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***Banatski Falstaf. Komična opera Pop
Ćira i pop Spira Dejana Despića***
**[*Banatian Falstaff. Comic opera Priest
Ćira and Priest Spira by Dejan Despic*],**
Sonja Marinković and Nemanja Sovtić
(Eds.), Novi Sad: Kulturni centar
Vojvodine Miloš Crnjanski, Beograde:
Muzikološko društvo Srbije, 2019, 208
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Before the reader is a collective monograph whose publication follows the premiere of the opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira (Pop Ćira i pop Spira)* written by academician Dejan Despić. The collective monograph² was issued by both the

Cultural Centre of Vojvodina *Miloš Crnjanski* (Novi Sad) and the Serbian Musicological Society (Belgrade) and it contains insights into different aspects of Despić's opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira*: ranging from the place of this opera in the composer's oeuvre and, more broadly, in the tradition of comic opera in the history of Serbian music, to the premiere and reception of the piece (Dr. Katarina Tomašević), the meticulous study of different aspects of the piece (harmonic language, musical language, ensembles and other aspects reviewed by Dr. Branka Radović), Despić's treatment of the comic elements in this opera (Dr. Sonja Marinković) as well as the critical reception of the opera. The texts are divided into four larger sections and they weave an interdisciplinary web that fully encompasses Despić's piece, uniting the musicological, literary, teatrological, performance and reception views.³ The number of monographs dedicated to a single piece is few. The fact itself makes this publication unique and it points out

The monograph was presented by dr Sonja Marinković; dr Smiljana Vlajić, composer and director of the Cultural Centre of Vojvodina *Miloš Crnjanski* and Gorica Pilipović M.A, editor of the music department of the RTS Radio Belgrade 2. Moderator of the promotion was Zorica Premate.

³ The segments are these: I part – Dejan Despić's opera – musicological view; II part – literary role model and libretto of Despić's opera; III part – premiere of Despić's opera; IV part – the libretto Merry Priests of Banat (*Veseli popovi banatski*). Beside these sections, reader will find preface, summaries of the six texts in English and three reviews among the pages of this monograph.

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¹ The review was written within SRO Institute of Musicology SASA, financed by Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

² The promotion of the monograph was held at Negotin, within the festival 54th *Days of Mokranjac* on 20th of September 2019 by the editor of the monograph dr Sonja Marinković. Second promotion was held in the hall of Composers' Association of Serbia on 19th of November 2019, within the festival *Bunt 7.0*.

to us the necessity of producing monographs of this type that encompass all the important aspects of the piece

The first part contains the following texts: "Life dedicated to music. On the creative poetics of Dejan Despić" (Dr. Katarina Tomašević); "Language and expression in the comic opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* by Dejan Despić" (Dr. Branka Radović) and the text "Treatment of Comic Elements in the Opera by Dejan Despić" (Dr. Sonja Marinković). The second part contains the texts "*Priest Ćira and Priest Spira*, between humor and poetry" (Dr. Tatjana Jovičević) and "Libretto of the Opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* by Dejan Despić in the Context of 'Opera dramaturgy' by Dejan Miladinović" (Dr. Zoran Đerić) while the third section deals with the performance and reception of this operatic piece and contains the texts "The Opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* from the Performer's Perspective" (Dr. Željka Milanović) and "The Operatic Response to Sremac's Challenge" (Branka Radović). Finally, the fourth section contains the libretto of the opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* which possesses many literary qualities that lie, above all else, in the fact that the spirit of Sremac is preserved and omnipresent in this adaptation and dramatisation of his novel.

