
REVIEWS

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BIG FESTIVAL JUBILEE

Review of the 60th Music Panel (November 3–5, 2023)**

Established in the early 1960s in Opatija, the Yugoslav Music Panel (today, the Music Panel) had been a unique setting for interaction and communication among Yugoslav composers of various aesthetic, poetic and stylistic backgrounds until the disintegration of Yugoslavia (1990). This festival had long ceased to be Yugoslav, and since recently, it is not even an Opatija festival any more. However, despite all the misfortunes, it has kept going as an essential gathering place for contemporary music. Last year, from November 3 to 5 in Osijek, under the auspices of the Croatian Composers'

Society and Cantus d.o.o., the 60th jubilee MP was held, which sought to reaffirm some issues from the past, give an overview of the current trends of contemporary music, and most importantly, to open perspectives for its future.

After the welcoming speech of the officials of the festival and the city of Osijek,¹ the MP opened with an evening piano concert given by the pianists Kata-

¹ The Artistic Director of the Music Panel, Tibor Szivoczka, among other things, highlighted: "The fundamental values and goals of the Panel have remained almost the same throughout its period: to promote contemporary musical creativity – once, from all Yugoslav countries, and today primarily Croatian and, as we have been an equal European Union component for ten years, European creativity." Bojana Plečaš Kalebota (Ed.), *60. Glazbena tribina Osijek 3.–5. studenoga 2023.*, Zagreb, Cantus d.o.o. – Hrvatsko društvo skladatelja, 6.

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rina and Vladimir Krpan in the Croatian National Theatre hall. The concert began with Stjepan Šulek's *First Piano Sonata* (from 1947) as a testimony of his aesthetic views, grounded in the classical values of the European musical tradition. Vladimir Krpan was nothing short of a virtuoso in Igor Kuljerić's *Moments for Vlado*, a work that brought to mind the turbulent aesthetic turmoil in the music of the 1960s, or Mladen Tarbuk's *For Vlado* (both dedicated to Krpan). The agogic richness, dynamic and textural contrasts in Frano Parać's variation-based *Thèmes*, Frano Đurović's *Piano piece 2012* (*Hommage à Morton Feldman*) and Stanko Horvat's *Sonnant* came to the fore as a result of the refined and sophisticated approach of pianist Katarina Krpan. Receiving a standing ovation, the inaugural MP concert ended with piano four-hand pieces composed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These were the compositions *Passo sempio* by Ivo Josipović, *Dick Tracy and the Very Short and Very Strange Story of Glaxo Blue* by Berislav Šipus and *Divertimento* by Davor Bobić, primarily characterized by the abundance of rhythmic components, but also (in the case of the latter) the influence of folklore melos. As the oeuvre of the three performing composers (Kuljerić, Parać and Horvat) was already performed at the Yugoslav Music Panel (in the 1960s and 1970s), their re-inclusion in the Panel's repertoire affirmed their artistic value in the present time.

The next day's performance was by the Cantus Ensemble, a chamber ensemble that has been considered to be one of

Croatia's most agile promoters of contemporary music for more than two decades. The conducting skill of Berislav Šipuš was already demonstrated in the first composition, *Taboo* for chamber ensemble by Sanja Drakulić, which addressed the issue of the increasing control of freedom in present times. The work of the MP Artistic Director, Tibor Szirovicza, *In between* for oboe, chamber ensemble and electronics, demonstrated the author's exciting process of transforming baroque articulation into contemporary musical expression. The virtuoso *Concert* for trombone and ensemble by Ante Knešaurek, performed by the magnificent Mario Šincek, was preceded by the performance of the avant-garde composition *Barasou, the ballad of rats and mice* for voice and chamber ensemble by Branimir Sakač, the initiator and founder of this contemporary music festival (the piece was previously performed at the Yugoslav Panel in 1971). The masterful play with instrumental colours, combined with inarticulate voices in the vocal part, performed by the brilliant Irma Dragičević, made the festival audience go wild.

