

**THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
„1 DECEMBRIE 1918”UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA  
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

**PhD thesis summary**

**THE SACRED IN THE ROMANIAN CREATION OF OPERA  
AND ORATORIO.**

**INTERDISCIPLINARY VIEW OF THE WORKS:  
„ÎN VREMEA ACEEA...” BY FR. ION POPESCU RUNCU,  
„CONSTANTIN BRÂNCOVEANU” BY SABIN DRAGOI  
AND „MEȘTERUL MANOLE” BY SIGISMUND TODUȚĂ.**

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**ALBA IULIA  
2023**

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## KEYWORDS

Oratorio, staging, sacre, opera, musical analysis, Ion Popescu-Runcu Priest, interdisciplinary view, stage.

## INTRODUCTION

I have always considered that music, during church services, has a missionary nature and is also a way through which man communicates with God, thus achieving a state of inner peace. Music has been, since ancient times, an element that has been present in rituals – vocal singing and music, in general, remain a form of expression and communication to this day.

Music is in close relation with religion, being the most appropriate way of expression, spreading, deepening and elevating, because it, amongst all arts, is the most expressive, the most full of meanings, the one that has the most powerful, the most beneficial influence, towards the human soul.<sup>1</sup> Only it has the force to enter into the mysterious depths of the soul, where the sermon meets with God.

Since ancient times and in the context of any religion, singing has been one of the forms by which divine worship is manifested. The Church's saints are of the opinion that, for all people, music is capable of a positive effect, which favours uplifting feelings in the human soul. Saint John Chrysostom considered that „nothing succeeds in elevating the soul in such a way, to wing it, to lift it above the earth, to untie it from the bonds of time (...) like a vocal melody or like an inspired song, rhythmically perfectly composed”, because „music moves the soul and raises it towards the One who created it.”<sup>2</sup> Saint Paul the Apostle considers worship music equal to spoken prayer: „I shall pray with the spirit, but I shall also pray with the mind; I shall sing with the spirit, but I shall also sing with the mind.”<sup>3</sup> He calls singing „the sword of the spirit”.<sup>4</sup> Religious music „has the same spiritual essence as the Gospels, hymns, psalms, the patericon, the books with the lives of the saints and the iconography; it is jolly for those to whom the Gospels bring joy, full of reprimands for those who feel guilt, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Domin ADAM, „Trecut, prezent și viitor în muzica bisericească românească (contribuții radiografice muzicale)” în *Altarul Reîntregirii*, Serie nouă, Anul XVIII, Nr.3, septembrie-decembrie, 2013, Nr. 3/2013, p.12

<sup>2</sup> Andreea Raluca NEAGU, *Efectele muzicii*, disponibil la <https://ziarulumina.ro/societate/religie-si-stiinta/efectele-muzicii-50484.html> (accesat la 2 aprilie 2018).

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. 14, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ef. 6, 17; Evr. 4, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Domin ADAM, „Trecut, prezent și viitor în muzica bisericească românească (contribuții radiografice muzicale)” în *Altarul Reîntregirii*, Serie nouă, Anul XVIII, Nr.3, septembrie-decembrie, 2013, Nr. 3/2013, p.12.

## **Goal and general objectives**

We might ask ourselves, during a simple reading of the title of this research endeavour, why is there a need in the field of Theology of an interdisciplinary approach of some profane works, belonging to the lyrical genre of classical music, with religious subjects or with strong sacred influences?

The answer is as simple as possible: after a long experience as a choir singer and deacon, but also as a soloist and opera director, I have come to the conclusion that opera and vocal-symphonic music, like the religious one, can have a missionary and educational nature, bringing man closer to Divinity, through its emotional power and presenting themes (sometimes inspired by reality) of a moralizing nature, which offers people reasons to reflect upon their own conditions and spiritual mood.

Many compositions from the sphere of classical music are charged with sacredness, through the use of religious texts or through the use of psaltic-type musical writings. These compositions, shown in a secular setting – philharmonic, opera, theatre or any cultural space – fulfil their role of spreading the Church's message to the public. In this way, the contribution towards the Church's mission is one not to be neglected.

