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# CONVERSATIONS

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***Bojana Radovanović\****

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts  
Institute of Musicology

## INTUITIVE JOURNEY THROUGH VOCAL DIVERSITY A CONVERSATION WITH JUG MARKOVIĆ

Jug Marković's vocal music has been echoing in my mind since our first year, studying at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Namely, a requirement for the first and second-year composition students is to write music for voice – one piece for choir and two for voice and piano. When the exams started to get closer at the end of the academic year, we, as Jug's colleagues, were invited to participate in an informal choir that would rehearse and record his composition *Pohvala vatri* (2011), set to the eponymous poem by the Serbian poet, Branko Miljković.



Jug Marković  
Photo: Ben Viaperalta

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\* The author's contact details: [bojana.radovanovic@music.sanu.ac.rs](mailto:bojana.radovanovic@music.sanu.ac.rs)

Although at that time it perhaps did not seem like it, the piece *Pohvala vatri* was the seed from which Jug Marković's vocal music would grow and which would, as it seems, inform my future encounters with this exciting opus. This choral sound is instantly recognizable in *Nirvana*,<sup>1</sup> a piece which was written years later and awarded with the ISCM Young Composers Award (2019). A distinctive affinity towards the finest lyricism is still one of the most striking traits of his music for voice – the playfulness and explorative spirit, as well.

Jug Marković (1987) is a Serbian composer and performer based in Stuttgart, who finished his BA and MA studies in composition at the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, studying with Vlastimir Trajković (1947–2017) and Zoran Erić (1950), as well as BA archaeology studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. After his Belgrade studies, Marković started to work toward international recognition, primarily through completed courses at the IRCAM (Paris) and the State University of Music and Performing Arts in Stuttgart (HMDK Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart), as well as through numerous awards and collaborations. In 2019, aside from the aforementioned ISCM Young Composers Award, he received the *Stevan Mokranjac* award of the Composers' Association of Serbia for his piece *De Rerum Natura*. He was successful in winning prizes at the New Classics Competition of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory (Moscow), the Gubaidulina Competition (Kazan), Matan Givol (Tel Aviv) and Ensemble Festival Competition (Leipzig). His piece *Vokativ*<sup>2</sup> (for orchestra) was selected as one of the "Recommended pieces" at the 65<sup>th</sup> International Rostrum for Composers.

Marković's music was performed at music festivals in Europe such as Ircam ManiFeste, DonaueschingerMusiktage, Biennale Nemo, Time of Music, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, New Music Dublin, Festival Mixtur, and interpreted, among others, by the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the Divertimento Ensemble, Mivos Quartet, Barcelona Modern, Black Page Orchestra, Diotima Quartet, TANA Quartet, Latvian Radio Choir, United Instruments of Lucilin, Chamber Choir Ireland, Gulbenkian Orchestra, the Brussels Philharmonic, and the RTS Symphony Orchestra. He was a composer in residence at the Cité des Arts in Paris, the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, and Snape Maltings in the UK where he was mentored by Michael Finnissy. Marković's

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6BtOGObGEg>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_5aEu6PFTQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_5aEu6PFTQ)

most recent projects include *nakraj sela* (composition for ensemble and two keyboard samplers), performed four times in four different cities as a result of collaboration of 2K+ (Novi Sad), Festival Mixtur (Barcelona), Black Page Orchestra (Vienna) and UMZE ensemble (Budapest). He is under commission by IRCAM and the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles for which he is currently working on a composition for choir and electronics. Also, he currently works as a lecturer of composition (Nebenfach Komposition) at the HMDK Stuttgart.

Although Marković actively creates in different fields – acoustic, electro-acoustic and electronic – in this conversation we will focus on his music for voice, or, more precisely, his stance toward voice, vocal technique and exploration, as well as his works (whether acoustic, electro-acoustic or electronic) that encompass voice. The exchange is divided into two parts, “On compositions for voice and actualities” and “On voice and the compositional process”, both of which have his self-proclaimed “deliberately intuitive approach to music” in mind, as well as his interest in overcoming premediated concepts, systems, and genre restraints.

### **On compositions for voice and actualities**

*In June 2023, a paper on your vocal music was published.<sup>3</sup> In the first days after the publication, you noticed that the first part of the title, that is, an excerpt from your introductory note in *Ultraterreno for two voices and piano* (2017) that was partly quoted, does not sit well with you regarding your current vocal writing style. For my part, although not applicable to your (vocal) opus in general, I sought the quote that was emblematic for the problematics and vocal versatility I was dealing with. The quote was taken from your sentence: “The music is highly eclectic and polystylistic and it should be approached accordingly.”<sup>4</sup> At that time, it was too late to modify the title, but that situation*

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<sup>3</sup> Bojana Radovanović, “‘The Music is Highly Eclectic, and it should be approached Accordingly’: Voice in Jug Marković’s Compositions”, *Musicology*, 34, 2023, 111–131, <https://doi.org/10.2298/MUZ2334111R>.

<sup>4</sup> Full paragraph from the Introduction: “The music is highly eclectic and polystylistic and it should be approached accordingly. You will encounter a couple of different stylistical complexes and compositional techniques. Therefore you will need to approach it with different vocal and pianistic techniques. These aesthetical differences should be stressed and even exaggerated. Do not be afraid to emphasize the presence of different ‘musics’ within the music as a whole.” Jug Marković, “About the piece and notes on performance”, *Ultraterreno*, score, 2016, 9.

*gave us an opportunity to begin this conversation with that discussion. Could you elaborate on how you see your vocal writing (and compositions in general) now, compared to the previous, more 'eclectic' years?*

Referring to the title of the article, I have to admit I was worried that it would suggest to the reader that my music is eclectic in general – which it is not. It can be, but not necessarily. That is a huge difference. Sometimes, like in the aforementioned *Ultraterreno*, where this quote was taken from, I like to stress this eclecticism and make it clear to the performer that they have to express multiple attitudes and take different roles within one piece of music. The case of *incidAnces*<sup>5</sup> is similar. On the other hand, some other compositions belong to much more closed systems, for example *Madrigal*, *Rusty Rose*, *Uspavanka* or *Dolma* (to name a few).

What is important to me is to think how I can be as free as possible. I am aware that complete freedom is not really attainable since I/we (consciously or not) operate in a specific context, but I do think about it, and I continuously try to identify the restraints. In that sense my music and my approach to making music has not changed much. It is still driven by intuition, the desire to play and the impulse to step out of the certain 'manner' once it becomes too comfortable.

*Your piece Nula for six voices was performed at the Musical Biennale in Zagreb in April 2023. This is a piece for six distinct voices, namely, the ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, created within the project "Balkan Affairs". Here, you take on the social themes of your own time, and more specifically, your childhood in Belgrade and Serbia under sanctions for the first time in your opus. What were the specific challenges in the context of this project?*

The biggest challenge of this project was the task I was given – to reflect upon the breakup and the aftermath of the breakup of Yugoslavia. This theme has been dealt with by numerous artists in our region and the biggest challenge was to avoid the commonplace and escape mannerisms in addressing this issue. This is the first time I decided to take on a socio-political topic and I normally avoid doing so for a reason. Concepts are not natural to my musical thinking. They do not come easily and spontaneously – let alone intuitively. I struggle with them, and I perceive them as something which is outside the world of sound, as something that has to be artificially attached to sound. I

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUliNDtrlnE>

have to admit, it took me more time to think about and develop a strong concept that is driven and motivated than to compose the actual music – that was the biggest challenge.

What I did, briefly explained, is that I set the text myself and grouped it into two main portions. The first was a very personal one and contained a list of objects, pictures, phrases, situations, smells and colours that I associate with growing up in Belgrade during the nineties, such as “devize, vize, dizel, marke, super, popis itd”. The second portion of the sung text of *Nula* is a rather statistical one and it speaks of inflation and uses the three largest denominations of printed dinar banknotes (500.000.000.000 for example), as well as the daily hyperinflation rate lists of December 1993.

*What about working with the ensemble, the Neue Vocalsolisten from Stuttgart?*

Neue Vocalsolisten were amazing singers and apart from being virtuosos they are flexible, very curious and kind, which makes them ideal collaborators to try risky and unconventional stuff. I was really excited to work with them, not only because of their reputation but because for me their group is representative both of the contemporary and the archaic. Their abilities are very versatile and their palette of vocal possibilities really is a reflection of ‘present day’ music. On the other hand, their vocal ensemble, consisting of six singers, is something that unmistakably reminds me of late renaissance madrigals (which I am obsessed with, to say the least). To me, this united polarity of two ends of one line was very inspiring.

*In July, Neue Vocalsolisten performed Nula at the Sommer in Stuttgart Festival. After the Zagreb premiere, was there a need for any changes? In Zagreb, just hours before the concert it was announced that one of the singers was unable to perform, so the Stuttgart premiere was the first occasion to hear the full ensemble perform the piece. From your perspective, what were the differences between the two concerts in terms of arrangement and the piece itself, in terms of the ensemble and the quality of the performance, and regarding the overall result of the “Balkan Affairs” project?*

Yes, there was a need for changes after the premiere, though that didn’t have anything to do with the inability of one of the singers to perform. ‘Opening’ the score after the first performance to give it a final set of changes and modifications is a common procedure in my case. These modifications very often mean reducing (as I am prone to overburdening), even cutting out some

parts and throwing them away. A good time to make such ‘hard’ decisions is after I have heard the music in its real context. Very often that comes when a certain amount of time has passed after the premiere, and when I am able to have a ‘colder’ look at the music. For example, just as I am doing this interview, these days I spoke to Vladimir Blagojević about *Fleece Beats* (an accordion solo piece he commissioned and premiered in April 2023), and I told him I thought bars 21 to 46 should be removed (six months after the premiere). I am sure he wasn’t surprised.

Regarding the inability of the Baritone to perform at the Zagreb premiere of *Nula*, there was not much one could do about it. I tend not to be shaken or dramatic when things like this happen. Musicians are not robots. It’s a normal thing to be unable to perform, to be ill, etc. I did not adapt anything for this specific situation, I just left it as it was, and Neue Vocalsolisten sang magnificently with one voice less (five instead of six). The complete second premiere (with all six voices) in Stuttgart, a couple of months later, was certainly a better experience and a more faithful representation of the score, especially bearing in mind that they already knew the piece and had had time to become comfortable with it.

*One of your last pieces that includes voice, Psalm for voice and flexible ensemble, deals with some vocal techniques that were popularized in spheres of more extreme music, namely, extreme metal music. I had the pleasure to consult with you about the extreme vocal pedagogy during the composition process.*

As you said, in *Psalm* the singer is required to use an extreme metal vocal technique called scream, more precisely “fry scream” or “false chord scream”. My affinity towards this particular vocal expression is no coincidence and it does not come as a fascination with the ‘exotic’ genre. On the other hand, metal, and specifically black metal, was an important part of my maturing and its aesthetics were as ‘default’ to me as was classical singing (something the two of us share). Knowing that you, Bojana, have been affiliated with this topic through your musicological research and your doctoral thesis but also as an aficionada of metal music, I was free to ask you a million questions in numerous voice messages we exchanged (many of which included actual ‘screaming’). Your guidance in this topic was precious and it showed me how to approach a classically trained singer and explain in a precise way what sound I want to achieve and how to get it, while avoiding vague descriptive terms. *Psalm* is my first work that pursues the implementation of ‘scream’ in

a thorough and organized way, and the first work that offers a set of vocal coaching instructions on how to achieve it. And it only scratches the surface to be honest. Now that the door is open there is the possibility of digging much deeper into it.

Maybe, at a certain point, *Psalm* will be sung by a metal vocalist. I would love this to happen!

*So, you are open to non-classical musicians performing your pieces? Is there any other occasion in your opus where this could happen?*

Absolutely. *Defiant walks barefoot* and *Psalm* are the two most obvious pieces where non-classical musicians can take part. They were both composed having in mind the possibility of non-classical musicians performing them. Apart from those two I can already say that I have imagined *Serbian Love Songs*<sup>6</sup> being sung by a singer from the domain of musical theater or pop-music. *IncidAnces* also occurred to me, though in terms of the complexity of the score they could be tricky for a singer who is not comfortable with reading new music scores. But concerning the voice type, vocal technique, color and expressivity this would be amazing and would totally work.

To realize how good this alliance potentially can be, one only needs to listen to the performance of Gorecki's *Symphony No. 3*, sung by Beth Gibbons of *Portishead*. This is an extraordinary example of how much potential these kinds of collaborations can have and how beautiful the result can be.

*Your new audio installation, HoME (premiered in October 2022 in Barcelona), as well as the composition for ensemble and electronics nakraj sela (premiered in September of this year in Novi Sad, and performed in Vienna, Budapest and Barcelona soon after), drew attention from the perspective of voice. Here you also worked with voice in a particular way. This continues the thread you've very successfully begun with the piece Defiant walks barefoot for voice and live electronics, which was composed for the IRCAM course and premiered in Paris in 2021. Is there a path to be recognized from one piece to the other – given that they both use and work with voice in some ways – even though they are fundamentally different in their genre and performative appearance?*

Let me first explain what is specific about *nakraj sela* and *HoME* installation. Namely, in both works I use the human voice (both speech and singing) as the initial material to create the electronic layer. Most of the electronics in both

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpD9aCVAAsc>

pieces are generated through various manipulations of the human voice. In that sense, the voice is embedded in the electronic layer even though it is not present on the stage. In the case of *nakraj sela*, it is played through one of the keyboard samplers. To the Serbian audience, the famous title taken from the traditional song “Na kraj sela” comes from those embedded voices, more precisely from a group of children whom we recorded, singing in the town of Novi Bečej, and whose singing was in real time, transformed into electronic sounds.

There is really no conscious trajectory to be identified, at least not that I am aware of at this point, though there are two things that *Defiant walks barefoot* and *nakraj sela* share. The first thread that connects them are the tools used for developing the electronics, more precisely the tools for processing the voice. Many things I tried in *Defiant* regarding live electronic treatments of the voice are reapplied in *nakraj sela*, many of which were further expanded and used in a more frivolous, improvisatory and exploratory manner. The second common thing for both pieces is a slightly “clubby” feeling, aesthetics that sometimes flirt with popular electronic music. This emulation of a different genre is not foreign to my work and in these two particular cases, employing gestures from “clubby” electronics and pop music is something that has particularly interested me in past years.

### **On voice and the compositional process**

*Given that voice holds a special place in your opus, it would be interesting to hear about what it means to you. How does composing for and working with voice differ and stand out in comparison with other types of work?*

Voice is an essentially organic instrument. The real primordial tool we can produce music with. To me, this is fascinating and magical, and deserves special attention. It's as simple as that – though I have to admit that this infatuation with voice came slowly and progressively. My early musical obsessions, as initially, in adulthood, were always with the piano and its vast repertoire. I could never have foreseen that the human voice would preoccupy me so much in my work if you had asked me 10 or 12 years ago. It happened so that I happily accepted some early opportunities to write for voice, and I did so without any preconception or premeditated goal to profile myself in that field. I just went for it with a good feeling and, as time went on, the beauty of working with voice and discovering its possibilities opened up to me more and more as I gave it space and attention.

*Your works with voice distinguish themselves not (only) in number or percentage compared to other authors, but also – and mainly, I would say – in the uninhibited research of vocal (and therefore bodily) possibilities and potential. Where does the inspiration for the diversity of vocal technique and style come from, for you?*

I suppose it comes from the listening experience, my listening affinities and most importantly the music I grew up with, particularly in my late teen years. I already mentioned the important role of black metal during that period.

It's important to understand that the voice in metal music, a voice that one might call "extended" in today's contemporary music terms, was not at all extended for me (nor for other metal heads), nor did I perceive it as anything out of the ordinary. It was normal, regular – just a way of singing, another option of how to use your voice. I could fall asleep while Ihsahn from Emperor or Abbath from Immortal screamed into my headphones (I still can, btw).

I believe that an inclination towards the diversity of vocality came from an intuitively formed feeling at that time (not from verbally articulated thought as I explain it now), that there was no such thing as a default singing voice in regard to which other vocal techniques were usable deviations. These are probably the roots of my "uninhibited research of vocal techniques", as you nicely put it in your question.

*One of the strongest features of your vocal works is the careful choice of the poetic texts the music is composed to. Since these are often poems and other texts you've known for a long time, what would you say comes first, the music or the sound? Do you read and text 'sounds' to you, or does the idea for the music come first and you look for verbal content based on its sound? I suppose both approaches are valid, but it would be interesting to see if there is any special difference between those two for you.*

First of all, I have to say that I believe that the relation between text and sound is arbitrary. Their connection works on a subjective, unconcrete, intuitive and above all mystical level. The connection between the sound and the verbal content is not absolute, though in the case of good music this bond appears to be strong and unbreakable.

There is no rule as to how I start the process of composing with the text. As you said, both approaches are valid. Sometimes, I let the text and inflexion of the words take me in a certain direction, sometimes I sing and hum it to

generate the ideas, and sometimes I force it and pack it into a preconceived sound world (and, of course, adapt it in order to be able to do so). Very often the text has a certain “vibe”, a certain atmosphere that a composer can choose to follow or not.

There is really no system behind it and I approach each text in a very individualistic way. My approach can even vary within one piece, let alone between two different pieces.

Feeling, intuition, and hunch have a major role here (as they always do).

*Usually, when the composer finishes the piece, the performance is dependent on the performers. If the author is not performing, the performer’s voice temporarily overtakes and represents the composer’s voice, to use the terms Edward Cone set up decades ago. The question of ‘control’ is an important one; in the moments of performance, the composer surrenders control in sounding out the piece to the performers. When the composer is present on stage, the situation is somewhat different. However, this giving over of control is reassumed by you (as a fellow performer, but also the authority) in *Defiant walks barefoot*, where you control the performer’s voice directly on stage. In the premiere performance, *Thea Soti* is on stage with you, and she completely relinquishes the control of her own voice (as a symbol of subjectivity) to you and your electronics. How do you see this complex and inspiring relationship?*

For an electronics performer (in this case myself) to have control over a “direct sound” (which is how we call the amplified sound of a musician who does not feed any electronics but goes directly to the speakers and audience) is not a common practice, I have to admit. The direct sound is usually set during the sound check and is further taken care of by the sound engineer at the mixing board. In *Defiant walks barefoot* I decided to take over control of the “direct voice” because I wanted to mix it live with a certain effect. For example, the entire “direct sound” was compressed most of the time and I needed control in order to mix the compressed and uncompressed sound during the performance. Or, for example, live cross fade the distorted vocals and clean (effectless vocals). For all those manipulations I needed the control of the voice to be with me on the stage and not fixed and immovable back at the mixing board like it would be done normally. Therefore, my need for control came from technical needs, ideas about electronic effects and how to make them work as I had imagined.

