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RADOŠ MITROVIĆ*

University of Arts in Belgrade
Faculty of Music
Department of Musicology

Review of the 33rd International Review of Composers in Belgrade (October 3–8, 2024)

Despite the less than ideal conditions in which the largest festival of contemporary music in our country is held, primarily in terms of finances and the absence of significant assistance and support from the state or city, The International Review of Composers manages to survive and offer listeners respectable program content every year.

The International Review of Composers opened with a performance by the RTS Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Olivera Sekulić-Barac, showcasing works by domestic composers.¹ The program included *Fanuil (Rvanje Jakovljevo) (Fanuil [Jacob's Struggle])* by Bratislav Petković, with a characteristic programmatic foundation, accessible language, and easy harmonious progressions. This was followed by Rajko Maksimović's *Diptych*, based on his earlier compositions

Not to Be or to Be? (1969) and *Eppur si Muove* (1970). The ensemble delivered an expressive and detailed interpretation of this vivid sonic imagery. Next was *Mimikrija (Mimicry)* by Milana Stojadinović-Milić – originally her 1987 graduation piece – built on carefully selected thematic material developed with virtuosity, showcasing the composer's nuanced approach to orchestration. Following this was *Lirska poema (Lyric Poem)* by Vasilije Mokranjac, a piece of idiosyncratic musical language, which employs a kind of “prolonged” sense of time through sustained chords and a dynamic interplay of texture expansions and contractions in a wave-like manner. The orchestra achieved a powerful, cohesive sound in the fortissimo passages, with the brass section playing a particularly prominent and flawless role.

The performance concluded with Srđan Hofman's *Koncertantne epizode (Episodi concertanti)* for violin and orchestra – an extraordinary and authentic piece. First performed in 1974, it consists of 14 contrasting episodes, featuring a highly virtuosic solo violin part. Marija

* The author's contact details:
radosh.mitrovic@gmail.com.

¹ Certain segments of this text, in a slightly modified form, were published in the program of Radio Belgrade 2: *Ars Sonora* (broadcast on 7.10.2024) and *Cultural Circles* (broadcast on 9.10.2024).

Špengler Marković masterfully delivered the solo cadenzas with exceptional precision and artistry.

On the second day the Gradilište / Construction Site New Music Ensemble performed a number of works dedicated to Srđan Hofman. The evening was titled *Mirrors: Music World of Srđan Hofman*, and it marked the 80th anniversary of the composer's birth, featuring works by his former students, honoring the recently deceased artist.

The program included *Secret Serenity* for string quartet by Milica Paranosić, a contemplative piece of refined lyricism and pronounced melodicism. The ending suggests a sense of incompleteness or unresolved tension, allowing the music to linger and evolve in the listener's subconscious, thereby opening a unique interpretive dimension.

Žice broj 3 (Strings No. 3) by Vladimir Korać, composed for string trio and electronics, explored playful interactions of timbres and textures. It subtly engaged with Hofman's work *Gledajući u ogledala Aniša Kapura (Looking at Mirrors by Anish Kapoor)*, whose motif is hinted at from the beginning. From there, a complex and multi-layered configuration unfolds, where the electronic part not only serves as a foundation but also drives the entire flow. The instruments enhance the sonic palette, creating a striking impression with sustained tones and a wide dramatic arc.

Hofman Trio (The Hofman Trio) by Ivan Brkljačić is based on three motifs from Professor Hofman's compositions: *Znakovi (Signs)*, *Koncertantna muzika*

(*Musica Concertante*) and *Ogledalo (Mirror)*. The piece features an egalitarian treatment of the instruments, with rhythm playing a pivotal structural role. Pianist Neda Hofman, cellist Srđan Sretenović, and the young but exceptional flutist Marko Sretenović maintained a high level of concentration, delivering maximum tonal and rhythmic precision.

The same could be said for Svetlana Savić's composition *Blagi čaj vazdušni (Mild Tea, Made of Air)*, also written for flute, cello, and piano, inspired by the poem by Saša Radojčić. The piano part is subtle and suggestive, and the composition ends abruptly, with a motif in shorter note values – seemingly unfinished, yet profoundly meaningful.

The strikingly crafted piece *Rebus (Rebus)* by Nataša Bogojević, written for the same ensemble as the previous two works, is inspired by the concept outlined in the program note of Srđan Hofman's work of the same name. The author develops her own distinctive language, executing the dramaturgy with thoughtful precision and inventive solutions, avoiding patterned formal structures in the instrumental lines.