Everything depends, however, on the way the show is presented on stage and, because it is a very complex genre, which entails a syncretism of the arts – music, literary text, dancing, scenography, plastic arts, acting art and light design – has a very strong impact on the audience. Unfortunately, these days, directors and scenographers, instead of “exploiting” the positive qualities of a show and of music, in particular, bring vulgarity and obscenity to the stage, not knowing how to transform the sounds so harmoniously combined by some composers into scenic actions and images that transform the entire show into an art form beneficial to the soul of the viewer.

The element of originality of this thesis shall be represented exactly by the directing of the shows, but also by the musical analyses.

Taking these aspects into account, through my research approach I wish to bring to the public's attention, firstly, the spiritual facet of classical music, its educational and missionary nature, and, secondly, the interdisciplinary approach (theological, musical and directorial) of some works with a religious subject, novel and lesser known to the general public: the two-part musical fresco “În vremea aceea” by priest Ion Popescu Runcu, the oratory „Constantin Brâncoveanu” by Sabin Drăgoi and the opera-oratorio „Meşterul Manole” by Sigismund Toduță.

The final purpose of the doctoral thesis will be to present this type of religiously inspired classical musical works (which respect the sacred aspect both in music, text, and also

during staging) as a real means of spreading the Church's message beyond Its gates and, consequently, as a means of bringing people closer to it.

### **The stage of the research**

The work contains biographies of the composers, their contributions to the musical-religious field, the musical analyzes of the works listed in the title and the proposed directions.

Of these three works selected for analysis there are numerous materials to be found regarding biographical data of the composers or the general data of the compositions, the high number of material could also be observed through the high and diverse number of footnotes from their respective chapters in this thesis or from the bibliography. On the other hand, regarding the musical analysis of these three works, the materials are non-existent, because, generally, musical analysis carried out thoroughly and punctiliously, is an approach that is only achieved as an intense exercise to understand a certain musical language. At the base of the process there stand the general procedures of analysis, derived from publications and textbooks of musical theory, harmony or polyphony.

Also, the attempts to stage these works were few, their showings being performed in a rather concert manner, not emphasizing the visual impact.

### **Research methodology**

The „sacred”, which is present in the title as a unifying part of the three chosen works, will be demonstrated through all the three interdisciplinary perspectives: the musical research will help create a stylistic profile of the composers and the works being analysed, which will highlight the meaning of these works within the theological field, musical analysis will reveal another aspect of these works, emphasising their intrinsic value and demonstrating the powerful load of religious music, which includes specific methods of the Byzantine song, and the directorial component will represent the use of research carried out on the first two aspects (theological and musical) in the service of the final product, the show itself, which, enhanced through directorial or scenographic methods, must not depart from the sacredness of the music and the libretto.

In the course of the research, we will use – for the segment of the work dedicate to biographies and contributions to the theological field of the composers chosen to be researched – various sources: from historical writings and articles, up to private archives. For the latter case, we remind of the precious personal archive belonging to Iorgu C. Steriu, which

contains valuable information about the life of the priest Ion Popescu Runcu and which was made available for this research.

As for the musical analysis of the works, the general knowledge of musical theory, harmony or polyphony, put to the service of deciphering the musical languages of the composers, will serve as pillars. In this regard, the ways of analysing the works differ, depending on the direction of the writings, in the three works there being found tonal, modal languages (of folkloric or Byzantine influence) or even modal-atonal (in the work of Sigismund Toduță). Precisely in this sense, depending on the actual requirements of the score, these guiding pillars acquire a specific coherence, which represents the originality of the thesis, which is drawn from the essence of the originality of the analyzed work. The analysis will be punctuated by musical examples, which will serve as a demonstration of certain aspects identified in the score.

As far as the segment dedicated to the direction goes, it will represent the finality of the previous steps, being, in addition to the musical analyses, the element of personal contribution. The framework for the show presentations will be chosen according to the message of the work and the possibility of creating an atmosphere as suggestive as possible, in accordance with it.

### **Limits of research**

The thesis has a very precise delimitation, narrowing the scope of research around only three works: the musical fresco *În vremea aceea* by the priest Ion Popescu Runcu, the oratorio *Constantin Brâncoveanu* by Sabin Drăgoi and the opera *Meșterul Manole* by Sigismund Toduță. However, this approach attracts towards itself the thorough study of other related aspects, such as the origin of the opera and oratorio genres or the lives of the composers and their musical activities.

