

THE SENESCU FAMILY ORCHESTRA: THEIR MUSICAL PATH FROM MOLDAVIA TO AMERICA

by Paul Gifford

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In the late nineteenth century new opportunities arose for klezmerim in Moldavia and Bucovina. Jews had migrated from Galicia and Russian-occupied Poland in large numbers to this region during the latter part of the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth centuries. Although they lacked civil rights until 1918, authorities tolerated them for their activity in the economy, having replaced the Greek merchants that were expelled following anti-Greek and anti-Ottoman riots in 1821. Migration gradually increased the proportion of Jews living in towns like Iași, Bacău, Galați, and elsewhere, especially in northern Moldavia. In Botoșani, the home of the family which is the subject of this study, Jews comprised 51% of the population in 1899.¹ Historians of Romanian Jewry describe Jewish culture in that city, in comparison with that in Bucharest and Transylvania, as more traditional, largely Yiddish-speaking, with a strong Hasidic presence. Yet we will show, by the example of the Senescu family, that some Jewish klezmerim in Botoșani were acculturating to a Romanian identity by the 1880s and that other Jewish musicians sought a middle ground to perform in an exotic but non-Jewish context.

A *catagrafia* (fiscal census) taken in 1845 in Botoșani lists seven Jewish residents who were identified as musicians, along with one *pelivan* (a badkhn, or wedding jester). The record gives their names and, remarkably, their instruments:²

Leizer sin Buium	Clarnetar [clarinetist]
Iosip sin Moisa	Scripcar [fiddler]
Herșcu sin Iosip	Scripcar [fiddler]
Simha sin Froim	Țambalar [tsimbl]
Froim sin Bercu	Palivan [badkhn]

1. Florea Ioncioaia, "Foreigners in Town: Urban Immigration and Local Attitudes in the Romanian Principalities in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Ulrike Freitag et al., eds., *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2011), 54-9; *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, s.v. "Botoșani," at <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Botosani>.

2. *Catagrafia*, 1845, *Serviciul Județean Botoșani al Arhivelor Naționale*, f. 277, provided by Sorin Goldenberg. Jews in Botoșani used the Slavic patronymic sin and did not adopt surnames until the twentieth century or emigration. Using the same source, Ițic Kara-Șvarț finds four fiddlers, four clarinetists, four bassists, and three badkhnim in Botoșani. See I. Kara, "Lăutari evrei din Moldova," *Revista Cultului Mozaic* 19, no. 320, 15 Apr. 1974.

Zalman sin Haim Leib	Țambalar [tsimbl]
Alter sin Strul	Bas [bass]
Iancu sin Ioina	Scripcar [fiddler]

These men were not the only klezmerim in Botoșani, but perhaps the fact that they were listed together indicates some association. As in Iași, Botoșani klezmerim were probably members of a guild headed by a *staroste* (guildmaster). Their instruments contrasted from those used by Rom lăutari in that city. Dumitru Lavric describes a guild of lăutari that was established in 1830 and consisted of *scripcari* [fiddlers], *cobzari* [cobza players], *doboșari* [drummers], *muscalagii* [players of the panpipes, derived from the Ottoman miskal], and *dairagii* [tambourine players].³ These musicians entertained at lavish feasts of local boyars, receiving substantial payment for their efforts, as well as for common people at taverns, weddings, and fairs. Certain lăutar dynasties developed in Botoșani, including those of the Paraschiv and Filip families. Neculai Filip (1856-1918) enjoyed a career which took him to Russia, Italy, and elsewhere in Europe.⁴

We will focus on one of the klezmerim in the 1845 list: Alter sin Strul. Born about 1810,⁵ he may have played, in addition to the bass, as mentioned in that list, the other instruments used by local klezmerim as well. In a document from 1874, he is described as a *clanetariu* [clarinetist].⁶ Altar (as the patronymic was usually written) and his wife Paia (known as “Pauline” after her emigration to the United States in 1907) had a number of children born between about 1850 and 1865. All their sons became musicians and a daughter married one as well. These children form the original backbone of the orchestra, and it is important to identify them correctly.

The eldest son, Strul (or Srul), born about 1853, whose “surname” remained “sin Altar,” moved to Braila and then Galați, in southern Moldavia, until he and his wife emigrated to the United States in 1914, intending to move to Chicago.⁷ He accompanied his brothers on their first trip to America, but returned and did not participate in the family orchestra. As the eldest son, he may have played the clarinet.

