Grigore Manolescu [4].

Grigore Manolescu, for the sake of the theater, ran away from home at the age of 15 (September 1872), while he was a student at the "Sf. Sava", in an attempt to enroll at the Conservatory in Bucharest, where, between 1872 and 1875, he became a student of the well-known actor at the time, Ștefan Velescu. After such a feat, absolutely scandalous for his high social status, his parents "didn't want to know about him anymore. Driven out of his home, he found shelter in Zaharia Buenescu's band, where he played his first roles" [7].

Even at the Conservatory, the beginnings were not too bright, because Professor Velescu "claimed, as the first condition for the future actor, a flawless physique - and Manolescu, otherwise tall and distinguished, had his legs bent inwards and spoke a bit slurred" [7].

At one point Maria Theodorini wanted to hire him at her theater and asked for Ștefan Velescu's approved opinion regarding the artistic skills of his student. The answer was that "he's not good for anything" [6].

However, the love for the theater won, and Grigore Manolescu, making constant efforts and "unwavering will, got rid of every flaw in his speech, so that the dramatic critic Eminescu wrote that "no Romanian actor has been mentioned who could say well such lines like Manolescu" [7].

While he was still a student at the Conservatory, he made his debut in 1873 on the stage of the Bossel Theater, directed by Matei Millo.

Obviously, the emotional connection between the two artists, Aristizza Romanescu and Grigore Manolescu, stage partners and later, husbands, was a strong one. However, it was not without legal problems, because when Aristizza Romanescu married Grigore Manolescu, also previously married (1884-1889) to the artist Ana Popescu⁷ she did not divorce her second husband, Mihail Manolescu. As a result, the two were sentenced for bigamy “to a year and a half in prison each, but, due to their position, they intervened, and they did not serve the sentence” [7].

Between 1879 and 1880, Aristizza Romanescu is in full professional ascension “when she plays in *Despot*, *Daniceff*, *Two Orphans*, *Boyers* and *Chicoi*, *Venetian Weddings*, etc” [5].

6.1. Studies Abroad: Paris and London, Scotland

In 1880 she left for Paris, together with Grigore Manolescu, with a royal scholarship offered by Queen Elizabeth.

Ion Ghica and Vasile Alecsandri [5] both asked the Queen to come to the theater to see the two artists. Queen Elizabeth comes to the theater and attends the performance “*The Banker's Girl*” [7], by V. A. Ureche. As a result, the Queen urges Ion Ghica, as director of the National Theater, to send Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu to Paris, “to continue their dramatic studies” [5]. Thus, the two obtain the royal scholarship with which, on February 16, 1880, they arrive in Paris, where they are accepted as students at the Conservatory.



Figure 16. Queen Elisabeth [11].



Figure 17. Professor Dalaunay [8].

In Paris they study with the famous french actor Delaunay, also with Got and Regnier, professors at the Paris

Conservatory, who notice the exceptional talent of Aristizza Romanescu, “being amazed by her talent (the French newspapers praise her)” [7].

In Paris, Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu have the great fortune of ending up under the protection of George Bengescu who “is the guide, adviser and devoted friend of all Romanian actors studying in France” [5].

At the request of Ion Ghica, the general director of theaters in Romania at that time, expressed in a letter: “I put them under your protection, and please help them with advice and with the relationships you have at the French Comedy try to be useful to them and art will bless you” [5], George Bengescu takes them under his protection. When the two young people arrived in the capital of arts, George Begescu, career diplomat and later member of the Romanian Academy, was the secretary of the Romanian Legation in Paris. Friend of Ion Ghica and Vasile Alecsandri, in the country, in France he became friends with the great French artists Got, Dalaunay, Renier. George Bengescu “opens the first doors in the world capital of art for the scholars Aristizza Romanescu, Grigore Manolescu and Ștefan Iulian” [5]. The two are also helped by Colonel Alecsandri [5], the brother of the great poet, also in Paris. Through them, Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu get to know various Romanian and foreign personalities: “Elisa Filipescu and Maria Cantacuzino (Madame Puvis de Chavannes), but also Al. Dumas-son, Sardou, Juliette Adam or Emile Chevè” [5].



