

Gavril Marcuson Walking On Victoriei Ave.



This photo was taken during a promenade on Victoriei Ave., on 11th June 1936. Wearing a second lieutenant's uniform is my friend, Buttescu; the other one is me, Gavril Marcuson. Back in those days, Bucharest was full of charm, poetry and picturesqueness. The city had far less inhabitants than it has today. When I was born, there were between 200,000 and 300,000 people. Today, there are two million. There were very few motorcars in Bucharest. Most of them were Fords and, when they rode, all the tin they were made of jingled. These were the cheapest cars. There were also some luxury cars - Buicks and Chevrolets. Gradually, the electric streetcars became widespread. Much later, after World War II, trolley-buses were introduced - I was already old by then. People went for a walk on Victoriei Ave. every day, but especially on Sunday morning. The promenade

place was between the Military Circle and the Royal Palace Sq., opposite the University Library. This is where people walked back and forth, and there were so many of them, that the sidewalk became too narrow and there were people who walked on the street. Victoriei Ave. was divided into three lanes: the left and right lanes were for motorcars riding to and from the Palace; the middle lane was for carriages. At the time, there were numerous carriages in Bucharest - perhaps there were more carriages than cars. One of the city prefects, Gavril Marinescu, had the sidewalks bordered with chains, so people could no longer walk on the street [around the 1920's]. No man would go out without wearing a hat - this was out of the question. I remember I once went out without my hat, and my mother came running after me with a hat in her hand, and told me: 'How can you go out like this? People will think you're crazy! Take the hat!' There were some extraordinary stores on Victoriei Ave. There was the 'Giaburov' carpet store, owned by some Armenians, and Dragomir Niculescu's grocery, where 'Romarta' is today. The rich people of the time - Parliament members, bankers - would come and buy ladlefuls of caviar. They would tell the owner: 'Dragomire, make it one kilo, two kilos!' I remember the Otetelesanu terrace, where the Telephone Company Palace lies today. The writers used to come there. I went there too, and I heard Florica Florescu [Ed. note: lyric artist renowned at that time] sing. I went to the Gambrinus terrace. When going to the old National Theater, I would sit in the circle. I paid 10 lei for a seat. There were actors who claimed they only performed for the gallery, for it is the gallery alone that confirms a great actor. The National Theater had special acoustics, it was very pleasant and had a curtain that had been painted by Traian Cornescu; behind it was the velvet curtain. I remember the Lyric Theater - this is how the Opera was called back then. It was bombed by the Germans [during World War II], and was demolished. It was located in Valter Maracineanu Sq., next to Cismigiu [Park]. This is where I saw my first opera and ballet performances. I remember the Athenaeum fresco painted by Traian Petrescu, if I'm not mistaken. Extraordinary! The entire Romanian history around the Athenaeum's hall.