

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Romanian Culture

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Gheorghe Carulea

Interviewed by

John Muntean

On

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INTERVIEWEE: Gheorghe (George) Carulea

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SUBJECT: Romanian Culture

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JM: This is the interview with George Carulea for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program regarding the Romanian Culture and Mahoning county by John Muntean at 1725 McCullum Road on September 17, 1975 at 7:30pm.

George, could you tell me what part of Romania were you born in?

GC: I was born in the North part of Romania. It's called Copsa Mica, the village where I was born. The main city by Copsa Mica is Sibiu, which is very well known by culture and the Brukenthal Museum. They have there all kinds of pictures, all kinds of beautiful paintings.

JM: Most of the paintings in that museum are they of Romanian artists or....?

GC: No, they are all over the world.

JM: Can you tell me what a typical day was like in Romania when you were a child of maybe 10 or 11 years old? This would be in about the 1940s or so.

GC: Well, I tell you in 1940 my father was in the war at that time. So, I just was with my mother and... well it was not everything. You couldn't find sugar and oil and things like that. Because it was war time.

JM: Did you live on a farm or in the city?

GC: In the city, in Bucharest, the capital.

JM: Did your mother work?

GC: No, no. She didn't work.

JM: Then you found it pretty hard to get food?

GC: For myself, I got everything. But my mother was struggling to get it. They had aid from the government. The government was paying for all the wives whose husbands were in the war. They were paying them through the church.

JM: What was school like when you were a child?

GC: Well at that time, that was a German type of school. It was some kind of militarized. Military business.

JM: Where they really strict?

GC: Oh, very strict. And of course, after when I went to the high school. That was the primary school before. We have four years of primary school then we go to high school) and that was pretty tough. And very strict. And I took religion up to the 2nd grade.

JM: Religion? What kind?

GC: Orthodox.

JM: Orthodox. And that was in school that you took it?

GC: In school. All the Primary School and in the High School, up the 2nd grade was the year things changed.

JM: Did they teach you very much about Romanian culture in school at that time?

GC: Oh yes.

JM: What did they tell you about Romanian culture? Do you remember?

GC: Well, we had the Romanian history, which was up to [19]48 was the Romanian history, like we had before even in primary school. Right before we became... and all the things that happened and how the Romanian people came. After that, after [19]48, things changed. Like when the communists took over. Everything was changed in the history. The whole history was changed.

JM: In other words, they changed it to suit themselves?

GC: Right. Now, of course, we have the Romanian religion too. Well, in a way, not worldwide, but it's well known. Romanian music and George Enescu... But after the communists took over, everything was shut down.

JM: You mention about Romanian music- George Enescu or something like that?

GC: Oh, George Enescu. [b.1881- d.1955]

JM: Is he an orchestra leader or a composer or something else?

GC: He was a composer. He was a performer, and he was an orchestra leader.

JM: When was this? Do you remember? A long time ago?

GC: Oh, this was back before the war.

JM: Oh, so back maybe in the 1920s?

GC: In fact, he died in the 50s. In France. He was a leader of Romanian music.

JM: Did he write any music?

GC: Yes, a conductor and composer. He wrote music.

JM: Most of the music that he wrote, would it be more of a traditional type of Romanian music?

GC: Yes, traditional Romanian. That's the Romanian Rhapsody, which is one the most beautiful you can hear. It's really something.

JM: What about some of the dances that they do, like the cadîineasca and stuff like that? Was the music composed specially for that type of a dance, or was the music just made up and people danced to it?

GC: I tell you, most of the time, it was made up by the people.

JM: So, in other words, it wasn't composed or anything?

GM: But there were certain composers, they took the theme from that and they composed more sophisticated things.

JM: In other words, little by little they put little things together and made a song that people used. Did you learn to dance the cadîineasca in school or was it taught to you in a festival?

GC: Never.

JM: Did you ever learn how to dance?

GC: Never. I learned from my cousins and other people living in the country like in the villages, anytime that I went there. They taught me how to hance and how to sing. But not in school.

JM: Did you have a lot of different types of festivals types of events where this culture was exhibited, meaning shown?

GC: No.

JM: So how did you go about learn it? Just by talking?

GC: Just by talking to people and learning from other people. Other people telling me. But not in the school or in school activities.

JM: But did the villages have a lot of festivals?

GC: Oh yeah, like every other day. They have a big ballroom there and they were dancing there.

JM: Did the churches have festivals?

GC: Well, after the 1946-1947 the churches were pretty down. Just to the service. Nothing else. No other activities. Just the service.