Figure 18. Aristizza Romanescu studying in an intimate setting [8].

In the capital of the arts, the two students “visit all the museums and listen to additional courses in art history, philosophy and literature” [7].

Now the foundations are being laid for that great culture of Aristizza Romanescu that everyone will talk about and recognize in just a few years: “with a talent and a dramatic culture like hers, she would have been enthusiastically received anywhere taken to any other country” [7] and that “she is among the first actors who affirm that an actor's imperative necessity - beyond talent, vocation and stage qualities – is study and culture” [7].

The first period of studies in Paris is between February 18, 1880 and October 1880, when she returns to Romania for an internship at the Theater in Bucharest, where she becomes a member of the second class [7], with 2 debut performances “*Daniel Roebat*” and “*The joy of the house*” [7].

⁷ Ana Popescu appears will bear the name of Ana Popescu Manolescu for several years. He will bear this name on stage as well.

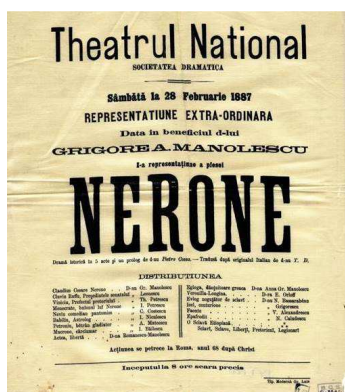


Figure 19. The poster of the show "Nerone" [12].

Then, starting in 1881, she returned to her studies, in Paris, but without a scholarship, "at her expense this time" [7] like the rest of the study trips she will make abroad from now on.

It should be mentioned that Aristizza Romanescu leaves for London, when her protector and friend Ion Ghica is appointed as ambassador [1]. His capacity as Romanian plenipotentiary minister [2] in London offered more possibilities for his protégés.

In London, in 1881, she made "contact for the first time with the Shakespearean theater at his home" and completed her studies with the famous actress Ellen Terry [2]. From her, Aristizza learns the "secrets" of interpreting Shakespearean roles, which she will brilliantly play alongside another legend of the Romanian theater, Grigore Manolescu.



Figure 20. Manolescu as Hamlet [4].

As an actress, in addition to her extraordinary ability to work and study, Aristizza Romanescu was divinely gifted with "multivalent talent" [7], being able to play varied roles from comedy to tragedy, vaudeville.

She had an exceptionally "rare" memory - which allowed her to play without the help of the prompter" [7].

6.2. The Return to Romania - The Beginning of the "Romanescu era" – The Triumph and Dominance on the National Theater Scene

In 1881, the director of the Odéon Theater, Paul Porel, offers her employment, she refuses, even though her father Constantin Dimitriadu tells her to accept [5], she, however, returns to Romania, where she works at the National Theater, as a 2nd class company member [7].

In making the decision to refuse Porel's proposal, in addition to the option she personally had, she is encouraged, in this sense, by her close associates, among whom the first was Ion Ghica, with the fundamental idea of "propagating the Romanian Theater" and the moral duty towards the artist's country.

We must not forget the atmosphere of those years in Romania, country in which between 1877-1878 waged a war of independence with the Ottoman Empire, and in 1881 it was proclaimed Kingdom, so that the decision to return to the Romanian theatrical scene and bring Romanian theatrical art to the level of the European one it seemed absolutely natural and logical.



Figure 21. Aristizza Romanescu [10].

Upon her return to Romania, in October 1880, she debuted together with Grigore Manolescu in the play "Daniel Roșcat", followed by roles in the plays "Iadeș", "The uncle poverit", "After the breakup", "Caterina Howard", "The spark", "Miss Wilton", "Sânziana".

During the theatrical vacation of 1881, she left for the second time, in Paris, to study, from now on only "at her own expense" [7].