Also, the need for a deeper understanding of the works being analysed leads us to offer details regarding certain important persons, such as is the case of the work *Constantin Brâncoveanu*, where there are entire pages dedicated to his reign and Martyrdom.

The legend of Manole the Craftsman gravitates around the monastery of Curtea de Argeș, therefore this aspect challenges us to inspect the history and legends surrounding this edifice.



# THE SYNTHETIC PRESENTATION OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

In the **introductory** chapter, we set out to begin documenting starting from the effects of music on the human brain, based on medical research. In part, the various functions that the multiple areas of the brain perform in receiving and interpreting the musical message, have been highlighted. Continuing from this aspect, I have highlighted the essential role music plays in the church, in maintaining The Word, supporting this information with quotes from the Holy Scripture or from various sources from religious literature. Also, I have brought fourth arguments on why music during church rituals has therapeutic effects for the brain and soul of man. Thus, this chapter has the final purpose of highlighting the beneficial role of music for the human spirit.

The desire for interdisciplinary analysis of some types of opera and oratorio works has brought with it the need of a chapter which would contain information about the origins of these musical genres. **Chapter I – Sacredness in the Romanian creation of opera and oratorio** has as a final purpose the general understanding of oratorio and opera genres and discovering the way in which they materialised in Romanian religiously influenced cultured creation.

In the first subchapter details about the origins of opera and oratorio are summarised, considering that an explanation of the inclusion of the chosen works from one of these genres is necessary in this approach. Thus, information is given regarding the definitions of the genres, the centuries in which they appear, characteristics and the main representatives which laid the foundations of opera and oratorio, through their compositions. The appearance of the opera in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Italy, was specified through the work of Jacopo Peri: the opera *Dafne* (1598). The oratorio has its origins in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, being a genre that was in close relation with the evolution of musical language within the Western church.

After the foray through the importance of these genres in the universal music, the next subchapter deals with the evolution of Romanian musical culture, so that the last subchapter narrows the area of research, focusing on composers of religious operas and oratorios from our country. Thus, here there are found short biographies and details about the creations of some important Romanian composers, such as: Paul Constantinescu, Dimitrie Cuclin, Valentin Timaru or Viorel Munteanu. Ion Popescu-Runcu, Sabin Drăgoi and Sigismund Toduță are researched separately, each in his own dedicated chapter.

**Chapter II – The priest Ion Popescu-Runcu. The musical fresco „În vremea aceea...”** has as its final goal the emphasis of the sacred aspect of the musical fresco *În vremea aceea* by Ion Popescu-Runcu from the perspective of the same three chosen interdisciplinary approaches: theological, musical and directorial. In order to better understand the later discovered depths in the musical discourse, I have considered that an important part of penetrating the meaning of his music is based on the knowledge of the composer's musical preoccupations, on his contribution in the theological field, but also on the knowledge of the path of the man Ion Popescu-Runcu.

Thus, the first subchapter deals with aspects regarding the personal life of the composer: his birth in the Runcu village in the Dâmbovița county, on December 25th in 1901, the familial environment in which he grew up and his musical training. The next subchapter described aspects relating to his pastoral activity at the Saint Sofia Church in Bulgaria, where from the year 1923 up to the year 1948 he was, in turn: conductor, deacon and priest. Although his service within the Church of Sofia was divided by many short returns to the country, we have chosen to dedicate a subchapter to his pastoral activities in Bucharest only from the moment of his definitive withdrawal from Bulgaria, in the year 1948. From this subchapter emerge deeply human attributes of the father – his cheerfulness, diligence and sincere passion for music – put in the service of restoring his spiritual life from the very foundations, which from the year 1948 have gravitated around the churches in the country.

The subchapter dedicated to his compositions includes the titles of his main works, divided into categories: liturgical, non-liturgical and profane.

The subchapter dedicated to the oratorio chosen for study begins with an introductory preamble, where the framing of the oratorio as a piece of writing, the impact caused by the modifications brought forth by composer Constantin Arvinte to the work and the brief description of the oratorio are presented.