Sloim, known as “Iwan/Ivan,” and later in the United States as Solomon and Sam, was born about 1859. He, with his brothers, took the surname “Senescu” before 1895 and played the bass viol as well as the violin. In some photographs he wears a sash that identifies himself “Iwan Senescu, Dir.” His wife Tauba (Toby) and their two daughters, Ernestine (cello) and Charlotte (violin) played in the orchestra.

Marcu (“Mitică,” or “Matico,” as spelled by his descendants), born about 1861, played the panpipes and cello. His daughter Rosa played the violin.

Ițic, born about 1863, was a bachelor and immigrated to the United States with his family. Nothing further is known of him, but he seems to be the dancer in the photograph with his nieces Ernestine, Charlotte, and Rosa (Fig. 4).

Jonize (perhaps a German spelling of the Romanian Ionița, but his original Jewish name is unknown), born about 1865, played the violin.

Their sister Meriam married, in 1874, Moise sin Mochi, a musician. He immigrated to America, became Moses or Morris Goldenberg, later Goldberg. Their eldest child, Max Goldenberg, later Senescu, born about 1875, played clarinet and violin with the Senescus. Their son-in-law, Morris Wexler, played the cello.

Early Years In Europe

For the early years of the Senescus we must rely on inferences from a handful of written records. As

3 Dumitru Lavric, “Vestiți lăutari din Moldova (III),” *Luceafarul*, 12 Jul 2011, <https://luceafarul.net/vestiti-lautari-din-moldova-iii>.

4 Lavric, “Vestiți lăutari din Moldova (III).”

5 Ages must be estimated with caution. He was described as seventy in 1880, fifty-seven in 1870, and sixty-five in 1874, in his children's marriage certificates.

6 Marriage certificate, Registru Starii Civile, 1874, no. 165, Serviciul Județean Botoșani al Arhivelor Naționale, courtesy of Sorin Goldenberg.

7 New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957, Ancestry.com.

Altar's sons grew up in the 1860s and 1870s, we can assume they followed him to play at Jewish weddings and other festivities. They probably all learned the clarinet, violin, bass, and dulcimer (ȕambal, tsimbl), all of which appear in their publicity photographs, but clearly some specialized on certain instruments. The last birth record recorded in Botoșani of children born to any of Altar's sons shows that Marcu's daughter Rifca (later Rosa) was born there in 1887 at the parents' home on Stradă Țiganimi (Gypsies' Street). At this point, at least according to places of birth claimed for other grandchildren born between 1886 and 1891, brothers Sloim, Marcu and perhaps Strul, Iȕic, and Jonize left Botoșani for Bucharest.

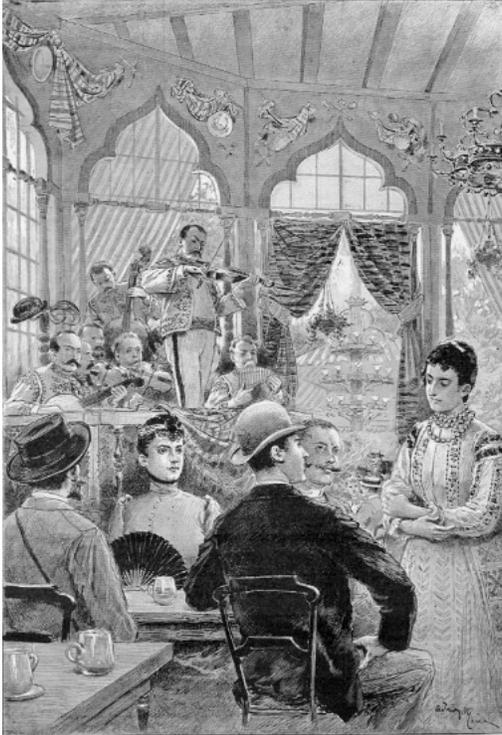


Figure 1: Anghelus Dinicu playing panpipes with ensemble inside restaurant, Exposition Universelle (Paris, 1889.)



Figure 2: Sava Padureanu and orchestra playing outside restaurant, Exposition Universelle (Paris, 1889.)

We cannot be certain about what drew them to the capital. The brothers could have earned an income by playing at Jewish weddings. Perhaps Jonize studied at the conservatory, although this is difficult to determine with certainty. We do know that Marcu played the panpipes and probably learned it in Botoșani, as it was used by local *lăutari* there. Whatever the reasons for moving to Bucharest, including opportunities to learn a wider repertoire there, an event in a distant capital created a new demand for the instrument. This was timely and fortuitous for Marcu and his family.