In 1882, after becoming a first-class theater company member [7] she arrives for the third time in Paris to continue her studies, where she continues to take lessons from Professor Delaunay, then again in London, then in Scotland, and finally again in Paris [7].

The following seasons she plays on the stage of the National Theater in Bucharest, but she spends her vacations studying abroad.

The 1881-1882 season she plays as a 1st class company member [7], in the piece "Marion Delorme", and the next one, from 1882-1883, she plays the role of Susana, from the piece "Nea Frațilă".

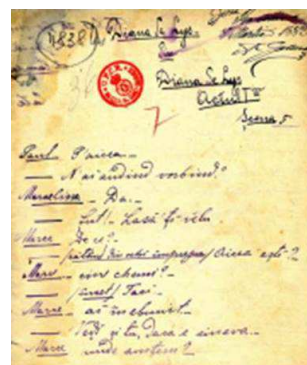


Figure 22. The first page of the notebook with the role of Diane de Sys played by Aristizza Romanescu [10].



Figure 23. Aristizza Romanescu in the role of Alma [4].

In the 1884-1885 season, Aristizza Romanescu achieved great success by performing the role of Geta in „The fountain of Blanduzia”, by V. Alexandri, on the stage of the National Theater in Bucharest. The play was performed on March 22, 1884.



Figure 24. Aristizza Romanescu in the role of Geta [4].

In addition to her presence on stage, the actress also has her first experience as a teacher, teaching “free lessons at the “Elena Doamna” asylum to a few selected students” [7].

Upon returning to Romania, after the first period of studies spent in Paris, she works as a teacher for the declamation course at the Bucharest Conservatory.

6.3. Tours in the Country and the Historical Provinces

Also in the spring of 1885, she made a tour to Cernăuți, in Bucovina, then to Botoșani and Iași [7] and it is interesting that in this tour she goes by the name of Aristizza Romanescu Manolescu [5], and her brother Mircea Dimitriade is also part of the band.

The 1885-1886 season she plays only on the stage of the National Theater in Iași, even if she is remunerated with smaller amounts, because she resigned in protest from the National Theater in Bucharest, with which she re-engages in September 1886, for a period of 2 years “then again in Iași”[7],

for the 1888-1889 season, “where the new theater “Pastia” is inaugurated” [7].



Figure 25. Aristizza Romanescu – drawing [4].



Figure 26. Grigore Manolescu in the role of Ovidiu [11].



Figure 27. Aristizza Romanescu playing Marguerite Gautier [8].



Figure 28. Grigore Manolescu in the role [11].

During the stay in Iași, in the location known as “Tivoli Garden”, the artists give a series of performances, after which the band is reformed [7]. Now it is composed “of a part of the actors from Bucharest and of several artists of the Iesian National Theater” [9]: Gheorghe Cârjă, Alexandru Manoliu, N. A. Bogdan, Dimitrie Constantinescu, Constantin Ionescu, H. Emandi, Vlad Cuzescu (Cuzinski), Alexandrescu, Verona Almăgeanu, Alexandrina Alexandrescu, Ecaterina Ionescu, Eliza Orloff, Eliza Gănescu, etc.



Figure 29. The National Theater from Iași.⁸

In fact, the actors from Iași are saved [3] by Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu, because on the night of February 17 to 18, 1888, the National Theater in Copou burned down, and practically, the actors remained on the streets.

In this new composition, the Manolescu Troupe goes to Botoșani where it gives a series of shows.

In June and July of 1888, Aristizza Manolescu (Romanescu), with Grigore Manolescu and the band, toured Pitesti, Braila, Galați, Iași, Chișinău and Botoșani [7].

After Botoșani, the tour follows in Bessarabia, in Chișinău, where they play shows in Romanian, managing to pass the Russian censored plays such as “Hamlet”, “Two Romanian soldiers”, “Baba Hârca”.