Continuing this subchapter dedicated to the work, the analysis of the oratorio is profiled, which deals with musical aspects, such as: modulations, rhythmic changes, changes in measure or modes. These types of modifications in musical discourse have been highlighted in the thesis through musical examples taken from the score, for the ease of following the analysis, but also for the clarification of the stated information. In this way, the accuracy of interpreting the thesis' musical language used by the composer can be demonstrated in context. These uses, in the thesis, of psaltic and linear music knowledge in deciphering the musical content of the work have revealed compositional elements from both fields: with both tonal, as well as modal processes.

As for the part dedicated to directing the work, the piece of originality is integral. If, in the part dedicated to musical analysis, the foundation for identifying structure and musical direction is dictated by the modifications in music, in direction it is the text that achieves the most powerful influence.

The directorial movements and the stage setting were closely related to the textual content of the work. In this sense, choosing to stage the musical fresco in the citadel of Alba Iulia was inspired by the possibility of creating an image that is impactful for the public: the crosses present above, on the citadel's walls. The work has never before been staged in a complete performance manner (directing and scenography). In the manner presented in the thesis, the dramatic aspects of the work were punctuated by the director in order to highlight the text: the Apostles lines – “Where is our sun?” – is punctuated by a complete absence of lights on the scene, which personifies the darkness of despair. Also, during the Golgotha's Road moment, we chose to make a procession of a large cross, which will advance above the citadel's wall, up to the point of the wall which corresponds with the middle of the scene. Throughout the entire direction, the lights, character movements and the projections on the citadel walls form an entire arsenal which underlines the sacred in music and text.

**Chapter III Sabin V. Drăgoi. The „Constantin Brâncoveanu” oratorio** has the final aim of highlighting the sacred aspect of the oratorio *Constantin Brâncoveanu* by Sabin Drăgoi from the perspective of the three chosen interdisciplinary approaches: theological, musical and directorial. Following the same line of research, the first subchapters are dedicated to information about the life and work of composer Sabin Drăgoi.

The first subchapter contains details about to the composer's childhood, with an emphasis on the village spirit, which he was strongly influenced by, dedicating most of his work to it. Also, the thesis includes aspects relating to Sabin Drăgoi's musical training, following the composer's interest in the folkloric and religious fields. The next subchapter describes Sabin Drăgoi's activities in the didactic, pedagogical and publishing fields. Holding positions in musical centers, among which we mention those of director of the Timișoara Conservatory (1925-1943) or director of the Cluj-Timișoara Opera, Sabin Drăgoi was a sparkling presence in the musical world of the time. His intense activity as a conductor of the *Doina Banatului* or *Crai Nou* choir is also specified. The subchapter dedicated to his compositional activity highlights his strong calling for music inspired by folklore (such as the work *Divertisment rustic*), but also to religious writing, his three liturgies representing a harmonious oscillation between tonal and modal elements. The research part dedicated to the

life and work of Sabin Drăgoi ends with the subchapter dedicated to the awards and distinctions he received.

Although the information regarding the composer have already been in the body of the thesis, I considered that we cannot stop directly on the analysis of the *Constantin Brâncoveanu* oratorio without researching aspects of his life and reign, in order to understand his prominent position both as a ruler, as well as a man of God. The first subchapter deals with his origins from the Craiovești, Basarabești and Cantacuzino clans. The positions occupied by him from a very early age, such as vtori seneschal, vtori chancellor or steward are also mentioned. At the same time, his refusal to become lord, in 1688, followed by, in the same year, the necessity to occupy the function, being anointed as lord of Wallachia, is recorded.

The subchapter describing his contribution to the religious field contains his activities to restore and erect numerous religious building in the country.

The lord's contribution to the cultural-religious life of the country was one on multiple levels, as it is described in the subchapter regarding the Brâncovene era, him being recognized for his contribution to raising the educational status of the country, opening schools, numerous books being published in his time, including the Bible from 1688, but also developing an architectural style during his time, a style that bears his name (the Brâncovean style).

