
CONVERSATIONS

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A MUSICAL MEMOIR An Interview with Jugoslav Bošnjak (1954–2018)

... It was one of those conversations that we both knew would be our last, but that was not mentioned. I was meant to ask the kind of questions one is supposed to ask in such circumstances, so that Bošnjak, in his responses, might say whatever he wanted to be remembered of him forever. That summer, in 2018, we wrote to each other. There was no opportunity to meet up and sit down to talk, and talking over the phone seemed too ephemeral and mundane for the occasion. Our task was to record in writing something important and to send it off into the future. Jugoslav Bošnjak, my university classmate



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and colleague at Radio Belgrade, was preparing for his voyage into music and light. And his *Cosmic Trilogy* (*Trilogija kosmosa*), his last project, which he undertook in his final years, would tell us the most about its author's inner universe, about his efforts to transcend life, here and now, life symbolized as cosmos, as this pervasive disorder in which the entropy of chaos keeps growing, to transcend such a notion of life by means of a higher order and the rules of artistic creation. To transgress against it through beauty and meaning. That is why his *Big Bang* (*Veliki prasak*) and *The Universe* (*Svemir*) end with chimes, decaying and evaporating into silence: lest we forget that the basis of the universe is infinite empty space, while that of music is endless silence...

Jugoslav Bošnjak acquired his B.A. and M.A. degrees at the Composition and Orchestration Department of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, under the supervision of Rajko Maksimović. Already with his final project, a symphonic image titled *Aleph* (*Alef*, 1981), he attracted the attention of the professional public and won that year's Student October Award. His Master's final project, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Tibetanska knjiga*), likewise a single-movement symphonic image, won the 1985 Vasilije Mokranjac Foundation Award for best M.A. final project that year. *Chimera* (*Himera*), a *concertante* work for violin and orchestra, won the 1983 annual award of the Composers' Association of Serbia.

Bošnjak devoted his career to Radio Belgrade, first as music assistant at the Drama Division, and then, three decades later, as an esteemed producer, entrusted with running the big ensembles of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation (Radio televizija Srbije, RTS).

Bošnjak's style acquired its basic outlines already in *Aleph*, characterized by a luscious and thick orchestral sound, a heightened and undulating emotional tension, and a neo-romantic kind of narration amalgamated with occasional usage of harsher sonorities and a Fauvist colouring. The same path was pursued in his *Tibetan Book*, which has seen multiple performances not only in Yugoslavia, but also in symphonic concerts abroad. This period saw the formation of Bošnjak's aesthetic position, defined not only by the traits of his musical narration mentioned above, but also by his programmatic focus on extra-musical contents, which he, following in the tradition of the late Romantics, painted in rich colours and with much orchestral skill.

In the late 1980s, the language of Bošnjak's style proved easy to assimilate and fit into that period's contemporary postmodern musical idiom, that of his generation of authors, in terms of simultaneously developing an eclectic

musical writing. His strong penchant for clear layouts in formal and harmonic terms, for mellifluous melodies, as well as a type of musical narration characterized by high emotional amplitudes and almost naturalistic sound images, metaphors, and symbols, generated a richly coloured orchestral sound with a clear and transparent dramaturgy. His music's almost novelizing flow constantly invites the listener to follow it in two ways: by listening to it in an emotional and passionate way as well as, one might say, by 'visualizing' the sound narration of Bošnjak's music, which imposes its tonal images on the listener's eyes and ears alike. This is an indisputable trait of Bošnjak's sound, whether in his most accomplished, orchestral works, such as *Aleph*, *Tibetan Book*, and the *1453 Overture (Uvertira 1453)*, whether in his Concerto for Piano and Strings, or his peculiar oratorio and choral works such as the *Revelation of St. John (Otkrivenje Jovanovo)* for choir and trumpet, the *Gospel according to St. Mark (Jevanđelje po Marku)* for vocal soloists, choir, and symphony orchestra, *Three Dreams (Tri sna)* for soprano, harp, and strings, or his two ballets, *Osiris and Isis (Oziris i Izida)* and *The Autumn of the King (Kraljeva jesen)*. This world of visual attraction to the sound of a large orchestra comprises his so-called *Cosmic Trilogy* as well, with its three symphonic fantasies: *The Universe* (2015), *Big Bang* (2016), and *Orion Nebula (Orion-nebula)*, (2018). The first of those, *The Universe*, won its author an April Award of the City of Belgrade.