The series of performances in the capital of Bessarabia, performed in the large, rented hall of the “Fürer” circus-theater, begins on September 18, 1888 with the play “Hamlet, King of Denmark”, by W. Shakespeare. T. Burada mentions that the show was a success: “this play was received by the audience in Chișinău with the greatest sympathy, both for the way it was played and for the fact that for the first time a play by such value, was available in the Romanian language” [9].

Two days later, on September 20, 1888, “Civil Death” is played, then “Intrigue and Love, a tragedy in 5 acts and 9 paintings”, by F. Schiller, “Two Sergeants”, “Pride and Love”, “Sullivan”, etc. [9].

When the play “Two Romanian soldiers, vaudeville in one act” was performed, “the theater being completely full” [9], the proceeds were 2,360 rubles [9].



Figure 30. The poster of the show “Hamlet”. Chișinău. 1888 [3].

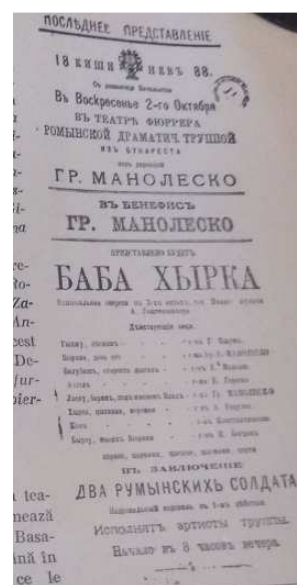


Figure 31. The poster of the show “Baba Hârca” - Chișinău. 1888 [3].

To all this, we must add a few words about the Russian censorship at that time in Bessarabia, namely that “the Romanian bands were prevented from playing and roaming the Bessarabian Romanian cities” [3, 9] and that “the plays were sent to the Russian censorship” [3], which often delayed their timely return.

In this regard, in addition to generating the necessary income for survival, “itinerant bands had a multiple role: as a link between different cultural formulas, to socialize some communities, constituted geographically and physically rather than spiritually, to modernize the structures of civil society, which remained for centuries in turn buried in a pernicious laziness of the oriental type” [5].

After crossing the Prut, the band continues its tour in Pitești, Brăila, Galați and Iași.

Since 1889, it will remain only on the stage of the National Theater in Bucharest, starting on August 15. On the same

⁸ Image source: Internet.

date, Grigore Manolescu also returns to the National Theater in Bucharest, where he is also a theater company actor first, but “also stage manager for drama, comedy and tragedy pieces (together with C. I. Nottara)” [7].

6.4. The Manolescu-Romanescu Troupe - An Exceptional Theatrical Phenomenon - Vienna: Artistic Ecstasy and Financial Agony

In 1890, in Iași, Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu arrived in the city, creating a troupe in the composition of which “several members of the National Theater joined and at the same time employing some gagists who had played during the winter of 1889-1890” [9].

This new troupe, which will remain known in the history of Romanian theater as the “Manolescu Troupe”, began the series of performances, as a result of the contract concluded between the two artists, as leaders of the troupe, and the local dramatic society [9].

The shows will take place for two months, in the hall of the “Sidoli” circus in Iași, on April 1, 1890.

In the summer of 1891, the Manolescu troupe toured Vienna, where, starting on June 4, 1891, it gave a series of performances at the “Karlstheater” [7], in Romanian. The tour itself “constitutes a unique artistic event in the history of Romanian theater since the end of the last century...”, “an old and daring project” of Grigore Manolescu “to make Romanian dramatic art known abroad, an idea that met the need of affirming national values” [8].

The band had 28 actors, among them G. Cârje, Mircea Dimitriade, C. Ionescu, obviously, Aristizza Romanescu et al.



Figure 32. The Manolescu band on tour in Vienna. [4]

On the stage of this famous theater, Romanian artists played in “Hamlet”, “Neron”, “Romeo and Juliet”, “Fountain of Blanduzia”, “Pride and Amor”, “Prince of Denmark”, “The spark”, etc. in Romanian.