The Romanian pavilion at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris featured a restaurant with two Romanian ensembles, one playing inside and the other outside, led by Angheluș Dinicu and Sava Pădureanu respectively. The instrument most noticed, according to Cosmin Minea, was the panpipes. Dinicu's composition, *Ciocărlia* [The Lark], still widely played today, became a hit of sorts. The Romanian Gypsy orchestras "overshadowed" the Hungarian Gypsy orchestras at the fair. Those from Hungary created a sensation at the earlier Exposition in 1867 but now had lost some of their novelty.⁸ The popularity of these costumed musicians now created a new demand in at tourist-oriented expositions, amusement parks, and restaurants.

The Senescu brothers, now living in Bucharest, took their first major engagement only two years later, at the Allgemeyne Landesausstellung or Landes-Jubiläums Ausstellung, held in Prague, then a city in the Austro-

⁸ Birth certificate, Registru Starei Civile, Nascuți, 1887, no. 1177, Serviciul Județean Botoșani al Arhivelor Naționale, courtesy of Sorin Goldenberg.

⁸ Cosmin Minea, "Hungarian and Romanian Gypsy Music at the 19th Century Parisian World Exhibitions," term paper at https://www.academia.edu/7196545/Hungarian_and_Romanian_Gypsy_Music_at_the_19th_Century_Parisian_World_Exhibitions_Term_Paper_CEU_2014_

Hungarian Empire, from May 15 to October 18, 1891.⁹ Details of this appearance are not known, but within a year, four of the brothers were part of an eleven- or twelve-piece group that signed a contract to play in New York.

The Eden Musée, a popular entertainment center on 23rd Street in New York City, had featured Hungarian Gypsy orchestras regularly since its opening in 1884. Groups were contracted for periods of six months or so and brought from Europe. Lajos Munczi's orchestra, who had appeared there several times, apparently went on strike and the Eden Musée's management signed a Romanian group essentially to break the strike. Eleven or twelve musicians left Hamburg on the S.S. Normannia and arrived in New York on 14 May 1892. By the time the group reached New York, however, the Hungarians had settled their dispute putting the Romanians out of work.¹⁰

Passages

The ship's passenger list gives us specific information about the Romanian group's members. Eleven Romanian musicians are listed, including four Senescu brothers (still using the traditional patronymic "sin Alter"): Strul (40); Sloim (36), Marcus (32), and Ițic (29). Other musicians had Christian names and were undoubtedly Rom lăutari from Bucharest: John Stan (32); Ghița Stoican (26), Mitică Rădulescu (35), and Andrei Drăgan (54), and a German, Hermann Palm (18) from Breslau.¹¹ A newspaper story described how "Martin Sanalta" (i.e., Marcu sin Alter) called at Ellis Island, applying to be sent back to Europe as contract laborers, but the Treasury Department had ruled that musicians were to be treated as artists, not as contract laborers, and would have to pay their own return fare. It also mentioned that the group of twelve included one woman (perhaps a singer) and that five of the musicians were satisfied to remain in the U.S.¹² What the Senescu brothers did after being stranded in New York City is uncertain. Marcu returned to Europe by 1895 or earlier; his son George was born in Breslau, Germany, on January 12, 1896. Ițic may have stayed in the U.S. for four more years, perhaps until 1895.¹³ Jonize married Clara Schott, a musician, in New York City in 1897 and signed an oath swearing allegiance to the United States,¹⁴ but soon returned to Europe. Strul returned to Romania and lived in Brăilă and Galați.

The Senescu family orchestra's heyday followed. The exact personnel seems to have varied according to season or tour. Existing postcards, which they must have sold at their appearances, seem to date from around 1898 to 1903 and show nine or ten musicians in somewhat varying groups. The basic group seems to have consisted of brothers Sloim (Ivan) and Marcu (Mitică), sometimes with an unidentified male violinist or with Jonize (violin). In 1895, a Leipzig newspaper called it the "Romanian Ladies' Band" under the direction of Iwan Senescu.¹⁵ By that time, Sloim's wife Tauba had joined (playing tambourine or drums), as well as with the brothers' nephew, Max Goldenberg on clarinet or violin, and Sloim's daughters Ernestine on cello and Charlotte on violin and Marcu's daughter Rosa on the violin.

The țambal appears consistently by itself in the photographs, as if it were played on occasion by one of the brothers who doubled on it. This instrument, long part of Jewish ensembles in Eastern Europe, had only been recently introduced to Romanian music, probably through the same method that we may presume the Senescus had learned to play the panpipes—proximity, experimentation, borrowing, and cooperation. We have noted that Marcu lived in Botoșani's Gypsy quarter (*țiganie*), which must have created such opportunities. Unfortunately, we can only guess how it might have been used in the ensemble, whether as part of the earlier Jewish instrumental

⁹ *The Evening Statesman* (Walla Walla, Wash.), 16 July 1907, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, 26 June 1892, p. 36

¹¹ New York, Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957, at Ancestry.com. Viorel Cosma, *Lăutarii de ieri și azi* (București: Editura Style, 1996), 130, mentions Rădulescu as one of the soloists of Romanian popular music who were members of the 35-piece multi-ethnic orchestra led by George N. Ochiaiubi after his return to Romania from St. Petersburg in the late 1890s.