Bošnjak's oeuvre features circles of interest rooted in contents that relate to cosmogony, mythology, and ritual: the nature of the emergence and existence of the universe, the world, humankind and its philosophy and religion. From Borges's mystical short story *Aleph*, via the Buddhist rituals of the *Tibetan Book*, the ancient Greek legend of *Chimera*, the myth of *Osiris*, to the biblical myths of the Gospels and legends from Serbian national history. These are the extra-musical contents intended to 'sacralise' Bošnjak's music, which, addressing the 'sacred', was meant to become 'sacred' itself. Perhaps that is precisely why he chose the broad stylistic matrix of Romanticism, wherein the composer becomes a 'holy man', an over-man, while music was prepared to become humanity's artistic religion. It was precisely in Romanticism that orchestral sound grew to become the paradigm of the style and became powerful enough to rival the non-artistic world reflected in it and thus absorbed into the all-pervasive being of art.

In the creative mythology of Jugoslav Bošnjak, the orchestra was the mythical deity that created the world.

In that ontological-philosophical-aesthetic sense, for him composing was a cosmogony ritual, a procedure whereby the world continues being and persisting in itself, which affirms its *meaningfulness*. Therefore, his music is an orchestral re-construction of today's world modelled after Romanticism in terms of expression and even form; as such, it offers our chaotic present a consistent and almost enlightened answer to the question of meaning.

It was the religious concept of a creator himself, who sought to 'understand the world' through music.

Where is does it all begin?

One summer afternoon; the school year was finished and I was spending a part of that summer at my grandma's house in Zemun. That afternoon, I was woken up from slumber by *The Animals'* song *The House of the Rising Sun*. I jumped out of bed and put my ear close to the radio. In that song I innately recognized what was unconsciously lying dormant in me as the music of those early years of my life.

A bit later, when I was 10, my parents gave me a guitar. I had a booklet with some basic chords, so I learned them and started working out on my guitar songs by bands that were popular at the time, *The Beatles*, *The Animals*, *Procol Harum*, etc. I played my guitar at parties, became 'popular' with the girls, and worked out my own songs, with lyrics of my own. Later, I always used to say: "My guitar brought me to music". One afternoon, I was playing it in the schoolyard of High School No. 2 in the Zeleni Venac area of Belgrade, when a friend of mine, Šilja Miletić, who later played double bass in the Philharmonic, came up to me and said: "Why are you wasting your time in this Sing Sing" (referring to my high school) and suggested I should transfer to the Stanković School of Music, where he had already transferred some time before.

With my father's permission, I abandoned my secondary education and began pursuing an education in music, at Stanković. I was already 17 at the time, so, to put it succinctly, I accelerated my schooling by finishing four grades in two years. I had to abandon the guitar at the recommendation of my late piano teacher, Vera Tadžić. Because your hands are used differently on a guitar, it could not fit with playing the piano, which was compulsory in the School's Theory Department. My time in secondary education in music was filled with a lot of listening to music with the aid of pocket scores, learning about everything that constitutes the musical styles of Europe's heritage

in music. But I wasn't only interested in music. I read a lot, a lot of fine literature as well as philosophical works. At the time, there were three, in my mind, great thinkers who were especially *en vogue*: Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, and Henri Bergson. These philosophers, along with their best known works: *Will to Power* (Nietzsche), *The Decline of the West* (Spengler), and *Creative Evolution* (Bergson), became my lifelong companions.