I have to say that I am, in general, very happy about giving control to the musicians finally when the performance is about to happen. Or even earlier, during the rehearsals. It is a huge relief for me to hand over control, actually. I don't think my music is only mine and I don't bear the whole responsibility for its presentation and its existence. When I was younger that troubled me a lot, to be honest – the inability to control everything. Nowadays, it is a completely different story, I can't wait to share the responsibility and unburden myself.

*Defiant walks barefoot* was really a particular situation in every sense. Unlike Thea, who has owned the stage for many years now, for me, this was the first time in many years that I took part as a performer of my own music (probably since the last time I publicly played some of my piano pieces such as *Fantasia*, or *Nocturne for Cila*). I would never have decided to perform on stage if it had not been for Thea's friendship and her uplifting and reinforcing presence. So I would say that, in the end, there were no power dynamics in this collaboration. On the contrary, it was based on trust, and that trust included letting each other into domains that are normally off limits (such as the question of "direct sound").

*Will you explore these power dynamics with vocal performers further, in the future?*

Yes, but in the direction where I give as much control as possible to the performer. This seems considerably more appealing and fruitful to me, at the moment, than micromanaging.

*Do you have any specific plans and ideas for the next vocal exploratory compositional project?*

I am very happy to share that I am currently working on *Stabat Mater* – for baroque choir and electronics, commissioned by IRCAM and the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles. The premiere is scheduled for April 2024. I am incredibly excited about this project since I have been wanting to write *Stabat Mater* for ages and was always in love with other composers' "Stabats". I will not reveal too much, but what I can say is that in this project I treat the voices in a rather traditional way and exploit what baroque singers do best – create a beautiful, serene, clear and straightforward sound. In terms of the complexity of the electronics, this will be my most ambitious work so far and my first multimovement work (8 or 9 movements) since *incidAnces* in 2017.

*Looking back to Serbian Love Songs (2016), one of your early pieces for voice and even Uspavanka (2012), written during your composition studies, how do you see the trajectory of this “vocal” journey, Stabat Mater and beyond?*

To be honest with you, Bojana, these numerous talks and exchanges that the two of us have had about the topic during the last year, and especially the interviews, have made me look at my own trajectory systematically for the first time. Taking a step back from the present moment, the dearest things to me are those that contained rather risky compositional choices and those where, without thinking too much, I impulsively went for what I like. I guess I will keep that in mind for *Stabat Mater* and beyond. *Summa summarum*, it seems to me that I have had fun and a good time with the human voice.

For a more serious answer and insightful take on this question I would leave it to you, your colleagues or anyone who might be interested to explore.

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## STUDIES

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*Jelena Novak\**

Center for Study of the Sociology and Aesthetics of Music  
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

### S IS FOR SINGING, SCENE, SERBIA: TENDENCIES IN THE WORLD OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY (POST)OPERA

**Abstract:** The twenty-first century saw an abrupt and remarkable resurgence of activity in the contemporary opera scene in Serbia. In this essay I construct a 'map' that affords a glimpse into different tendencies, styles, and approaches to opera by contemporary artists who live and work in Serbia, as well as by artists who live beyond Serbia's borders but remain connected to its cultural space through education, language, and the experience of living and/or working there during some period of their lives. I offer a brief outline of developments within each of the following three groups of pieces: 1. reinventing tradition: folklore and beyond; 2. postmodernist strategies: challenging the voices of conventional opera; 3. conceptual and experimental approaches to opera.

**Keywords:** Contemporary opera in Serbia, Music and opera identity, Jasna Veličković, Anja Đorđević, Irena Popović Dragović, Ana Sokolović, Isidora Žebeljan, Katarina Zdjelar, Marko Nikodijević

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\* The author's contact details: artina@beotel.net

## Introduction: Singing after the turn of the Millennium

The twenty-first century saw an abrupt and remarkable resurgence of activity in the contemporary opera scene in Serbia. In particular, three new operatic works appeared around the turn of the millennium: *DreamOpera* (2001) by the group TkH (Teorija koja Hoda [Walking Theory]) and Jasna Veličković, the chamber opera *Narcissus and Eho* (2002) by Anja Đorđević, and the opera *Zora D.* (2003) by Isidora Žebeljan. Those three works exemplified three different attitudes to opera in Serbia: (1) a reliance on conventional operatic protocols while drawing inspiration from national heritage and tradition (Žebeljan); (2) various postmodern strategies calling into question the conventional form and content of opera (in the case of *Narcissus and Eho* by Đorđević, this meant exploring crossover music); and (3) a conceptual and experimental approach to opera (TkH and Veličković).<sup>1</sup>

The three groups of pieces I consider correspond to previously illuminated tendencies exemplified by Žebeljan, Đorđević, and TkH and Veličković. The recent developments in opera discussed here constitute a distinctive 'scene' that departs from the paradigms that previously dominated the musical world in Serbia. During the twentieth century, that world was firmly rooted in romanticism and neoclassicism. Opera appeared on the Serbian cultural scene considerably later than in those European countries that already possessed longstanding operatic traditions. *Na uranku* [*An Early Awakening*] (1903), by the composer Stanislav Binički and librettist Branislav Nušić, is considered to be the first major Serbian opera, created nearly two decades before the founding of the Belgrade Opera House in 1920. *Na uranku* belongs fairly and squarely within the pedigreed traditions of romantic opera, and most of the operas written by Serbian composers during the twentieth century continued to inhabit that romantic universe, often inspired by musical folklore. Romantic traditions of opera have continued into the 21st century, mainly in the work of male composers, such as Rastislav Kambasković, Svetislav Božić and Ivan Jevtić.

In contrast, the diversity of idioms and the multiple musical and theatrical practices that began to appear on the postmodern horizon of Serbian opera in the twenty-first century fascinate with the fecundity and the variety of their means of expression, promoting a break with the romantic traditions

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<sup>1</sup> For further details about those three pieces, see: Jelena Novak, "The Latest Serbian Opera, An Essay on Phantasms of Tradition, Gender Identities and Representation in the Musical Theatre", *International Journal of Music New Sound*, 25, I/2004. <https://www.newsound.org.rs/pdf/en/ns25/6Novak.pdf>. Accessed: January 13, 2024.

and calling into question the values conventionally associated with opera as a genre. Most of the Serbian composers who write postmodern operas are women, who seem happy to be regarded as iconoclasts.

I will discuss recent operas by artists who live and work in Serbia, as well as by artists who live beyond Serbia's borders but remain connected to its cultural space through education, language, and the experience of living and/or working there during some period of their lives. The Serbian and ex-Yugoslavian diaspora, of which I am myself a part, is huge. Many composers who previously lived or studied (or both) in Serbia no longer live there. But that does not prevent them from remaining an integral part of Serbian culture.

In this essay I construct a 'map' that affords a glimpse into different tendencies, styles, and approaches to opera, and thus contributes to a better understanding of the history and further development of the genre in Serbia. I will also offer a brief outline of developments within each of the following three groups of pieces:

1. Reinventing tradition: folklore and beyond
2. Postmodernist strategies: challenging the voices of conventional opera
3. Conceptual and experimental approaches to opera

In ensuing sections, I will briefly discuss several pieces that exemplify each group of operas in greater detail, and thus establish a horizon from which we might better construct a history of the genre in Serbia. Most of those pieces were performed in front of the audiences in Serbia except works by Marko Nikodijević, Marina Abramović and *Opera of Things* by Jasna Veličković. The works I had chosen are, in chronological order:

- *Dreamopera* (2001) by Jasna Veličković (b. 1974) and *Teorija koja Hoda* (TkH)
- The opera *Narcissus and Echo* (2002) by Anja Đorđević
- The one-act opera *Zora D.* (2003) by Isidora Žebeljan (1967–2020)
- *Operrrrra is a Female* (*Opera je ženskog roda*, 2005), directed and curated by Bojan Djordjev (b. 1977)
- The one-act opera *Svadba* [Wedding] (2011) by Ana Sokolović (b. 1968)
- *Vivier: A Night Report* (2013–14) by Marko Nikodijević (b. 1980)
- *AAA (Mein Herz)* (2016) by Katarina Zdjelar (b. 1979)
- *The Opera of Things* (2019) by Jasna Veličković

- *The opera project 7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (2020) by Marina Abramović (b. 1946), invited composer Marko Nikodijević
- Opera in 17 songs *Deca* (Children, 2022) by Irena Popović [=Popović Dragović] (b. 1974)

This ‘map’ that I propose is by no means comprehensive. I offer just a brief, more or less chronological overview of several illustrative examples. Those examples are like some kind of markers on the map, typical or most outstanding ‘landscapes’. This kind of map can never be complete and completely ‘accurate’. That is not even its aim. The aim is to ‘map down’, to set down or delineate – as in a map – the scene of contemporary opera in Serbia, and beyond it. I say beyond because some of the mentioned authors and works have connections with the Serbian art world, but are or were mainly living abroad, or even those pieces were never performed in Serbia although the authors spent a significant part of their life and education there.

When old cartographers were making the maps of new worlds they did so by using incomplete knowledge collected from pioneering expeditions. My criterion for picking up the pieces as the ‘markers’ is the intensity with which those pieces resonate with important questions that are being posed in the world of postopera globally. Some of those questions are: Who can sing in opera?, Who can have a voice?, Why sing today at all?, How does the relationship between what we hear and what we see produce meanings on the stage of opera? What does it mean to sing live? How to sing opera beyond the opera house?

An analysis of my ‘map’ reveals that the profile of different operatic species in Serbia corresponds roughly to profiles found more widely in the Western world today. *Differentia specifica* would be that the operas that lean on reinventing a national heritage mostly use Serbian musical folklore and language, which is not of course the case with operas beyond the Serbian cultural space.

### **1. Reinventing tradition: folklore and beyond**

The group of operas involved in experimental and conceptual practices is located at one end of the spectrum of the opera genre in Serbia, possibly the most innovative and challenging one. At the other end are operas that preserve some element of continuity with tradition. In some cases this means continuity with conventional operatic forms and gestures, and in other cases it is with Serbian folklore, whether in the form of traditional music or national myths/histories.

The libretto of Isidora Žebeljan's one-act opera *Zora D.* is based on a text taken from a TV script by Dušan Ristić. The authors of the libretto – the composer's husband Borislav Čičovački (b. 1966), sister Milica Žebeljan (b. 1971) and Isidora Žebeljan herself – turn to a version of the myth about the fictitious Serbian poetess Zora Dulijan, using fragments of poetry by Jovan Dučić (1871–1943), Miloš Crnjanski (1893–1977) and Milena Pavlović Barili (1909–1945). They establish the character of a mysterious poetess who burned her poems and was betrayed by her friend Vida and her fiancé Jovan. The libretto sets the events of the 1930s in Belgrade between Zora, Vida and Jovan alongside a present-day story in which Mina, who resembles Zora, investigates the unexplained disappearance of the poetess. This piece was commissioned by the Genesis Foundation and has had a considerable number of performances outside Serbia.<sup>2</sup>

At the premiere of *Zora D.* during the Belgrade Music Festival in 2004, the choice of the German language came as a surprise to me, but it seemed in tune with the author's choice of an expressionist musical idiom. In the opera's seven scenes ostinato repetition structures follow each other in the collage-stringed sections. There are frequent allusions to folk themes, though the most striking departures from the expressionist paradigm occur in the ethno-jazz fragments of the piece. Conventional operatic voices (soprano, baritone and two mezzo-sopranos) are used, as well as a conventional operatic singing vocal technique.

The logocentric structure of conventional opera (a hierarchical relation between libretto, music and staging) is deconstructed and reconsidered to a great extent when the director becomes a co-author, of equal importance to the librettist and composer. A famous example is the case of *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), where Robert Wilson (b. 1941) and Philip Glass (b. 1937) co-authored the piece. Dissecting the institution of opera on the stage, exposing how operatic texts really function, and how meaning is produced, stands in opposition to an ideology of narrative and naturalistic representation. David Pountney's direction of *Zora D.* was along these lines. "Unknown" parts of the scene are revealed as the opera progresses. The audience is placed in a voyeuristic position. The key moment is when the last curtain appears on the stage, after which part of the curtain also descends, to create a voyeuristic parting through which

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<sup>2</sup> For more details about the piece, see: Jelena Novak, "The Latest Serbian Opera, An Essay on Phantasms of Tradition, Gender Identities and Representation in the Musical Theatre", op. cit.

we can see the orchestra and the director. At that moment, the opera is revealed as a “machine” that produces meaning and sense, as a self-reflexive structure in whose bare functioning we voyeuristically participate.

In my review of *Zora D.* after the premiere I wrote that this piece is significant for a local context in which national feelings are on the ascent, and that it thus establishes a kind of new national opera.<sup>3</sup> In a wider context, its importance is different and less telling. The exoticism of a minor national operatic culture in the Balkans has a specific connotation for a Western art market that expects “exoticism” in order to place the work on the global cultural map.

Another noteworthy piece from this group is the one-act opera *Svadba* [Wedding] (2011) by Ana Sokolović.<sup>4</sup> It treats traditional (folk) music in somewhat unexpected ways, on the one hand celebrating it, but on the other problematizing an over-facile approach to folklore. This creates an intriguing dynamic that stretches the conventions of the genre.

In *Svadba*, six female singers (the bride-to-be and five of her friends, bridesmaids, all bearing traditional Serbian names), without an instrumental accompaniment, depict the eve of the wedding of Milica (soprano). It is the last night that the future bride spends with her girlfriends. The scenes are full of joy, expectations, and excitement, but also of melancholy, since Milica’s life is about to change. The fact that they sing *a capella* brings a particular vulnerability to this musical *Écriture féminine*. Danica, Lena (sopranos), Zora (soprano or mezzo-soprano), Nada and Ljubica (mezzo-sopranos) achieve a sagacious and surprising balance between the luminosity and brightness of the ‘raw’ folkloric female vocality and the experimental vocal tendencies of modernism and postmodernism, such as those exhibited by Kathy Berberian (Catherine Anahid Berberian, 1925–1983) in her famous piece *Stripsody* (1966). Those techniques include onomatopoeic sounds, stylized trilling and ululation, shifting vocally rapidly between different music styles, using *Sprechstimme* (‘speech-song’) etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Jelena Novak, “Politička ekonomija opere”, *Vreme*, 718, 07.10.2004. <https://www.vreme.com/kultura/politicka-ekonomija-opere/>

<sup>4</sup> Ana Sokolović lives in Canada. Her opera *Svadba* was written for the North American market – and only belatedly embraced as a “Serbian” opera (and Ana as a “Serbian” composer). Namely, before *Svadba* was premiered in Serbia at the 2012 BEMUS festival, Ana Sokolović was virtually unknown in her homeland. I was lucky that Ana was my counterpoint teacher in secondary music school “Mokranjac” in Belgrade, just before she moved to Canada.



**Image 1:** Victoria L. Awkward as Milica with bridesmaids in the Boston Lyric Opera and Opera Philadelphia collaboration on the film opera *Svadba* (2022) by Ana Sokolović, film still.

The opera is sung in Serbian, uses both the verses and the melodies from Serbian and Balkan traditional music, and explores the bright vocal colors of folkloric female singing characterized by glissandi, singing with a somewhat stiff throat, insistence on singing together in dissonant intervals and promoting vocal techniques that often invoke nasal singing and non-vibrato. The music and poetics of Igor Stravinsky form an obvious reference point, with the title of the piece referring to his *Les Noces* (1923). The expressionist treatment of folkloric materials establishes a dialogue with Stravinskian gestures, especially in its rhythmic intensity and its ability to construct extended melodies from a tiny melodic core consisting of just a few notes.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. Postmodernist strategies: challenging the voices of conventional opera**

Postmodernism in music in Serbia is quite often characterized by trying to find new ways of establishing a dialogue between popular and classical music. Both operas *Narcissus and Eho* and *Deca*, an opera in 17 songs are impor-

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<sup>5</sup> A Boston Lyric Opera production, co-produced with Opera Philadelphia unveiled new film opera of Sokolović's, *Svadba* debuted on January 28, 2022 on BLO's operabox.tv and the Opera Philadelphia Channel. Director Shura Baryshnikov and conductor Daniela Candillari create "a timeless, magical world based on composer Ana Sokolović's music and libretto". For more info see: Heidi Waleson, "Svadba Review: Recorded Rites", *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 2, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/svadba-boston-lyric-opera-opera-philadelphia-ana-sokolovic-shura-baryshnikov-11643841618>

tant examples of that tendency. In both cases the strongest intervention comes into the position of conventional, romantic, coloratura opera singing. Both pieces use the mosaic-like structure of the disposition of 'songs'. In the case of *Narcissus and Echo* those songs flirt both with the opera and pop song worlds, and in the case of *Deca* all kinds of vocal idioms are 'grinded' through a post-minimalist loosely repetitive music structure.

A different postmodernist tendency that challenges the operatic voices comes with the work of Marko Nikodijević where 'queering the pitch' of the voices is present and opera becomes a site of difference.

### 2.1. *Opera Singing in Crossover: "Narcissus and Echo" and "Deca"*

*Narcissus and Echo* by Anja Đorđević (2002) is a typical example of the post-modernist opera. The libretto is based on the well-known myth and on the poems by Marija Stojanović (b.1974) in Serbian. The narrative is fragmentary and an atmosphere of surrealism prevails. It is an opera that relies on the strategies of crossover music. It features a series of 'songs' rather than arias, sung by the composer herself, playing the role of the nymph Echo. The manner of singing is far removed from the vocal techniques associated with conventional operatic voices. The vocal material introduces some of the song-like qualities associated with operas and musicals, but the singer/composer Anja Đorđević primarily appears as a pop star singing at her own pop music concert. The role of Narcissus is sung by a countertenor, a reference to the castrato voice, while the two nymphs are sung by coloratura sopranos. This opera interrogates the border between popular and classical music, and at the same time engages with postmodernist strategies of reinvention (of the form of opera), the reinterpretation (of myth in opera), recentering (the figure of the singing woman on the opera stage) and the reformulation of the operatic genre. In 2011, the opera was presented in a film version, *Narcissus and Echo*, for which Saša Radojević, the Belgrade-based director and author known for non-institutional 'garage films' authored the script and directing. This opera-film represents a further step towards questioning the function and status of the opera today.