¹² *New York Times*, 18 June 1892, p. 8; *Chicago Tribune*, 26 June 1892, p. 36.

¹³ When he immigrated in 1903, he reported that he had lived in the United States from 1898 to 1902, which is not possible, because he was in Europe touring with the family during those years.

¹⁴ New York, New York, Extracted Marriage Index, 1866-1937, Ancestry.com; New York, State and Federal Naturalization Records, 1794-1943, at Ancestry.com. His given name is transcribed as "Fanize [sic]."

¹⁵ *Leipziger Tageblatt*, 31 May 1895.

ensemble (clarinet, violin, țambal, bass) or as accompaniment to the panpipes.

European Appearances

We can reconstruct a partial list of appearances and awards from newspaper advertisements and stories. Jonize took a prize at the Gewerbeausstellung in Berlin (1896). The family orchestra played at the Kursaal and Castan's Panopticum, in Berlin; the Krystall-Palast, in Leipzig; the Welt Restaurant, in Dresden; Williams' Hall, Hamburg; Café Monaco, Brussels; the Oostende Pier; Krestovsky sat, an island amusement park near St. Petersburg; and Restauracja "Pod Nową Gwiazdą" in Warsaw.¹⁶ Certainly this is merely a partial list, as we can also find them in Haarlem and Sweden and Denmark. Jonize's wayward son Samuel, fifteen, having made his way from Washington state to Washington, D.C., and before Juvenile Court for having destroyed another boy's bicycle, impressed a reporter with stories of his travels. His parents divorced when he was two and his father took him on his tours, which included Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and England.¹⁷



Figure 3: Senescu Orchestra: Charlotte (in foreground, with violin), Ernestine (cello), unidentified (tambourine), Sloim/Iwan (bass), Marcu /Mitică (muscal), Max (violin), Rosa (violin), Tauba, Ițic. Courtesy of Beverly Churchill.

European reviews of the orchestra are scarce, and it likely did not make recordings. Clearly by 1892 the four brothers were playing Romanian music with *lăutari*, and they must have done so by ear. By 1895 the girls of the younger generation started to take center stage, and they clearly were taught according to Western European musical principles. Thus we can imagine a repertoire of operatic themes, popular waltzes, marches, and the like, arranged for two violins, cello, bass, clarinet, drum and tambourine, interspersed with muscal (panpipes) and violin solos, and those instruments, accompanied by țambal, playing for dancers on stage. Whether any specific Jewish music was included seems doubtful, unless perhaps conceived as "Romanian." Surviving programs show that Sava Pădureanu's orchestra, which the Senescu orchestra must have emulated, included polkas, waltzes, romances, and operatic medleys (as a Russian reviewer described when Pădureanu's ten-piece group played at Krestovsky sat, where the Senescus also played).¹⁸

One program from a concert the Senescus were planning in Haarlem (the Netherlands) in 1895 appeared in the local newspaper:¹⁹

¹⁶ *The Evening Statesman* (Walla Walla, Wash.), 16 July 1907, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Washington Evening Star*, 24 July 1908, p. 18.

¹⁸ *Novoe Vremia*, 15 July 1894, in Viorel Cosma, *Lăutarii de Ieri și Azi* ([București: Editura Style, 1996], 109.

¹⁹ *Haarlem's Dagblad*, 9 Oct. 1895.

Souvenir d'Odessa.....	Ocki Albi
Les Patineurs Valse.....	Waldteufel
Leichte Cavallerie, Ouverture.....	Suppé
Pizzicato Polka.....	Ink
Cavatine uit "le Barbier de Seville"	Rossini (to be selected by Mr. Theodor Georgescu)
Weltstreit.....	Schreiner
Ungarische variationen (piston solo).....	(to be selected by Mr. Mitica Senescu)
Pluie d'or, Valse.....	Waldteufel
Rumanier Romance (violin).....	(to be selected by Mr. Ivan Senescu)
Siotgalop	

Repertoire and Reviews

Notable additions to the "light" music standards by Waldteufel and others and the operatic selections are urban *lăutar* composition by Ochi-Albi, the "Hungarian variations" played by Mitica, and the "Romanier Romance" offered as a violin solo by Ivan Senescu. The "piston" solo must be the panpipes. These two items indicate that the orchestra was able to play by ear, thus preserving its origins in klezmer and *lăutar* music.