JM: Did the service stay the same or did it change at all?

GC: The service was the same. The only thing that changed- you know, “we remember the king” instead “we remember the president of the county.” That was the thing that changed. Other than that, things were the same.

JM: When they would have events like weddings in Romania, did it change after the war too? Or did they continue the same traditions?

GC: Well, it depends... it sounds kind of strange, but it depends what kind of a job you had. If you were in the country, in a village, they went to the old traditions with the weddings. If you were in a city, and you had good job let's say, you were afraid to go to the church to have a church wedding. Because the church in Romania is accepted by the Constitution, BUT it's not accepted by the doctrine- by the Marxists, Stalinists. So, if you want to have a job in the city and you want a church a wedding, maybe the next day you don't have your job. That's the way.

JM: Was there a lot of church weddings or not many then?

GC: Well, it depends on the person. Because, most of the people, they don't care. We go and we'll do it- whatever will happen.

JM: Does the government accept the church wedding?

GC: They accept it, but they come after you after that. It's a thing accepted. It's like the church in Russia. It's one of the most outstanding churches in this world. You know?

JM: Can you remember back when you were a child, at wedding receptions, did they have a wedding cake?

GC: No.

JM: What about later on? Recently, back maybe about 15 or so years ago? Do they have a wedding cake at the reception?

GC: They have some cookies there and some things... A Romanian wedding now, in the city, it's like from six o'clock in the evening until the next day. It goes- all around.

JM: Do they have gypsy music there?

GC: Everything is there.

JM: Romanian food?

GC: Oh yeah- Romanian. It's mostly Romanian food.

JM: Do they ever try to steal the bride or anything? I understand that some of the Romanians when they were over here, back 20 or 30 years ago, they would try to steal the bride.

GC: Oh, yes. Years and years ago they used to do this.

JM: But that's changed too?

GC: It's not anymore. As long as I remember- like for at least 25 years.

JM: So then it's changed in Romania.

GC: Oh yeah.

JM: In regards to the arts, I understand by talking to you previously, that the arts over there in Romania are becoming a little bit abstract. Could you tell me who is a famous artist in Romania?

GC: As I told you, this is [Ion] Țuculescu. He is one of the most outstanding painters in Romania.

JM: Is he still alive now?

GC: Oh yeah.

JM: His art then would be of the late modern generation?

GC: Yes.

JM: Is there anyone that would be considered a pioneer type of artist?

GC: Well, I left Romania 4 years ago. At that time, Țuculescu was on top.

JM: I mean, before him, before his time, was there anyone considered to be --- in the modern time?

GC: Not in the modern time.

JM: What about more of the older arts? Is there anybody you were mentioned about at school or anything?

GC: Old school like painting? That's Grigorescu, which is really good. He painted like this.

JM: Like flowers and vases and so forth.

GC: Something like present: you see it and you like it. It's not something you have to put your mind to work. That was Grigorescu. If one of these days you will be able to come over to my apartment, I can show you two original paintings of his, so you have more of an idea about his paintings. In modern art, it's just Tuculescu- and that's 1950s.

JM: Ghoerghe, today was is the most popular sport in Romania?

GC: Soccer.

JM: And that was even when you were a child too?

GC: Oh yes. That was always.

JM: Do they have any broadcasts of the games on radio?

GC: Oh yes. On the radio and on TV.

JM: On TV, do they have sometimes ballet on tv too?

GC: Oh yes.

JM: It gives the people an idea of how Romania culture carries on. I see. Also, in regards to Romania, what did the houses look like when you were a little boy? And what do they look like now? Are they about the same or have they, since the war, torn many down and built new ones?

GC: They've since been past, because during 1944-1945, Bucharest was bombed up and down. By the Germans, by the Americans, by everybody. So the city was rebuilt after that. Most of the buildings are now really modern. It's like modern architecture. Most of the city was... up and down.

JM: What about your village? Has it been rebuilt?

GC: Not too much. It wasn't too much damaged from the war. Just little houses like they used to be years and years ago. But, that region is not a perfect region for a new development.

JM: What part of Romania specifically would you say to be the culture center?

GC: I can say that's Bucharest because of the environment. And Brasov.

JM: Where is there located?

GC: That's 160 km north from Bucharest. It's in the heart of Transylvania. That's a really, really good part of culture.

JM: Are the people in Romania proud of the Romanian/Aromanian culture?

GC: They can't say it loud, but they are.

JM: I see. Were you permitted underneath the Communist regime, to travel about Romania as you wanted or did you have to get their okay to travel?

