REVIEWS

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The 17th International Conference of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade – *Music in Socio-Cultural Turmoil* (29–31 October 2025)

The 17th traditional biennial international conference of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade – *Music in Socio-Cultural Turmoil* – took place from 29 to 31 October 2025. Current social, cultural, and geopolitical developments formed one of the broader thematic frameworks of the conference, providing the space for examining the complex relationship between music and society and asking questions about "how music corresponds with social processes", "how the participants of the musical ecosystem respond to the pulsation of time", and "whether paradigmatic changes in the history of music (almost) always corresponded to social changes".

The formal hall of the Rector's Office at the University of Arts and its Rector's Hall hosted a total of eight sessions under the following headings: "Music and Society: Mediating Values and Change"; "Protest Tracks: When Songs become Weapons"; "Turmoil and Paradigm Shifts"; "Musical Testimonies of Crisis and Transformation"; "Music between Debate and Danger"; "Music, Ideology, and Institutions in Turmoil"; "Music in Transition: Identities, Ideologies, and Innovations"; "Music in Shaping Cultural, Educational, and Political Identities". These headings comprised, among other topics, those relating to music and politics, philosophy, sociology and his-

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tory, as well as issues pertaining to the status of musical institutions, orchestras, and digital musical archives in the context of Europe, and the creative poetics of authors espousing various stylistic frameworks. The sessions were chaired by professors from the Department of Musicology: Ivana Perković, Marija Masnikosa, Dragana Stojanović-Novičić, Biljana Leković, Stefan Cvetković, and Radoš Mitrović.

The proceedings opened with introductory keynote addresses delivered by Prof. Mirjana Nikolić, Rector of the University of Arts; Prof. Srđan Teparić, vice-dean for scholarly research at the Faculty of Music; and Prof. Ivana Perković, Chair of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music and member of the conference's Organizing Committee, and proceeded with thirty-minute presentations by the participants. The entire gathering unfolded in a pleasant atmosphere and overall tone, leaving enough room for spontaneous, relaxed, and inspiring talks during the coffee and lunch breaks.

The participants – scholars and researchers – that is, their explorations and presentations encompassed in their approaches a broad range of historical and contemporary, local and global musical practices. In addition to providing insight into the multifaceted discourse on music amid cultural and social turmoil, the conference's comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach made it a forum for multilayered and provocative enquiries and discussions, with musical examples from diverse traditions – in classical and popular music genres alike. These practices were surveyed through the lens of cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances that shape and multiply their meanings, roles, and functions, reflecting thereby the complex processes through which music, in the broadest sense, participates in the development and formation of human civilization.

The keynote speakers at this, 17th conference, Prof. Paul Craenen from the Royal Conservatory in The Hague; Dr. Dario Martinelli, professor of the history and theory of art at the Kaunas University of Technology in Lithuania; and Dr. Juha Ojala, professor of music performance research at the Sibelius Academy's doctoral programme at the University of the Arts Helsinki, gave plenary talks on the following subjects: "Where is responsibility in music's ambiguity?"; "Ideologies are (un)dead: left and right as a cultural models in political songs"; and "Musical praxis as creation of virtual worlds". Substituting for Prof. Georgina Born from the department of anthropology at University College London, who was also planned as a keynote speaker but had to cancel due to illness, Prof. Rolf Bäcker of the Catalonia College of Music organized and led a discussion on artificial intelligence in musicology and higher education in music.

The keynote speakers' presentations opened numerous perspectives on reading the place and positioning of music – from ancient times via watershed moments in the history and culture of the 19th century to contemporary musical expressions, the performativity and role of music in activism, as well as songs that

changed the world and reshaped narratives in music and society. The programming of concerts of western European art music, to paraphrase Prof. Craenen, constitutes a sort of political act and has its import, meaning, and messages, apart from calling for a rethinking of the very autonomy of that art. Who stands to the left and why, who stands to the right, and what in that context Giorgio Gaber's Italian hit *Destra-sinistra* represents was memorable precisely because it seduced us with its musical content, while its basis was informed by important questions. However, this was not the only coupling of music and politics – Prof. Ojala presented us with his own vision, stressing that musical practice enables a safe domain for playing, testing, and thinking about possible changes in the real world, and that analysing, that is, perceiving and interpreting the signs of subjective experiences and social aspects presented in music provides a significant contribution to performance practice.[1]

Over the course of eight sessions, reflections on music bounced off between its roles in social, cultural, and political shifts and its power as a tool of protest, artistic activism, and a witness to crises. From analysing musical practices through history in Oleksandr Okhrimenko's presentation on changes in the musical landscape of the 13th century, via the artistic responses to social turbulences explored by Jovana Vukosavljević, Biljana Leković, and Radoš Mitrović, to Rachel Johnson's discussion of military music in her presentation and Maria Semi's consideration of the aesthetic of musical practice in "dangerous places", the topics covered a wide range of roles that music assumes in the formation and reflection of social turbulences. Also, in her discussion, Lucy Abrams-Husso addressed the change in contemporary music interpretation and American orchestras during the 1980s, with a special focus on the commercialization of music.

The conference also included a dissemination event of the IN.TUNE alliance, a proud member of which is the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Under the auspices of its two-day programme, the Hungarian violinist Eszter Haffner gave a masterclass at the Adventist Church in Belgrade. The audience then had the opportunity to enjoy two concerts featuring works by Damjan Jovičin, Frederic Rzewski, a group of Romanian contemporary composers, and Michael Pisaro, hosted in the auditorium of the Composers' Association of Serbia, alongside Damjan Jovičin, by his friends and students from the Faculty of Music, as well as Nataša Penezić and Adriana Toacsen. Particular attention was drawn to a two-hour panel titled *Reimagining Society through Innovative University Cooperation in Music and the Arts*, which took place on October 30th, featuring the domestic and international participants of this unique European alliance dedicated to art and music. The speakers included Cristina Cubells and Alex Tentor, whose talk, titled *Politics in Open Score*, presented the complex theoretical frameworks of the

[1] See the conference website: https://musicinturmoil.wixsite.com/msct/post/musical-praxis-as-creation-of-virtual-worlds.

relations between politics, society, music, and interpretation. The very spirit of the IN.TUNE alliance reminded us that this was an idea born out of a need for a response to contemporary social and cultural shifts – an idea that connects artistic and educational institutions across Europe in search for new models of understanding and cooperation in contemporary academic communities.

These elements were all reasons why the 17th international conference of the Department of Musicology went rather successfully, leaving in its wake questions, images, and memories including, whether by accident or not, a quotation from the final slide of Dario Martinelli's presentation: "Politics of music is the art of living together".