

MARTOR



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Belfast

Interview done by Bogdan Iancu

I arrived in Bucharest in 1989, when I began my faculty studies; well, it was actually the Agronomics Institute. After graduation, I specialized in naïve music criticism and public and private sound effects. I still work in the field. I've lived in Bucharest ever since. What can I say? I was lucky then, as I am lucky now, to find an escape: I lived in underground rockers' communities with all sorts of weird hippies and interesting people. That was my good luck.

We used to gather in various places: at Muzica [*prestigious music store in Bucharest*], at Mozaic, in Cișmigiu Park, and we would exchange tape cassettes, disks, and posters. The deal was, "I give you a pack of coffee on a Metallica poster" or "I give you a pair of design glasses for an Antrax poster". At the time we would listen to a lot of heavy metal: Metallica, Antrax, Led Zepelin, Sex Pistols, but I would also listen to a lot of punk. We used to go out together for a beer, as alcohol was the common element that connected us... We got into trouble with the cops... I even went to reformatory school once: I had had a punk group before 1989 which we called "Vidanj" and I played at Buzău with some friends – we had said something like, "let's get ourselves a punk group" and it was ok for a while.

When the Revolution broke out, I was in Bucharest and I also wanted to write some of that stuff on the walls. But I was afraid and I ended up writing nothing, but I went at the Dalles Hall on the evening of the 21st. Back then I was friends with Laurențiu Cătlan. His memorial plaque is still there, at the Dalles Hall; he was among the first to be mortally wounded on the street barricades. I remained there until they began driving trucks into the crowd; at that point I left together with two friends of mine because I realized that things would get ugly, dear citizens, and they would beat the crap out of us. So, I left with my mom to the countryside, at Țândărei, Ialomița. She had got on the phone as soon as she had seen those horrors on TV and she had told me, "Come home at once, if you don't want to get in serious trouble!" Ok, mamma!

I returned in January. I had spent the holidays in peace with my folks, I met childhood friends and we celebrated the Revolution in our own way. I came back to Bucharest in January. I lived at the Agronomics Institute, and then I moved to Grozăvești¹ where I would spend a lot of time doing nothing in especial, and in later years I even lived there illegally 'cause I wasn't

¹ Student hostel quarters.

entitled to a room there anymore; in 1998 I moved out of there for good.

We were a rather numerous gang there: there was Leo, Piele (*skin*), Vio, Poetu' (*the poet*), Viorel Moțoc, Alex Tomasseli, Mihai Călin, the actor, Maria Răducanu, the jazz singer. There were some honky tonks there too and we first stormed the Cecenia¹ ... at that time the pub had an earthen floor and metal tables; everything was so deliciously undignified that we felt ecstatic. Who else was there? Oh, yes, there was the Grigore-musical-ear group; these guys just popped up out of nowhere: Octav Segărceanu and Adi Chișu were mathematics students. You can bet that we spent more time at the Cecenia than reading at the library, but it was like a forum to us. That pub was like a forum. When we were dead drunk and felt like taking a walk, we were paripatetics but we usually spent our time debating things at the pub; that was our academia ... Now they call it by a more sophisticated name, the Azteca. There used to be some interesting people there. I remember a guy called Horia, a drinking pal of mine. They said that he had been a member of the Political Police or something of the kind. He was really screwed and a first-hand alcoholic who, when dead drunk, told us about his glorious deeds, as well as some macabre stories. The guy read all sorts of "fashionable" books, books on parapsychology, and once in a while he also gave us money for a drink. There was another guy, Miler, a philosophy and philology graduate and who lives in Canada now. He had a huge library in his hostel room where he would receive the chosen few who were allowed to read his books. Cioran, Eliade and Nae Ionescu were the fashionable readings back then and everybody went nuts about them ... but what I liked best was that Nemira Publishing House had printed the "Nautilus" series, as I've always been fond of sci-fi books.

The parties at Grozăvești were regular orgies.



