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# TRIBUTE TO PROF. DR. VESNA MIKIĆ

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## IN REMEMBRANCE OF VESNA MIKIĆ (30 May 1967 – 30 October 2019)

Last year, we prematurely lost Dr Vesna Mikić, a full professor at the Faculty of Music, one of Serbia's leading scholars in the field of musicology, a member of the Faculty who spent almost three decades of her life engaging in selfless, passionate, expert, and committed participation in every aspect of the Faculty's work, as a teacher as well as a major figure on Serbia's cultural scene. She was a member of the Serbian Musicological Society, the Composers' Association of Serbia, the Department of Stage Arts and Music at Matica Srpska in Novi Sad, and founder and director of the Centre for Studying Popular Music. But most of all, her colleagues and students will remember her as a

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generous, noble woman, endowed with an extraordinary kind of energy and *joie de vivre*, a fighting and authentic spirit, a dear colleague, comrade, and friend, entirely committed to her profession and students.

Vesna Mikić devoted her entire professional life to music and musicology. As a valedictorian student at Mokranjac Secondary School of Music, where she graduated from the music theory department (1981–1985), she immediately joined the B.A. in Musicology programme at the Faculty of Music. A brilliant student, she earned her undergraduate degree in 1991 with a high GPA (9.32), securing the highest grade for her final thesis, supervised by Mirjana Veselinović Hofman, who likewise supervised her master's and doctoral dissertations and remained her chief model and source of inspiration for the rest of her career. The subject of her final B.A. thesis, *Igor Stravinsky: Neoclassicism – Simulation – Communication*, delineated an important area in her future scholarly interests, geared toward analysing and interpreting complex manifestations of neoclassical ideas in European and Serbian 20<sup>th</sup>-century music. The continuing presence of those interests in her work is likewise borne out by the subject of her master's thesis: *Neoclassicism in Serbian Music during the Sixth and Seventh Decade [of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]*, which she successfully defended in 1994. Her subsequent reflections on these and related issues were crowned by *Lica srpske muzike: neoklasicizam* (Faces of Serbian Music: Neoclassicism), a book-length study published by the Faculty in 2009, where, 20 years on, she offered an entirely new approach to the interpretation of phenomena she pursued throughout her career. In her doctoral dissertation she broached a new set of problems, in what was an innovative and bold manner at the time, engaging in interpreting the contemporary status of music (the topic of her dissertation was *Music in Techno-culture*; it was defended on 2 April 2002 at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade). A revised version was published by the Faculty of Music in Belgrade in 2004.

Following two short teaching stints at Stanković School of Music (1991) and Mokranjac School of Music (1992), both in Belgrade, she tied her professional career to the Faculty of Music, where she started working immediately upon graduation (1991), but over the course of her career, spanning almost three decades, she collaborated with many other institutions as well and gave an invaluable contribution to their work and development. Especially noteworthy was her work at the interdisciplinary study programme at the University of Arts in Belgrade, master's and doctoral programmes in Art and Media Theory, Digital and Multimedia Theory, which she helped build

from the very beginning, providing an important contribution to their authentic profiles with her innovative courses focusing on popular music, art and politics, as well as new media and technologies. She also taught at the University of Priština, Academy of Music in Cetinje, Faculty of Philology and Art in Kragujevac, Academy of Music at the University of Banja Luka, and the Academy of Music at Slobomir University in Bijeljina. Wherever she worked as a visiting professor, she brought along and generously shared her great body of knowledge, total commitment to her work, professional honesty, moral firmness, as well as human warmth and understanding.

Despite her many professional engagements outside this Faculty, it still remained her only real home, the institution to whose advancement and work she was fully committed, especially its Department of Musicology, its teachers and students. Although her primary field of interest was issues in contemporary music, she never found it difficult to rise to any professional challenge or need, owing to the breadth of her interests, and I do not think that there is a single member of the Department's teaching staff for whom she did not substitute at some point, quite selflessly and always highly professionally. At the Faculty, she opened new fields of research, boldly, and not without resistance, she provided genuine answers to the challenges posed by shifts in contemporary culture and art, innovatively positing new disciplines in line with the highest professional standards. Her authority of an expert was captivating, but even more so were her communication skills, energy, rejection of a faceless world populated by masks, not human faces; she generously offered as well as expected love, understanding, support, and cooperation. For her, the "We" was always more important than the "I", which is truly rare in our artistic world. In her own unique way, she was warm and kind to all, but at the same time uncompromising in guarding the authority of knowledge as her own highest ideal.