Katarina Tomašević in her text "Life dedicated to music. On the creative poetics of Dejan Despić" observes the opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* within the broader context of Dejan Despić's oeuvre. The author provides the reader with the composer's biography as a vehicle to present his creative, theoretical and pedagogical work. Tomašević explains the rea-

sons behind Despić's hesitation to cope with such a complex genre as opera, and later the reasons for his acceptance to make such a move. She then states that his daring was awarded the Audience's Prize at the international *Armel Opera Festival* in Budapest (26), as well as acclamation from the critics. After that, the author points out the aspects of this opera that show the unique features of Despić's oeuvre brought to a new level, and in that light she distinguishes elements such as the humour (of the *Haydnesque, good-natured kind* (28) as the composer himself reveals), the treatment of the folkloric material, the communicative qualities and other elements. The text is very informative, not only for connoisseurs of Despić's character and opus, but for readers who are being introduced to his operatic work, as well as his previous oeuvre.

Branka Radović makes her contribution to this monograph, in the form of a text titled "Language and Expression in the Comic Opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* by Dejan Despić" and provides the reader with an analytical view of the score of this opera, highlighting the fact that she had an insight into the score without even expecting the premiere of the work. Using extensive analysis, the author pointed out the multiple layers of this piece, singling out the qualities of the score (symmetry as an especially interesting phenomenon). Having done that, the author underlines the significance this opera has, placing it within the framework of Serbian opera tradition, stating that "like many old comic operas or the first comic operas, Despić's piece has a similar outer structure divided into two

acts, both ending in mass scenes, the former with a feud, and the latter with a wedding” (34). The author also points out that it is necessary to bear in mind that, even though the “music derives from the inflection of the spoken word, it is not that of the Janaček or Konjović type” (35). Given that we “barely had any tradition in this genre”, the author believes that this particular opera written by Despić could be considered both as a “development of a genre and its cornerstone” (56).

Sonja Marinković provides a different analytic insight into this piece, accentuating in her own text the unique place Despić’s comic opera has in the canon of Serbian music, pointing out, similarly to the previous author, that “this genre in Serbian music barely has a representative” (58), and she supports this statement by listing the few but precious number of examples that we do possess in our history. Further on, she adds that the composer’s previous experiences naturally led him to the decision to write an opera. Believing that the opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* may bear the genre affiliation *comedy of manners* (*komedija naravi*), the author took one important fact into consideration: by that, we mean the skillful depiction of our mentality that, according to the author, actually lies behind the wittiness of the opera. The treatment of the comic elements is indicated, and those elements are not a direct illustration of the text, but rather, the “musical wittiness, playfulness, ingenuity and invention complements the dramatic situations and indisputably witty lines” (62).

Tatjana Jovičević gives the reader an insight into the very literary work that

provided the basis for the libretto of this opera – the novel of the same name (*Priest Ćira and Priest Spira*) written by Stevan Sremac – in the light of many adaptations as some form of other lives of this novel, primarily considering the film and television adaptations (and less those in the theatre). There is a very interesting characterisation of the mentality in the novel that, according to the author, “will be rephrased into characterisation via mentality” (86). Further on, she believes that Despić’s opera, as an adaptation had more success than, for example, the television adaptation from 1982 (directed by Soja Jovanović), explaining that the great success was achieved by establishing a parallel or alternation of the dramatised Sremac narrator (100). The author disapproves of the presence of the *caricature scenes* in the opera, however, she finds the justification for such librettistic solutions in the fact that the libretto was based on the novel and therefore, the presence of such scenes is understandable and acceptable. In the end, she concludes that the opera was, subject-wise, far more successful than the other adaptations. We would add to this that the success of this adaptation lies precisely in the space the author insinuated in the title of her text – the very nature of the libretto positions it in the space between comic (as the common denominator of both Sremac’s work and Despić’s opera) and poetry (the literary quality this libretto possesses as an entity outside the context of the opera). The author, thus, sheds light on the libretto as an important aspect of Despić’s work that took “a step away from the scenic, film and television adaptations created so far” (100)

by fulfilling the criteria of *comediographic reconciliation*.