The performances on the “Karlstheater” stage represented an extraordinary theatrical success for the Romanian troupe, but also a great financial failure for Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu, who could not even pay for the stay in Vienna and the return to Romania: “the troupe could not return to the country, unable to pay the expenses of directing and maintenance in Vienna and not having travel money” [8].

At the same time, leaving for Vienna at the end of May 1891, the artists found the Romanian community in the Austrian capital mostly gone to the baths and an almost

complete lack of publicity [8], the only exception being Iosif Vulcan's “Familia” magazine, which announced the Romanian band's tour ahead of time.

The expenses were paid through the intervention of the Romanian government, and the debt of 2400 fl. was postponed, but Aristizza Romanescu, left alone, after the premature disappearance of Grigore Manolescu, paid this debt for years [8]⁹, which was the cornerstone of her later financial and generally material instability. To these were added the medical expenses related to Grigore Manolescu's illness. In Vienna, during the tour, the first symptoms of the terrible disease appeared, which tormented him for a year and took him suddenly [8].

Another presence of the two artists together with their band is reported in May 1892, when “they opened the series of performances, on May 7, 1892, with the “Civil Death” [9], followed by the play “Ana Rov”, with the two actors in the main roles.

Then the Manolescu troupe makes a short trip to Piatra-Neamț, but Grigore Manolescu's illness worsens, he “could barely perform the physical effort of appearing on stage” [8] and the actors return to Bucharest from where they leave for Paris.

Here, emaciated, Grigore Manolescu dies on July 14, 1892, after being operated for stomach cancer, and his body is brought to the country, being buried in Bucharest.



Figure 33. The poster of the show “Civil Death”. 1892 [10].

6.5. Career Peak - Recognition of Merits - Leaving the Theater

After the death of her famous husband, a decade of exceptional professional activity follows for the great actress, in which her professional merits and unique talent are recognized, playing with equal success both on the stages of the great theaters of Romania and in various improvised places, for the sake of art, as well as to honor the payment of the debts

⁹ According to the agreement that allowed the situation to be resolved, Grigore Manolescu and Aristizza Romanescu were obliged, in exchange for the payment of the debt, to give half of each one's salary and the benefits obtained until its liquidation.

of the Viennese tour of the Manolescu Band: "... I don't want anyone to suffer as I suffered, playing on stages with a 4 m ramp, with ragged sets and stuttering partners"[13]. The wonderful artist Aristizza Romanescu continued to play, "on the contrary, suffering insults and undeserved sanctions, being accused of greed, indiscipline and cabotination, the artist carried her martyrdom over the years, in the provincial towns, playing on primitive stages and with stuttering partners, with a selflessness that is rarely seen" [8].

Because of the policy of "mutual advantages between the director and the actors". During P. Grădișteanu's directorship on the stage of the National Theater in Bucharest, "the degradation of the repertoire" began [8], with "pieces below any artistic level" [8], so that "the artist's indifference towards the theater gradually turns into disgust" [8]. As a result, the great artist appears less and less on stage, realizing "that between her and the world of the Bucharest stage, there is an abyss" [8], and the season 1898-1899 presents itself "for the great, brilliant career of Aristizza, as "the beginning of the end" [8].

However, in the 1899-1900 and 1900-1901 seasons, quality shows were staged on the National Theater stage [8]: "Romeo and Juliet", "The Lady of the Camellias", "Hamlet", "Macbeth", in which Aristizza Romanescu plays.

In January 1899 Aristizza Romanescu is decorated by the Ministry of Public Instruction with the 1st class Bene-Merenti Medal [7]. This comes to officially complete the recognition of extraordinary talent, professional merits by the public. The press of the time, through the article signed by G. Ionescu-Gion on January 15, 1899 in "Constituționalul" [8], listed them: "the natural endowment, intelligence and artistic work in studying the roles, the incomparable diction and the wonderful voice, the unparalleled growth and richness of the talent capable of interpreting the most varied roles of the dramatic repertoire, the vivacity of her eternally young talent, the understanding of the role in the whole of its normal development in the unfolding of the action, the realism of creation, finally, the passion for theater" [8].