In part two of the concert, visitors enjoyed the lyrical atmosphere of the composition *Memorie* for voice and chamber ensemble by Frano Parać, inspired by the poetry of the composer's father, Ivo Parać. It was followed by *Un jardin sous la pluie avec un compositeur sans parapluie* for 13 instruments and multi-instrumentalist by Berislav Šipuš, a piece imbued with elements of improvisation, and was definitely one of the

highlights of the 60th MP. The expressive movements of the top multi-instrumentalist Ratko Vojtek (who demonstrated his skill in playing multiple instruments) and the frolic of the light effects in the hall gave the piece an almost stage character. This rather lengthy concert ended with *Descent to the top* for voice and chamber ensemble by Stanko Horvat, a cycle of eight songs which, due to the author's death, was completed by conductor Šipus, Horvat's student.

The second day of the festival closed with a jazz concert by the Matija Dedić Trio in the foyer of the Osijek Cultural Center. As a great lover of the oeuvre of Croatian composer Dora Pejačević, pianist Matija Dedić opened the concert with her piano cycle *Life of Flowers*, Op.19 (from 1905). Then, joined on stage by double bass player Zvonimir Šestak and drummer Krunoslav Levačić, the Trio delivered a spectacle that went on past midnight. The audience rose to its feet in a standing ovation for several compositions by Matija Dedić (who experiments with different musical genres), as well as very interestingly arranged traditional songs performed as part of the Trio repertoire.

The Sunday concert at noon was delivered by foreign MP guests, members of the Slovak Quasars Ensemble (violin, cello, flute, clarinet, piano and percussion), who have been hard at work, promoting both contemporary music and rare and forgotten pieces, primarily by Slovak authors, for 15 years. The concert began and ended with chamber music

pieces by Ivan Buffa (an author familiar to the Croatian audience for performing at the 2021 Music Biennale Zagreb), whose artistic expression is characterized by imaginatively experimenting with timbres. While in the *Fresco*, the author was inspired by fresco painting, the work *Pareidolia* was the fruit of Buffa's reflection on the phenomenon of the possibility of shaping a visual or auditory perception into meaningful images. Slovak composer Jana Kmiťová's youthful work, *At the Bottom of the Day* for clarinet and piano, conveyed the author's penchant for great contrasts, and the abundance of different percussion instruments in the chamber piece *Kamea* from this composer's oeuvre contributed to the exotic atmosphere of the concert.

Apart from the works by Slovak composers, the Quasars Ensemble's repertoire also included a work by a Polish author, *Nyos* for violin and cello by Tomasz Skweres, as well as two works by Croatian composers, *I ritorni* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano by Sanda Majurec, and *Pika's Tale* for clarinet and electronics by Ana Horvat. Focusing on microtonal and quarter-tone harmonies, Skweres has written a highly virtuosic piece, testing the technical capabilities of both string instruments almost to the limit. Formally based on the ritornello form, Sanda Majurec's composition conveyed an exciting dialogue between the wind and string instruments, permeated by the vocal 'communication' of the musicians themselves. Analogous to a point in fine arts, as an undefined element upon which all others are based, the ini-

tial sound in electronics was, according to the author, the initial point for developing the *Pika's Tale* composition. The organic harmony between the brilliant clarinetist Jozef Eliáš and the electronic soundtrack captivated the audience, who followed it with a standing ovation not only for Eliáš but also for the composer Ana Horvat.

The Jubilee 60th MP ended in the Osijek Cultural Center with a concert of works by different generations of Croatian authors performed by the Zagreb Wind Ensemble. After Milo Cipra's well-known dodecaphonic piece *Aubade* (performed at the Panel in Opatija as early as 1965), the audience was presented with *Transfigurazioni*, a student work by Mladen Tarbuk, which showcases the rich and diverse timbres of wind instruments through motivic development (performed at the last Yugoslav Panel in 1990). The Ensemble also demonstrated a compact expression in Danijel Legin's *Capriccio*, a neoclassical-style, three-movement, piece. Although written way back in 1987, Davorin Kempf's virtuoso *Toccatina*, reminiscent of baroque forms, was not premiered until this MP. The program of these highly skilled and experienced Zagreb musicians closed with two *Wind quintets*. While Dubravko Palanović strove to permeate and intertwine several contrasting segments in his piece, Srđan Dedić, the author who sees the wind quintet as a 'magical set-up', delivered a wealth of colours and contrasts through the skilfull juxtaposition and synthesis of the instrumental sections.