She approached the complex and responsible duties of supervising B.A. and M.A. final theses, specialist and doctoral scholarly and artistic projects with a high degree of responsibility, investing this work with the joy of mutual discovery, forming young people not only as experts, but also instilling them with self-awareness, responsibility, and creativity. She is survived by a significant academic progeny in Belgrade (Biljana Leković) and Novi Sad (Valentina Radoman and Milan Milojković), but her contribution is still larger than that. She was one of those professors who never left her students indifferent or unchanged, and this authentic gift for pedagogy and its fruits resist quantification.

In my opinion, her public speaking was as important, which she pursued on various occasions and many different podiums, for she was always only too happy to engage in this kind of work, seeking to raise the visibility of musicology in the public sphere as well. Truly amazing was the energy with which she engaged in all kinds of organizing work in the field, as Department Secretary, sitting on a number of Faculty and University committees, and, finally, as Head of the Department of Musicology, until her terrible illness took its toll. She should be credited the most for the way the Department marked its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and, at the same time, an important jubilee of its esteemed professor Dr Mirjana Veselinović Hofman. Likewise, she was highly active in representing the achievements of Serbian musicology abroad. She helped foster the spirit of collaboration among various institutions and took an active part in the activities of a number of professional associations.

The scholarly contribution of Vesna Mikić to contemporary musicology has yet to be assessed by the passage of time and I am sure that her works will long be recognized as the starting points of new paths of research, in terms of topics and methodologies, and that they will be of vital importance to scholarship in this field. Their value and the continuity and intensity of her contribution are affirmed by the fact that she was ranked among the top category of scholars in Serbia. Her published monographs, *Muzika u tehnokulturi* (2004) and *Lica srpske muzike: neoklasicizam* (2009), supplied a fundamental contribution to the discussion of those topics. Her unfinished manuscripts will be edited and, upon publication, will claim their rightful place in the history of Serbian musicology. She never shied away from complex challenges. And she never took the beaten track. She was bold and original in problematizing and reflecting on every problem.

Her oeuvre comprises every genre of musicological writing – monographs and surveys, reviews of new pieces, musical editions, analytical studies, lexicographic contributions to Serbian and international encyclopaedias, reviews of musicological writings.<sup>1</sup> With her expert translations from French and English she enriched the scholarly literature in Serbian to a significant degree. She was selfless in performing her editorial duties as deputy editor-in-chief of *New Sound* and as part of special-issue editorial teams, where

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<sup>1</sup> Her last finished writing was dated 14 August 2019. It is a review of a collection of essays on Dejan Despić's comic opera *Pop Ćira i pop Spira* (Priest Ćira and Priest Spira). Her clever and original insights communicated in this review may be found in the volume, which was published toward the end of that year.

she was often the leading and most committed team member. Her achievements have been judged as exhibiting “a secure command of the issues discussed, analytical precision and innovative interpretations, clarity and direct expression, responsibility in applying her scholarly apparatus, and consistency in expressing her personal positions and creativity. She has boldly broached a whole series of issues that had not been discussed in our contemporary musicological literature and provided a significant impetus for further quests in the field of new media, techno-culture, and popular art. At the same time, she has continuously pursued explorations in Serbian post-WWII music, especially by interpreting the contributions of contemporary authors” (M. Veselinović Hofman, an excerpt from her recommendation of Mikić for promotion to full professorship, Faculty archives). She published articles in leading Serbian and international scholarly journals, participated in numerous Serbian and international scholarly gatherings, and frequently sat on the initiating and organizing committees of many conferences.

She took part in every research project conducted by the Faculty’s Department of Musicology: *Srpska narodna i umetnička muzika* (Serbian Folk and Art Music, 1996–2000), *Srpska muzika i evropsko muzičko nasleđe* (Serbian Music and Europe’s Music Heritage, 2001–2005), *Svetski hronotopi srpske muzike* (International Chronotopes of Serbian Music, 2006–2010), *Identiteti srpske muzike u svetskom kulturnom kontekstu* (Identities of Serbian Music in Global Cultural Context, as well as a series of international projects (AD-AM-TEMPUS at the University of Arts in Belgrade, 2005; *International Relations in the Context of Yugoslav Music Institutions: The Case of Serbia and Slovenia* (2008–2009); *Eurovision Song Contest and New Europe – Birmingham* (2009), London (2011).

The untimely departure of Dr Vesna Mikić is a major loss for the Faculty, especially its Department of Musicology. The only consolation is that the hearth of love, which she bequeathed to all those who were close to her, will never die out, that those who knew and loved her will continue to draw inspiration and guidance from it, and that future generations will preserve the memory of her honest, intellectual, expert, and brave outlook on life and our profession, fully committed to knowledge and hard work.