In the subchapter describing the Martyrdom of the Brâncoveni Saints, it is described how his qualities as a man and lord displeased the influential people surrounding him. Furthermore, his riches represented a great temptation for the Turks. Shortly after the letter with the nine charges was sent towards the High Gate, Brâncoveanu and his family are seized by the Turks. The episode of their Martyrdom is described in detail, with testimonies from the scene.

In the subchapter dedicated to the celebration of the Brâncovene Martyr Saints there are numerous quotations on offer, present in religious literature, about what the notions of „Saint” and „martyr” mean, information related to canonization and the troparions dedicated to them.

In the subchapter dealing with the musical analysis of the oratorio, notions belonging almost exclusively to the modal field were used, as the writing is predominantly that of Byzantine chants. In this work, some musical constants identified were the presence of muted percussion and brass, their sonorities, especially during slow tempos, suggesting the idea of precession, rhythm of steps. Some parts of the work are of an impressive symmetry, of an astonishing mathematical sense in regards to the writing of the musical discourse. That is why

I have considered that highlighting these aspects on a visual level, through the presence of tables, is absolutely necessary.

Continuing the analysis, the director's vision comes to emphasize the solemnity of this work. Unlike the other works chosen for analysis in this thesis, for this work, the composer, together with director Ion Sahighian, had in mind a sketch of the show at a visual level. In our approach, we relied on the elements suggested by them, enriching them, but, where we have considered it necessary, we argued straying from them, so that the scenic and directing framework presented to the audience to be as visually suggestive and as faithful to the text as possible. The choice of space for the setting was Mogoșoaia Palace, which is one of the most representative buildings erected by the lord Constantin Brâncoveanu. The presence of the church and guest house within the architectural ensemble helps to separate the two social categories present in the oratorio: boyars, noblewomen and monks, nuns. The projections will also make reference to the church of Saint George the New, where the relics of Saint Brâncoveanu are located. For the direction's ending, everything that means projection and artificial lighting is given up, so that only the torches of the crowd of Martyrs remain shining round and around the public.

**Chapter IV. Sigismund Toduță. The „Meșterul Manole” opera** aims to finally illustrate the sacred side of the opera *Meșterul Manole*, by Sigismund Toduță, from the perspective of all three chosen interdisciplinary approaches: theological, musical and directorial. The chapter includes details about the composer's career and musical activity, details about the history and legends of Curtea de Argeș Monastery, musical analysis – which in this case is tied to the composer's musically expressionist language and the directorial concept proposed to present the work.

In the first subchapter, the life and creation of composer Sigismund Toduță is dealt with. Starting from the moment of his birth, on May 17, 1908, in Simeria, Arad county, the research moves through his initial course in life, his musical training, as well as his fields of activity: musical teacher, assistant accompanist, pianist of consulting teacher. As in the case of Sabin Drăgoi, his musical preoccupations in the field of composition focus on religious and folkloric elements. Among his compositions, we mention *Symphonic variations on a popular theme*, *Liturgy for equal voices*, *Five Choirs* or the opera-oratorio *Meșterul Manole*.

We could not start the analysis of the work *Meșterul Manole* without bringing to the fore the edifice around which the entire work gravitates: Curtea de Argeș Monastery. Starting from the Foundation of Wallachia, whose first capital was Curtea de Argeș, our research directed us towards the person of Negru Vodă which, although his historical existence is

contested, his appearance in a legend related to Curtea de Argeş Monastery, as well as his arrival in Făgăraş assure us of his true existence.

The next important person closely related to the history of the Monastery was Neagoe Basarab, who ascended the throne of Wallachia on January 23, 1512. He intensively supported the restoration of the Curtea de Argeş Monastery, for whose architectural aspect he seems to have been largely responsible. The renovated church, which bore the patronage of the Holy Mother, was finished in three years and consecrated on August 15, 1517, but the interior murals were only finalized after the death of the ruler, who was buried right in the Curtea de Argeş Monastery. His successors continued the church's renovation, which over time was subjected to many natural degradations, as well as vandalism. These renovations were realized under the guidance of countless architects. The present aspect of the Monastery, externally and internally, is detailed in the thesis.