Zoran Đerić has contributed to this monograph with his text “Libretto of the Opera *Priest Ćira and Priest Spira* by Dejan Despić in the Context of the ‘Opera Dramaturgy’ by Dejan Miladinović”, setting himself the goal to present Miladinović’s attitude towards libretto, the work and the duties a librettist should have, as well as opera dramaturgy. The author believes that – in the libretto *Merry Priests of Banat – the protagonists are characterised by their very names, that is, their nicknames and their professions* (117), which is, according to him, natural, bearing in mind that the characters are familiar to the readers of the novel. However, having in mind that this is opera in which music clearly illustrates the nature and the deeds of the characters, as well as their relations, we are of the opinion that the previous knowledge of the novel is not a necessity in order to enjoy this opera.

Not only did she contribute as a conductor of the opera, but Željka Milanović also left a written trail about her experiences during the preparations of the premiere of this demanding piece and the performing challenges she had to overcome during her encounter with the piece, starting with re-reading of the novel by Sremac, proceeding with reading the libretto written by Miladinović, then the work with the score and work with the soloists, choir and the orchestra. Moreover, she speaks about the unique features of the piece. One performer’s testimony is an immensely valuable contribution to this monograph, due to it containing a meticulous theoretical analysis

of the piece, which not only underlines the nature of the score, but the nature of working on one piece. It is very clear from this text that the author completely understands the language and intentions of the composer. Also, she recognises the space in which the composer allows the performer to manifest his own voice as an author through interventions made to the score.

Branka Radović, in the review after the premiere of the work, firmly expresses the belief that Despić succeeded in answering the challenge posed in Sremac’s novel. The author explains the reasons for such an opinion, praising the great effort the ensemble of the Serbian National Theatre put into preparing and performing this opera. Be that as it may, the work holds an important place in, the author underlines, the “rather modest legacy of comic operas in Serbian music literature” (149). The author notes and praises the performer interventions made by Željka Milanović (whose exhaustive work on this opera is noticeable not only on the stage but also in the text, previously presented here), primarily the one regarding the wedding scene that comes to the fore, completes the work, and gives the unfolding of this piece a certain charm. We learn from the author’s insights into the premiere of the work that the ensemble demonstrated great enthusiasm, recognising the importance of staging this particular opera. She also noted the presence of subtitles (from Serbian to Serbian) due to the complex nature of the parts that influence the understanding of the text sung by the performers.

This collective monograph gives a complete insight into the origin, premiere and nature of this operatic piece and its place in Despić's oeuvre as well as its place in the overall genre within the history of Serbian music. Together with the score, this monograph will be the starting point for many researchers, their questions and quests for new answers

and interpretations of Despić's work, which will – we believe – continue to bring humor and mirth to the lives of its listeners, in spite of the challenges and circumstances of the environment. Also, we believe that the success of this opera will inspire other authors to tackle the challenges of composing for the stage.

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**Iva Nenić, *Guslarke i sviračice na tradicionalnim instrumentima u Srbiji – identifikacija zvukom* [*Gusle female players and female players on traditional instruments in Serbia – identification by sound*],
Beograd: Clio, 2019, 299 pages,
ISBN 978-86-7102-576-8**

The book *Gusle female players and female players on traditional instruments in Serbia – identification by sound* by ethnomusicologist Iva Nenić was published in

2019, and it is based on her PhD thesis defended at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade in 2015. This book is the very first ethnomusicological study of female performances on traditional instruments in Serbia and it represents a significant contribution and a breakthrough in the subject which had, somehow, eluded the attention of local academia within the framework of contemporary theories of ideology, identity and gender performativity.

Through the five chapters of her book, Iva Nenić systematically develops and chronologically explains the practice of women playing traditional instruments in Serbia, as well as its genealogy and the identification processes that this practice entails. The author's discourse and her specific writing style are very innovative and clear – refreshing in comparison with the dominant narratives in ethnomusicology, even humanities in general. Another, very special contribution that this book makes is a bold, well grounded and constructive critique of the role of theory in ethnomusicology. In spite of (but, at the same time precisely

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