In Nietzsche, I was attracted to his aphoristic style, his thesis about the imminent advent of 'nihilism', the 'eternal return of the same', as well as his relentless critique of European decadence. In a monumental way, Spengler observed every known culture, looking for parallels between them, such as the one between Caesar and Napoleon, and wisely developed the notion of culture as a living organism, from the concept of civilization as its inevitable but inanimate continuation. He distinguished between the culture of the ancient world and the Roman civilization, as well as between European culture and the technological civilization we inhabit today. Bergson held that life is constant evolution that we may understand by means of intuition rather than reason. As in that adage, *panta rei*, we do not see the film but only a photograph, and the next morning we already seek to push the drawer into an old cupboard, but it does not fit there anymore. I could spend a long time talking about this philosophy from the turn of the century, which shaped my view of the world and culture in it.

Shall we return to composing?

I failed to mention an important fact. I began my education in music with the clear intent to become a composer by pursuing a regular education. Whatever I wrote was done quickly, in a flash, instinctively, and unconsciously modelled after something from the tradition I knew. Still, the first thing I did that was a bit more serious was a *Prelude, Aria, and Diptych* (*Preliđ, arija i diptih*), for piano, with which I passed the entrance exam and entered the composition class of Prof. Rajko Maksimović. That year, 1975, was the year he joined the Composition and Orchestration Department, and Milovan Filipović and I were his first students. He was an excellent choice for me. He let me bring in larger segments of work. He used to say: "I am your first professional audience"; he never sought to influence the contents of what we wrote, but preferred to discuss its quality and the proportions of individual sections. For instance, he would say: "If a motive appears only once, you should get rid of it". He was and remained an informal professor, he social-

ized with us, let us borrow his scores, and shared his home cooking with us. His assessments of compositions were either–or. He knew very well what could pass at the Department, which had a very good reputation at the time. Its professors were Stanojlo Rajičić, Vasilije Mokranjac, Enriko Josif, Petar Ozgijan, and Aleksandar Obradović, assisted by Srđan Hofman and Vlastimir Trajković.

Already my entrance exam piece, the *Prelude, Aria, and Diptych*, was later recorded, performed by pianist Dubravka Jovičić, with whom I developed a close relationship and collaboration regarding everything I wrote for the piano. Every piece I wrote as a student was well received at the Faculty, not only at the exams. All of them, from my first-year *Piano Suite (Svita za klavir)*, the Lied titled *The Little Girl (Devojčica)* from my second year, the *Trio – Variations (Trio – varijacije)* from my third year, the string quartet I wrote in my fourth year and won that year’s annual award of the Composers’ Association of Serbia, to my final project, *Aleph*, which won that year’s Student October Award of the City of Belgrade.

At that time, did you follow any models?

As a young man, of course I loved composers from various style periods, who made a special impact on my work. From Bach, inevitably, to Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*. I was especially fond of Scarlatti’s baroque; at the time, I wasn’t too keen on the Viennese Classics, though I loved Beethoven as a forerunner of Romanticism, and I was especially fond of the late Romanticism of Franck, Mahler, Richard Strauss, as well as Ravel’s impressionism; as for 20th-century music, I preferred mostly Russian composers, especially Scriabin and his *Poem of Ecstasy*. In essence, a young composer is influenced by whatever s/he hears, especially at concerts. As a student, I was particularly influenced by Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, more than by any other piece from the 20th century.

I’d like to return to my B.A. final work, my symphonic poem *Aleph*, inspired by the eponymous short story by Borges. Its final sections already hint at my last orchestral works, *The Universe* (2015) and *Big Bang* (2016). *Aleph* has been performed several times. It was premièred in Belgrade on 21 April 1982 and then there were further performances at the 1984 Yugoslav Composers Forum in Opatija, as well as in Australia (Brisbane, Queensland Symphony Orchestra). Crucially, that was already the time when the symphony orchestra became my preferred medium, with or without choir, and at that time most of my works were already somehow related to literature.

The titles of your pieces point either to literature or to a kind of programme?