Several other pieces make a feature of crossover genres and popular culture. For example, the poetics of Irena Popović [=Popović Dragović] (b. 1974) may be related to dramatic and post-dramatic theatre scenes, as most of her mature compositions are written for contemporary theatre companies in the

region of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> Most often she collaborates with directors Kokan Mladenović and Andraš Urban. In many of their productions, live music composed by Popović takes centre stage and turns the entire theatrical project into a transgressive act of musical theatre that on occasion adopts the character of ‘the operatic’.

Like Anja Đorđević, Irena Popović [=Popović Dragović] is often on the stage herself playing and/or singing. Her music is typically repetitive, melodic, and tonal. It is situated on the broad horizon of post-minimalist practices in music. Vocal techniques are far removed from the sound of the classically-trained voice. Her own voice, as well as the voices of the actors that she herself trains for the performances, appear almost as a kind of “*artless singing*”,<sup>7</sup> signaling the vulnerability of the human voice.

In 2022, the National Theatre in Belgrade commissioned from Popović the ‘opera in 17 songs’ *Deca* (Children), based on the novel of the same name (2021) by the Serbian writer and poet Milena Marković (b. 1974). The author of the libretto based on Marković’s novel is Dimitrije Kokanov, Igor Koruga is the choreographer, the costume designer is Selena Orb, and I myself am the music dramaturge of the piece. The novel in verse is an intimate narrative about the writer’s own life: her childhood and adolescence in a Belgrade middle-class, patriarchal family, becoming a young mother of a child with special needs, becoming an established writer and poet, establishing her own identity within a network of relations with female and male family members, lovers, friends and children, and coping with all kinds of conventions of patriarchal society against the backdrop of the disintegrating state of Yugoslavia which mobilized all kinds of sadnesses, personal and collective. The libretto depicts verses from the novel, grouping them in seventeen songs, which are in turn grouped in three parts: I Forest of Skyscrapers, II Sea of Tears, Mother’s Milk and Children’s Piss and III Wind. The three motives of forest, sea and wind originate from romantic poetry and are reinvented in the writing of Milena Marković.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2006, after spending some time studying at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, and inspired by the artistic but also the consumerist aura of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart that vibrates through that city, Popović created the opera *Mozart, Luster, Lustik*. The main collaborator on the project was the alternative rock band from Belgrade, *Kanda, Kodža i Nebojša*, thus resulting in a rock-opera.

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Gorbman, “Artless Singing”, *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.3828/msmi.2011.8>

Taking the role of both composer and director of the piece, Popović interrogates singing techniques in opera by blending the voices of operatic singers and the non-trained voices of actors. Quite often in the opera an aria will present a non-operatic voice ‘supported’ by an operatic voice singing along with it, helping the untrained singer, but also providing an interesting vocal color. Fourteen actors that were not trained as singers, three trained opera singers and a children’s choir consisting of children from the margins of society (hor Nade) took part in this opera as its ‘singing force’. They were accompanied by an ensemble of ten musicians. A collective choral group is positioned on the stage, performing and at the same time illuminating various vocal genres – folklore singing, popular music vocals, the singing of actors, lyrical opera singing, the chanting of football fans, the vocalizations of orthodox monks, children’s voices, etc. Taken together, the singing voices of actors, the opera singers and the children living in the margins of society perform in this opera various modes of melancholy and sadness.



**Image 2:** From the finale of the opera *Deca* by Irena Popović [=Popović Dragović], Belgrade National Theatre, 2022.  
Photo by Marijana Janković

In a musical language Popović uses repetitive motives, and repetitive grid ‘grinds’, which merge various musical languages almost seamlessly, including American minimalism, a post-minimalism close in style to that of Michael

Nyman, tunes from film musicals, Mozartian melodies, rock and punk, some subtle allusions to rituals associated with Serbian folk music and even turbo-folk. All of these allow Irena Popović [=Popović Dragović] to dissect the position of the woman, and especially the woman as an artist and mother in a patriarchal society such as that of Serbia.

[...]  
I am sad but I keep talking  
I never stop talking  
if I would stop  
a bear would catch me  
and sit on my chest  
a wolf would catch me  
and grab my back and my neck  
crows would peck me  
[...]<sup>8</sup>

These are verses from Milena Marković's novel *Deca* that find their way into the libretto. The aim of the opera's 'performance of the novel' is not storytelling, but polemics and the construction of signs. Sadness is used as a vehicle for connection and inclusion in performance, and as the aim and experience of collective performance through singing and song. The political status of identity codes and positions are also illuminated in this piece, for example: who are these people who sing opera but do not read music (actors and children), who are the people (children from the margins) who sing in national opera, but do not have their own home? Who are the performers/actors/singers/dancers who do not represent sadness and its narratives but perform them? The intimate and narrative atmosphere of the novel are used in the opera as an archive of social and poetical codes that further play with identity politics – class and gender identity, sexual identity and biological status. Marko Nikodijević is also interested in the operatic questioning of the identity. He does that by rethinking the gender roles and vocalities of the characters.

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<sup>8</sup> My translation. From the libretto of the opera *Deca*, see: Dimitrije Kokanov, "Libretto for opera *Deca*", in: *Deca*, opera in 17 songs, program booklet, Belgrade, National Theatre, 2022.

## 2.2 Queering opera: “Vivier: A Night Report ”

*Vivier: A Night Report* (2013–14) by Marko Nikodijević<sup>9</sup> is a poetical archive of protocols, experiences, concepts, memories, fears, desires, and sorrows connected to the Canadian composer Claude Vivier’s (1948–1983) unusual destiny.<sup>10</sup> Nikodijević was inspired by the ‘myths’ surrounding Vivier, and these are by no means myths of power and grandeur. Rather they are ‘myths’ of sorrow, of insecurity, of the quest for identity, and of the struggle with emotional pain and rejection. Those are the subjects that Vivier, as a homosexual, both symbolized and questioned.

All the characters from Marko Nikodijević’s opera originate from Vivier’s life and works but they are re-indexed or re-enacted differently. The countertenor voice of Vivier is what primarily sets him apart from all the other characters. Vivier represents a symbol for the vulnerable (especially LGBTQ) minorities. In addition, the countertenor voice associated with the character of Vivier questions the typical voice-gender relations in opera and beyond. This voice sings beyond gender; it shows that voice-gender relations are not a fixed category. The specific colour of the countertenor makes it easily recognizable, so that Vivier’s voice on one hand makes it impossible not to notice him. On the other hand, he is also symbolically isolated from the rest of the community (and the other members of the cast in this opera). This decision about how to represent Vivier vocally truthfully transposes his eccentric figure from the ‘real world’ to the singing world of opera.

When I asked Marko Nikodijević how he made the decision to give the character of Vivier to a countertenor voice, he insisted on speaking about that high voice as a color in an opera that did not rely on the timbre of high-tessitura instruments. He actually compared composing to the act of painting:

That chamber opera is orchestrated without any high instruments such as violins, flutes, oboes or trumpets. This was a conscious reduction that enabled me to produce an entirely different kind of orchestral sound image. It is a kind of deliberate reduction, reductionism as a paradoxical means of generating complexity.

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<sup>9</sup> Here I draw from my previous text: Jelena Novak, “Vivier Reenacted: Singing beyond Masculine”, *International Journal of Music New Sound*, 45, I/2025, 139–150. <https://www.newsound.org.rs/pdf/en/ns45/11Novak.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Subotica-born and raised in Serbia, after finishing his studies in Belgrade Nikodijević moved to Germany and there started to develop an international career. His opera *Vivier* has not been staged in Serbia. At the time of writing this text, Nikodijević moved back to Belgrade to teach there a one-year course at the department of composition of the Faculty of Music.

It's similar to the composite palettes of 1950s structural painters, who worked with a few primary colours: a pixel of green, a pixel of yellow, a pixel of blue, and a pixel of red each, with a huge number of combinations obtainable from those four colours. I pre-compose by excluding things because composing is not about what you add up but what you exclude.<sup>11</sup>

The role of the male chorus in this opera is also significant: it acts as a reference point like the chorus in Greek tragedy, commenting on the 'drama'. It also wears different musical 'masks'. For example, there is Gregorian chant, and at the end of Scene 2 the music resembles the singing of the Orthodox Church, although here accompanied by the electric organ and strings. This reference to Orthodox Church singing does not come as surprise since in some of his other compositions Marko Nikodijević also refers to Serbian music. An example is "GHB / tanzaggregat" (2011), in which he presents the famous Serbian folk song "Lela Vranjanka" in an intriguing way. I perceive those reflections of the traditional music of Nikodijević's homeland as some kind of perpetuated dialogue of his own musical (and other) identity. Reinventing the role of masculine vocality in opera, and creating an opera about the composer who composed operas, all establish intriguing standpoints for the reinvention of operatic conventions.

### **3. Conceptual and experimental approaches to opera**

This group of pieces, which lean on a tradition of experimental and conceptual art, comprises the smallest number of works. However, their range is the widest and their content the most diverse, since the composers, directors, and librettists stretch the conventions and boundaries of 'the operatic' to the greatest extent. Three different tendencies by composers within this category emerge: a reliance on a tradition of experimental musical theatre and opera, 'curating' an opera, and installing the operatic

#### *3.1 Reliance on a tradition of experimental musical theatre and opera: "DreamOpera"*

In 2001, *DreamOpera* by TkH and Jasna Veličković appeared on the horizon of a post-socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>12</sup> The work calls into questions opera as an

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<sup>11</sup> Jelena Novak, "Music as an Aggregate of Colors, Conversation with Marko Nikodijević", *International Journal of Music New Sound*, 57, 1/2021, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.5937/newso2157001N>

<sup>12</sup> TkH, short for *Teorija koja Hoda* (Walking Theory) was founded as a group for artis-

institution, and specifically its confinement to the opera house. The lack of institutional support of the opera house opened up possibilities for developing larger horizon of the opera poetics, as these were not pre-conditioned by the rigid opera rules. This is an opera that denies elitism that is perceived to lie at the heart of the operatic world. It shows that in an age of media and advanced technology it might be enough simply to watch an opera on the screen. In this way the institution of opera is transformed into its social opposite, becoming in effect readily accessible, affordable, and unglamorous. *DreamOpera* also reinterprets the institutions of performance art and lecture-performance, and it converts art theory into theatre with the help of live painting and video, involving a collage of photographs, diverse images, and film fragments.

*DreamOpera*'s libretto is a fragmentary text spoken in both English and Serbian by the TkH members. It includes phrases (often slogans) from the theory and philosophy of art and from the world of marketing, such that the meaning of the text is constantly in flux. It re-examines and problematizes the very context in which the opera was created and performed—a post-socialist society and the IDEA New Moment marketing campus in the Slovenian city of Piran. At certain moments, the libretto's structure simulates the structures of the different opera ensembles, such as the duets, trios, and choruses. In other words, the self-referentiality of opera is foregrounded.

There is no live singing in *DreamOpera*, which uses an electroacoustic medium for the most part. Despite the fact that this opera lacks 'live singing' the layers of vocal materials from historical operas were imported into its musical tissue to serve as a kind of meta-singing, singing about singing. This might lead to interpretations of this opera being rather conceptual, than actual opera. At the beginning of the work, a sinusoidal tone, the sum of all frequencies, is emitted as a signifier for singing as a practice. That artificial voice – a kind of a mechanical cry – wonders if singing is still possible in opera. Rather than (singing) operatic characters performing a role on the stage, the opera features only (speaking) artists and theorists. The electronic

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tic and theoretical research in 2000 in Belgrade. Its founding members were Miško Šuvaković, Bojana Cvejić, Ana Vujanović, Bojan Đorđev, Siniša Ilić, Jasna Veličković, Ksenija Stevanović and Jelena Novak. Since 2002 TkH platform operates as an independent organization: TkH-center for performing arts theory and practice. The group also established the TkH journal <http://www.tkh-generator.net/portfolio-type/tkh-journal/> and realized together number of lecture performances, exhibitions, performance art pieces and other performances one of which was *DreamOpera*.

music is partly of a vocal origin, based on musical motives that were taken out of context from various historical operas and rendered almost unrecognizable. Arias are reduced to the spoken text units that mimic coloratura; they are often brief advertising slogans that, like coloratura, can be repeated indefinitely. With their references to the stereotypes of the art market, they effectively question the power of capitalist institutions.

### 3.2 'Curating' an opera: "*Operrrra is a Female*" and 7 "*Deaths of Maria Callas*"

Somewhat related to *DreamOpera* conceptually is *Operrrra is a Female* (2005), directed by Bojan Djordjev (b. 1977). Djordjev treats the institution of opera as a museum. In this work he sets out to 'exhibit' several existing musical compositions that were not previously considered to be operas, but pieces of music including singing: *Sažeti prikaz neumitnog i tragičnog toka sudbine koji je krhko biće Male Sirene odveo u potpunu propast* [A Brief Account of the Inexorable and Tragic Course of Destiny which Led the Little Mermaid's Fragile Being into Total Disaster] (1994) by Goran Kapetanović (1969–2014), *Classifieds* (2005) by Anja Đorđević, and *Untitled* (2005) by an Irish composer Jennifer Walshe with whom Djordjev had previously collaborated. Director Djordjev acts here as a curator. The figure of the composer is no longer the key authorial voice here, a tendency that has been seen on the general scene of opera ever since Robert Wilson and Philip Glass co-authored *Einstein on the Beach* back in 1976. Each of these depicted compositions becomes an act of an opera. Djordjev displays several works featuring operatic elements and allows them to form a new piece, proclaiming the outcome as an opera. This strategy is an early example of 'curating an opera', while at the same time exemplifying a site-specific composition. *Operrrra is a female* was performed in the unfinished building of the Botanical Faculty in Belgrade, housed within the Botanical Gardens Jevremovac. Being performed in a skeleton of a building that is not connected to opera or a musical institution, this piece symbolically negates the opera institution. Being site-specific emphasizes its experimental character.

The piece examines the forms and functions of the female voice in opera, as well as interrogating the status of opera as positioned between 'high art' and 'popular art' in digital age. The *mise-en-scène* of this opera is 'technological' and delays the presence of the performer. The scene is a screen that does not offer a smooth illusion, but confronts the audience and the opera's

working machinery, it is opera's "erased space".<sup>13</sup> During the entire opera, the performers are located behind the screens – either textile screens that reflect shadows, or electronic screens on which recordings are broadcast and edited. However, the voices of the performers, as surrogates for their bodies, are constantly present during the opera. Djordjev controls the visuals of this opera along with the members of his team, allowing the audience to see several situations that occur outside the visible scene, but under the watchful eye of the camera. Playing and singing musicians, collages, and live-painting are combined with the previously recorded videos. The effect completely erases the boundary between live performance and its delayed broadcast.

Curating an opera reaches a new level in the piece *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (2020) by Marina Abramović.<sup>14</sup> The form of this opera is simple: seven arias are selected from the mainstream operatic repertoire, arias that were interpreted by the soprano Maria Callas in an unforgettable manner. The seven sopranos are engaged, each taking one of the leading roles from the following operas: *La Traviata* and *Otello* (by Giuseppe Verdi), *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* (Giacomo Puccini), *Carmen* (Georges Bizet), *Lucia of Lammermoor* (Gaetano Donizetti), and *Norma* (Vincenzo Bellini). The arias are separated by electronic interludes (sound designer Luka Kozlovački; composer Marko Nikodijević) and there is also an Introduction and "The Eighth Death" composed as well by Nikodijević. While the singer is performing an aria on stage, a short silent film (directed by Nabil Elderkin), is projected on the stage as a music video. In those videos, Abramović and the actor Willem Dafoe comment on the operatic deaths in the surreal, spectacular, and sometimes absurd, scenes. Unexpectedly, the arias are heard as a film music sequence.

It may seem that the focus of *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* is the life, the voice, and the career of Maria Callas, but first and foremost this piece is autobiographical. Abramović reveals that she has been fascinated by the character and work of Callas since her childhood, when as a young girl in Belgrade she discovered Callas's voice and fell in love with her interpretations:

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<sup>13</sup> Ana Vujanović and Bojan Djordjev, "A Conversation on the Margins of Operrrrra", in: *Operrrrra is a Female*, program booklet, Belgrade, Belef, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Opera *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* had its world premiere on September 1st, 2020 in Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich. It was performed there during the COVID pandemics and that required respect for special required rules for the performers and the audience. One of the performances was transmitted online. Aside from seeing it that way, I attended live performance of *7 Deaths* in Amsterdam's Royal Theatre Carré on November 4th, 2022.

I only remember having breakfast in my grandmother's kitchen when I was fourteen years old. We had an old Bakelite radio, and I remember I heard this voice coming out of the radio. I had no idea it was Callas, and I didn't know what she was singing. I didn't understand the words – it was in Italian – and I remember that I stood up, feeling the electricity going through my body, and with this incredible sensation of emotions passing through me. I started to cry uncontrollably, and it was such an emotional effect that I have never forgotten it. After that I wanted to know whose voice it was, who this person was, and I really wanted to know everything about her. Her voice has such an enormous emotional impact, and it had some kind of electric energy passing through it, a gift that very few people in the world have.<sup>15</sup>



**Image 3:** Marina Abramović and Willem Dafoe in a video still from the trailer of the opera project *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*

As time went on, the relationship between Marina Abramović and Maria Callas grew more complex. Abramović realized that she and Maria had much in common, that they even looked alike, and that unhappy loves are some-

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<sup>15</sup> Jelena Novak, "The Curatorial Turn and Opera: On the Singing Deaths of Maria Callas. A Conversation with Marina Abramović and Marko Nikodijević", *Sound Stage Screen*, 1 (2), 2021, 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.54103/sss16640>

thing that marked both of their lives.<sup>16</sup> It might be claimed that this opera is primarily about Marina Abramović, depicting her art, status as a diva, her rise on the international art scene, ego, pain, suffocation, motionless waiting, undressing, youthful looks, and her unhappy relationships. And these ‘motives’ from her life are also present in her art. The institution of opera with its background of romantic heroines dying onstage becomes a convenient ‘container’ that keeps all those romantic and expressionist motives together,

The composer of the Introduction, Interludes and “The Eighth Death” in this opera is Marko Nikodijević. Against the background of the electronic Ligetian ‘clouds’ in the interludes, Abramović narrates the texts inspired by operatic heroines and their deaths. Here, the disquieting, almost frightening music of Nikodijević and Kozlovački seems to draw a lot in its expression from transformed vocals. Towards the end of the opera, in “The Eighth Death”, Marina Abramović appears on the stage, as Callas is shown dying in her Paris apartment. In the final moments, Abramović is on stage in a glittering golden dress, enacting slow, deliberate movements. The singing voice of Maria Callas is eventually heard, and the live, golden figure of Marina becomes like a doll. Abramović pays homage to Callas with this opera, celebrating her unique capacity to connect the body and voice into a single spectacular whole.