One guy would bring the music, another would provide the amplifiers, beds would be taken out of the hostel room and brains were evicted from our skulls to make room for alcohol. We had up to 70 people at the party and we would all chip in for drink; we were like a corporation. Nobody would bother us there. The cops would show up, have a drink with us and then they would leave. They knew that they could have a word and a drink with us there. When the party was over, the room looked like the city of Dresden after

¹ A sordid pub in the Grozăvești student hostel quarters.

the bombings. Once in a while we smoked some pot from a Polish guy called Tomek. Sometimes he was so high that he wasn't afraid of anything anymore. We were like a lost poets' club. In 1996 there arrived a group of girls who were members of Gregorian Bivolaru's Yoga Movement and who would have like us to become members too, but they ended up drinking with us ...

Life at Grozăvești was fabulous, a real tribal life. Whenever Leo cooked, you could smell the delicious smell all through the corridor. We would celebrate the day of the satisfied tongue, when we would eat like pigs. We had hot water at the showers all the time, and also sex ... I remember a story about a guy I had met in a pub, at the Butucei. The bar was ours, the guys in the tribe. The space belonged to the University and a guy called Radu Cartianu, the brother of the chap from Timpuri Noi, had rented it. Sometime in the summer of 1996 we all lived in the bar because we hadn't solved the accommodation problem yet. The whole thing was utterly demented; we even had a TV set there and we would all gather up to watch films; when people came in for a coffee, you could hear voices say, "Take your God-damned leg off my mattress, if you don't want trouble". And it was in the summer of 1996 that a guy, George Sfârșeală from Buzău, a painter, arrived. He was pretty talented and he just hanged around the Butucei; he picked up chicks with his painting and everything. From painting to sex there was only one small step. As he didn't have a room of his own and we, the merry urban tribe, were already crammed up in ours, where could he go? He usually took the girls to the showers. One evening he picked up a girl and off to the showers they went; 20 minutes later he showed up with blood on his face: "man, I slipped on the tiles at the showers and bumped my head on the glass walls! Well, we eventually took him to the hospital and it all ended well.

We were the Grozăvești nightmare for years on end. I lived in the D wings for four years.

Lady Viorica, the building administrator, gave me a room every year 'cause she had taken a fancy at me, and she would change it later so that I wouldn't get caught. At the time I was working at Tele7 TV station, at 2M+, at the *Național Daily*, the *Cotidianul Daily*, and at Mediafax news agency. The guys from the League also helped me get a room at the hostel. I often went with them, as I was pretty close to the student high circles: Marian Munteanu, Roncea, and The Movement for Romania ... I had my moments of "insanity". Cioran, Eliade and others like them also had their moments of "insanity", right? Why shouldn't I go crazy with Marian Munteanu's Movement for Romania? All intellectuals go through their moments of crisis.

The "Cross March" was organized in 1992. There was a powerful movement amongst students at the time demanding closer relationships with Basarabia, and an integration of the inhabitants of the province in the "Romanian cultural space"; that was when I met and befriended a lot of people from Basarabia. At Lent, a group of students left Chișinău on foot and they were met at the border by a numerous group of "martyrs" – I had remained in Bucharest because I was busy – among whom there was Rafael Udriște, Sorin Popescu and Romeo Moșoiu; they were the great "leaders". They proceeded on foot on a course from Iași to Bucharest. They brought a cross into the University Square; they went to the Patriarchy and attended the religious service; Teoctist himself, the Patriarch of Romania, came and gave them his blessing. They were all busy doing all these things. Strikes were the only occasion which still brought us together.

I hadn't been a personal witness to all these events. In 1990, when the events in University Square took place, I had heard of Marian Munteanu but I hadn't met him personally; I played some small part in the street riots 'cause I was somehow a street-meeting addict, a "punk". They had camped in front of the National Theatre but I can't remember very well. Frankly, at the time I was more interested in all

sorts of books I had always wanted and which I was finally able to find in bookshops. I can't say that I'm a very good observer even now. I used to hang around with the punkers at Piața Romana (*The Roman Square*) and The Museum of Romanian Literature. I once heard Pitiș say that, as he walked in the streets of London, he wasn't amazed to see a punker wearing their weird clothes and with a hair crest on his head in the middle of a discussion with a very serious businessman. I have always wanted to see such a thing going on in our streets too, so that I could feel the same sense of normality.