Between 1899 and 1903, she played theater, a lot, and just as much "abroad (France, Sweden, Denmark), yes and in the country..." [5], after which... she leaves the theater.

Aristizza Romanescu retires from the theater at the age of only 49 years in full physical and creative strength. The final personal decision "to retire from the theater" [8] she took it in October 1902 [8], for the same professional reasons, the most important being the quality of the repertoire: "apparently varied and always renewed - it had a very low level" [8], along with the obligation of the Management of the National Theater in Bucharest "to present in a single year (1902-1903) 54 new plays, mostly devoid of any dramatic value" [8]. Inheriting and learning from the professionals in her family and colleagues, with whom she grew that "fine common sense" and a "vast general culture" of the Theodorini generation, Aristizza could not accept with indifference the decay of the theatrical art of that period. The decision to leave the theater was fully justified, the reason was not material, and the explanations are provided by the artist herself in her book "30 years. Memories": "And I

played for nothing, for free, for glory, - as I played for the Athenaeum, for the wounded, for the floods, for the medical students, for the invalids, for Leăgănul, for Materna, for Obolul, for the reserve fund, for school canteens, for studies abroad, for poor children, for sick comrades, for Bolintineanu, for the red cross, for Eminescu, for the Women's Reunion... and I don't know for whom, - so, if I were to count, many more times, I played for others, not for myself.

From then on, little by little, year by year, day by day, I became disgusted. There are moments when I think that someone has cast a spell on me; thus, how is it explained that I, the enthusiast from another time, returned from where I left; I can't stand theater anymore" [13]. This is the explanation of the same person about whom Delaunay, in a letter addressed to the poet V. Alecsandri, said: „Cette petite respire le theater par tous les pores" [5].

Ion Cepoi, in his work, states that when the new director of the National Theater Ștefan (Shtefan) Sihleanu learned of Aristizza Romanescu's resignation decision, referring to the annual budget, he exclaimed: „Fortunately you are leaving, you and Bârseasca!... 30,000 lei less... Otherwise, what would I do?" [5].

She officially resigned from the Bucharest National Theater on February 15, 1903, when she "played in the farewell performance, consisting of 3 plays in one act each by Haralamb G. Lecca" [7]. With this, an important period in the history of the Romanian theater called "Romanesque era" ends [1].

Ion Anestin, a witness of this era and an active participant in it, commented on this huge theatrical loss in the following way: "the creator of Ophelia from Hamlet, Juliet from Romeo and Juliet, Alma from Onoarea, Clara from Pride and Love, Adriana from Adriene Lecouvreur, Ovid's Juliet, the woman whose diction and voice were unmatched, leaves the theater and the retreat performance is given in front of a far from full hall, but in the presence of Queen-poet Elisabeta" [1].

The hall would not have been full, but according to other testimonies "the ending was disturbing, emotional to the point of paroxysm, with Nottara's cry: Stay, Aristizza!, repeated by M. S. Queen Elisabeta, then by the entire audience!" [5].



Figure 34. The poster of Aristizza Romanescu's retirement show [8].



Figure 35. Aristizza Romanescu at the time of her retirement from the theater [10].



Figure 36. Aristizza Romanescu – drawing [14].



Figure 37. Aristizza Romanescu [4].

As a pensioner, at the age of only 54, the prima donna of the Romanian theater “the strongest personality of the Romanian theater of all times received a pension of only 194

lei” [5]. To help her, the Minister of Public Instruction “proposed 100 lei per month under the title of “provisional aid”, from the mercy funds” [5].

6.6. Teacher of Declamation at the Dramatic Conservatory in Bucharest – Founder of a Theater School and Mentor of the New Generation

Aristizza Romanescu also inherited the talent of a teacher from her father, who was also a declamation teacher [7] at the Dramatic Conservatory from Iași. Like him, she “was particularly concerned with the problem of diction” [5]. She taught the art of declamation at the Dramatic Conservatory in Bucharest, when she was “appointed professor of direction for the declamation course” [2] beginning with the date of September 1, 1893.