### 3.3 *Installing the Operatic: “AAA (Mein Herz)” and “Opera of Things”*

In an intriguing text written by Milena Medić about the composition *Little Mermaid...* by Goran Kapetanović, the author refers to the piece not as an opera, but as a work that contains operatic elements (Medić 2001). By locating those elements, Medić tries to define the essence of “the operatic” and to reveal its true meaning – that is to define the main features of a discipline by using an example that lies outside it. However, there is a growing number of pieces situated in the world of the visual arts that use opera as their theme and/or material.<sup>17</sup> These pieces, too, can form useful laboratories for defining ‘the operatic’, as seen in *Opera for a Small Room* (2005) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, *An Opera of Prehistoric Creatures* (2012) by Marguerite

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> For the world of installations that use opera as a subject and/or material see more at the program booklet of the exhibition *Postopera* co-curated by Kris Dittel and Jelena Novak in 2019, Rotterdam: TENT and Operadagen Rotterdam festival. [https://www.tentrotterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/PO\\_BookletB5\\_DEF.pdf](https://www.tentrotterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/PO_BookletB5_DEF.pdf)

Humeau, and *Sun and Sea* (2019) by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė. Here, I refer to two pieces by artists related to a Serbian cultural space that likewise tend to question what the notion of the operatic means by problematizing its elements within the world of the visual arts: *AAA (Mein Herz)* (2016) by Katarina Zdjelar and *Opera of Things* (2019) by Jasna Veličković.

The four-minute-long video piece *AAA (Mein Herz)* by Katarina Zdjelar shows a close-up shot of a young woman, the vocalist Barbara Kinga Majewska, directly gazing at the camera, as if aiming to hypnotize the viewer. Majewska performs the piece, assembled from fragments of four compositions, each drawn from a different cultural and historical context. Vocal idioms from the classical Lied, an operatic aria, a folk tune, and a pop song succeed one another, seemingly at random. The four pieces and their distinct temporalities merge in this demanding vocal performance, switching languages, musical idioms and vocal techniques. The singer's soprano voice alters and travels between them effortlessly. Her motionless face appears as a screen on which different forms of the 'operatic' are presented. What remains constant throughout the performance is the materiality/corporeality of the singer's voice. This singing face displays various identities, with any corporeal dimension carefully concealed. The de-synchronization between the singing voice and the cybernetic-looking face begs the question of who sings, how, and why. This reinvention of the relationship between the singing body and the voice is the motor that drives the opera beyond generic borders, and in this case, it is a clear sign of the reinvention of the operatic.

Another work that deals with questions of the voice and of the operatic beyond opera is Jasna Veličković's *Opera of Things*.<sup>18</sup> The title of this work alludes to the concept of the 'Internet of Things', which involves extending Internet connectivity beyond standard devices into any range of common objects, such as a lamp or a thermostat. Veličković's *Opera of Things* extends the concept of the voice beyond its conventional connection to animate beings. She is interested in producing the sounds that are triggered by the electromagnetic fields of everyday electronic devices, thus giving them a 'voice'. This piece was commissioned and first performed by/at the exhibition *Post-Opera* (2019, TENT, Rotterdam) in two forms: as a three-part sound installation including the Velicon, an instrument invented by Veličković; and as a

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<sup>18</sup> See the excerpt of Jasna Veličković's *Opera of Things* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFRKYojcQ9I>, Accessed on January 9, 2023.

live music-theatre experience performed on several occasions. At different times the installation performs an ‘intervention’ in the exhibition with three short compositions, referring to the elements in an opera: there is an aria, “Beauty 3.2 Volts”; a duet, “Diva and the Beast”; and a female quartet, ‘Ophelia’. The ‘voices’ we hear are invoked by the objects on the display – two groups of power adapters and a Velicon.



**Image 4:** Barbara Kinga Majewska in Katarina Zdjelar’s, *AAA (Mein Herz)* video still

## Conclusion

While working on this text I was also conducting research for my new book project with the working title *Opera in the Expanded Field*. I mention this because it was interesting to look in parallel at transgressive opera pieces on the global opera scene and in Serbia. In the book, by leaning on the concept of ‘sculpture in the expanded field’ established by Rosalind Krauss.<sup>19</sup> I discuss how opera extends beyond its borders – beyond liveness, beyond human, beyond drama, beyond opera house, beyond West, beyond composer and beyond operatic. In discussing the institution and definition of opera there,

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<sup>19</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the expanded field”, *October*, 8, Spring 1979, 30–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778224>

I depict pieces that have a tendency to break the rules and conventions. However, while looking through a large number of works to find those that are the most transgressive, I began to understand that the construct of three categories of pieces I establish in this text – I Following tradition / National themes and idioms, II Postmodernist strategies: challenging conventional opera, III Conceptual and experimental approaches to opera – is applicable to the global opera scene in general. Thus, this map of the contemporary opera scene in Serbia is not dramatically different conceptually from what happens, for example, with contemporary opera in The Netherlands or in Portugal, to depict two countries whose scenes I have already followed for a long period of time.

The difference would primarily lie in the strength, richness and speed of institutions that are ‘in the game’. Thus, for example, The Netherlands is home to several contemporary opera festivals, its main opera house has a tradition of commissioning opera pieces from contemporary composers, and in general the contemporary music scene is very well developed and the audience educated to be able and willing to follow this kind of repertory. None of this is the case in Serbia: there is no opera festival there, commissioning pieces of contemporary opera and music is still the exception rather than the rule, the contemporary music scene struggles to find support and institutionalization, and the general audience is neither willing nor educated to follow this scene. Despite all this, the map of operas I established in this text is quite rich and diversified. When we look closer, the truth is that most of the pieces I discussed here were either produced out of Serbia, often by artists who belong to its cultural space but mostly live and work outside of it (Nikodijević, Veličković, Sokolović, Abramović, Zdjelar) or supported by at least some foreign institutions (as in the case of *Zora D.* by Isidora Žebeljan). Only in some of the cases mentioned here, notably *Narcissus and Echo* by Anja Đorđević, *Operrrrra is a Female* by Bojan Đorđev and *Deca* by Irena Popović [=Popović Dragović], have Serbian institutions stood behind the projects. Of course, there is a much larger corpus of pieces than the one I decided to represent in this text. When I look at all the pieces I could find information about, the majority are those that extend traditional values, a smaller number are those that develop postmodernist strategies and smaller still are those that adopt an experimental approach to opera. Thus, the conclusion is that the identity of the contemporary opera scene in Serbia mirrors what happens on the global contemporary opera scene, that substantial pieces that can be discussed within that scene originate and are supported from abroad, and that

despite the lack of institutional support, and money in the artworld, there is great enthusiasm that makes the scene unique and diversified, despite institutional limitations.

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## Summary

The twenty-first century saw an abrupt and remarkable resurgence of activity in the contemporary opera scene in Serbia. In particular, three new operatic works appeared around the turn of the millennium: *DreamOpera* (2001) by the group TkH (*Teorija koja Hoda* [Walking Theory]) with Jasna Veličković, the chamber opera *Narcissus and Echo* (*Narcis i Echo*, 2002) by Anja Đorđević, and the opera *Zora D.* (2003) by Isidora Žebeljan. Those three works exemplified three different attitudes to opera in Serbia: (1) a reliance on and reinventing of conventional operatic protocols while drawing inspiration from national heritage, folklore and tradition (Žebeljan); (2) various post-modern strategies calling into question the conventional form, way of singing and content of opera (in the case of *Narcissus and Echo* by Đorđević, this meant exploring crossover music); and (3) a conceptual and experimental approach to opera (TkH and Veličković).

The three groups of pieces that I consider in this study correspond to tendencies exemplified by Žebeljan, Đorđević, and TkH and Veličković. In the first part of the text – Reinventing Tradition: Folklore and Beyond – I examine how elements of folklore and tradition remain to be used (*Zora D.* by Isidora Žebeljan) and reinvented (*Svadba* by Ana Sokolović). The second part of the text – Postmodernist Strategies: Challenging the voices of conventional opera – brings considerations on balancing between the worlds of popular and 'classical' music, opera form and singing. I zoom in on *Narcissus and Echo* by Anja Đorđević and the opera in 17 songs *Deca* by Irena Popović. Deliberations about queering opera arrives in the last section of this part of the text relating to *Vivier: a Night Report* by Marko Nikodijević.

In the third part of the text – Conceptual and Experimental Approaches to Opera – I discuss: 1) Reliance on a tradition of experimental musical theatre and opera (*Dreamopera* by Jasna Veličković and TkH), 2) 'curating an opera' (*Operrrra is a Female* by Bojan Djordjev and *Seven Deaths of Maria Callas* by Marina Abramović), and 3) Installing the operatic (*AAA Mein Herz*) by Katarina Zdjelar and *Opera of Things* by Jasna Veličković.

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***Aleksandra Kovač\****

Independent researcher

## THE SPACE BETWEEN IMAGE AND MUSIC IN THE FILM *WITHOUT WORDS*

**Abstract:** This paper examines the relationship between music and image in the experimental film *Without Words* directed by Miloš Radivojević (1972). The interaction of music, through Kornelije Kovač's improvisation and musical theme, silence, through the absence of noise, speech and sound design, and image, as an experimental, non-narrative form, provides fertile ground for analysis: that of each individual element's effect on the viewer, as well as of their joint, interdependent creation, which conveys a strong impression. This analysis focuses on the process of constructing the music score through music improvisation, and the effective use of the musical theme in this film, as well as its multi conventional role within a non-conventional film system.

**Keywords:** Kornelije Kovač, Miloš Radivojević, experimental film, *Without Words*

The oeuvre of Yugoslav composer Kornelije Kovač (1942–2022), whose work marked the artistic and cultural scene in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 20th century, considering its size and variety, speaks of a musical artist with great ambitions and inner strivings. Concurrent with his successful career as a composer of popular music, with an entire musical legacy of original compositions, Kovač garnered acclaim as a film composer, leaving a significant mark in the field of film music. He composed music scores for more than fifty Yugoslav and Serbian feature films and TV shows, in the period between 1968 and 2006.

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\* The author's contact details: alexandrakovach@yahoo.co.uk

As a film music composer, Kovač explores the film-narrative system, experiments with its principles and limitations, but most of all studies the various ways in which music creates meaning within an audio-visual context. Using various techniques, styles, instruments and practices, he creates an authentic sound and music score. The familiarity and direct and discreet identification of Kovač's melody, in popular, as well as instrumental and applied music, survives as a defining characteristic of Kovač's entire musical opus, and the composer uses it with equal efficiency in all areas of his music activity, relying on its direct communication with the listener/viewer. A musical theme, as a conventional musical phenomenon, helps the composer dissect, anchor and define meaning in both mainstream and alternative film. It remains Kovač's basic building block, always conveying something personal, different, and yet so familiar, both in narrative film, and one that is non-narrative in its construction, like the alternative film directed by Miloš Miša Radivojević, *Without Words*. Kovač composed the music score for this film in 1972 and received the Golden Arena that very year at the Pula Film Festival.

This paper will distance itself from the usual, established view of one of three basic individual areas of the audio-visual system (speech, sound, music) and will focus on the co-dependent relationship of all three elements in the abovementioned film. The interaction of music, through Kovač's improvisation and musical theme, silence, through the absence of noise, speech and sound design, and image, as an experimental, non-narrative form, provides fertile ground for analysis: that of each individual element's effect on the viewer, as well as of their joint, interdependent creation, which conveys a strong impression. This analysis focuses on the process of constructing the music score through music improvisation, and the effective use of the musical theme in the experimental film *Without Words*, as well as its multi-conventional role within a non-conventional film system.

The film *Without Words* is an "almost unique work within the Yugoslav cinematography of its time",<sup>1</sup> according to the film critic Marijan Krivak. The film, one of Radivojević's earlier works, deals with the topic of existentialism, relying heavily on the "man against the world" idea, and man's search for meaning. The early films of this director (*Bees in the Bonnet*, *Without Words*,

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<sup>1</sup> Marijan Krivak, "(Film) Bez (reči) – umjetnička vježba ili koherentan iskaz?", *Zapis – bilten Hrvatskog filmskog saveza*, 73, 2012. [http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo\\_zapis\\_detail.aspx?sif\\_clanci=34049](http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo_zapis_detail.aspx?sif_clanci=34049)

*The Will*) all fall under the category of alternative, experimental films. When exploring the term "avant-garde film", Ivana Kronja implies the search for new, expressive forms of film, and characterizes it as elitist, personal, and strictly connected to the concept of experimental, alternative film.<sup>2</sup> Radivojević opposes the mainstream as well as the accepted and established moral and cultural codes of the society and time in which he creates, and that is the main reason his first movies could be perceived as avant-garde, alternative, experimental. Božidar Zečević's definition of alternative film conveys an idea of a "particular way of expression, one that constantly places itself in opposition to the governing cultural codes, i.e. belongs to the type of awareness and consciousness that opposes that culture and does not accept it".<sup>3</sup> Distancing itself from the traditional comprehension of film, the alternative film expression represents a clear "poetic-aesthetic orientation of the author towards the research of new spaces in their own film expression and sensibility".<sup>4</sup> All these definitions of the alternative within the film system indicate the movement of the artists' individual strivings towards the new, unexplored and free. The authors of alternative film, like Radivojević, are seekers of the truth, which they strip to the bone, brutally and uncompromisingly, by using their intimate, non-coded language, and by testing their own limits and abilities.

This is precisely why the notion of alternative in film cannot be reduced to a couple of new expressions by a director, different author philosophies and their relationship with the mainstream. The wide spectrum of the alternative in film includes several different subtypes, according to the aesthetic, structural-value classification of Hrvoje Turković.<sup>56</sup> Radivojević's creation *Without Words* plays unintentionally with practices and ideas of several sub-

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<sup>2</sup> Ivana Kronja, "Ka definiciji avangardnog filma", *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti*, 11-12, 2007, 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> Božidar Zečević, "Serbian Avant-Garde and Alternative Cinema", in: Miodrag Milošević (Ed.), *Alternative Film/Video 2016/2017. Discussion / Art Movements / Subversion*, Beograd, Akademski filmski centar, Dom kulture "Studentski grad", 2018, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Miroslav Bata Petrović, *Alternativni film u Beogradu od 1950. do 1990. godine*, Beograd, Arhiv alternativnog filma i videa Doma kulture Studentski grad, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Hrvoje Turković, "Što je eksperimentalni (avangardni, alternativni) film", *Zapis – bilten Hrvatskog filmskog saveza*, 38, 2002. [http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo\\_zapis\\_detail.aspx?sif\\_clanci=192](http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo_zapis_detail.aspx?sif_clanci=192)

<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic classification of alternative film by Hrvoje Turković implies the division into the following categories: surrealist or poetic film, avant-garde documentary, underground film, abstract film, automatic film, conceptualistic film, and expanded film.

types of Turković's categorisation, binding together the poetical, non-narrative construct, documentarism, performance and body art. It also deals with subversive topics, that oppose what is morally and culturally acceptable. The disturbing radical approach to taboos used by Radivojević in his film, focuses on the questions to which the director does not offer any answers, but demands them from the active, engaged, and never static viewer. However, Radivojević did not wish to create "some form of conceptualism, nor avant-garde, but a film from one's own point of view. The idea was not to make a classical nor an alternative film, but a space between image and music in which an identity of a man would be born, based on his feelings that can be seen in the image and heard in the music... a protagonist without words."<sup>7</sup>

A continuous cry for freedom and the undisturbed and courageous opposition to the established, that come naturally to this author, represent Radivojević's personal film manifesto, clearly shaped in his first independent cinematographic works. A creator and a prolific director-author, Radivojević made his first film at the age of thirty (*Bees in the Bonnet*), and this film marked the beginning of a long-term collaboration with the composer, Kornelije Kovač, with whom he continued working on most of his feature and TV films. Kovač started working on the film *Without Words*, after already partnering with several important Yugoslav directors: Mirza Idrizović, Zoran Čalić, Predrag Golubović, Bata Čengić, Branko Gapo, and again, Miša Radivojević.

*Without Words* is constructed as a series of 26 tableaux, enhanced with music and silence. As the film title implies, the viewer remains denied the basic element of narration – speech. This film, with its every frame and idea, lack of narrative, the causal and logical, bravely balances between pure improvisation and a creative exploration of the intimate. The protagonist of the film is played by the Yugoslav and Serbian actor Dragan Nikolić, who, along with the music, is the only constant and connective tissue of this, always unstable, structure. By using his role in the film, the actor takes the viewer through various psychological states; he does not allow rest or pause, but constantly sets new challenges and demands. The scenes alternate, without any obvious narrative coherence, presenting an individual character in various spiritual, emotional and mental conditions, performing various actions. The protagonist prepares his meals, eats, smokes cigarettes, drinks heavily,

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<sup>7</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, the conversation with the director Miša Radivojević was held and recorded on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 in Belgrade.

plays with a monkey, is harassed by a bully in the street, faces a firing squad, vomits intensely, has sexual intercourse with a doll, tries to break out of his own skin... The director's goal was to challenge the actor in every scene, so he could convey the essence of life and the world around him, as Radivojević imagined it in 1972. "What is the hero of that time like? He drinks heavily, does dumb things, but he also stirs up an uprising, raises his voice, tries to organise a mutiny, and loses his life in these attempts."<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that the very same year, after several showings (Pula Festival, Dom Omladine), the film was black-listed, due to its liberal ideas, and therefore banned.

