ROAR ENGELBERG – ROUTES TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORWEGIAN-ROMANIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS. AN INTERVIEW

Crina LEON
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași

Roar Engelberg (born 1964) is a Norwegian pan flautist, extremely fond of Romanian folk music. His performances have been highly appreciated both in the Northern and Low Countries, but also in Korea and the USA. In 2007 he was awarded the Order of Cultural Merit, in the rank of Knight, by the President of Romania, "as a sign of great appreciation for promoting Romanian culture and art and the image of our country in the Kingdom of Norway." Engelberg was instructed by the Romanian pan flute player Nicolae Pîrvu and has collaborated among others with Norway's classical guitarist Stein-Erik Olsen. He graduated from the Hilversum Conservatory in Amsterdam and since 1985 has released a large number of albums, some of them bearing Romanian names: Doina *(1990),* O pasăre străină *(2000) and* Inimă de lăutar *(2007). On 21 September 2018 he was invited to perform in Bucharest, on the occasion of the extraordinary concert dedicated to the entire career of the world-famous pan flute artist Gheorghe Zamfir.*



Photo credit: Holden Foto

BDD-A29359 © 2018 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:59:24 UTC)

CL: One hundred years of Romanian-Norwegian official diplomatic relations were celebrated in 2017, yet the cultural relations between the two countries are even older. In the 21st century, you are one of the prominent Norwegian figures involved in enhancing the bilateral cultural relations with Romania together with Arne Halvorsen, Steinar Lone, Svanhild Naterstad or Jardar Seim. How strong is your relationship with Romania?

RE: It is very strong. At times, I have the feeling that more or less I have lived mentally in Romania, even if I stay in Norway, by listening to Romanian folk music and studying it.

CL: Your early encounter with Gheorghe Zamfir's music was definitely important for your career as a pan flautist. What other Romanian musicians, except for Gheorghe Zamfir, have influenced you?

RE: It is very true. If I had not listened to Gheorghe Zamfir playing the lovely Romanian folk tune *Cântecul lui Iancu Jianu* on the Norwegian radio, I would probably never have taken up pan flute playing. But the pan flute player Nicolae Pîrvu from Craiova had an even stronger importance for my development as a pan flute player, coming on tour to Norway with the *taraf* (folk music ensemble) of Benone Damian, year after year for a longer period. I met him every time he was on tour, and actually, I went with the ensemble on tour learning and having daily lessons.

CL: How can you still promote Romanian music in Norway and what do you play?

RE: I always try to play some Romanian folk music in my concerts and tell the audience about the pan flute and especially the *nai*.

CL: What kind of cooperation did you have with Romanian musicians in the past? Do you envisage any in the future?

RE: I had a very good cooperation with the Ștefan Bucur ensemble. I arranged tours for them, they used to stay at my place during the tour, and in 1989 I made an album with them in Oslo, just before the revolution. Later, I played with Marian Alexandru, who took up the ensemble when Ștefan Bucur unfortunately died, much too young. I have made two albums with Marian Alexandru and the Ciocârlia ensemble in Bucharest. The latter was released by Electrecord.

CL: How did the Norwegian audience receive your Romanian music, especially the albums bearing Romanian names: Doina *(1990),* O pasăre străină *(2000) or* Inimă de lăutar *(2007)? Who chose the titles of these albums?*

RE: I chose the titles for the records. Maybe not typical of Romania? The audience in Norway is normally very impressed by this music, when they come to listen to it live. Then they understand it much better than if they listen to it from a CD, which seems to be a little bit confusing for most people here. "Too many notes and rapid movements..."

CL: In 2007 you were awarded the Order of Cultural Merit, in the rank of Knight, by the Romanian state. What did this distinction mean to you?

RE: It mostly meant recognition of my life-long work. To learn, to play and to promote Romanian pan flute music. So, it was a very strong personal satisfaction to receive it, and a very great inspiration to carry on with my work.

BDD-A29359 © 2018 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:59:24 UTC)

CL: I have read in a previous interview about the concert for panpipes and symphonic orchestra, composed by Constantin Arvinte especially for you. Has this concert taken place?

RE: I am sorry to say, it has not. It is very hard to get things like this happen in Norway. Maybe it could be done one day in Romania, hopefully.

CL: Are there any other Norwegian artists who play the panpipes?

RE: Yes, I do have some students who have become very good players. Nobody has made a living from it, but their skills mean that they could have, if the cultural situation in Norway were a little bit different.

CL: What does Romanian music currently mean to you and what other type of music are you playing at the present moment?

RE: Romanian music will always mean very much to me. I listen to Romanian folk music a lot, and I am overwhelmed by the new musical treasures popping up all the time. So I feel great enrichment brought to my life through this music. I play a lot of classical music and try all the time to find a new repertoire and even make my own music.

CL: Apart from playing the panpipes, you are also a painter. How do you combine these forms of art?

RE: Well, I paint, ok. But I am not at all at the same level with painting as I am as a musician. But I find great pleasure in it and I try to combine my concerts with a small exhibition. I am self-taught as a painter, learning it by watching videos on YouTube. Modern times....

CL: Thank you very much for all your efforts to promote Romanian culture in Norway throughout the years and thank you for accepting to give this interview. I believe that awareness of the existing Norwegian-Romanian cultural ties will also enhance the quality of future bilateral cooperation.

BDD-A29359 © 2018 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:59:24 UTC)