That is true. *Aleph* and *Chimera* for violin and orchestra (after Borges's short stories) as well as *The Tibetan Book* (all three of them written during my B.A. and M.A. studies) were inspired by literature. I must also take pride in noting that *The Tibetan Book* was the first piece to win the newly established award of the Vasilije Mokranjac Foundation for works by graduate students of composition. It appears on the recording released to mark the 50th anniversary of the Symphony Orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation (*50 godina Simfonijskog orchestra RTS*) and on the CD compilation of my music that came out later. Whilst working on it, I did yoga, read a lot about Buddhism, and tried to capture with my piece that state in between death and rebirth that the book calls *bardo*. Of course, that is impossible, especially that the listener might experience something like that, but I still keep the programme scheme of that piece. After finishing my graduate studies, I re-embarked on a programmatic voyage into the past. On 12 January 1989, at the première of my *1453 Overture*, subtitled *The Fall of Constantinople (Pad Carigrada)*, the reaction from the audience was such that I had to take three bows on the orchestra stage. My source of inspiration was the chanting of Dragoslav Pavle Aksentijević, so I inserted one of the chants, the *Kyrie eleison*, into the work's orchestral score, as a quotation of Pavle and his small choir, singing from the gallery of the Kolarac. The conductor was our chief conductor at the time, Vladimir Kranjčević. There is a moment in the piece when the smaller choir, singing the *ison*, takes over from the violoncellos and double basses, using the same pitch, while the orchestra stops and the celebrant comes in, chanting.

With that Overture, you left the waters of academia. What happened then?

At that time I had already started working as producer of the choir and symphony orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation and thus had an opportunity to absorb the orchestra sound and record performances of works by composers from Yugoslavia and abroad. I liked my job, because it put me in constant touch with 'live' music. I wrote my own music during the summers, sacrificing my vacations to have time to compose. In 1986, in a single summer, I wrote my first ballet, *Osiris and Isis*, on a commission from the *Marble and Sounds (Mermer i zvuci)* Festival in Arandelovac. Unfortunately, due to the sudden death of Alek Đonović, who initiated the commission, it was never staged. It was performed as an orchestral suite by the Belgrade

Philharmonic in 1989, led by Maestro Cristian Mandeal, now a famous conductor. After that, I wrote a choreographic poem, *The Little Prince* (*Mali princ*), inspired by the famous book by Saint-Exupéry. The poem features a harpsichord *obbligato* and it was recorded for Radio Belgrade under the leadership of Angel Šurev. It was never performed live, although a lot of people thought it was very good, and the reason for that is simple. I didn't fight to have it performed. In 1989, responding to an internal commission to mark the 50th anniversary of the Choir of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, I wrote my first setting of a Biblical text – the *Revelation of St. John*, for an unusual ensemble – solo trumpet and mixed choir. That was also the first piece conducted by the current chief conductor, Bojan Sudić, then an aspiring young conductor. The soloist at the première was Blagoje Angelovski. The *Revelation of St. John* is a choral drama in seven movements and my first musical encounter with Biblical texts. I remember the words of the late Professor Enriko Josif: "I think, my dear child, that this is your greatest achievement so far". As far as I know, the *Revelation* is, if not the only one, then one of the few works written for this unusual ensemble, and a setting of the final Biblical text at that. Solo trumpet and mixed choir are really not a common sort of ensemble, and then there is also the fact that I quoted the apocalyptic texts straight from the Bible, with selections and some omissions. I followed the same working principle in the *Gospel according to St. Mark* and, later, in the *Book of Job* (*Knjiga o Jovu*); to retain as much as possible from what are quite extensive texts and preserve their Biblical meanings. I wrote the *Revelation* in a single summer, working as though 'someone else was writing with my hand'.

Can we provisionally leave chronology aside and turn to your works inspired by Biblical texts?

Gladly. Following *The Revelation*, there were further Biblical settings in 1995 – *The Holy Gospel or Passion according to St. Mark* (*Sveto jevanđelje po Marku*), an oratorio for a vocal soloist (the Evangelist), mixed choir, and symphony orchestra – and, in this century, from 2007, my largest work, the *Book of Job* for soloists (mezzo-soprano and bass), mixed choir, and large orchestra. The *Book of Job* is my most complex and large-scale undertaking, an oratorio taking 46 minutes in performance. It was dedicated to Maestro Bojan Sudić and marked the 30th anniversary of my work as an artist and producer. Its première on 26 December 2012 was a huge success. It's been broadcast on radio and television a number of times, but the critics have ig-