Krivak claims that Miša Radivojević's film encompasses "the interweaving of all three modes of film" and that it is "at the same time a documentary, narrative fiction and experimental film", with prevailing meta-film elements.<sup>9</sup> Such a film classification would require the composer to create music that can reconcile these totally different film categories, perform all the roles and functions that are predetermined by its position within the film system, and communicate with the viewer, by means of a wide spectrum of musical conventions and events. However, most importantly, the music would have to naturally bind itself to the world of experimental film, in which there are no rules of fiction and narration, but those of total, undisturbed freedom of expression and creation. Kovač attempts to respond to the challenge, by using improvisation as a composing method, as well as experimenting with conventional methods in an unconventional way. The relationship between music and image in this film, and its analysis, are directly conditioned by the author's expression, visual dramaturgy, structure and content of the film. But "what could the role of music be in aesthetic environments far removed from those formed in mainstream films?"<sup>10</sup> The question of music and its role in alternative film is a question of the relationship between two strong expressions, having shaken off the shackles of conventionality. The very history of analysis of sound-image relationship presents a development of the theoretical thought, studied by many film music theoreticians. Kathryn Kalinak emphasizes several important schools of thought regarding sound, in relation to the image.<sup>11</sup> The first scholars that wrote about this topic considered sound

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Marijan Krivak, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Holly Rogers, "Introduction", in: Holly Rogers and Jeremy Barham (Ed.), *The Music and Sound of Experimental Film*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010.

subordinate to the image. The famous *Statement on Sound Film*, signed by Soviet filmmakers Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov in 1928,<sup>12</sup> classified film sound by whether it moved parallel or in counterpoint to the image.<sup>13</sup> Siegfried Kracauer additionally establishes the theory of parallelism and counterpoint,<sup>14</sup> which survived to this day, although some film music theoreticians find it flawed.

Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, in their revolutionary book *Composing for the Films*, claim that image and sound are two completely different and separate forms of expression, and that their relationship cannot be defined by certain types of movements.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Kalinak states that, by positioning music next to the image and discussing the type of their joint movements, we assume that the image, in itself, is a holder of meaning. She claims that the image is amorphous and can offer many different meanings, while the music is the one that actually strengthens and consolidates one of these many interpretations. “Music pins down the image track.”<sup>16</sup> Claudia Gorbman states that “music anchors the image in meaning”<sup>17</sup> by expressing moods and connotations, that, together with the image and other elements, help the viewer understand the narrative. The question is: can the music anchor the image only if the image is conventional and determined by the rules of mainstream films? Can music convey meaning if there are no strict rules of narration? Is the music in an alternative film a priori alternative itself, as it is a part of an unconventional system where determined rules of mainstream film do not apply?

Kovač's music score for the film *Without Words* can provide some answers. On the one hand, in certain scenes, the music faithfully, almost in perfect synchronicity with the image, conveys certain meanings, atmospheres and ideas. On the other hand, in others, it becomes a means of contrast, that

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<sup>12</sup> The “Report” was published for the first time in the Leningrad magazine *Здизн Искусства* on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1928.

<sup>13</sup> The parallel movement implied that sound enhances and emphasizes the meaning of the image, and that the counterpoint movement, counteracts it.

<sup>14</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1960, 139–144.

<sup>15</sup> Theodor Adorno, Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press; London, BFI Publishing, 1987.

negates the image, contradicting it uncompromisingly and directly. A more detailed analysis of this work will show that Kovač's music, by itself, separated from Radivojević's image, represents a combination of the conventional and the experimental, the musical theme and the improvised music, the music of coincidence. Kovač mostly improvised and composed his music while watching the film for the first time, in the recording studio of "Dom inženjera i tehničara" in Belgrade, and recorded it directly on tape, during one of three days the director and composer spent together. What little time he had before entering the studio, while reading the screenplay, Kovač used to compose the two main musical themes, the only ones that were not improvised on the spot.

The decision that the film would not contain any synchronous noise was due to a limited budget, as well as to the director's wish. The music was the key to understanding the image, but the crucial task of the composer was to introduce something Radivojević calls, "the murmur of the soul".<sup>18</sup> In order to enter the intimate world of the protagonist, Kovač uses various instruments, which were within his reach in the studio at any given moment. The two basic instruments that define the score are a Rhodes electric piano and a Hammond organ, with an occasional appearance of the harpsichord. Curious wind instruments, the most characteristic ones being the harmonica, the Indian flutes in F and in E, and the Don Partridge flutes, paint certain scenes with specific colour, rhythm and melody. Kovač uses exposed piano strings, over which he drags his fingers and pieces of paper, creating a haunting soundscape. The magnetic tape is played alternately at slower and faster speed, and sometimes even backwards. Congas, wooden percussion, as well as the composer's body, cheeks, hands and mouth, become the means for a direct transmission of the protagonist's anxiety, rage, discomfort and excitement. Kovač uses everything within his immediate reach, limited by the lack of space, time, and money, but not ideas. In that segment, the composer takes over the baton and plays with harmonies, rhythms and melody, that persist in all forms of his expression, as diatonic, recognizable, and created in accordance to the compositional rules of popular, rock, jazz, blues, soul and progressive music. Every tableau is different, with music only occasionally connecting two or more images. Most often, an individual image is connected to a separate musical event. Kovač's understanding of the film's idea and philosophy are reflected in every music improvisation, which sounds

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<sup>18</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, op. cit.

more like a composed musical event, elaborated and prepared in advance, than a composition created and performed in real time.

The music of the film *Without Words* plays an important role in Radivojević's philosophic experiment, and creates a strong impression on the viewer. The reason for this lies in the fact that the only sound element that affects our senses and perception of what we see on the screen, is actually, music. Kovač guides us through a labyrinth of musical themes, atmospheres, voices, styles, rhythms and instruments that take turns in transporting us into the inner world of the protagonist. His music controls and manipulates the viewers perception of the image, by using a musically understandable and easily recognizable language. Adorno and Eisler see film music as a basic connective tissue, a cement that unifies elements that are, otherwise, incompatible and contrary: the mechanical product and the viewer.<sup>19</sup> Let us not forget that film is still a technical product as well as an artistic one, composed of frames that take fast turns, an entity in constant danger of disintegration.<sup>20</sup> Music creates an impression of continuity and unity, by using a unique musical idea, that connects the entire film. Kovač uses music to merge heterogeneous images into one whole, by using and repeating certain instruments, colours and musical themes.

The music in this film is treated similarly to one in a silent film, when its projections were accompanied by a pianist, playing music of different moods and styles or just improvising on the piano. Music is the most important element that helps us slide into fiction more easily. We forget that a film is a technical product, and willingly transition into this fictional new world, while being transformed into a lulled, hypnotised subject.<sup>21</sup> When there is no music in the film, it is harder for us to achieve a suspension of disbelief and attempt a jump from reality into fiction, and vice versa. We require music as the one essential element that helps us believe the unbelievable. Radivojević could have chosen an entirely different approach to the sound, enriching the film with murmurs and noise, eliminating the music completely. However, this film would then convey a different message, and the viewer would have the impression of a naked and brutal reality, that might be too raw, radical and disturbing. The director tries to soften the blow to the viewer, undoubt-

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<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, Hanns Eisler, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, New York, London, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Gorbman, op. cit.

edly stricken by this film, by using music. The viewer is left at the mercy of Kovač's music score which serves as a guide to a better understanding of the protagonist's identity and emotions, and a reminder that this is fiction, after all. Musical silence occurs rarely and with no significance to the image track. Kovač uses it as a rest stop, either for himself or for the viewer, and thus with each new appearance, the music has an even bigger and stronger influence. With its absence of murmurs and sounds of real life, this film starts to feel like a dream, a hallucination, abandoning the sphere of the realistic and turning towards the internal, towards the emotional, intimate world of the protagonist. We witness the direct transmission of the protagonist's internal anxiety, and drown with him, gasping for air, deeper and deeper into the dark waters of his turmoil, guided by each new musical and visual event.

The film begins with title credits that transform into the first scene, named "Fingers Dancing Across a Woman's Leg". The protagonist (Dragan Nikolić) is on the train with a woman (Dunja Lango), sitting opposite him in the train compartment, and he starts to drag his fingers over her leg. He takes off her shoe and touches her in fascination, while she sits disinterested, without any reaction. The camera is hand held, with a subtle movement that simulates the movement of the train. The dimmed light hued with red tones, and two people, one engaged and excited, and the other static and non-reactive, offer Kovač the freedom to create an authentic musical sequence. The title credits and the first scene of the film are accompanied by a combination of rhythmical patterns that the composer performs with his own voice, playing with the word *Bez* (without) and the consonant *M*, as well as foot stomps. Kovač pronounces/sings the letters *B*, *E*, *Z*, in a melodic pattern, but also freely, without any order, through his teeth, yelling in exaltation, mumbling, changing the intonation and timbre. The foot stomps that alternate with the voice, in rhythmical motifs, create the impression of ritualism, paganism and folklore. The first scene emphasizes and suggests a special relationship between music and image, one that is interdependent and complementary. Without violating the integrity of the other, these two expressions outline the joint idea, in equal measure.

The next scene breaks the rhythm and the structure, and brings a total contrast, both cinematographic and musical, featuring the protagonist, sitting on the floor in a suit, with a bow tie, surrounded by bottles of liquor, drinking heavily, talking, laughing and yelling in silence. He is a sad clown, a jester, the main character of a silent film, and makes us laugh with his sadness and restlessness. The music of this scene, directly, without reluctance,

borrowed the musical techniques from the circus, the music hall, the vaudeville and the silent comedies of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. Kovač creates a melody with a harmonic accompaniment, that has recognisable and easily memorised motifs, sometimes played in sequence on a Rhodes electric piano. The “mickey mousing” technique<sup>22</sup> is used to remind us of the first silent films. Mervyn Cooke speaks of the “illustrative musical effects synchronised with specific events in the film’s physical action”<sup>23</sup> when he defines this technique and reminds us of the extended use this, backing of the image with the music, had in Walt Disney’s animated feature films.

The “Suicide” scene is among the most impressive ones in the entire film, because Dragan Nikolić’s acting is so convincing, that for a moment we forget that it is a film we’re watching, and not a disturbing reality. The only time we get a chance to hear sounds and murmurs of the diegesis is at the beginning of this remarkable scene. Our protagonist lights a cigarette and then attempts to commit suicide, with an entire arsenal of various weapons. The knife and the razor are real, and the unease that this scene provokes in the viewer is equally credible. This type of scene in a mainstream film would be accompanied with music, filled with musical conventions for fear and suspense, which mainstream film managed to consolidate and imprint in the viewer’s subconscious during its history of development. However, here, within the framework determined by Radivojević and Kovač, everything is possible and allowed. The attempted suicide is accompanied by a lyrical, melancholic, lush, full-blooded musical theme, that, by melody, harmony and style belongs more to Kovač’s rock and jazz compositions, than to an alternative film. This palpable contrast between the disturbing image of a man who attempts the unthinkable, and the consoling, slightly utopian melody, reflects the strength of both artists’ ideas and their freedom of expression.

The “Suicide” theme is one of the two main musical themes of the film. It will appear several times more, in the scenes “Leeches”, “Vomiting”, “Pit” and “Disinfection”, in which our protagonist takes live leeches from a bowl of water and lays them directly onto his naked chest, vomits intensely, falls into a pit in which he is buried alive, and is disinfected naked in a prison cell. This musical theme becomes a symbol of the protagonist’s suffering, anxiety, de-

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<sup>22</sup> The Mickey Mousing technique marked the first silent films, as well as Walt Disney’s cartoons.

<sup>23</sup> Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

struction and self-destruction. The second theme, named "Women"<sup>24</sup> by the composer himself, plays the role of a leitmotif, which accompanies the protagonist's love interests and his relationships with women, as well as with a plastic doll. Besides several scenes that portray his various liaisons with various women (actresses Neda Arnerić, Dušica Žegarac, Branka Matic, Snežana Lipkowska), the scene that explores the relationship between the protagonist and a plastic doll features the most complex and substantial execution of the music theme. Using this gradation - from the developing and repeating motifs, to the music theme in its full form - Kovač highlights the protagonist's inability to obtain a real relationship with women in his life. For him, love is born only in a relationship with someone who is not real, that cannot love him back.

The functionality of the musical theme and its role in narrative film are well known. The theme, based on the Wagnerian principles of motif and leitmotif, accompanies the appearance of a certain person, place, situation or emotion.<sup>25</sup> When we transfer the theme from pure instrumental music, where it represents an essential idea, to film music, the theme becomes an important sound element that is repeated.<sup>26</sup> Irena Paulus mentions that the theme can be a melody, but also a melodic or rhythmical fragment, as well as a harmonic progression, and that the principle of repeating is the most important one for the use of a theme in film music.<sup>27</sup> Although film music borrows the idea of leitmotif from Richard Wagner, there is a significant difference in the manner of use. James Buhler mentions that Wagner's leitmotifs bring meaning and resist it at the same time, because film music eliminates the mythical from the leitmotif and does not question it, while Wagner uses it to convey the meaning and revive the linguistic nature of music. The leitmotif is rarely allowed to stop or slow down the course of the film, in order to express its essence, while Wagner makes sure it has the space and time to convey meaning.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The musical synopsis written by Kornelije Kovač during his work on the film *Without Words* is owned by the author of this paper.

<sup>25</sup> Claudia Gorbman, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> James Buhler, David Neumeyer, Rob Deemer, *Hearing the Movies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, 196.

<sup>27</sup> Irena Paulus, *Teorija filmske glazbe, kroz teoriju filmskog zvuka*, Zagreb, Hrvatski filmski savez, 2012, 124.

<sup>28</sup> James Buhler, "Star Wars, Music, and Myth", in: James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, David Neumeyer (Eds), *Music and Cinema*, Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 2000, 41-42.

Kovač treats the musical theme in this film with respect, and allows it time to communicate with the viewer, directly and without disruption. It develops, has variations, appears as both leitmotif and a mere hint, but whatever form it appears in, Kovač uses it as a tool of association and identification, helping the viewer understand, but most of all, feel everything the protagonist is feeling. The “Suicide” theme is composed as a song, with a distinct melodic part, moving sequentially, while the form and structure are reminiscent of Western Europe’s 1970’s progressive rock music. This is supported by the fact that Kovač developed this theme a couple of years later, as a popular music track, in the early 1980s, during his life in Great Britain. The song was completed with an added lead vocal (singer Linda Jardin), an arrangement played by British musicians, and lyrics in English. Kovač’s other theme in the film “Women”, is equally melodious, catchy and is stylistically a French chanson, a type of French popular music, famous in the 1950s and 1960s.

“Suicide” appears after the static frame of the protagonist exercising, and the music continuously transforms from one scene to the other. Radivojević believed that Kovač would manage to find common ground between musical continuity, on the one hand, and fragmentary music, on the other, “by using his power of imagination, knowledge, but mostly his ability to improvise”. The director didn’t strive for continuity, in a musical sense. “The visual dramaturgy of this film is such that we are seeing arranged images. But if we do the same with music, the mechanism will be visible, and that does not work. The task was to imagine every single image, and that meant that improvisation was necessary. Sometimes the music would embellish only one image, and other times it would connect several.”<sup>29</sup>

The exercise scene is accompanied by a baroque improvisation on the Hammond organ, in free tempo, and in the next one the viewer is reminded of the “Suicide” theme. The composer’s playfulness and the unrestrained and inspired leaps from one idea to the other (from Debussyan preluding in the shower scene, to the repetition of a newly introduced melodic motif in the “Self-kissing” scene, and the entirely new, contrasting music event in the scene in which the protagonist plays with a real monkey), speak of a composer comfortable with various musical styles.

The scene in which the protagonist prepares scrambled eggs and eats them is accompanied by a two-voice melody, played on the Indian flutes.

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<sup>29</sup> Aleksandra Kovač, *op. cit.*

Kovač paints his vision of Radivojević's idea with musical colours, but his painting never becomes dominant, blatant, with too many shadows, lines and shapes. Kovač's music is always enhancing the image.

"Man with the Monkey" made the biggest impression on the director while the music was being recorded. "The monkey sequence was long, and Kornelije was the intermediary between the man and the monkey. I was fascinated, because Kornelije improvised while fully sensing what was happening on the screen."<sup>30</sup> After a long improvisation on the electric piano, with the addition of a couple of percussion instruments, where music assumes a playful, somewhat circus-like character, but still with clear melodic outlines, the situation dramatically changes in the "Bully" scene. The composer emphasizes the similarity of the relationship between the man and the monkey, and the bully and the man. The bully harasses our protagonist in the street, and plays with him, just like the protagonist played with the monkey, treating him as a toy. Once again, Kovač turns to progressive rock, typical of the music he created with his band the *Korni grupa* – an opus that includes songs such as "Jedna žena" (One Woman) or "Put za istok" (The Road to the East).

Images accompanied by contrasting music, constantly alternate with those where the composer relies upon conventional music patterns, thus creating an expanse of expression.

"Execution" and "Wheat Field" are the scenes that follow. In the first, Kovač imitates the trumpet with his voice, using the fanfare motif from Hollywood war films, and in the second, he transitions to Bach-style prelude on the harpsichord, with a subsequent appearance of the organ. Such shifts from one style to the other, from one musical reality to the other, do not disturb the perception of the visual, but succeed in enhancing it.

In order to maintain the film's structure and unity, Kovač returns to themes, motifs and emotions. The reappearance of the opening theme "Without" serves as a respite for the viewer, but in this scene it seems like the protagonist is a part of the music itself, stomping his feet on the floor and moving to the beat of the music. But he does not hear it, it is not part of the diegesis, but the meta-diegesis instead, the part of the film space that vibrates between reality and fiction, and is a part of the protagonist's dreams and hallucinations.

"Women", a block made of several scenes, introduces a theme that makes a strong impression on the viewer with its simplicity, and could easily appear

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

in the love scene of a 1960's French movie. Again, Kovač uses the organ, electric piano and harpsichord, his most important allies in this soundtrack, in the following scenes, in portraying an intimate moment between lovers, the protagonist running in a field with women, the protagonist holding a child by its hand while running on a sand dune, and the image of a family sitting in the mud. The entire segment reflects the authentic ideas of directing, photography, editing, acting and music.

“Breaking Out of One’s Own Skin”, “Vomiting”, “Taxi”, “Intercourse with a Doll”, “Burial” and, in the end, “Disinfection”, represent a certain and designed progression towards the scene in which our protagonist, who lives, bites and feels, is sprayed and disinfected in a prison cell. The disinfection from life, freedom and love is accompanied by the “Suicide” theme, as a final reminder of the basic “man against the world” idea of the film. Kovač creates the gradation by using the main themes of the film, now well recognisable, but also their motifs and basic ideas.

It is certain that the relationship between music and image in the film “Without words” resembles a red hot ball that constantly emits the sparks of creativity, freedom and curiosity of the two artists, but, above all, of great interdependence. For the viewer, watching this film surely represents a wholly different experience than watching a mainstream film, and the relationship of the viewer with the music in the film assumes a completely new dimension. William Verrone believes that the reason for this is that in an avant-garde film nothing is clearly indicated and explained, like in a mainstream film, and thus our senses react in a totally different manner. A mainstream film uses the music to control and guide the viewer’s perception and manipulate their understanding of the story, plot, and outcome. An alternative film does not make it easier for the viewer, and makes them work hard in order to understand the film.<sup>31</sup>

Radivojević clearly demands total focus and attention from the viewer, but what makes the entire experience especially important is precisely the play of music and image, in which the music alternately confirms and refutes what the image implies. Kovač’s music takes the viewer on an exciting merry-go-round, often leaving them pensive and unsure of their perception of the image, thus creating a completely new audio-visual space, of which Radivojević speaks with enthusiasm.