A postcard showing Charlotte and Rosa in women's, and Ernestine and probably Ițiç in men's peasant costumes (as opposed to the stylized *lăutar* costumes worn by the performers) indicates that traditional Romanian dancing formed part of their performances (see Fig. 4).

Whatever the orchestra may have played, it certainly was successful. Already familiar to the public in Leipzig in 1899, a reporter there remarked:²⁰

The Senescu Romanian band in the Diamantschäuke can speak of great success. Their performances will satisfy every music lover and connoisseur. Director Senescu is not unknown in Leipzig, but since his last visit he has artistically perfected a band that can be considered a model.

A reviewer in Zurich wrote in 1902:²¹

Pretty much all the concerts that the Senescu Romanian band holds in the local area are well attended. The players, six women and five men, are artists and their achievements in individual and ensemble playing are outstanding. In individual numbers, a brilliant technique in mastering the instruments and an admirable elegance in playing emerge. The appearance in the national costume makes for a picturesque backdrop.

Emigration To America

When the eighteen-member family group sailed to America, they traveled together in second-class cabins. They were far from poverty-stricken: Sloim's family brought \$400, Marcu's \$120, with Joneze and Ițiç \$40. Clearly they had been enjoying a degree of financial success. It is possible that they felt that anti-Semitism limited their future in Europe. Certainly that must have been the case with Russia, where until 1917 many Romanian *lăutari* did very well playing in restaurants for aristocratic audiences. The Senescus must have been confident that they could continue touring in America.

Booking passage on the S.S. *Auguste Victoria*, Sloma Senescu (44), his wife Toni (39), daughters Ernestine (20), Charlotte (16), son Herman (19), and daughter Sale (11); Marcus Senescu (42), his wife Betti (36), daughters Rosa (15), Marie (10), and Helene (2), and sons Joni (11) and Georg (7); Jonize Senescu (41) and his son Samuel (11); Ițiç Senescu (39); and the brothers' nephew Max Goldenberg (28) and his wife Wally Rösner (26) (a German), left Hamburg on

²⁰ *Leipziger Tageblatt*, 5 Oct. 1899.

²¹ *Chronik der Stadt Zürich*, no. 31, 2 August 1902.



Figure 4. The “Senescu Roumanian Quartet” as dancers. Ernestine, Rosa, Charlotte, ? Itic. Courtesy of Beverly Churchill.

Figure 5. Photograph taken in Aalborg, Denmark. From top: Marcu/Mitică (panpipes), unknown (tambourine), Bertha, Rosa (violin), Sloim/Ivan (bass), Ernestine (cello), ? Tauba (violin), ? Charlotte, unknown (violin), Max (clarinet). Courtesy of Beverly Churchill.



4 June 1903, transferred to S.S. *Auguste Victoria* at Cuxhaven, and arrived safely at New York on 11 June 1903. Most of them named Itzig Schwartz, of 24 Rivington Street, New York (a brother-in-law) as their contact in the United States.²²

Their first New York engagement, at Pabst’s Harlem Casino, on 125th Street lasted until the end of 1903. They then moved to Chicago, where they played at the Drexel Café and Auditorium, and then in Rothschild and Company’s restaurant, for 14 months.²³ In October, 1904, in Chicago, Ernestine married Michael Svedrofsky, a Russian-Jewish violinist and Auer pupil who was concertmaster with the Russian Symphony Orchestra of New York and later concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera.²⁴ She lived most of her life in New York City, dying in 1964, and did not play professionally after her marriage. Sometime in 1905, however, the family orchestra experienced its first breakup. By May, most of the family were playing in Spokane,

²² New York, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1957, and Hamburg Emigration Index, at Ancestry.com. The name was transcribed for the index as “Senesen.”

²³ *The Evening Statesman* (Walla Walla, Wash.), 16 July 1907, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, 3 Jan 1904, 17 Jan 1904, 2 Aug. 1904

²⁴ Cook County, Illinois, Marriages Index, 1871-1920, at Ancestry.com; “Modest Altschuler and the Creation of the Russian Symphony of New York” at https://www.stokowski.org/Principal_Musicians_Russian_Symphony_of_NY.htm Svedrofsky was perhaps the first pupil of Leopold Auer to emigrate to the U.S.