I would hang around in clubs too. There was Club A, then the one at the Faculty of Letters where I saw one of the last concerts performed by Roata – the owner of this club was Giuseppe, the guy who also owns the Surmont stores in Bucharest –, but I generally didn't have much time for these things: I was busy doing something a little more lucrative, namely sell tape cassettes in Piața Romană. I was in a fantastic punkers' gang with other weirdoes; I've even kept in touch with some of them. We would make handsome money from the selling of tape cassettes and records. In 1991 a tape cassette was sold for 1000 lei, and in 1993 it was already worth 3000 of which we would get about a half. They cost 1500; there were some records registered under license in Russia and there were others produced by a guy, Andrei Tropilov. He was a painter from Sankt Petersburg who had opened a record store and a studio where he also did some recordings; he imported records under license and can you imagine what he would do next? He would modify the cover: the record, the music as such, would remain intact, and he would only modify the record covers and then he would sell them. Now they are valued at 500 euros each. With us, at Piața Romană, you could find anything you wanted. It was five or six of us. We found out that a guy had I don't know what

albums, we went at his place and made copies. That's what the 90s were to me. We would give the cops some of the profit or a beer; they were really tolerant ...

That was the beginning of the 90s: music, the possibility to look for anything and find anything you wanted and the knowledge that there were places in Bucharest where you could go to buy tape cassettes and records. CDs were still very expensive; you couldn't even consider buying them. The area between Piața Romană and University Square was the most sought for in Bucharest. For instance, Leo, a chap from our gang, sold tape cassettes and records at the University. There were people who would sell their stuff door to door at student hostels. They were very well connected guys who were supplied with tape cassettes which record companies from abroad would have destroyed and consequently, you could find some very interesting stuff with these guys. They sold cheap anyway. I would also go to festivals, such as Skip where I saw some great groups: Paradise Lost, Iron Maiden and so on. In 1994, as I hadn't got a ticket, I simply jumped over the fence and barely avoided being clubbed by the cops. I sold them some idiotic excuse; I used to have long hair and a gendarme asked when I had washed it last. I answered that it wasn't longer than that very morning because I wanted to go to the concert. He said, "I don't buy it." I said, "Go ahead and smell me." Then he asked, "Well, it's very nice that you washed your hair, but why don't have a ticket?" That was a great series of concerts. The concert performed by Timpuri Noi, for instance, it was after they had released that album with the picture of a child's head on the cover – it was a picture of Ion Rațiu actually. Then they went on to release an unplugged record of the concert at Ion Creanga Children's Theatre. There were also the concerts at Tei where you always had nasty scuf-

fles between rockers and punkers. The 90s were marked by the grudge that only here, in Romania, could be felt.

I remember that one year, right before April, there had appeared some posters announcing a Pink Floyd concert at Bucharest. The city was about to burst with excitement when they found out that the concert was actually a joke on Fool's Day. In the winter of 1996 I went to a concert at Preoteasa¹ and I was amazed at the launching concert for Domnișoara Pogany (*Miss Pogany*). In Grozăvești there had been only one big concert before the student strikes in 1995: the group in question was that of Grigore-musical-ear; they were decent enough to be taken for gigs abroad actually. They even released an album and they played at ProFM and 2M+ radio stations. I worked there too, at 2M+ radio station, when they were located in Victoria Square. There was a guy there, a certain Boby Torok, a Hungarian who had spent some time in America where he had been a member of some white supremacy groups. His show was a perpetual subject for scandal: for instance, he would

ask on air, "What on earth shall we do with our politicians?" And he also provided solutions: assassins on motorcycles as they had in Colombia.

Oh, let me tell you how I got my nickname: Gibson had just released his "Braveheart" and they said I looked exactly like one of the guys in the film, so they called me Braveheart. After a night of heavy drinking, one of the guys missed the name and pronounced it Belfast. That's how I got stuck with Belfast.

Let's go back to Grozăvești. We started leaving the place beginning with 1998. We couldn't make it there. We would keep going back there for a while and the last party was in December 2002. It was Leo's birthday. The main core of our gang was made of 10-15 guys but the rest kept changing. If we were to talk about the experiences each and every one of us went through, you'd get a volume thicker than the Encyclopaedia Britannica ...

Belfast

Translated by Alina Popescu