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<sup>31</sup> William Verrone, *The Avant-Garde Feature Film: A Critical History*, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, 2011

“Kornelije used all his musical capacities, and I used all of the ones at my disposal, and together we created something new, something that exists only between sound and image.”<sup>32</sup> That space, where the two entirely different artistic expressions, music and image meet, becomes a new audio-visual universe. It is fully synchronised in some scenes, and appears in conflicting contrast in others, thus clearly explaining to the viewer that this film does not provide answers, but poses questions. It is this relationship between the music and the image, Kovač and Radivojević, that requires the viewer to observe this work as a personal film, and not an alternative or experimental one. No idea, however taboo or controversial, for the time it was generated in, is concealed. On the contrary, those ideas are featured and receive full attention, both from the director and the composer, marking their own space, image and sound.

The film *Without Words* remains under lock and key in the archives of the Yugoslav Film Archive, where the original copy was placed after being black listed in 1972. Just like many others, this film remains a testament of an era and a society which, on the one hand, allowed its artists the freedom of expression, and on the other, immediately condemned them and deprived them of that very freedom.

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## Summary

Concurrent with his successful career as a composer of popular music, with an entire musical legacy of original compositions, Kornelije Kovač (1942–2022) garnered acclaim as a film composer, leaving a significant mark in the field of film music. He composed music scores for more than fifty Yugoslav and Serbian feature films and TV shows, in the period between 1968 and 2006.

As a film music composer, Kovač explores the film-narrative system, experiments with its principles and limitations, but most of all studies the various ways in which music creates meaning within an audio-visual context. A musical theme, as a conventional musical phenomenon, helps the composer dissect, anchor and define meaning in both mainstream and alternative film. It remains Kovač's basic building block, always conveying something personal, different, and yet so familiar, both in narrative film, and one that is non-narrative in its construction, like the alternative film directed by Miloš Miša Radivojević, *Without Words*. Kovač composed the music score for this film in 1972 and received the Golden Arena that very year at the Pula Film Festival.

Radivojević clearly demands total focus and attention from the viewer, but what makes the entire experience especially important is precisely the play of music and

image, in which the music alternately confirms and refutes what the image implies. Kovač's music takes the viewer on an exciting merry-go-round, often leaving them pensive and unsure of their perception of the image, thus creating a completely new audio-visual space. That space, where the two entirely different artistic expressions, music and image meet, becomes a new audio-visual universe. It is fully synchronised in some scenes, and appears in conflicting contrast in others, thus clearly explaining to the viewer that this film does not provide answers, but poses questions. It is this relationship between the music and the image, Kovač and Radivojević, that requires the viewer to observe this work as a personal film, and not an alternative or experimental one. No idea, however taboo or controversial, for the time it was generated in, is concealed. On the contrary, those ideas are featured and receive full attention, both from the director and the composer, marking their own space, image and sound.



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## NEW WORKS

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**Nataša Crnjanski\***

University of Novi Sad  
Academy of Arts

### **SEMIOSIS OF THE OPERA *THE KNOCK* BY ALEKSANDRA VREBALOV<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The opera *The Knock* was commissioned by the *Glimmerglass Festival* and was planned to be performed in 2021. Due to the pandemic the premiere was postponed, but *Glimmerglass* decided to film the opera and stream it on YouTube. The screened version of *The Knock* is the subject of this paper. Despite the setback, the opera had its live premiere on June 23, 2023 at the Cincinnati Opera House.

The libretto of *The Knock* was inspired by the autobiographical testimonies of military wives which Deborah Brevoort, the librettist, relied upon. Inspired by the strong emotions of the story along with the inner monologue of the characters, Aleksandra Vrebalov created music which not only reflects these inner states, but together with the text and image creates an inextricable semantic network, or in other words, a *semiosis* of the artwork.

**Keywords:** *The Knock*, military wives, *semiosis*, sign, symbol, icon, index

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\* The author's contact details: [natasacrnjanski@live.com](mailto:natasacrnjanski@live.com).

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The opera *The Knock* by composer Aleksandra Vrebalov<sup>2</sup> and librettist Deborah Brevoort<sup>3</sup> was commissioned by The Glimmerglass Festival.<sup>4</sup> The work was originally supposed to be premiered at the festival in 2021, but due to the conditions of the pandemic, the live performance was postponed. In the meantime, the opera was filmed and streamed on YouTube.<sup>5</sup> The work had its live premiere on June 23, 2023 at the Cincinnati Opera House. The director of both the filmed and stage versions was Alison Moritz and the conductor for the film version was Lidiya Yankovskaya. The filmed version is 67'48" long and all references in this article are made upon that version of the opera. However, measures from the full score<sup>6</sup> of the opera are also added for reference.

The term "The Knock" refers to the description of a death notice which is used within the military community. "The Knock" became a symbol of death in that specific community, or as linguists would call it, a "dead metaphor", since the term has lost its original (denotative) meaning and has been frequently used by community members in its metaphorical (connotative) meaning. In other words "a 'dead metaphor,' [is] one that has become conventionalized and has its own literal meaning".<sup>7</sup> For this reason, "The Knock", or more specifically the "knocking sound" can be perceived as the main (musical) signifier around which the *semiosis*, the process of creating signs and meanings, is possible. According to Charles S. Peirce, semiosis is "an action, or influence, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as sign, its object, and its interpretant,"<sup>8</sup> it is a process of signs working together to pro-

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<sup>2</sup> Aleksandra Vrebalov is a Serbian composer based in New York City (USA) and Novi Sad (Serbia). [www.aleksandravrebalov.com](http://www.aleksandravrebalov.com)

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Brevoort is an American playwright and librettist based in the New York City area (USA). <https://www.deborahbrevoort.com/>

<sup>4</sup> The Glimmerglass Festival is an American opera company founded in 1975. The Glimmerglass Festival presents an annual season of operas at the Alice Busch Opera Theater on Otsego Lake which is eight miles north of Cooperstown, New York, United States. See: <https://glimmerglass.org/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iE1zZDD2\\_2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iE1zZDD2_2s)

<sup>6</sup> The full score is provided thanks to the composer.

<sup>7</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003, 211–212.

<sup>8</sup> Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, Justus Buchler (Ed.), New York, Dover Publications, 1955, 282. Unlike Saussure, where the sign consists of the signifier and the signified, according to Peirce, the whole sign consists of three elements: the sign, the object and the interpretant.

duce a meaning in which one sign relates to another sign leading to an endless chain of signs.

The libretto of the opera was inspired by the autobiographical testimonies of military wives which Deborah Brevoort, the librettist, relied upon.<sup>9</sup> She confirmed that the military community was a difficult community to access, but she managed to create relationships with military spouses during a three year period in which she interviewed 43 women from different geographical regions. "During that time I was told many stories about 'the knock', so the story for our opera really comes out of those stories, the people and the wives that I met during that three year period... that project enabled me to write the story with a great deal of specificity, because of the generosity of the people who I met there and who shared much of their lives with me."<sup>10</sup> The story Brevoort wrote is brief and takes place in the space of one night. There is a clear "border" between day and night, good and evil, which according to semiotician Yuri Lotman, is the most important typological characteristic of space. The concept of a border in a literary work is very important, like in a fairy tale. There is a space in the forest where the events take place as well as the space of the house; characters from the forest never enter the house.<sup>11</sup> Here, night time is not chosen by chance, since it is dominantly related to evil and death. This specific time/space serves as the index which indicates something terrible is going to happen. Besides the short time frame of the story, the opera has many other minimalistic features, such as the small orchestra ensemble (violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, vibraphone, bass drum, snare drum, typewriter, cymbal, piano, electric/bass guitar). Furthermore, throughout the entire opera there are only 3 solo female voices and a couple of female choruses, while the only male character is Army Lt. Gonzalez. He was entrusted with the special task of delivering the death notification. For the entirety of the opera he is struggling between feelings of worthlessness, empathy and fear. This small range of material allows the writer and composer to focus on the psychological profiles of these characters, mainly Jo Jenner, the wife who eventually receives "the knock" and Lt. Gonzales, who delivers it. The inner

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<sup>9</sup> In 2023, Deborah Brevoort was awarded the prestigious Campbell Opera Librettist Prize by Opera America.

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Brevoort interviewed for The Glimmerglass podcast, November 2021. <https://glimmerglass.org/podcast/the-glimmercast-the-knock/>

<sup>11</sup> Jurij Lotman [Yuri Lotman], *Struktura umetničkog teksta* [The structure of artistic text], Beograd, Nolit, 1976.

monologues and psychological nuances of the characters are the elements with which the music is connected extrinsically by external semiosis – by signifying sound with lyrics and extra-musical meaning, and also intrinsically – by connecting musical motifs into a syntagmatic sequence and relating them through various processes of motivic work. Regarding the musical language which she used for depicting the emotions of the characters, Aleksandra Vrebalov says:

The part of work that I needed to do is to really delve into the depth of emotion that each character carried a different set of very deep emotional states that ranged from guilt to the sweetness of memories, that are past and captured to the most dramatic moment of the delivery of the notice and facing the [...] death of the loved one. So, in terms of research it really means delving into the depth of the human soul and trying to find the truest sound, the truest language in music for that.<sup>12</sup>

The story follows the lives of several military wives while their husbands are deployed to Fallujah, Iraq. The wives are in empty houses, surrounded by loneliness and filled with nostalgia and fear. The same setting brings forth the portrait of Lt. Gonzales who watches war movies on TV and would prefer to be in battle in Fallujah. Such a beginning creates a special atmosphere in which an event, a turn, is expected. Then Lt. Gonzalez receives a phone call from his commanding officer who gives him an assignment in Ft. Carson, Colorado. He only has two hours to get there to complete it. At the same time, the Commanding Officer's Wife (COW) calls one of the wives, Aishah, to tell her that the base in Iraq is on "black out" again. She is gathering the wives together at her home, which is Army protocol whenever communications are cut off from the war front. While Lt. Gonzalez is driving in his car, the military wives are gathering at the home of the COW. Jo, who is new to Army life, becomes increasingly anxious as the evening progresses. Lt. Gonzalez is anxious too, since he is not prepared for this new assignment. The synchronicity of these two characters is to be of great importance in relation to the musical material used to describe it. Lt. Gonzalez arrives at the COW's house and reviews the Army protocol for how to deliver a death notification. It is his first "knock" and he struggles emotionally with what he has to do. He decides to wait until the very last minute. When his time is up, he slowly marches up to the door and knocks. When Lt. Gonzalez steps into the house,

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<sup>12</sup> Aleksandra Vrebalov interviewed for The Glimmerglass podcast, November 2021. <https://glimmerglass.org/podcast/the-glimmercast-the-knock/>

the women immediately know why he is there, but they don't know which one will receive the knock. Lt. Gonzalez slowly marches up to Aishah and gives her the ritual salute, indicating that she is the one receiving the knock. But soon they realize that Jo, the young Army wife with a newborn child, is the one who has lost her husband. In grief she runs out of the house with her baby. Lt. Gonzales realizes that delivering the knock is the hardest job of all. Surrounded by the chorus of military wives, Jo watches the stars fall as the sun rises and morning comes.<sup>13</sup>

In relation to music, it is important to emphasize that the elimination of a large performing apparatus, along with the suppression of "superfluous" movement, score choreography and visual effects all enable a revelation of purity and beauty of the sound-image-text relationship in the film. We could say that the instrumentation is typical of Vrebalov's style. The sound of loneliness which represents the wives is the sound of the string ensemble. The lines of voices and instruments intersect in unison with the text "Early evening is the hardest", indexing that all the women are feeling the same way. With the words "But our houses are empty; our husbands, far away" the military drum (snare drum) sounds discreetly (1: 48; m. 19). It is the musical symbol of the Army and battle, and at the same time represents the index of a distant space, the *heterotopos*, since the war is far away. The long distance is also confirmed by the melodic line – the word "away" is followed by a minor sixth ascending melodic leap (1:54; m. 20). The opening shows three wives spending an early evening at home thinking about their absent husbands, doing the usual things (writing a diary, preparing dinner...) and discovering little agreements between spouses to think of each other while looking at the moon ("Wait to look at the moon with you"). This discrepancy of characters and space, here and there, *topos* and *heterotopos*, is presented through a combination of woodwinds and military drums.

The sound becomes anxious with the introduction of the image of Jo, a young Army wife, who is nervously waiting for a call from her husband ("There is nothing to do, but to wait to hear from you", 3:12, m. 54). That sound also represents Lt. Gonzalez (4:36; m. 121) who dreams to be a soldier in battle in Fallujah, but was assigned to stay at home ("Stuck with the job no one wants to do!", 5:05; mm. 137–138). The text delivered by the characters, along with their actions, both give the impression that the same thing is repeated every night, almost depicting boredom, with the redundant repetition of fast rhythmic patterns in the strings reinforcing this impression (Women:

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<sup>13</sup> More on <https://www.cincinnatiopera.org/the-knock>

“Doin’ nothing, ’cause there’s nothing to do”; Lt. Gonzalez: “Waiting for something to happen”). The atmosphere of deep sadness is equally presented at all three levels: music, text and image. The text “All this waiting makes us blue”, “Blue is the color of waiting” (5:54; mm. 158–167) is symbolically connected with the blues style in music which emotes melancholy and sadness.<sup>14</sup> In that sense, Vrebalov deploys atypical opera instruments. The piano creates an almost lullaby-like atmosphere (7:40; m. 197) along with flute, clarinet and vibraphone. A strong blues inflection is created by the timbre of the electric guitar (8: 11; m. 205) and especially later at the moment when the women are comforting each other before they get together (12:30; m. 322). The electric guitar receives its full meaning when the phrases “Turning everything blue” (13:03; m. 334) and “Everywhere blue” (14:03; mm. 348–354) appear, iconically referring to blues, but symbolically referring to deep sadness (Fig. 1). It is also a perfect counterpoint to the ensemble of wives at a gathering (21:03; m. 515) with clarinet and bass.

**Figure 1.** Blues intonation (mm. 346–354,  $\text{♩}=78$ ) embodied by a minor third interval and the timbre of the electric guitar

The image displays a musical score for a scene from an opera, specifically measures 346 to 354. The score is written for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Electric Guitar (E. Gr.), Soprano 1 (S. 1), Soprano 2 (S. 2), Alto (Aho), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The vocal parts (S. 1, S. 2, and Aho) have lyrics written below them: "night air, eve - ry - where blue". The electric guitar part is prominent, featuring a bluesy intonation characterized by a minor third interval. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩}=78$ . The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf*.

<sup>14</sup> The term Blues may have originated from “blue devils”, meaning melancholy and sadness.

Another important sign of sadness in the opera is the descending *glissando*, or more generally the descending melodic line which usually appears in a chromatic passage. When it comes to the *glissando*, it is mostly in the interval of a minor third. Interestingly, blue notes (or "worried notes") in blues are usually thirds as an essential part of the sound. In this blues scene (mm. 315–354) the sounds of minor descending seconds prevail (Fig. 1). The importance and ubiquitousness of the minor third in relation to the semantics of the opera is shown by the fact that, in relation to the original score, instead of a major ascending second, a descending minor third as a *glissando* is performed. (6: 32; m. 169).<sup>15</sup>

This musical sign of sadness could be seen as a more elaborate version of what music historiography knows as the rhetorical figure *pianto / sigh gesture*<sup>16</sup> which contains catabasic movement. It is conventional sign denoting the topic of sadness and grief with a signifier of a descending minor second (Fig. 1, word: "blue"). This interval is used redundantly in the melodic lines of all voices and instruments throughout the entire opera and refers to a deep sadness which cannot be avoided. This musical sign is so powerful that it was used by Renaissance composers in madrigals as well as by Baroque composers to indicate the presence of lamentation and death, and their meaning still has not changed to this day.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the descending path of the melody as a representation of sadness in music has its foundation in embodi-

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<sup>15</sup> Other small changes in comparison to the original score were noticed in the film version, such as the expulsion of section C (mm. 43–53).

<sup>16</sup> In the list of 27 topics by Leonard Ratner, who is the founder of the topical theory in music, this sign is called the *Sigh Motif, Seufzer*, and is numbered 24. Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*, New York, Schirmer Books, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the *pianto/sigh gesture* see: Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, Princeton University Press, 2000, 17, 31, 66–73; Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006; Joan Grimalt, "Poučavanje glazbenoga značenja", *Theoria*, XXI/20, 2019, 11–28; Joan Grimalt, *Mapping Musical Signification*, Cham, Springer International Publishing, 2020; Vladimir Karbusicky, *Grundriss der musikalischen Semantik*, Darmstadt, Wiss. Buchges, 1986; Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004; Robert Hatten, "Four Semiotic Approaches to Musical Meaning: Markedness, Topics, Tropes, and Gesture", *Musicological Annual*, 41/1, 2005, 5–30; Robert Hatten, *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2018; Nataša Crnjanski, "Sigh Gesture in Mokranjac's Garlands", *Mokranjac*, 22, 2020, 2–16.

ment theory<sup>18</sup> i.e. the idea of embodied cognition,<sup>19</sup> according to which man conceptualizes the world on the basis of one's own bodily experience and the space in which it operates.<sup>20</sup> According to this theory, "sadness in human perception generally has a downward trajectory, which is reflected in language (e.g. "He fell into despair"), but also in other areas".<sup>21</sup> The conceptual metaphor which enables cross-domain mapping between the physical domain and language is: "Happy is up; Sad is down". This is the reason why, in language, we use expressions like "I am feeling up" or "I am feeling down". The application of this metaphor in non-verbal domains such as music is fascinating because it holds the same meaning, but delivers an even stronger effect. The *pianto / sigh gesture* is an exact example of such mapping in music. Its persistence as a topic testifies to a concept which is deeply embedded in our cognitive processes, making it a universal phenomenon in different historical-cultural contexts. In this regard, the fact that many phrases and words delivered by the female characters end with a descending minor second as a signifier of the *pianto / sigh gesture* confirms its importance for the semantics of the opera (Fig. 2–4). From that point of view, certain moments of tonal painting of the text are also significant, which brings the text-music relationship into the most direct connection. In other words, they are motivated

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<sup>18</sup> Embodiment theory is based on the idea that our mental processes depend on bodily experience, that is "the physical makeup of our bodies in many ways defines the way we think". Mihailo Antović, "The Role of Movement in Musical Signification: From Cognitive to Conceptual Semantics of Music", in: Milena Medić, Miloš Zatkalik, Denis Collins (Eds), *Musica Movet: Affectus, Ludus, Corpus*, Belgrade, University of Arts, Faculty of Music, 2019. Some of the most significant studies in the field of cognitive linguistics that talk more about the so called cross domain mapping are: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press (reprinted original 1980), 2003; George Lakoff, "The neuroscience of metaphoric gestures: Why they exist", in: Alan Cienki, Cornelia Müller (Eds), *Music and Gesture*, Berkeley, University of California, 2008, 283–289; Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987; Mihailo Antović, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson, op. cit.; George Lakoff, op. cit.; Mark Johnson, op. cit.; Nataša Crnjanski, *The Glossary of Music Semiotics*, op. cit., Mihailo Antović, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Nataša Crnjanski, "Passus balcanicus or the Sad Music Has a Downward Trajectory: Contribution to the Study of Mokranjac's Garlands", *Časopis za muzičku kulturu Muzika*, XXVII/1, 2023, 7–45.