Irena Popović presented the lucid and innovatively conceived composition *Šaputanje, tišinoвање, tihovanje, tugovanje (Whispering, Quieting, Silencing, Mourning)*, for children's voices and piano. This piece creates a communicative and deeply poignant sonic image, due to the inventive use of children's voices. Meanwhile, Nina Perović contributed her work *Plavo (Blue)* for piano and

electronics. The electronic part features modified water sounds, rich with symbolic meaning, serving as a backdrop for the progression of shorter motifs, shaped with finely tuned dynamic development. Neda Hofman Sretenović delivered an inspired and exceptional performance, breathing interpretive life into the piece with remarkable sensitivity.

Next came Jasna Veličković's musical vignette *Odsjaj (Glare)*, which diverges significantly from the typical expression of the composer's style. Intimate in character, the piece features a motoric musical flow that culminates in a slow exposition of the theme, serving as a kind of seal after the turbulent progressions that precede it. The work was a true refreshment in the concert program, brought to life through the meticulous interpretation of Neda Hofman-Sretenović.

The performance concluded with *Portrait* for violin and piano by Laura Čuperjani and *Suspense* for violin, piano, and electronics by Aleksandar Perunović.

Portrait consists of a series of episodes with diverse dramatic frameworks, where the instruments are treated equally in delivering the material, establishing excellent complementary relationships. This created an imaginative soundscape, further highlighted by a striking interpretation that illuminated the work's inventive structure.

Perunović's piece, as noted in the program, features an electronic layer almost entirely assembled from fragments of Srđan Hofman's music. The performance was exceptionally well-executed, capturing the intricate drama of the com-

position. The pianist also had an additional performing role, reciting text taken from Hofman's *Makamba*, enhancing the overall sonority. The climactic segment was particularly well-executed and deeply felt, with a dynamic crescendo in which the performers played with full sound, gradually building an intense and powerful image. This culminated with a recording of Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony*, briefly followed by the voice of Professor Hofman himself, seamlessly integrated into the overall thrilling soundscape.

The International Review of Composers continued on October 5th at the Student Cultural Center, beginning with *Trillium* for harpsichord by Andreja Andrić, followed by */otkriće se/ (/will be revealed/)* for piccolo flute, bass clarinet, cello, and electronics by Maja Bosnić. The composer juxtaposed two sonic layers: an electronic part, often composed of piercing segments, and an instrumental part relying on extended techniques and short sounds. At times, overwhelming noise contrasts with the subtlety of the instrumental layer, creating a striking dynamism.

Panayiotis Kokoras then presented *Bellow* for accordion and electronics, with Marija Ratkov delivering an exceptional performance, demonstrating precise control over the complex instrumental part. The electronic layer was constructed from a variety of modified sounds, ranging from animal noises to the clacking of a typewriter. However, the piece lacked clear dramatic direction, resulting in a monotonous and somewhat

predictably designed auditory play that fell short of nuanced craftsmanship.

Aleksandar Savić presented *Orange-Gray* for piano and electronics, performed with exceptional skill by Bojana Dimković. However, despite the strong performance, the composition itself lacks expressive development and surprises, with its abrupt and unprepared ending leaving an impression of incompleteness and an unresolved musical thought.

Next came *Adlez* for guitar and electronics by Wenbin Lyu, performed confidently by Zoran Anić, who delivered rhythmically-precise musical flourishes. This was followed by Predrag Radisavljević's *Kulshedra*, for female voice, accordion, and live electronics – a piece that was essentially an electronic study in sound manipulation with an improvisatory character.

The first part of the evening concluded with *Fantasia Skortato* for violin, harpsichord, and live electronics by Paul Pankert. The work featured postmodern playfulness with Baroque mannerisms and other tropes, heavily employing reverb to create a fragmented structure. However, the piece's ending lacks conviction and leaves the listeners with a sense of unanswered questions.

During the second part of the evening, we had an opportunity to hear *Vytra* by Daria Baiocchi, for oboe and electronics, performed by Ivana Dakić, followed by *Ne sasvim iskreni komadi* (*Not Completely Sincere Pieces*) for cello and piano by Miloš Zatkalik – a very innovative and interesting piece that presented a somewhat unexpected expres-

sion compared to the composer's previous oeuvre. Also performed were *Arija* (*Air*) by Božo Banović, *Ngbaka Poliptih* (*Ngbaka Polyptich*) for flute, cello, and piano by Dušan Bogdanović, and *The Nightingale and the Poacher's Gun*, for piccolo and electronics by Ian Wilson. However, the standout pieces of the evening were undoubtedly *Impuls* (*Impulse*) for saxophone, trumpet, and accordion by Lazar Đorđević and *Haiku V* (*Haiku V*) by Veljko Nenadić, for piccolo, percussion, and optional electronics.

Impulse is a work that continues the trajectory of Lazar Đorđević's recent compositions, characterized by authentic expression, energy, and convincing dramaturgy. There is no empty space or weariness in the material. With excellent knowledge of accordion technique, he uses the instrument to its maximum potential, contrasting distant musical realms with skillful dramatic rises and tensions that energize the structure. His imaginative sound world was fully captured in the performance by Milan Savić, Jovan Savić, and Branko Džinović.