Costache Dimitriadă introduced the teaching of the art of declamation into the circuit after the volume translated by himself, the polyglot, “Declamation course”, by Don Vicente Joaquim Bastus, was published in Bucharest in 1867 [7]. His daughter, Aristizza, also publishes “an admirable course of diction called “Dramatic Art”, which is printed in 1906 [2], obviously, having her father as her master.

As an actress “with a great temperament, and refinement, merging with her roles and with an unsurpassed Romanian diction” [2], she had a “thoughtful interpretation, giving the greatest importance to the dramatic text, highlighting the deep meanings and sub-meanings of the text” [2].

She was a mentor for the golden generation of pre- and interwar Romanian theater performers, being the first to affirm and impose on her students the respect, in their professional development, of a fundamental principle, namely “as an imperative necessity of the actor - beyond talent, of vocation and scenic qualities - study and culture” [7].

Among her students in the realistic interpretation of theatrical roles are her students from the Bucharest Dramatic Conservatory:

Mărioara Ventura, Maria Filotti, Lucia Sturdza Bulandra, Sonia Cluceru, Maria Ventura, Marioara Voiculescu, Alice Cocea et al. In a short time, Lucia Sturdza Bulandra will occupy the position of prima donna of the Romanian theater scene in the first half of the 20th century.



Figure 38. Lucia Sturdza Bulandra [14].



Figure 39. Maria Filotti [14].

And indeed, her students had a worthy model to follow, because: “Certainly, Aristizza radiated - according to the testimony of her contemporaries - a real fascination around her, to which her great culture contributed, her sure intuition in knowing the human soul, her affective temperament and an undisputed distinction in behavior. Her critical spirit, asserted with decency and measure, was doubled at the same time by a pronounced sense of self-criticism, which preserved her objectivity throughout her life in assessing people and her own situations, not always of a nature to stimulate her creative enthusiasm” [8].

After her resignation from the National Theater, this occupation as a teacher at the Bucharest Dramatic Conservatory somewhat supplemented her modest income, but on October 1, 1914 she was retired.

Aristizza Romanescu, together with Grigore Manolescu, Matei Millo, Constantin Nottara and other great Romanian actors are the founders of the school of realistic interpretation in the Romanian theater. In this sense, in order to support realistic art, “together with C. I. Nottara, she did a particularly fruitful work within the conservatory in Bucharest” [4].

Some believe that Aristizza Romanescu played more than 336 roles, others 348 roles, and according to C. Nottara [8], over 600 roles. Until now, she is the only actress in the Romanian theater who has played such a large number of roles.

6.7. Publishing, Cinematographic and Educational Activity

She published a volume of memoirs – “30 years. Memories”, in 1904 and a manual of dramatic art – “Arta dramatica”, published in 1906.

During a tour in Bucovina in June 1910, Aristizza Romanescu plays alongside Petre Liciu, Al. Mihailescu, Belcot, G. Ciprian, Gh. Duțulescu, etc. The tour represented a “real affirmation of the Romanian theater in Bucovina” [3].

Aristizza Romanescu also dabbled in cinematography. In 1910, one of the first 5-minute videos appears, in which the great artist is taking a walk, with Victor Eftimiu, on the seashore [5].

A second film participation is an episodic role, of a sister

of charity [15], from the “group of ladies from the Red Cross” [15], from the first Romanian film “Independence of Romania”. The film, directed by Aristide Demetriade, was made between 1911 and 1912 and almost the entire troupe of the National Theater from Bucharest played in it.



Figure 40. Aristizza Romanescu in the group of ladies from the Red Cross [4].

During the time, the great actress performed various roles “from most universal and Romanian dramaturgy: Shakespeare, Moliere, Schiller, Goethe, Ibsen, Victor Hugo, Al. Dumas - son, etc., or Caragiale, Alecsandri, Macedonski, Bengescu-Dabija, Odobescu, Polizu-Micșunești, Bacalbașa, Constantin Lecca, etc.” [5].