<sup>21</sup> Nataša Crnjanski, "Sigh Gesture in Mokranjac's Garlands", op. cit., 7.

signs or those which contain the characteristics of the text (icons). Some examples are already mentioned: when wives are singing “our husbands far away” (1:52; mm. 20–21) with a leap of a minor sixth and an ascending glissando which refers to a distant space; when Jo sings “drives me up the wall” (3:14; m. 75) with an ascending scale-like melodic line; when Lt. Gonzales sings “It looks like every star in the sky has fallen to the ground” (29:29; mm. 706–707), where the words “fallen” and “ground” are presented with a descending glissando, etc.

**Figure 2.** Aishah’s singing with descending minor seconds (words: “curtains”, “then wait”, “the moon”, “with you”),  $J=76$ .

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, labeled '128.4', features a vocal line for Aishah and an orchestral accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "pull out the left - si - vers", "chick - en, so - led, new...", "O - pen the cur - tains, then wait". The orchestral accompaniment includes Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The second system, labeled '134.2', features a vocal line for Aishah and an orchestral accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "wait to look at the moon", "with you", "with you", "with you". The orchestral accompaniment includes Oboe, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The tempo is marked as  $J=76$ .

**Figure 3.** Aishah's phrase ending with a descending minor second, Jo's singing beginning with a minor third,  $\text{♩}=68$ .

758.9°  
196

Vibraphone *tender like a lullaby* *p*

Jo *p tender like a lullaby*  
wait - ing for

Aishah  
Jer - rett are you there?

Pno.

Ve.

Cb.

Detailed description: This musical score snippet shows a section starting at measure 196. The Vibraphone part features a melodic line with a descending minor second at the end, marked with a box 'L' and the tempo  $\text{♩}=68$ . The lyrics 'tender like a lullaby' are written above the Vibraphone and Jo's parts. Jo's vocal line begins with a minor third interval. Aishah's vocal line has the lyrics 'Jer - rett are you there?'. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The strings (Violins and Cellos) are present but have no notes in this section.

**Figure 4.** The descending chromatic line (“She’ll need help through the night”) indicates Jo’s destiny of receiving “the knock”,  $\text{♩}=90$

227.17°  
341

Cl.

E. Otr.

Jo *mp*  
I'm not hun - gry

S. 1  
sink - hole of sor - row. She'll need help to get through the night

S. 2  
sink - hole of sor - row. She'll need help to get through the night

Alto  
sink - hole of sor - row. She'll need help to get through the night

Pno. *mp* *p* *fff*

Ve.

Cb.

Detailed description: This musical score snippet starts at measure 341. It features a descending chromatic line in the vocal parts (Soprano 1, Soprano 2, and Alto) with the lyrics 'sink - hole of sor - row. She'll need help to get through the night'. The piano accompaniment has a complex texture with chords and moving lines. The strings (Violins and Cellos) play a rhythmic pattern. The tempo is  $\text{♩}=90$ . Dynamic markings include *mp*, *p*, and *fff*.

The twist in the plot is the moment when Lt. Gonzales receives a call (8:32, m. 213) that he needs to travel “up country” and deliver a notice “in two hours”. This is accompanied by strings in a faster version, this time in an “angular rhythm.”<sup>22</sup> For this purpose, Vrebalov uses horizontal polymetry switching 7/8 meter (2+2+3) with 9/8 (2+2+2+3, 3+3+3), which perfectly depicts the excitement of Lt. Gonzales. At one moment a typewriter in the background is heard as the iconic sound of the writing of a “death notice” (10:08; m. 254) and the names of the women who call each other “Hello Sally? Kelly? Jennifer? Joan?” appear (mm. 257–262). The viewer knows one of them is getting a message tonight, but not which one. The women are concerned for Jo since “she is new to Army life.” As the night progresses, Jo becomes more and more nervous, while the other wives assure her that it’s all just protocol, or even “Mandatory Fun” (?!). The irony of the expression “Mandatory Fun” is musically illustrated by a dialectical opposition between the strict movement in the strings and the bassoon (depicting the word “mandatory”) on one side, and trills in the flute, along with downward melodic passages in the clarinet, piano and vibraphone on the other side (depicting the word “fun”) which refers to the presence of falsehood and lies (20:08; mm. 493–505). In the traditional sense, irony is contrasting, because it says one thing and means another. The literal translation is a complete negation of the conveyed meaning. Irony – saying one thing, thinking another – is essential for subversion, because it demarcates the work into at least two layers of meaning, into two voices that do not have the same force, while the external form contains what is not true.<sup>23</sup> This is exactly what is present here. Furthermore, there are important signs – indices pointing at Jo, hinting that she is the one who should receive the message. She feels a “funny taste in [...] mouth, like acid” (16:21; mm. 418–421).

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<sup>22</sup> In comparison to the first appearance of Lt. Gonzales in the binary meter 4/4 (m. 123).

<sup>23</sup> Dimitri Shapovalov, “Speaking in Two Voices: Irony and Lyricism in early Prokofiev“, *Slavonica*, 10, 2004, 21.

**Figure 5.** The irony of the expression “Mandatory fun” is expressed by a specific timbre and by the movement of the melodic lines (mm. 492–496,  $\text{♩} = 120$ )

The musical score for Figure 5 consists of multiple staves for various instruments and voices. The instruments shown are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Violin (Vln. 1 and 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The vocal parts include Soprano (So.) and Alto (Alto.). The lyrics for the Soprano part are: "Man - da - to - ry fun" with the instruction "very articulate, as to make it official and clear". The lyrics for the Alto part are: "com - mu - ni - ca - tions or just for 'man da to ry fun.'" followed by "We pro -". The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120.

The word “protocol” becomes a comfort word for wives and Lt. Gonzales. Testifying about her experiences with the military community, Brevoort explains the importance of the protocol: “Military culture, I quickly discovered, has a dizzying set of protocols and customs that are strictly observed. These protocols form the substance of military life and govern its rituals. It was important to honor them while writing *The Knock*; they form the structure for the libretto and score, and composer Aleksandra Vrebalov and I made every effort to ensure they were represented as accurately as possible.”<sup>24</sup> In the opera, the wives console themselves by saying “it’s just protocol” and that they’ve been through it before, while the Lt. comforts himself by remembering “he has a protocol” and that he has to stick to it. For that reason, a very significant moment in the opera is precisely when, beyond any protocol, a beautiful prayer appears. Lt. Gonzales prays (17:19; m. 438) to Querida Vir-

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.cincinnatiopera.org/blog-database/2023/5/9/song-for-the-soldiers-wife>

gen de Guadalupe, asking her to teach him gentleness and strength, and to give him courage. The melody of the prayer is semantically related with sadness, which is again embodied by descending minor seconds and the sound of strings in a choral-like texture (Fig. 6). He is praying in Spanish, a factor which entices the viewer/listener to instantly become intimate with him. The viewer/listener is witnessing Lt. Gonzales's psychological struggle with his difficult task and at the same time is following the psychological struggle of Jo who goes through the "protocol" with other wives for the first time. The introduction of prayer is extremely important for the dramatic narrative because it intensifies the dialectical opposition between "protocol" and "emotion", "order" and "chaos". This opposition is equally important for the musical narrative since it not only introduces two different musical atmospheres, but also differs in tempo, treatment of the text (syllabic-melismatic), instrumentation and other elements.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 6.** The prayer of Lt. Gonzales (mm. 436–446, ♩=72) accompanied by strings in a choral-like texture, the melody is filled with descending minor seconds ("protocols", "como", "amable", "Querida Virgen")

The image shows a musical score for the prayer of Lt. Gonzales, measures 436-446. The score is in Spanish and includes parts for Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Pno.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Cb.). The vocal line for Lt. Gonzales is in Spanish. The tempo is marked as 'ritem.' with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The lyrics are: 'All I've got are pro - to - cols. Que - ri - da Vir - gen de Gu - da - lu - pe. es - se - na me - tu - ma - re - ra de co - mo ser a - ma - ble a - ma - ble y fir - ta - le - ra. Que - ri - da Vir - gen'.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that after "the knock" Lt. Gonzales concludes that "There is no protocol for this" (53:26), thinking of the woman struck by the terrible news.

There are several exceptional songs in the arias which describe exactly what the composer testified about depicting the deep emotions of the characters. It is important to note that there is no romanticization of these events. Everything is real and therefore cruelly painful. A wonderful moment transpires with the duet of Jo and Aishah (23:46; m. 564) in which Jo reveals that she had a fight with Kelsey on the day he left for Iraq. Again, the melodic line is filled with the *pianto/sigh gesture* and bluesy minor thirds (Fig. 7). Aishah

Figure 7. Jo's Aria (mm. 564–575, ♩=78) with minor thirds and *pianto/sigh* gestures

The image displays a musical score for a duet between Jo and Aishah. The score is divided into two systems. The first system, starting at measure 564, features Jo's vocal line with lyrics: "The day Kel-sey left I picked a fight dropped him off at the bus left him on the". The tempo is marked as ♩ = 78. The second system, starting at measure 571, features Aishah's vocal line with lyrics: "cub drove a-way did-n't e-ven say good bye I watched him in the rear view". The dynamic marking **FF** is present above the first measure of the second system. The instrumental accompaniment includes Violin 1 and 2, Viola, and Cello, with specific performance instructions such as *p. sul pont.* and *gliss. between the notes*.

tries to comfort Jo. She didn't even say goodbye and his hurt look is "burned in her mind and makes her feel like dirt". This duet is intersected with the

singing of Lt. Gonzales who is questioning himself why he was chosen for this assignment (m. 587). It is a marvelous portrayal of their emotions with a tutti ensemble, including piano, bassoon and electric bass, doubled by a string ensemble in a lively, bluesy counterpoint with voices, flute and clarinet (Fig. 8, m. 619). The local culmination of this part appears with Jo singing "I didn't say goodbye" and Aishah answering "I never say goodbye" – "Because goodbyes are forever". A love song sung by Aishah (35:28; m. 826) is touching as well, accompanied by piano, electric guitar and flute. Lt. Gonzales conjoins accompanied gradually by strings, flute, clarinet, electric guitar and piano. They both sing about soldier's faces – she thinks about her husband whose face she can't remember, and Lt. Gonzales wonders what the soldier who died looked like. Again, the *pianto/sigh* gesture is redundant. The final aria of Lt. Gonzales (52:56; m. 1122) which happens after he delivered the message is also very poignant, bringing back the blues atmosphere: "What do I do"; "She has fallen like a soldier, Shot by my words"; "I would rather stare into the

**Figure 8.** Tutti ensemble in bluesy counterpoint (mm. 621–630, ♩=110)

The musical score for Figure 8 is a multi-staff arrangement. At the top left, it is marked '25:46.4" and '62/4'. The instruments listed on the left are Fl., Ob., Cl., Bsn., Bass, Jo, Aishah, Pno., Vin. 1, Vin. 2, Ve., and Ch. The score shows a complex rhythmic texture with many triplets and sixteenth notes. Lyrics are provided for Jo and Aishah. A rehearsal mark 'II' is placed above the Flute staff. The overall style is described as 'bluesy counterpoint' in the caption.

237.3<sup>2</sup>  
626

Fl.  
Ob.  
Cl.  
Bsn.  
Bass  
Aishah  
Pno.  
Vin. 1  
Vin. 2  
Vla.  
Vcl.  
Cb.

for - get the what it's too There's no - thing you can do On nights like

barrel of a gun, than into the eyes of this fatherless child”; “This is the hardest job of all, watching wives and children fall. This is the cost of war.” The aria comes after the plot denouement, the general climax, in which the characters from both sides of the communication chain finally meet. The solo lines of those songs are often doubled by violins or woodwinds, but since the emphasis is on the text, its syllabic treatment is more pronounced, along with the natural accentuation of the words from which the melodic line arises.

As mentioned earlier, “the knocking sound” is the main musical sign of the opera. It appears as two signifiers, so the importance of it lies within its polysemy and at all levels of meaning which are interconnected on an iconic and symbolic level, or in Peirce’s terms, levels of Firstness and Thirdness.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> C.S. Peirce, “On a New List of Categories”, *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 7, (1868), 1867, 287–298. According to Charles Peirce, there are the following sign categories: signs in themselves (legisign, sinsign, qualisign), signs in relation to an object (symbol, index, icon) and signs in relation to their interpretants (rheme, dicent, argument). When a sign is perceived in relation to the object, there is an icon based on similarity (Peirce’s Firstness), then an index based on the reference of the sign

The first signifier appears as the sound of a heartbeat in an almost surgically precise portrayal of the psychological state of Lt. Gonzalez (Fig. 9). His character is always introduced by an anxious rhythm in the string instruments (14:21). Lt. Gonzalez wonders “What’s that knocking sound?” during his trip. The sound frustrates him as his trip continues. It becomes louder and louder, and when he finally realizes that it’s his own heart, he exclaims: “I am like a ticking bomb, about to explode” (30:00).

**Figure 9.** The “knocking sound” embodied by the sound of the bass drum (mm. 454–459,  $\text{♩}=72$ )

The musical score for Figure 9 consists of several staves. At the top, there is a tempo and meter marking: 18728 4/4, 454. A box labeled 'AA' is positioned above the B. D. staff. The B. D. staff shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked 'mf, dry'. The Gonzalez staff shows a vocal line with the text 'SPOKEN: DAMN, THERE'S THAT KNOCKING SOUND AGAIN!'. The Pno., Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vcl., and Ch. staves show a complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked 'scratchy and dry, close to the bridge'.

to something with which it is in a causal physical relationship (Peirce’s Secondness) and a symbol with a conventional and arbitrary relationship between the sign and object (Peirce’s Thirdness). Since Saussure’s symbol is an arbitrary sign, some theorists avoid the term symbol and prefer to use an arbitrary sign or a conventional sign. Cf. Philip Tagg, “Introductory notes to the Semiotics of Music”, <https://www.tagg.org/xpdfs/semio-tug.pdf>, 1999, 4. Saussure, on the other hand, established that the character of a symbol is never completely arbitrary, meaning there must be some trace of a natural relationship between the signifier and the signified. Cf. Ferdinand Sossir [Ferdinand de Saussure], *Opšta lingvistika [General Linguistics]*, Beograd, Nolit, 1977 [1916], 136. See more: Nataša Crnjanski, “Sigh Gesture in Mokranjac’s Garlands”, op. cit., 202–207.

While Lt. Gonzalez is changing clothes, the music takes over the role of the text, the beating of his heart is heard along with wonderful and elusive motifs in the solo violin which are carried on by the piano and various wind instruments. Those motifs, like thoughts, come and go with a very determined rhythm, gradually becoming angular in melodic lines and symbolically ending in a minor second. The director, Alison Moritz, made an analogy of this scene with preparing for battle, since both tasks require uniform and protocol.<sup>27</sup> This analogy will be obvious to viewers at the very end of the opera or the moment when Jo Jenner finally receives the message and Lt. Gonzalez perceives her as a soldier falling from a bullet, hit by his words. Finally, Lt. Gonzalez thinks he received the answer to his question, why he was assigned this task (“I come from strong people. We do jobs no one else can do. My Mother cleans toilets, my father digs ditches!” m. 797). The first “knocking sound” iconically represents the heartbeat and symbolically the psychological distress of Lt. Gonzalez.

A new “knocking sound” appears when Lt. Gonzales finally arrives in front of the house. He waits until the end of time, since “the longer life will remain the same for the woman inside”. The motif is in a higher register (40:54, m. 914; 41:32, m. 927), this time orchestrated by an interesting timbral play of vibraphone, violin, double bass and piano (Fig. 10). The “knocking motif” is transformed in Morse code, a sign Vrebalov has used in her work before.<sup>28</sup> Here, it triggers several interpretants<sup>29</sup> around which a *semiosis* is created. It conveys the message (of death) and since it is mainly used in the military, it again indicates a strict protocol which cannot be avoided. A

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<sup>27</sup> Signs of war are everywhere. While traveling, Lt. Gonzalez comes across a Target store (15:06) and wonders how he didn't see the red circle and dot “marking the spot where the bullet should hit” before.

<sup>28</sup> For example, in the work *Antennae*, Morse code plays an important role since the composer examines its acoustic quality and communicational potential. See more in: Nataša Crnjanski, “Play of signs in the work *Antennae* by Aleksandra Vrebalov”, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Interpretant is Peirce's term which enters into the triadic structure of the sign: sign-object-interpretant. According to Peirce, the interpretant is a mental tool which arises through the connection between the sign and the object in the mind of the one who interprets the sign. Cf. Nataša Crnjanski, *Pojmovnik muzičke semiotike [The Glossary of Music Semiotics]*, Novi Sad, Academy of Arts, 2019, 73). An interpretant is a new sign which creates another interpretant, leading to an infinite series of *unlimited semiosis*. Cf. Umberto Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work”, in: T. A. Sebeok (Ed.), *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979, 193.

descending *glissandi* in the strings and descending melodic lines work together as musical signs of deep sadness (mm. 921–927).

**Figure 10.** The “knocking sound” as Morse code, descending melodic lines and *glissandi* as musical signs of sadness (mm. 914–927, ♩=72)

**SCENE 7**  
 3851.3  
 914 (remains @ ♩ = 72)

Fl. *dry, with a metal stick, keep the pulse at all times mentally*

Vib. *mp*

Gonzales SPOKEN: Here we are.  
 Home of the Com - man - der.