Finally, *Haiku V* by Veljko Nenadić brought a refreshing element to the concert program, evoking the music of the Far East through the confrontation of contemplation and ecstasy, with electronics subtly coloring the impressive sound result. Virtuoso Ivan Marjanović guided the flow with excellence, which, unfortunately, seemed to end too abruptly and prematurely, despite being an exceptionally creative musical concept.

The next concert, on October 6th, was dedicated to the piano works of

Vladan Radovanović. Pianists Nataša Penezić, Dimitrije Nikolić, Marija Radojević, Jasmina Raković, and Vladimir Aćimović performed *Magistarski Preludijum i Fuga (Master's Prelude and Fuga)*, *Devet komada (Nine Pieces)*, and *Prelidi (Preludes)*. This was a remarkable event, because this segment of Radovanović's work is largely unknown to the public. It was particularly fascinating to hear his pianistic style and imagination, which demonstrate not only a deep understanding of the instrument but also a profound knowledge of musical literature. *Prelidi (Preludes)* were especially interesting due to their tonality and the ways in which it was treated in the unique musical language of this great composer. From Baroque references, contrapuntal exercises, and sudden harmonic solutions to modulations and the juxtaposition of contrasting characters, to virtuosic, melodic, and emotionally-inspired pieces, all of these elements were present. We could hear all of this in a relatively short time, given that these vignettes display an erudite understanding of musical literature and skillful manipulation of musical materials. Each of the young pianists performed with exceptional precision and clarity, unveiling the hidden yet exciting realm of Radovanović's compositional work.

The next day, on October 7th, at the Cultural Center "Parobrod", the program featured performances by the Quartet of the *Belgrade Chamber Orchestra*, the *Wonder Strings Quartet*, as well as flutists Jelena Šarenac Španović and Stana Krstajić, and harpist Ivana Pavlović. In

addition, the audience was treated to performances by accordionists Branko Džinović and Petar Bešović, percussionist Ivana Marjanović, and pianist Bojana Dimković.

Following Ryszard Osada's piece *Prism* for flute, which, according to the program note, "explores the three lowest notes of the instrument and their deformation and 'splitting' in sonic structures derived from the basic tones and their overtones"² – a work whose sound was not very convincing — came the composition *Na ivici (On the Edge)* for flute and harp, by Anđela Milić. This piece, based on constant dialogue between the instruments, featured intricate textures and a largely uniform dramaturgy, with pauses as a fundamental structural element.

Olga Janković then presented *How to Make a Bonfire II* for string quartet. The composition is divided into two clearly distinct sections: the first is built on repetitive, postminimalist patterns, while the second contrasts completely with rapid string attacks, percussive instrument sounds, and extended techniques of a neo-avant-garde nature.

The work *Collage of Immortal Pictures* for accordion and string quartet by Vladica Mikićević contains seven movements, where the dominant approach is a collage-like thinking (as the title indicates) with divergent images, ranging from long-held sections to energetic eruptions.

Milan Milošević's *Zugzwang* for accordion follows a carefully constructed trajectory with a wide arc, sharp harmo-

² See https://composers.rs/?page_id=8522.

nies, and meaningful dramaturgy. The final composition of the evening, *Zvona* (Bells) by Mirjana Veljković for vibraphone and piano, featured particularly interesting sound solutions, with the piano part offering various forms of ostinato accompaniment and repetition of material, creating a striking overall sonic picture.

The second concert featured the piece *Ritratti surreali* for vibraphone by Massimo Lauricella, interpreted with exceptional precision by Milan Milić. This was followed by *Judgment Day* by Amos Elkana for bassoon, performed passionately by Goran Marinković. The piece *Inconsistent Dialogue* by Ivan Elezović, for trombone and violin, contains an intriguing combination of instruments, their rhythmic interplay through an equal treatment of parts, horizontal thinking, and a variety of techniques. However, the somewhat monotonous dynamic movement affected the overall listening experience of the piece.

Next was *Inharmonični sjaj* (Inharmonic Splendour) for soprano, clarinet, and piano by Mateja Nikolić. The piece's dramaturgy leads toward a climax, gradually increasing in complexity, with distorted sections and a voice that ascends into a scream, resulting in a loss of articulated singing and moving toward a complete sonic collapse.

Finally, Dragan Latinčić presented *Tri pesme na stihove Miroļjuba Todorovića* (Three Songs on Lyrics by Miroļjub Todorović) for soprano and piano. The composition featured an expressive vocal line with rhythmic patterns in the piano part,

establishing accompaniment that creates an exciting image in sync with Todorović's poetry, which included the songs *Ti si kajsiĵin cvet* (You are the Apricot Flower), *Grĵim tvoĵu senku* (I Embrace Your Shadow), and *Venĉanje* (Wedding).