nored it. A number of my distinguished colleagues who came to the première congratulated me sincerely, but the piece has failed to resonate among the critics. ‘Getting to grips’ with such long texts, texts that are difficult to sing, is always a huge risk and undertaking, given their contents and the performing forces. But I always liked the challenges of the ‘big screen.’ I chose the *Book of Job* because it has a universal meaning for all of the monotheistic religions. As part of the *Old Testament*, it belongs to Judaism and Christianity alike, and in terms of its commitment to God’s will (Spengler), it pertains to Islam as well. The oratorio comprises three acts: *The Man from the Land of Uz* (*Čovjek iz Uza*), *Tribulations* (*Stradanje*), and *Glory* (Slava). It addresses key religious themes, the suffering of the righteous Job, a man who was deeply devout, ‘the greatest of all the people of the East.’ With God’s permission, he was tested by Satan, so he lost everything and became gravely ill, but remained firm in his faith. This firmness was then rewarded and everything he had lost was returned to him and then doubled. The righteous Job is a symbol of every faith precisely on account of this firmness and willingness to suffer whatever comes his way but remain faithful to the Creator. In terms of musical style, in the third act I resorted to baroque counterpoint to a large extent. This was spontaneous and I think it fit into the whole piece rather nicely. Why the Book of Job? That becomes clear if one remembers what Nietzsche wrote: “For a tree to become tall it must grow tough roots among the rocks”. I’ve always held a deep belief in the link between tradition and contemporary music, which may be read in those words.

So far, we’ve talked about the ‘big screen’ – orchestral and choral music. What about chamber?

I’m restricting myself in this interview only to my most significant works, those that had a certain resonance in the public and were later included, in 2008, in the CD release of my music titled *Orkestarska i horska kosmogonija Jugoslava Bošnjaka* (The Orchestral and Choral Cosmogony of Jugoslav Bošnjak). That title likewise suggests that I’ve mostly written music for large ensembles. From my B.A. final project, *Aleph* (1979), all the way to *Big Bang* (2016), I was fascinated by the possibilities of a large orchestra and the tremendous richness of the colours, contrasts, and even grandeur of its sound. Nevertheless, in 1990, having finished my studies, responding to a commission from the Belgrade Baroque Quartet, I wrote a piece titled *Fairy Song* (*Vilinska pesma*) for flute, violin, violoncello, and piano; then, *Memory*

(*Sećanje*), for the late harpsichordist and friend of mine Miloš Petrović; and, in 1991, *Fate (Sudba)* for soprano and string quartet, my most frequently performed piece so far. It was performed in Serbia and abroad by the Belgrade String Quartet featuring Katica Nikolić, my late first wife, as vocal soloist (soprano). Around that time I also wrote my second ballet, *The Autumn of the King*, which remained on the repertoire of the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad for a full year, with choreography by Krunoslav Simić, and was also staged at the 25th BEMUS festival in 1993. I would also mention my Three Songs for Trombone and Orchestra (*Tri pesme za trombone i orkestar*), a *concertante* work from 1992, as well as *Watercolour (Akvarrel)*, a chamber piece for two pianos and percussion from 1993. Another piece I would also include in my chamber oeuvre is *Memory Mask (Maska sećanja)*, which was performed in 1996 by the St. George Strings at the 7th International Review of Composers.

What about Yugoslav Bošnjak in the 21st century?

At the very end of the 20th century, in 1999, following the “Merciful Angel” bombing campaign, my Concerto for Piano and String Quartet, featuring Dubravka Jovičić as the soloist and Alexander Apolin, from what was then Czechoslovakia, as the conductor, opened the 31st BEMUS festival. The piece was well received and in one text I was even called *naš Rahmanjinov* (our Rachmaninoff). There were some who didn’t like the sound of that too much, but I took it as a compliment. Dubravka played from memory and when I asked how she’d memorized such a complex and extensive piece, she said: “I practised from the beginning to the end and from the end to the beginning”. I was fascinated by that!