The 60th MP program was significantly enriched with non-concert events, with the premiere screening of the much lauded documentary *Echoes of Generations: 60 Years of the Music Panel of the Croatian Composers' Society* on the first day of the event. In the cinematic atmosphere of the packed hall of the Osijek Cultural Center, the audience breathlessly watched excerpts of conversations with numerous composers, musicologists, conductors and performers, and fragments from archival Panel footage kept in the Croatian Radio and Television archives. With a standing ovation for the film's authors, musicologists Petra Pavić and Dina Puhovski, as well as for the Panel itself, which has endured for 60 years, this screening represented an almost central event of the entire jubilee MP.²

In the morning hours of day two of the event, the documentary authors moderated the Round Table entitled *Music Panel – past, present, future* (participants: musicologist Marija Saraga, conductor Ivan Josip Skender and composers Mladen Tarbuk, Antun Tomislav Šaban and Tibor Szivoczka). After the presentation of the results of a survey conducted among the Croatian Composers' Society members, revealing that the main motivating reason for musicians to come to the MP was to meet or the opportunity to exchange opinions, the Round Table participants themselves

² The documentary is available on the Croatian Composers' Society Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoEmTeX95Pc>

highlighted the informative role of the festival.³ Along with the necessity of enriching the Panel with non-concert events, they pointed to the problems this event involved, primarily the lack of an audience.

Instead of the cancelled concert of organist Tea Kulaš, scheduled in Osijek's Co-Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, the organizers opted for what turned out to be a good move. Since the MP was attended by a large number of students of the Zagreb Academy of Music, composer Mladen Tarbuk encouraged the future musicologists and composers to express their views on contemporary music today. During a rather lively discussion, the students communicated, among other things, the need for a more significant 'presence' of contemporary music within the Academy of Music study programs. Apart from the students, the Slovak musicians, as MP guests, had the opportunity to present themselves to the festival audience in a non-concert format through an exciting *Conversation with the artists: Quasars Ensemble*, moderated by musicologist Srđana Vrsalović.

³ That function of the Panel has been woven into its concept since the very beginning. This is evidenced by the introductory text from the first Yugoslav Music Panel program booklet (1964), stating that, apart from learning about contemporary production, the musicians at this festival will be able to "present their artistic views and engage into a fruitful exchange of opinions [...], get to know each other better in person and thus revive the mutual contact necessary in a dynamic cultural community". *Jugoslavenska muzička tribina 64* [Program booklet], Opatija, Pozornica Opatija, 1964.

Along with the evidently rich accompanying program, in the three days of the Music Panel, the Osijek audience could hear a wide range of stylistic, poetic, aesthetic and compositional-technical tendencies in the contemporary music of the 20th and 21st centuries: from authors of the older generation whose works are deeply related to the Panel as a Yugoslav festival (Šulek, Sakač, Horvat, Kuljerić, Parać), to significantly younger Croatian (and not only Croatian) composers from the contemporary music scene. Exactly 60 years ago, Branimir Sakač asked the following questions at the first Panel in Opatija: "Where is our music now, how far has it moved with the times, what have we learned from others, and what are we bringing from our own and personal to this general movement, and how far have we come?"⁴ Six decades later, at the Music Panel in Osijek, the same questions were equally topical and, as long as they are relevant, this festival will have its *raison d'être*.

⁴ Erika Krpan (Ed.), *Međunarodna glazbena tribina: 40 godina. Opatija – Pula, Zagreb*, Hrvatsko društvo skladatelja – Cantus d.o.o., 2003, 10.