GC: No problems. You could travel throughout Romania, all over the place where you wanted to go. If you arrived safely, you had to go to the police and declare yourself like "I am here and I stay 3 days," or 4 days... So they can keep track. Not myself, but everyone.

JM: What was your occupation in Romania?

GC: I was working in an enterprise called foreign trade.

JM: Where you able to choose where you wanted to work or did they appoint you where they wanted you?

GC: After I finished high school, I didn't go to the factory or the university, so I have to go find a job. I found this job at this enterprise for foreign trade. That's because I was a little easy with a foreign language. So, the guy said we need somebody with foreign language, even if you don't speak 100% literary. That was for my export enterprise. It was dealing in textiles, materials. Import and export. I worked in an import office. After 5 years I was the head of that office. I had several people under me.

JM: Did the government keep track of what was going on?

GC: Everything is government owned. Everything that you did, you had to ask permission from the government. Like when you made a contract with somebody in the United States or Europe, they had to inspect. You had to ask the government "Give me permission to do this contract."

JM: Were you taught anything in Romanian newspapers anything about United States' culture or about the United States at all? Or did you learn from school?

GC: I learned from school. What I learned that was in the 5th and 6th grade when I learned about The International Peace Article- about the United States and those other countries....

JM: Is there many newspapers that have English, or is it mostly all in Romanian?

GC: No, everything is Romanian. If you want to read something in English, you have to buy the New York Times or Una Forte, also. Things like that. You can do it. At the school we learned about the history of the countries like the United States. You have the choice to learn the language if you want.

JM: How is the church over there in Romania compared to your church over here on Wick Avenue? Do you see any real differences? I don't mean in services. I mean in structure and culture.

GC: The service is the same. The people are more here than there, because there most of the people are afraid to go. The other thing, if you go, the priest is teaching you and telling you about God.

JM: What about the church inside in Romania? Do they have seats for people to sit or do they stand up?

GC: They have pews on the side. It's not exactly pews, its chairs you know? You sit down on the side of the church. The middle is empty.

JM: Oh, there's nothing in there?

GC: No.

JM: People stand up there then?

GC: Well most of them, they stand up. But it's different. It's not like here. The church is open every day from six o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock in the evening.

JM: Do they have services every day?

GC: They have services from 6 o'clock to 9 o'clock. I mean, the priest is there. The service, you know, getting the service and everything.

JM: Do they have usually have more than one priest?

GC: Usually they only have one priest and they have a deacon to help. Sometimes they have monks to help them with the service and other stuff. Like, I used to go to work and stop to the church, say a prayer and go to work. That's five minutes. Like just go- and go out. When I came

out from work, I was able to go into the church, say another prayer and to hear the service from the priest. It's not like here. Here you go only on Sundays. There it was every day, in my place where I was living. In 100 years there were 3 or 4 churches you could go in. They are supported by the state. Everything is paid by the state except the priests' salary.

JM: The schools you mentioned, they didn't teach anything about the Romanian dances or songs. You said learned most of that from your friends. Before you left to come here, about 4 or 5 years ago, who was teaching the younger people the traditional songs and dances? Was it still their friends and old people or is it the school?

GC: I think that was still the friends and the people around.

JM: The people just passing it from person to person?

GC: From one to another, because in the school they just tell you general. That dance, for example, came from the Turkish influence. It's a theoretical thing. They don't teach you the dance. They don't show you how to dance it. You just have to catch it from somebody else.

JM: What language did you speak in school? Romanian or Russian?

GC: Romanian. Well, you are obliged at that time, in my time, to learn Russian. So I took 8 years of that.

JM: Are there many words in Russian that are comparable to Romanian words?

GC: Not many because mostly it's a Latin language, Romanian. It sounds kind of strange, but because its surrounded by so many Slavic countries. Still it's a Latin language.

JM: Did they teach you in school, to teach you the Romanian grammar, did they started teaching you the alphabet and stuff like that?

GC: Oh yes.

JM: So, it's basically like in the United States they start off teaching you how to pronounce the vowels... ?

GC: Yes.

JM: Also, in regards to the schooling over there in Romania, was most of the schooling done in older buildings? When you came to the United States, were they mostly modern buildings or were they still the older buildings, like around World War II?

GC: The high school I was in for 8 years, it was 100 years old. It was the best high school in Romania.

JM: Did you walk? Or did they use buses?

GC: I walked because I was fortunate to live by there.

JM: Were there buses to take too?

GC: Not like here. You take your own bus, the public transportation. They don't have buses coming to pick you up.

JM: Over here, also they have what they call scholastic football, basketball games in which high schools play one another. Do high schools play one another in soccer games?