Figure 6. Senescu Orchestra about the time of their emigration, 1903. Seated, left to right: Charlotte (violin), Marcu (Mitică) (panpipes), unknown (drums), Ernestine (cello). Standing, left to right: Sloim (Iwan) (bass), Tauba, Max Goldenberg/Senescu (clarinet), Rosa (violin), Bertha, Jonize (violin).

Figure 7. The Royal Hungarian Orchestra, led by Louis Lipski (far left), who married Charlotte Senescu (ca.1909).



Washington, under the name “Jonize Senescu’s Royal Roumanian Orchestra,” with Rosa as soloist.²⁵

In Chicago With The Royal Hungarians

Charlotte and her father Sloim, however, remained in Chicago and joined the “Royal Hungarian Orchestra,” led by Louis Lipski. Father and daughter toured with them from 1905 to 1907. This group obviously emulated Hungarian Gypsy orchestras, with Hussar costumes and a well-known, Hungarian Gypsy cimbalom player, Karoly Horvath, but its repertoire ran to light classics rather than Hungarian. Based in Chicago, it was managed by the Redpath Lyceum Bureau and toured the Chautauqua circuit in smaller Midwestern cities. A reviewer for the newspaper in Port Huron, Michigan, praised Charlotte Senescu, commenting that “her mastery of the instrument was far above the average of professional violinists.” The same writer noted that “M.” Goldberg was the cello soloist.²⁶ Goldberg, as mentioned above, may have been Sloim’s brother-in-law. The 1910 census shows him in Chica-

²⁵ *Spokane Chronicle*, 1 May 1905.

²⁶ Port Huron (Mich.) *Times Herald*, 9 Dec. 1905.



Figure 8: The Senescu Orchestra on the West Coast, 1905: Unknown, but perhaps Ițic (bass), unknown (cello), Rosa (violin), unknown, Marie (?) (panpipes), unknown (flute), Jonize (violin), unknown (drums). Courtesy of Beverly Churchill.

go, as Morris Goldenberg, a musician, although most of his children later used the surname Goldberg.²⁷ Altar's widow Paia, listed as "Paulina," age 99, had immigrated in 1907 and in 1910 was living with Goldenberg. The reviewer for the Dubuque [Iowa] Daily Times, becoming a fan of the orchestra, noticed on 18 August 1906 "the warm glances that have passed between" Lipski and Charlotte Senescu, and predicted their marriage, which occurred in Chicago on 26 February 1907.²⁸ They had one child before Lipski died in 1914. Charlotte then went through two unsuccessful marriages before marrying Frederick C. Leemann. She died in 1972 in Seal Beach, California. The Royal Hungarian Orchestra continued to tour under different managers, one being its flautist, Sam Schilkret, a Galicia-born klezmer. Charlotte and her father reverted to the Romanian orchestra format for an engagement at the Wayne Hotel in Detroit in 1907. In response to a question about a local controversy over banning ragtime music, she offered that her orchestra "cannot cut off entirely the rag time concerts from the park concerts this summer."²⁹

Westward Ho!

Meanwhile, perhaps because of a fight or because they realized the inherent difficulties involved in maintaining a large family orchestra, Marcu (Mitică) and Jonize, with their wives and children and their nephew Max Goldenberg (later Senescu), set out for Spokane, Washington. The local newspaper announced on 1 May 1905 that Jonize Senescu's Royal Roumanian Orchestra with violin soloist Rosa Senescu would play a concert at the Hotel Spokane.³⁰ The group, advertised as the Royal Roumanian Orchestra, consisting of Rosa, lead violin, Jonize Senescu, violin; Marie Senescu, panpipes; possibly Ițic Senescu, bass, with hired flute, cello, drums, and possibly a violin, would begin playing regularly at the Louvre Restaurant in San Francisco on 21 October (see Fig. 8). While in San Francisco, Rosa and "E. Senescu" performed at two programs sponsored by the American Hebrew Patriotic League, Rosa playing "Scene de Ballet" by Charles Beriot and E. Senescu the Twelfth Hungarian Rhapsody by Brahms on piano.³¹

The musicians returned to Spokane and by 25 February 1908 were playing at the Silver Grill in a four-piece grouping, including Rosa, Jonize (violins), Max (clarinet), and Marcu Senescu (cello).³² At the end of March "Senescu's Original Roumanian Orchestra" began an engagement at the Louvre Rathskeller in Salt Lake City.

²⁷ 1910 census, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, enumeration district 833, sheet 17B, family no. 300.

²⁸ Cook County, Illinois, Marriages Index, 1871-1920, at Ancestry.com.

²⁹ *Detroit Free Press*, 18 June 1907.

³⁰ *Spokane Chronicle*, 1 May 1905.

³¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 Nov. 1905, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 Dec. 1905. It is uncertain who E. Senescu was.

³² *Spokane Chronicle*, 25 Feb 1908



Figure 9. Advertisement for the Senescu Roumanian Orchestra (*Seattle Star*, 6 October 1908).

Unfortunately, Rosa became ill and unable to play, and the cafe management refused to hire a replacement for the star, noting that the Senescus had “proven the most popular orchestra ever heard in this city.” This led the orchestra to sue the management for lost wages.³³ Their next stop was Seattle.

By 6 October 1908, the eight-piece Senescu Roumanian Orchestra was playing nightly at the American Cafe. Their engagement continued into the next year, although after January 1909, no advertisements appear until 25 November 1911.³⁴ It appears that either the orchestra proved too difficult to maintain, at least in getting engagements or family members were tiring of it. Rosa was appearing with two young women playing cello and piano at Pearsall’s Cafeteria in November 1910, while Jonize Senescu and his orchestra were playing for a ball at the Oddfellows’ Temple in March 1911.³⁵ Jonize continued his musical career but less in the spotlight. He directed a theatre orchestra in San Francisco in 1917 and 1918, but lived the rest of his life in Seattle, occasionally organizing Romanian orchestras but largely blending into the general musical life of Seattle. He died there in 1945. For a couple of years he, Max, and others lived in Vancouver and in May and June of 1915, they played at John L. Sullivan’s Irving Café.³⁶

Personal issues also contributed to the orchestra’s end. Marcu divorced his wife Bertha and remarried in 1911, then moved to Chicago. Max followed him a few years later before he died in 1918. A photograph of a group in Romanian costume, featuring Marcu with a violin, Max Goldenberg with clarinet, and Morris Goldenberg on bass probably was taken in Chicago during this period (see Fig. 10). Morris Wexler, after marrying Sarah Goldenberg, Morris’s daughter, in Botoșani, joined the family in Washington and later played with the San Francisco Symphony.³⁷ Most significantly, Rosa married Hilkey Robinson in 1912 and with him returned to Alaska, where she raised a family in the rugged frontier town of Candle.³⁸ Marcu’s sons George and Bernard, both violinists, went with him to Chicago. Bernard became a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Fine Arts String Quartet before moving to California, where he worked as a studio musician. His son Larry was a well-known jazz trumpeter in Los Angeles.

³³ [Salt Lake City, Utah] *Truth*, 21 Mar 1908. [Salt Lake City, Utah] *Goodwin’s Weekly*, 18 Apr 1908.

³⁴ *Seattle Star*, 25 Nov. 1911

³⁵ *Seattle Daily Times*, 4 Nov. 1910, p. 16; 1 Mar. 1911, p. 9

³⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 15 May 1915, 21 June 1915.

³⁷ Information from descendant Mike Lowther.

³⁸ Rosa was the subject of a documentary film, *A Rose in Candle*, created by Russ Reno and her granddaughter, Beverly Churchill, who has been very generous in sharing her photos and memorabilia for this article.



Fig. 10: Group in costume, Chicago, ca. 1915, probably Marcu holding violin, Max Goldenberg, clarinet, and Morris Goldenberg, bass; others unidentified. Courtesy of Mike Lowther.

Rosa's family preserved some programs, which give us some idea of the music they played after she and her relatives moved to the Pacific Northwest. Although by 1909, the orchestra still included Strauss waltzes and operatic medleys, it would appear that much of their active repertoire consisted of popular American marches and songs, including ragtime, by composers like Victor Herbert, Penry Wenrich, Ethelbert Nevin, with some European popular music as well. In roughly twenty-five years, the Senescu brothers had gone from playing at Jewish weddings to Romanian urban *muzica lăutăreasca* to European and American popular music appealing to a general, but changing (and, for them, foreign) audience. The addition and growing importance of their daughters made the group even more unique, since women professional musicians were very few in those days.

The Senescu family orchestra's success may have influenced the creation of other Jewish Romanian (or pseudo-Romanian) orchestras. Some of these were also women's organizations. Although surviving postcards are almost the only evidence of those groups, they are enough to demonstrate this phenomenon. The Internationales Zigeunerinnen-Orchester "Carmen Sylva," under the direction of Mrs. Adele Gerschberg was one (Fig. 12). Another was the Rumänisches Damen-Zigeuner Orchester, directed by M. Freid (Fig. 13). The young lady posed in front of the cimbalom in this last group appears to be identical with the one who appears in the postcard of the Roumanian Band under the direction of Miss Adrienne Sand (Fig. 14). The cimbalom player in the Rumänische Concertkapelle directed by Posmantir (Fig. 15) is the same man as in a postcard showing the Gebrüder Zimblor Orchester of Czernowitz (his name indicates a klezmer background). Finally, all the way through the 1930s, the English working-class resort of Blackpool featured different "Roumanian" orchestras. The illustration here (Fig. 16) shows "Fericescu's Royal Roumanian Band," led by A. Kagan. Except for the last, these postcards are largely in German, the language of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, where most such groups were likely to tour.