And now we come to the question of classifying, in terms of style and poetics, my music from this and the previous century. I will try to answer, though I’d rather leave that to musicologists. One thing is certain: my style has changed very little, ever since my student years. If you go on YouTube and listen to the very ending of my symphonic poem *Aleph* and any part of my award-winning piece *The Universe*, you will find a lot of analogies. I’ve always tended to compose in a flash and rather quickly. When composing, I always knew what my next step was going to be. In every piece I wrote, I was always highly inspired by the theme and very, very excited. When I said, in a class, something along those lines to my professor Rajko Maksimović, he wisely retorted: “If your piece doesn’t excite you, be sure that it won’t excite

anyone”. Today there are no musical styles anymore. In my view, we are living in an absolute democracy of styles. There are attempts, which may be logical enough, to classify contemporary works from this and the preceding century as neo-romanticist, neoclassical, postmodern, etc. Not all of my works belong to the ‘same style’. I, too, had to find my own style, trying out, along the way, many different creative paths. Some of my works, such as the ballet *The Autumn of the King* and the Concerto for Piano and Strings may easily be called neo-romanticist. But *Aleph*, the *Tibetan Book*, *Passacaglia Symphony* (*Simfonija pasakalja*), and *Big Bang* feature a poetics that is quite removed from those pieces. I have never sought to resist what naturally came to me, precisely along the lines of that maxim of Nietzsche: “For a tree to become tall it must grow tough roots among the rocks”. I am neither an innovator nor a modernist. I naturally try to synthesize Europe’s immense musical tradition, seeking to imprint the seal of my own creativity upon it. Without that tradition there can be no creative evolution in music either...

What is that ‘seal’ in this century?

After a hiatus of many years, which was not a crisis of creativity, but was caused by some personal developments, perhaps a sort of ‘saturation’, I’m not sure, my present wife’s mother, herself a musician, having heard many recordings of my pieces, said to me: ‘It’s a shame, son, that you’re not writing new stuff, as you’ve got such a gift for that’. And thus, in 2004, came the *Passacaglia Symphony*, though it was not performed until 2007, as a result of a collaborative project between Berlin and Belgrade. After a string of pieces inspired either by literature or extra-musical programmes, I wanted in a way to combine old and new. I was attracted to the baroque passacaglia form, because it enabled me to integrate, with a single extended theme, the contents of an entire complex symphonic and orchestral tissue in a single movement. The passacaglia gave me the kind of cohesion I was looking for. The work made a splash in the concert-going public, provoking lines such as the following: “The successful reconciliation of a strict baroque style with the romanticist dualism of drama and lyricism”. I’ve already mentioned my penchant for baroque counterpoint, as well as the neo-romanticist traits of some of my pieces. My life’s journey and artistic path, observed in terms of the dominant musical styles that coincided with it, encompasses modernism, postmodernism, as well as every possible stylistic striving of my contemporaries. I always had a feeling that a part of my, let’s say, neo-romanticism, was

not adequately received. But one should not forget that during the 20th century there were and there still are such antipodes on concert stages as Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

When I finished the *Passacaglia Symphony* in 2006, I started working on a huge oratorio, the *Book of Job*. After I'd written more than half of the entire score by hand, my professor Rajko asked which programme I was using, referring to music writing software. I said: "My own hand-and-pen programme". He immediately gave me his old computer, made me a printed list of every shortcut used in *Sibelius*, and showed me the basics. After I developed an elementary command of computers and programmes, I got myself a new computer, and then a whole world of benefits in composition opened up to me.

Why did you 'avoid' the benefits of computer use up to that point?

I had a sort of *a priori* resistance to that 'machine', and the late Vlastimir Trajković, member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, once told me about the same problem. I hated it, but I don't know why. Professor Trajković told me you must develop a liking for your computer to be able to use it properly. Using *Sibelius*, I discovered how much faster it was to write like that and, not insignificantly, that you can also hear what you write, without having to play it on the piano. Especially since most of my pieces are impossible to render properly on a piano. For the most part, I write linearly, so when I outline a section, I work out the parts one by one, trying to individualize them, from the top winds to the double basses. All of that helped me to break free from routine, and even a part of 'my former self', to a degree. I increasingly became a 'child of my own time'.