GC: Soccer games and athletics- like running, wrestling, jumping, gymnastics.

JM: So they would compete with one another?

GC: Oh yeah. Basketball also.

JM: The food that you used to eat in Romania when you were a child, did it start changing a lot as the years progressed and the Russians came over or did it stay basically the same traditional type?

GC: Basically, it was the same.

JM: Did it Westernize at all? Do they have hot dogs in Romania?

GC: Based on what I heard. I never saw it. But I heard now that they have hot dog stands in Bucharest. It wasn't at that time when I left Romania. Well, they started to have canned foods and all this stuff...

JM: Coca- cola?

GC: Yeah, Coca cola. It wasn't too much of a change, because most of the people still were sticking to the home cooking as they learned from...

JM: Ghoerghe, when you came to this country- what did you say, about 4 years ago, 5 years ago?

GC: Yes, 4 years ago.

JM: Did you see any real difference between the Romanian type of people living in the United States and the Romanian people in Romania- in the sense of culture? I know the language is different. Here the Romanian people speak English and over there they speak Romanian. But did you see any real difference in culture? You cannot say that people here have TV and people there don't, because that's not really culture. That's more economics. I mean in culture, and the type of traditional food that some of the families eat. And dances and so forth. Did you see any marked difference?

GC: Method of culture- that's a big difference.

JM: In what way?

GC: In a bad way. Because there I was able to go to the opera house. It was a 10-minute walk from my house. I was able to go there like every night practically. And the most expensive ticket there is \$1 to go and see "Bueno", whatever. In this side of the culture, food is the same- because my mother-in-law is cooking the same thing like in Romania. My wife is doing the same thing.

JM: But you mean in Romania they have places in which Romanians to go see Romanian culture whereas here they don't have places to go and see Romanian culture?

GC: How should I tell you? It's too far even if you have the chance to go see it. It's too far. It's like you have to leave something else aside and go there to see that. I'm 4 years here. I was to an opera once in Youngstown. Which, I don't blame anybody, but it's the way it is set up.

JM: What about the Romanian events? Say you would go to a Romanian picnic and see them dance. Have you noticed any real differences in that?

GC: We don't go. It's only in the villages. If you live in the town, in the city, you don't go. You go to work, you come home, watch tv, and go to sleep, and go back to work tomorrow.

JM: Gheorghe, what about the ones in the villages? Are they comparable to the Romanian events in the United States when they have it? Or are they different too?

GC: No, they started to be, in the villages, more modernized.

JM: I mean, those in the United States now. These Romanian dances that they have at picnics at Farrell or Sharon and different other places, or weddings or something like that. Are they almost like still in Romania, or are they different?

GC: Oh. Yes, No, they aren't.

JM: So, in other words they still carry some of the culture.

GC: They carry the culture and the tradition from the old country.

JM: So, you would say that a lot of the events they have that are pure Romanian are still pure Romanian? Except for some of the so-called English mixed marriages they have in this country?

GC: Oh yes.

JM: When you came to this country, did you have a hard time coping to the change of life over here? Here we speak English, over there they speak Romanian. Did you have a hard time coping?

GC: No, because I learned in English in the school.

JM: Oh, you learned it over there?

GC: Yes, I chose English there.

JM: You speak really good.

GC: Well, thank you. I just took the English course. And then in the enterprise I worked for, you know, I had to speak foreign languages. So that was for many years. It's not perfect, but you know, I try to do my best and learn every day, more and more. It was kind of difficult for me when I came here because of the dialect. That's not the Oxford English.

JM: [laughing] Yes, it's different form of grammar.

GC: [laughs] Yes.

JM: Is there anything else that you would like to add or say before we end now that you can think of?

GC: Just that Romania is a very great country. A really great country and they keep, the people there, are keeping the traditions. The feasts and everything. They keep it alive. No matter who comes and who says something else. They are keeping it. What I am glad, I'll tell you- what I'm really thrilled here in the United States because, in Romania, I was listening mostly to the American music. Now here, I hear so much Romanian music. All the places I'm going. That's a delight. It's a beautiful thing.

JM: Do they play a lot of rock and roll in Romania?

GC: Well, they started because its...

JM: They play the Beatles?

GC: Well yes.

JM: Thank you very much for your interview Gheroghe. When Professor Ernhardt listens to it, if he comes up with some questions that I forgot to ask, as I probably did- if he wants another interview with a few more questions, do you mind if I stop by again?

GC: I'd be delighted.

JM: Thank you again. Thank you very much sir.

[End of tape 38:55]