



The Romanian Athenaeum - a Temple of Music, Culture, and Science

Built at the initiative of the intellectual elite of the 19th century and with public support, so that Bucharest could have a high-level concert hall and an adequate space for scientific events, the Romanian Athenaeum is the headquarters of the George Enescu Philharmonic and an iconic building for modern Romania. In 2024, the European Commission awarded the Romanian Athenaeum the European Heritage Label for its significant role in the history and culture of Europe.

The Athenaeum is recognized as one of the most impressive buildings and concert halls in the world, captivating with its architecture and exceptional acoustics. The building is remarkable for its two large circular spaces, the concert hall and the foyer, where the central rotunda is marked off by 12 pink stucco Doric columns. Access between levels is provided by four flights of Carrara marble stairs, the work of sculptor Carol Storck.

The initiative to build the edifice belonged to the Romanian Athenaeum Society, founded in 1865 at the initiative of cultural and scientific personalities such as Constantin Esarcu, V.A. Urechia, Nicolae Kretzulescu, and Alexandru Odobescu. Financing was done through public subscription—the famous "Spare a Leu for the Athenaeum" campaign—and through donations.

The project was designed by French architect Albert Galleron, recommended by the author of the Paris Opera, Charles Garnier, and known to the Bucharest public for other impressive projects, such as the National Bank of Romania Palace. Galleron collaborated on the project with notable Romanian architects Grigore Cerchez (1850-1927), Alexandru Orăscu (1817-1894), Ion Mincu (1852-1912), and I.N. Socolescu (1856-1924).

The main building was constructed rapidly, between 1886-1889. Later, an annex building was added. The inauguration took place on February 14, 1888, with a scientific conference held by Romanian writer and archaeologist Alexandru Odobescu. On March 5, 1889, the first symphonic music concert was held in the Great Auditorium of the Athenaeum, performed by the Romanian Philharmonic Society, an institution continued today by the George Enescu Philharmonic.

The monumental organ in the Great Auditorium concert hall of the Romanian Athenaeum was built by Oscar Walker and inaugurated in 1939, after a fundraising campaign lasting nearly 15 years, initiated by the great Romanian



composer George Enescu and supported by him through concerts in various cities across the country. The organ has impressive dimensions—3,400 pipes, 7 meters in height, and 12 meters in width—and an unforgettable sound. Its timbral aesthetics synthesize romanticism and baroque and cover 50 registers.

The fresco in the Great Auditorium of the Romanian Athenaeum depicts the main moments in Romanian history. The initiators of the Athenaeum's construction wanted this fresco from the very beginning, but it could only be realized between 1933 and 1938, by painter Costin Petrescu. Once again, funding was provided by citizen contributions, through the sale of vignettes featuring images that were later included in the fresco.

Over time, the stage of the Romanian Athenaeum has hosted some of the greatest names in classical music: George Enescu, Arthur Rubinstein, Richard Strauss, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, Herbert von Karajan, Dinu Lipatti, Pablo Casals, David Oistrakh, and many others.

In 2024, the European Commission awarded the Athenaeum the European Heritage Label, attesting its importance in Europe's cultural landscape. The Romanian Athenaeum is the third building in Romania to receive this recognition.

The Athenaeum is open to visitors who wish to discover the story of this iconic building in the heart of Bucharest. The visiting schedule is updated monthly and can be found here: <https://filarmonicaenescu.ro/en/info-program-bilete>.

For more details about the history of the Romanian Athenaeum, visit: <https://filarmonicaenescu.ro/en/istoric-ateneul-roman> (**Romanian Athenaeum – The History of the Romanian Athenaeum** section).