This year's Review of Composers concluded with an outstanding program that presented ambitious works across diverse poetic frameworks. The evening began with *Etnos* (Ethnos) by Vladimir Tošić for harmonica and string orchestra. Originally written for the unique combination of harmonica and gusle, and dedicated to Bojana and Nikola Peković – who have been performing as a duo for years – this composition resonated with a striking tone in its new arrangement. Tošić remained in his recognizable post-minimalist style, utilizing repetitions and a catchy harmonic language. The exceptional Belgrade Chamber Orchestra *Ljubica Marić*, conducted by Rade Pejčić, along with soloist Nikola Peković, delivered a secure and inspiring performance.

Nikola Peković demonstrated technical prowess and refined musicality with every tone, adapting effortlessly to different aesthetic frameworks. He maintained this quality during his interpretation of *Ka zvezdama 3* (To the Stars 3), for accordion and string orchestra, by Tatjana Milošević Mijanović. The piece created a dynamic between stillness and turbulence, between sparse solo textures and intense ostinatos, resulting in a dramatic structure that worked effectively through to the piece's conclusion.

Drawing parallels with baroque elements, *Tri mlada meseca* (Three young

Moons) – *Ostinato, Intermezzo, and Aria* by Igor Andrić – is a well-organized composition, with a clear form and developed melodies that evoke a romantic sensibility. The ensemble played with calm, poised inspiration, thoughtfully building the musical whole while precisely following the flow's logic.

Next, the program featured *Formacija fantazije (Formation of Fantasy)* by Ana Kazimić, which presented a finely-sculpted theme with variations, followed by Branka Popović's *Weaving* for accordion and string orchestra. In this piece the accordion part predominated, with virtuosic passages, and contemplative sections, often holding long sustained tones. The composer's impressive imagination created an immersive musical world of breathtaking sonic beauty.

Continuing his interest in ritual, Draško Adžić presented *Danza Pompeiana II*. This piece is a postmodern whirlwind into which the composer immerses the listeners, filled with numerous simulacra and materials that unfold with dense texture, exceptional tutti sections, and a lucid relationship with time, which he manipulates skillfully. The work's intricate layering and dynamic contrasts create a compelling sonic experience, highlighting Adžić's command over compositional techniques and his ability to evoke both historical and contemporary sonic landscapes.

Remaining in a recognizable manner, communicative and energetic, the piece *Johnny Falcon* by Dragana Jovanović opened a space for the virtuosic ac-

cordion flourishes of Nikola Peković, to whom the composition is dedicated. Following this imaginatively conceived work, full of unexpected solutions and allusions to quasi-folkloric elements as well as other idioms, the concert concluded with Isidora Žebeljan's *Dark Velvet, in Memory of Gustav Mahler*, arranged for violin and string orchestra by her student Veljko Nenadić. Violinist Kata Stojanović performed the contemplative melodies with extraordinary inspiration, infusing them with a romantic passion, paying close attention to nuances and coloring them with a sculpted tone, while listening attentively to the orchestra that supported her with precision. This exceptional interpretation of a composition that contains emotional pathos – sophisticated rather than banal or melodramatic – marked the end of one of the most musically consistent evenings of the Review.

The 33rd International Review of Composers in Belgrade presented a significant number of compositions across a wide stylistic spectrum, oscillating in quality but consistently supported by high-level performances, which were the hallmark of the entire festival.

The following awards were presented at the festival: the *Stevan Mokranjac* award for a premiere compositional achievement from the previous year went to Vladimir Korać for *Water* for accordion and electronics; the *Aleksandar Pavlović* award for significant contributions to the promotion of Serbian music in the country and abroad went to the ensemble *Metamorphosis* and pianist

Marija Timotijević; a special recognition for her long-standing contribution to promoting Serbian music was given to Mirjana Lazarević; the Young Artist Award was presented to harpist Irina Pejoska.

Unlike previous years, this year's Review of Composers moved the focus towards domestic composition, with fewer works by international musicians. A positive change was the return to the practice of changing concert venues. Some of these choices were less successful, such as the cramped and acoustically problematic space of Cultural Center "Parobrod", while others, like the Museum of Science

and Technology, where the festival concluded, were an excellent step forward. This venue, with its exceptional acoustics, provided a rare opportunity for concert activities. We had the opportunity to hear a larger number of works than usual that treat the electronic media in divergent ways, and it should also be noted that the accordion took a special place in the festival repertoire this year.

Finally, after several years, the Review of Composers opened with a grand concert by the RTS Symphony Orchestra at the Kolarac Endowment, as befitting this unique showcase of contemporary music in Serbia.