The most important and famous roles played by her were the following:

Catherina Howard, Messalina, Maria Suart, Baroness d'Angeles from “Demi-Monde”, Denisa, Dolores from “Patria”, Francesca di Rimini, Margareta from “The Lady of the Camellias”, Marquise de Pompadour, Amalia from “The Thieves”, Francillon, Eboli from “Don Carlos”, Luisa Miller, Iulia from “The Great Galeotto”, Judita from “Uriel Acosta”, Desdemona, Maria from “The Renegade”, Caterina from “The Brave Woman”, Rebeca from “Rosmer Sholom”, Magda, Adrienne Lecouvreur, Bianca from “Fear of Joy”, Salambo from “Amilcar Barca”, the role from “The Flower Child”, Maria from “After the Breakup”, Ileana from “The Wanderer”, Vidra from “Răzvan și Vidra”, Ophelia from “Hamlet”, Clara de Beaulieu from “Pride and Love”, etc. [7].

6.8. The End of a Legendary Life

Aristizza Romanescu died on June 4, according to other information on June 5, 1918, in the refuge of Iași. “They all led to the Eternitatea cemetery the one who was the most important Romanian actress of the last century - Aristizza Romanescu. A refugee as well, she died in great need”, reports Ioan Massoff, quoted by Ioan Cepoi [5]. In this sense, the ending is almost identical to that of the great actor Matei Millo, upon whose death “they found absolutely no money” [5], moreover, as in the case of other great actors such as Frosa Sarandi, Ion Tănăsescu, Theodor Theodorini, Mihai Pascaly, Costache Dimitriade, Achille Popescu [5], who after a brilliant artistic life spent under the spotlight, producing major changes in the collective mind, climbing to the highest spiritual peaks, becoming living legends in life, ended up in abject poverty, alone and sick: “What is to be said? Nothing.

The others - beyond the theater - are just text, illusion, loneliness" [5].



Figure 41. Aristizza Romanescu aged [10].

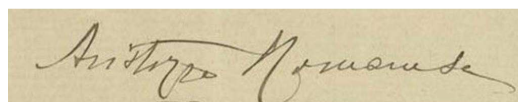


Figure 42. Aristizza Romanescu's signature [7].

7. Conclusion

Over the course of time, the great actress performed various roles "from most universal and Romanian dramaturgy: Shakespeare, Moliere, Schiller, Goethe, Ibsen, Victor Hugo, Al. Dumas-son, etc., or Caragiale, Alecsandri, Macedonski, Bengescu-Dabija, Odobescu, Polizu-Micșunești, Bacalbașa, Cobstantin Lecca ș.a." [5].

She successfully played on the big stages of Romania, performing roles from the European and national repertoire, with equal success, from vaudevilles to dramas, inaugurating an era known in the history of Romanian theater as the "Aristizza Romanescu era", turning into a legend. Together with the actors Constantin Nottara and Grigore Manolescu, she promoted and established the "Romanian School of Realist Interpretation", which significantly increased the aesthetic character of performances, becoming the mentor of a whole generation of actors from Romania in the 20th century. She performed a number of approximately 600 roles, a number that has not been surpassed even to this day.

Aristizza Romanescu's entire activity in the field of performing arts is one of the cornerstones of what is now known as the Romanian National Theatre.

The research presents an eloquent example of the evolution of the generation of great Romanian theater personalities from the second half of the 19th century, who

combined talent with intense study and hard work for the growth of the Romanian national theater. At the same time, it offers us a new view, with aspects unknown until now, regarding that very important period. At the same time, the period was also extremely difficult in the development, consolidation and flourishing of the later Romanian theatrical art, that of the 20th century. This Romanian theatrical art, through its representatives, was integrated, naturally and along the way, in the very beautiful, unique, thriving era of European civilization until the outbreak of the First World War (1914), known as the Belle Epoque.

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