Moving away from the historic-real perspective from which we have beheld the edifice up to this moment, we carry out the legendary research from this point on, which will serve as the foundation for the starting point of the analysis of this work. The ballad *Monastirea Argeşului* by Vasile Alecsandri, the most widely known version of the myth of Manole the craftsman, will also be explained from the perspective of the interpretation offered by Father Dumitru Stăniloae. Also, in this subchapter we will also present the legend that links the Curtea de Argeş Monastery to ruler Neagoe Barab.

After this foray into the historical-legendary past of the Monastery, the thesis touches on the aspect of central interest in the chapter: the opera *Meşterul Manole*. Before the musical analysis, I considered it necessary to compare the libretto of the opera with the drama *Meşterul Manole* written by Lucian Blaga, on whose text the libretto is based. Also in this preamble of the musical analysis there exists an analysis of the main character's inner feelings and a description of the symbolism of some elements. At the same time, the expressionist framing of the character's commotion is mentioned, which also justifies the modern, modal-chromatic sonority of the work.

The musical analysis will precisely capture the multiple ways in which the work's expressionism manifests itself, with climaxes formed from modern sound processes, with melodic onomatopoeia, vocal writing of the sprechgesang or Sprechstimme style or frequent fluctuations of tempo and metrics, which lead the audience into an impression sound of an unreal setting. In certain moments of the work, a line in the libretto even corresponds to total metrical dissolution. However, at the end of the work, it brings back the sound of cymbals and bells, re-anchoring everything in the real and sacred plane.

The director's vision of the work starts from the frame setting, the staging location, which couldn't have been any other than the Curtea de Argeş Monastery. In this way, even the initial struggle present in the work, that of the continuous collapse of everything the craftsmen were trying to achieve, I proposed to be presented visually through a projection of the Monastery made through mapping, which will show successive collapses of the walls, on the overture of the work.

An impactful visual element are the obsessive haunting from Găman's mind, which are imagined to be made in the current direction by the ballet, with well choreographed moves. For the subsequent sacrifice to be visually suggested, during the verse "a precious human life will be built in the wall" I have chosen that the pillar by which the sacrifice will be received shall stand alone on the projection, illuminated in red. Also, another impactful element for the audience is the beginning moment of Act III, on the instrumental side, when the choir will descend into the public and whisper to the ladies and misses the words "Don't come today", an addition that we have allowed ourselves, because it comes in underlining and empathizing the musical-textual load that will follow.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research endeavor has proposed an interdisciplinary approach of some Romanian religiously inspired musical works, which are not part of the type that are widely known to the public. This thing is what precisely represented an advantage of the present thesis, which has proposed, as its final goal, through the use of directors, to be able to create a real possibility for these works to be known to the general public and, implicitly, the sacredness of their musical and textual content to represent one of the multiple ways through which the message of the Church may reach people.

In the interdisciplinary journey of the chosen works, the binder was “the sacred”: as a part of the life and concerns of the composers, as a presence in text and music and as a guiding line in the staging process. If in the first situation “the sacred” was easily identifiable through the information discovered in various sources, in the second situation, in musical analysis, it was separated from sonorities later deciphered through the knowledge of both psaltic and linear music, so that in the situation of directions it is even created: by choosing the frame of editing, by the projections of religious elements or through the director’s instructions.

In addition to the choice of works about which there is not a lot of information, the interdisciplinary perspective towards them appears as an important element of novelty, where, maybe, the greatest element of novelty and, at the same time, of originality, is occupied by the directing section.

The element which can represent a continuation of the research carried out is the effective staging of the analyzed and directorially sketched works. This approach in itself, of materializing the conception, can represent an entire study, detailed according to all the aspects that arise in the realization of the vision.

This doctoral thesis is enriched with appendices that complement the research carried out: photographs, personal documents from private archives or in personal possession and comparisons between librettos and the biblical text or, as the case may be, the text that stood at their base, which served as inspiration.

The extensive bibliography, consisting of sources (origins, dictionaries, encyclopedias, manuals), secondary literature (studies and articles) and web sources ensures that research is based on solid information, which is all the more impressive in terms of the number of works, considering that the musical analysis and the director’s part represent a large percentage or personal contributions.



Thus, the sacred present in the line of all three works was highlighted through the interdisciplinary approach of three aspects (theological, musical and directorial) applied to each work individually.

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