Rosa Senescu's Roumanian Orchestra
M. SENESCU, Manager

WEEK COMMENCING SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 1909

<p>SUNDAY, TUESDAY, THURSDAY, SATURDAY.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Plumed Knight" March St. Clair 2 "Wine, Women and Song" Waltz Strauss 3 "A Day in Venice" Nevin 4 "Il Inarany" Overture Gomez 5 "La Zingana" Bohm 6 "The Busy Bee" Bendix <p style="text-align: center;">Intermission 15 Minutes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Guard du Corpe" March Chambers 2 "Tuscana" Waltz Buccalossi 3 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 4 Entre act "Spring Dreams" King 5 "La Tosca" Selection Puccini 6 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 7 "La Gazelle" Bendix 8 "Hajinalka Czardas" Roberts 9 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 7 "Caught in the Net" King 8 "The Cannon Ball" Northup <p style="text-align: center;">Intermission 15 Minutes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Tuscaro" March Asher 2 "Ciribiribin" Waltz Pestolozza 3 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 3 "German Patrol" Eilenberg 4 "Mlle. Modiste" Selection Herbert 5 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 5 "A Whispered Thought" Johnson 6 "I Love My Wife, but Oh, You Kid" Clark 7 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 7 "Tropical Moon" Overture Peters 8 "My Lady Laughter" Blake 9 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 9 "Peaches and Cream" Wenrich 10 "Le Kie King" Clerc 	<p>MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Police Parade" March Linke 2 "Violets" Waltz Waldteufel 3 "Las Golondrinas" Klugerscheid 4 "Isabella" Overture Suppe 5 "The Sirens" Bendix 6 "Amina" Serenade Linke <p style="text-align: center;">Intermission 15 Minutes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Il Bersagliere" March Boccaleri 2 "Fluie D'Or" Waltz Waldteufel 3 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 3 "Whispering Flowers" von Blon 4 "Hungarian Romance" Tobani 5 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 5 "Down South" Myddleton 6 "Dreaming" Daley 7 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 7 "Carnival on Pike" Young 8 Favorite French Song Reckord <p style="text-align: center;">Intermission 15 Minutes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Ye Merry Birds" March Tobani 2 "Gross Wien" Waltz Strauss 3 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 3 "Siamese Patrol" Linke 4 "It Happened in Nordland," Selection Herbert 5 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 5 "Last Kiss" Blake 6 "Colored Beau Brummel" Bert Ragan 7 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 7 "Merry Melodies" No. 8 Mills 8 "The Girl From the Golden West" Adams 9 Song Miss Beatrice Hall 9 "It Looks Like a Big Night Tonight" Allsyn 10 "Smarty" von Tilzer
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Figure 11. Program (1909). Courtesy of Beverly Churchill.

Figure 12: International Women's Gypsy Orchestra "Carmen Sylva," directed by Adele Gerschberg.



Internationales Zigeunerinnen-Orchester
 „Carmen Sylva“
 Dir.: Fr. Adele Gerschberg. Herren.



Figure 13: Roumanian Ladies' Gypsy Orchestra, directed by M. Freid



Figure 14: Roumanian Band under the direction of Miss Adrienne Sand.

Figure 15: Roumanian Concert Band, directed by Posmantir. The cimbalom player is identical to the player that appeared in a postcard as "Gebrüder Zimbler Orchester," from Czernowitz.



Figure 16: Fericescu's Royal Roumanian Band, led by A. Kagan, at Blackpool, England (1915?)

About The Author



Paul Gifford is a writer, musician and collector. He began researching the hammered dulcimer when he began playing it more than 50 years ago. In the late 1930s, his father, a Juilliard graduate, had been a customer of Lower East Side businessmen like cimbalom maker John Koleszar and secondhand instrument dealers the Blank Brothers. Paul was an archivist at the University of Michigan-Flint for more than 30 years. In preparing *The Hammered Dulcimer: A History* (Scarecrow Press, 2001), he collected old photographs with the instrument. This article developed from a couple of postcards of the Senescu family that he had acquired from European dealers.

<http://www.giffordmusic.net/index.html>