How did that happen?

Other people have heard the same thing in my most recent works: *Music of Silence* (*Muzika tišine*, 2015) for solo guitar and string orchestra and then, with universal approval and an April Award of the City of Belgrade in the field of music, *The Universe*, four symphonic scenes from 2015, and *Big Bang* from 2016.

The Universe was a continuation as well as turning point in my creative work. If we're talking about *Aleph*, my first orchestral work, then it was a continuation, but if we're talking about my neo-romanticist Concerto for Piano

and String Orchestra, it was still a turnabout in style. *The Universe* is an attempt at a musical journey from my own microcosm to the visible macrocosm, expressed in music. What I managed to relay to my audience, as much as that was possible, was my sheer excitement, which has a sort of 'secret connection' with Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Of course, Kubrick 'taught' me to express the ineffable, to connect, in an archetypal way, a distant past with a possible future. The film's ending shows the 'inorganic' monolith with the embryo of a child. And here we can return to Spengler, who says that European culture is the antecedent of technological civilization. In his view, culture is an organic creation bound to the soil, whereas civilization is its inorganic but necessary continuation... And while my wife was accepting on my behalf the April Award of the City of Belgrade for music, I was getting radiotherapy at the National Cancer Research Centre in Pasterova Street.

Without even being aware that I was ill, in the summer of 2016, as a natural sequel to *The Universe*, I was writing *Big Bang* (moving quickly, but also with much difficulty concerning some sections, constantly returning and revising them), in order to qualify for the 26th International Review of Composers. That piece was performed on 10 October 2017 as the closing work of the entire 26th Review. It, too, like *The Universe* before it, met with universal acclaim.

What happened after Big Bang and its space journey?

Following my release from Belgrade's City Hospital (*Gradska bolnica*) in September 2017, in a very short span of time, I wrote the third part of what is now my 'cosmic trilogy', *Orion Nebula*, which has yet to be performed. Regardless of its possibly post-romanticist underpinning, as you once mentioned to me, these pieces are a step up from my previous work towards something new and unknown in my musical journey from Baroque to space.

In your view, where is today's music headed?

In my mind, expression through music is an absolute privilege, not for everyone in professional terms, maybe not for everyone's ears, but it is an incredible opportunity to express, without words or images, *that which is ineffable*, and that is your internal life of the soul poured into sound. The music of today is pursuing a very, very individualistic path. The only thing that is not individualistic is the universal need of authors to create, in every era, includ-

ing today. Some think that the age of great music has passed, while others maintain that there is yet so much new music ahead of us. Both views are partly correct. The age of extremely differentiated styles from the Renaissance to Romanticism and of the great masters who wrote their music at the time has passed, never to return. However, the huge experience that we have under our belt and the immense freedom to express ourselves, unfettered by any rules, is right in front of us. As a music producer of many decades and a contemporary of so many authors whose music I've listened to at countless concerts, I am well aware of the sheer wealth of musical expression both here and abroad. There are so many instances when it's wonderful to read or hear words by musicologists about contemporary works, because their words, inspired by music, become not commentaries on, reviews, or scholarly analyses of works, but *creativity* in their own right.

And you and your personal and artistic poetics?

In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, there is a line addressing the deceased that goes something like this: "You will hear the music of an infinite space". All of us, our feelings, our art, our innate being, our every instant, that totality of our thinking, science, space travel and the travels of the spirit, as well as our sincere musical attempts to express it all are this *music of an infinite space*. It's important to be sincere, without trying to be too smart; it's important to try and reach those for whom one composes. That was and still is my motto. Of course, all of that requires a lot of education, one must keep abreast, as much as possible, of what others are writing, and remain open to difference. Someone once said that only music needs no words. Music was and will always be a mirror of our innate being, thoughts, and feelings, and the unique experience of a moment in our life, whatever its duration. Music organically binds those 'moments' into an integrated whole that carries the seal of its author. If those who listen to that music come to recognize themselves in that seal, a unique interaction occurs between the composer and the listener. For me, that communication with the audience was always important.