
THE AMATEUR ART MOVEMENT AT THE BEGINNING OF CEAUȘESCU'S REGIME. 1965-1971

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Abstract: The paper looks at the various organizational forms preceding the national festival *Cântarea României* (The Singing of Romania), i.e. choruses, folklore groups, artistic brigades, etc. In the first years of the Ceaușescu regime, the amateur art movement was not a priority to the RCP leadership. However, several legislative projects were initiated by the authorities to give financial support to trade unions' and students' artistic brigades, and to various contests and competitions for amateur artists. The year 1968 marked a turning point for the amateur artistic movement. An exacerbation of Ceaușescu's cult of personality could be noticed. Moreover, opponents to the socialist system were labeled "lunatics" and threatened to be chastised. In Bucharest, approximately 2,000 students, according to some sources, openly proclaimed their Christian beliefs on Christmas Eve, ignoring and even defying the official artistic events organized by the students' amateur artistic movement on the occasion. In addition, especially starting with the end of December 1968, measures and social and administrative structures were devised by the party and state authorities to encourage mass participation in the amateur artistic movement.

Keywords: Amateur art; Nicolae Ceaușescu; non-professional art; people's culture; communist regime.

At the beginning of Ceaușescu's regime, according to the official definition, the amateur art movement "had an important contribution to the development of the socialist conscience and the esthetic education of the masses, and to a pleasant and instructive use of leisure time."¹ Gradually, within less than a decade, the importance of this movement would be overemphasized, with culture being seen as a mass phenomenon rather than a product of the elites. Several researchers, including Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, noticed a similar ideology in the institutionalization of *Cântarea României* (The Singing of Romania), a mass phenomenon crediting

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¹ Central Historical National Archives (Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale – hereafter: ANIC), Fond Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Român – Secția de Propagandă și Agitație (hereafter: Fond CC of RCP – Propaganda and Agitation Department), file no. 3/1965, p. 18.