Vln. I *dry, percussive*

Ch.

3901.3  
 917

Vib. **BBB**

Gonzales There's a wreath on the door that's your tar-get Gon - za - les. The

Vln. 1 *no vib., detached*

Vln. 2 *no vib., detached*

Vla. *slow gliss., creasy, soft*

Vc. *gliss.*

Ch. *slow gliss., creasy, soft*

3914 9<sup>o</sup>  
921

Vib. Vibraphone

Gonzales (Checks his watch)  
line of de-parture the point of no re-tarn.

Pno. *mp*

Vln. 1 *mp*

Vln. 2 *mp*

Vla. *gliss.*

Vcl. *p slow gliss., creepy, soft*

Cb. *p slow gliss., creepy, soft*

CCC

The same *glissandi* return when the message is delivered to Jo Jenner. The melody of prayer (43:19; m. 960) is echoed, beautifully arranged with bass guitar, clarinet, strings and piano. The choral-like texture of the clarinet and bassoon evokes a funeral-esque sound (m. 974) and the prayer gradually becomes the plaint. When Lt. Gonzales finally goes to knock at the door, he doesn't know the proper way to knock since the protocol doesn't advise him how to do so (45:29; m. 998). He then prays again and asks the Querida Virgen de Guadalupe how he should knock. When he finally does the "knock" (46: 53; m. 1017) and enters, the music depicts his anxious state by referring to the "knocking sound" in his head (bass drum) and something creeping down his neck (*tremolo* in strings and squeaky sound produced from inside the piano). Both he and Jo Jenner are overwhelmed with emotion. Her exclamation "Nooooooo" (m. 1106) with an upward glissando is accompanied by a tutti ensemble depicting her emotional chaos. The second signifier of the "knocking sound" iconically represents "the knock" at the door, but symbolically – the death itself.

Figure 11. The moment of delivering "the knock" (m. 1092, ♩=54)

**QQQ**

*Gonzalez doesn't know what to do.  
He pulls a script from his pocket and reads.*

40'29.2"  
1092

S. D. Snare Drum *mp*

Jo. SPOKEN: No. *(Trying to wind the charger cord.)* SPOKEN: No. *(Trying to wind the charger cord.)*

Gonzales: SPOKEN: *like a recit., do not vocalize too much, rhythm close to natural speech*  
Mrs. Jen-ner I have a spe-cial mess-age for you from the Se-cre-ta-ry of the Ar-my.

Pno.

Vln. 1 **QQQ** *gliss.*

Vln. 2 *gliss.*

Vla. *gliss.*

Vc. *gliss.*

40'51.3"  
1099

S. D.

Jo. SPOKEN: No. *(Trying to wind the charger cord.)*

Gonzales: He en-trusted to me to ex-press to you his deep re-gret that your hus-band Kel-sey Jen-ner died in Fal

Pno.

Vln. 1 *gliss.*

Vln. 2 *gliss.*

Vla. *gliss.*

Vc. *gliss.*

By using sound rather exclusively, Vrebalov succeeds in creating a musical analogy of the “dead” metaphor which exists in language. In Fig. 10, we observe descending *glissandi* as signs of sadness, the military drum as a sign of Army and protocol, clusters and note heads as arrows that visually evoke “bullets and arrows” which hit the heart of the person receiving “the knock”. Because the listeners/spectators do not have an insight into the opera score, we should mention here the suggestive notation of the composer, where the semiographic representation of the sound essentially depicts the textual action in a visual manner.<sup>30</sup> This is another feature of her music which can also be seen throughout the composer’s entire musical oeuvre. It may not be sufficient to mention that this semantic relationship between the visual representation of sound and the program it describes stems from the composer’s deep inclination towards visual art. Namely, Vrebalov often “paints” using an ink drawing technique, and her individual musical and artistic works are in a unique relationship on the verge of synergy.

Unlike the ending in the libretto, where Lt. Gonzalez is supposed to hold the baby, in the film version Moritz decides that Aishah and COW will hold the baby. Then Jo runs off with the baby as the stars disappear from the sky. After the women’s chorus composed in a choral-like, funeral-esque texture, Moritz also added a funeral scene in which Jo is handed a flag wrapped in a triangle, and the opera ends with the lines “Blue and stars are all that will remain of her husband, the soldier.” The polysemy of the concept of “the stars” is present, since the stars appear on all three levels of meaning, as symbol, index, and icon. The stars represent the states on the flag (a symbol of loyalty), (disappearing) stars are indicators that morning is about to come (indices for a new day), and the stars in the sky represent the souls of the dead (icons of risen souls).

*The Knock* centers upon the lives of those who mostly have peripheral roles in the stories about soldiers – those who are left behind, those who lose, those who wait. By coincidence, in this opera they are embodied in the characters of women. It should be remembered that in American culture, as well as in some other cultures, women are also part of the military system, so it is possible to talk about the global message of this opera out of gender and particular context. A great effect in the opera was achieved by the characters

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<sup>30</sup> One such example is the moment when the women sing “fighting a war in Fallujah” in a canonic imitation, with musical notation resembling a soldier’s battlefield (1:58; mm. 22–24).

in the film sometimes being silent, but the viewer/listener still hears their inner monologues. This has a much stronger impact and would not be possible on stage in a live performance. To some extent we see this as an advantage of the filmed opera, including the ability to see the story through the details (the director's eye), closely acting through mimicry and the ability to listen/watch again, among other things. In this regard, we have to mention the cast, whose exceptional acting and singing contributed to the quality of the film, even more intensely and noticeably than when it comes to a live performance.<sup>31</sup>

We observed several important signs used in the opera. The most important are the "knocking" sound and the catabasic musical signs which indicate the presence of deep sadness and grief: the descending minor second (*sigh gesture / pianto*), the minor third and the downward *glissandi*. The significance of the "knocking sound" with two signifiers, a heartbeat and the door knock, and two signified, anxiety and death, can almost be compared to Beethoven's fate motif. Indeed, the semantics of these signs are reinforced by interesting and atypical opera instrumentation, such as the electric guitar and electric bass with particular reference to the blues. The composer Aleksandra Vrebalov thoroughly examines the communication potential of those conventional signs and uses them in an unconventional manner to fulfill the music-text-image as a whole. Together with the director and librettist she created a global message which transcends borders, spaces and nations. It all confirms that the signs should not be studied in isolation, but as we concluded, in the process of *semiosis*, with the various relationships which make up that process, as Charles Morris stated (1975). To summarize, these sign relations are the real source of (musical) semantics, where music speaks more than we think.

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<sup>31</sup> The cast, in order of appearance: Commanding Officer's Wife: Stephanie Sanchez; Lisa: Lisa Marie Rogali; Victoria: Victoria Lawal; Aishah McNair: Mia Athey; Joella "Jo" Jenner: Mary-Hollis Hundley; Lt. Roberto Gonzalez: Armando Contreras; Jarrett McNair: Roy Allen; Funeral Guest: Abby Rodd; Funeral Guest: James F. Rotondo III.

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Glimerglass Festival, <https://glimerglass.org/>

### Summary

The opera *The Knock* was commissioned by the *Glimerglass Festival* and was planned to be performed in 2021. Due to the pandemic the premiere was postponed, but *Glimerglass* decided to film the opera and stream it on YouTube. The screened version of *The Knock* is the subject of this paper. Despite the setback, the opera had its live premiere on June 23, 2023 at the Cincinnati Opera House.

The libretto of *The Knock* was inspired by the autobiographical testimonies of military wives on which Deborah Brevoort, the librettist, relied upon. Inspired by the strong emotions of the story along with the inner monologue of the characters, Aleksandra Vrebalov created music which not only reflects these inner states, but together with the text and image creates an inextricable semantic network, or in other words, a *semiosis* of the artwork. The term "The Knock" refers to the description of a death notice which is used within the military community. "The Knock" became a symbol of death in that specific community, or as linguists would call it, a "dead metaphor", since the term has lost its original (denotative) meaning and has been frequently used by community members in its metaphorical (connotative) meaning. Besides the short time frame of the story (one night), the opera has many other minimalistic features, such as the small orchestra ensemble, 3 solo female voices and a couple of female choruses, while the only male character is Army Lt. Gonzalez. This small range of material allows the writer and composer to focus on the psychological profiles of these characters, mainly Jo Jenner, the wife who eventually receives "the knock" and Lt. Gonzales, who delivers it.

In the article, several important signs used in the opera are observed. The most important are the "knocking" sound and the catabasic musical signs which indicate the presence of deep sadness and grief: the descending minor second (*sigh gesture / pianto*), the minor third and the downward *glissandi*. The "knocking sound" appears as two signifiers, a heartbeat and the door knock, and two signified, anxiety and death. The semantics of these signs is reinforced by interesting and atypical opera instrumentation, such as the electric guitar and electric bass with particular reference to the blues. The composer Aleksandra Vrebalov thoroughly examines the communication potential of those conventional signs and uses them in an unconventional manner to fulfill the music-text-image as a whole.



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## RESEARCH AND TRADITION

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### ***Milena Petrović\****

University of Arts in Belgrade  
Faculty of Music, Department of Solfeggio and Music Education

### ***Marina Marković\*\****

University of Arts in Belgrade  
Faculty of Music, Department of Musicology

### ***Sara Savović\*\*\****

PhD Student  
University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Music, Department of Solfeggio and Music Education

## EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF MILAN Đ. MILIĆEVIĆ (1831–1908) IN THE CONTEXT OF SERBIAN MUSIC EDUCATION

*Never let the sun go down  
until you learn more,  
until you become a better person  
than you were yesterday<sup>1</sup>*

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\* The author's contact details: milena.petrovic@fmu.bg.ac.rs.

\*\* The author's contact details: marinajmarkovic@gmail.com.

\*\*\* The author's contact details: savovic.sara4@gmail.com.

1 The words of Jovan Đak, Milićević's father, written in the preface of Milićević's book *Школе у Срдији од почетка овога века до краја школске 1867. године* [Schools in Ser-

**Abstract:** The oeuvre of the Serbian educator, writer, pedagogue, translator and ethnographer Milan Đ. Milićević completes the existing picture of music pedagogy in Serbia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Milićević did not directly deal with music pedagogical issues, he was deeply convinced that learning music has a central role in the moral development of the individual and community if it is grounded in mastering church chants and folk songs in the teaching process. This would correspond to the concept of folk music pedagogy, which is in conformity with the general guidelines in Serbian music education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Milan Đ. Milićević, church chants, folk songs, folk music pedagogy.

## Introduction

Milan Đ. Milićević (1831–1908), educator, writer, pedagogue, translator and ethnographer, lived during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was one of the famous, but today insufficiently known figures from the history of Serbian pedagogy. At the time of the national awakening and liberation of the Serbian people from Turkish slavery – major and significant changes in Serbian society – Milićević had numerous responsibilities. Among the many activities he dedicated himself to during his long working career, the following are particularly notable: he was a teacher, a senior official in the Ministry of Education and Church Affairs, the editor and publisher of the pedagogical journals *Škola* and *Srpske novine*, a Serbian government adviser and member of the National Assembly, a member and the president of the Kolarac foundation, a member of the Serbian Royal Academy,<sup>2</sup> and one of the founders of the Serbian Literary Association, and Literary Cooperative.

Primary research sources include Milićević's historical, ethnographic and pedagogical works and diaries. We examined them in order to complete the picture of the position of education, general and music pedagogy at the time when Milićević, as Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Church Affairs (1861–1888) and a school supervisor, particularly advocated the preservation and nurturing of Serbian music heritage – both spiritual (ecclesiastical) and secular (folk). This activity coincided with the period of Serbia's state

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*bia from the Beginning of this Century Until the End of the School Year 1867*], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> Milićević was one of the first sixteen members of the Serbian Royal Academy, founded in 1886. He served in the Department of Social Sciences at the same time when the composer and conductor Davorin Jenko worked in the Department of Art.

development, in which progress was significant in the sphere of culture, art and education. The national curricula reflected the socio-political climate of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we shall first shed light on the position of education in Milićević's era, as well as Milićević's moral and aesthetic principles, which became the basis for the foundation of folk music pedagogy. It consisted of learning church music in schools, on the one hand, and on learning secular music by singing Serbian folk songs and dancing round dances, on the other. The ways in which folk pedagogy was implemented also constituted an important part of Milićević's interests. We used his pedagogical methods as a starting point for understanding and interpreting the singing methods in primary schools, written by singing teachers at the beginning of the seventh and the end of the ninth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Schooling and Education in Milićević's Time

Milan Milićević was the secretary and school supervisor in the Ministry of Education for eighteen years (1861–1879). His service coincided with the reign of two princes from the Obrenović dynasty – Mihailo (1860–1868) and Milan (1868–1882).

Prince Mihailo's educational policy encouraged the general progress of people, and built solid foundations for the school system.<sup>4</sup> The school system was expected to foster cultural, economic and social progress.<sup>5</sup> Education became the serious responsibility of the state, and there was an increased

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<sup>3</sup> See: Славко Гавриловић и др. (ур.), *Историја српског народа, V/2: Од Првој устанка до Берлинског конгреса 1804–1878* [*The History of Serbian People, V/2: From the First Uprising to the Berlin Congress 1804–1878*], Београд, Српска књижевна задруга, 1981; Чедомир Попов и др. (ур.), *Историја српског народа, VI/1: Од Берлинског конгреса до уједињења 1878–1918* [*The History of Serbian People, VI/1: From the Berlin Congress to Unification 1878–1918*], Београд, Српска књижевна задруга, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Владета Тешић, *Морално васпитање у школама Србије (1830–1878)* [*Moral Education in Serbian Schools (1830–1878)*], Београд, Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, 1974, 75.

<sup>5</sup> Андреа Јовановић, Слађана Суботић, “Лист Школа и његов допринос развоју просвете и школства Србије 19. века (са посебним освртом на радове Милана Ђ. Милићевића)” [*Magazine Škola and Its Contribution to Education Development in Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (with Special References to Milan Đ. Milićević's Works)*], in: Дејан Вукићевић (ур.), *Сусрети библиографа у спомен на др Георгија Михаиловића* [*Meetings of Bibliographers in Memory of Dr Georgi Mihailović*], Инђија, Народна библиотека “Др Ђорђе Натопшевић”, 2019, 166–167.

awareness about its importance: according to the Law on Central Administration from 1861, education was, in terms of importance, right behind justice.<sup>6</sup> Legal changes were made and the organization and function of all types of schools were reviewed. As of 1867, the following educational institutions existed in Serbia: primary schools, Sunday schools, a school of agriculture, a women's high school, secondary schools, high schools, the theological seminary, a military school, a military academy, a school of engineering<sup>7</sup> and the Great School – the highest Serbian educational institution of that time.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, an organized way of learning music began at the state's expense and according to European standards, namely the existing models of the organization of European schools were accepted. The Rules for the three-year Government Music School and the two-year Government Singing School were formed.<sup>9</sup>

During the reign of Prince Milan, primary, secondary and higher education was improved and modernized.<sup>10</sup> Primary education became compulsory for all children, while the education cycle in high schools was extended to eight years. Besides many renowned people, Milan Đ. Milićević, Josif Pančić, Stojan Novaković and Milan Milovuk were members of the Permanent School Commission, which dealt with issues related to teaching and education. At that time, the curricula were prepared for primary school and high school. In 1871, Milan Đ. Milićević and Milorad Šapčanin designed the Course Schedule for male and female primary schools and created teachers' instructions.<sup>11</sup> The number of schools, teachers, students and textbooks increased significantly. Due to the lack of necessary qualifications, the practice of one professor teaching several subjects was abolished.<sup>12</sup> Considering that

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<sup>6</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Историја педагогије [The History of Pedagogy]*, Београд, Државна штампарија, 1871.

<sup>7</sup> School of Construction (authors' note).

<sup>8</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Школе у Србији... [Schools in Serbia...]*, op. cit., 1.

<sup>9</sup> Биљана Милановић, *Европске музичке праксе и обликовање нације кроз креирање националне уметничке музике у Србији у првим деценијама 20. века [European Musical Practices and the Shaping of a Nation through the Creation of National Art Music in Serbia in the First Decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]*, doctoral dissertation, Београд, Филозофски факултет Универзитета у Београду, 2016, 98.

<sup>10</sup> Арсен Ђуровић, "Образовање у време владавине краља Милана" ["Education During the Rule of King Milan"], *Историјски часопис [Historical Review]*, 57, 2008, 301.

<sup>11</sup> Андреа Јовановић, Слађана Суботић, op. cit., 167.

<sup>12</sup> Арсен Ђуровић, op. cit. 304, 306, 310.

teachers' and professors' exams were compulsory for the entire teaching staff, Milićević's job required him to travel frequently around Serbia and visit schools, in order to examine and evaluate young teachers.<sup>13</sup> Milićević advocated the existence and active action of teachers' unions. They were organized in different places in Serbia with the aim of decentralizing the education system and encouraging local communities to participate in decision-making and school management. Teachers' unions also had a great influence on the professional development of teachers.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1870s, the first public reading rooms were opened in Serbia and the first pedagogical magazines appeared. At that time, Milićević edited the magazine *School*, and he also wrote the following works in the field of pedagogy: *Школе у Србији од почетка овога века до краја школске 1867. године* [*Schools in Serbia From the Beginning of This Century to the End of the School Year of 1867*] (1868), *Педагојске поуке за учитеље, родитеље и све пријатеље народнога образовања* [*Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers, Parents and All Friends of National Education*] (1870), *Како се учи школа* [*How to Teach in a School*] (1869)<sup>15</sup> and *Историја педагогије* [*The History of Pedagogy*] (1871).<sup>16</sup> These pedagogical works, as well as the texts published in the magazine *Škola*, had a powerful impact on the development of education, depicting at the same time the socio-political situation in contemporary Serbia.<sup>17</sup>

Milićević's diary notes bear witness to significant social and cultural events in Belgrade at the beginning of the eighth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They testify to nurturing the practice of urban and rural musicianship,<sup>18</sup> as

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<sup>13</sup> This practice is the forerunner of today's professional development of employees in education and teacher certification exams for the teaching licence.

<sup>14</sup> Андреа Јовановић, Слађана Суботић, *op. cit.*, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Како се учи школа* [*How to Teach a School*], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1869.

<sup>16</sup> Milićević was an editor and publisher of the magazine *Škola* from 1868 to 1876, when publication was suspended due to the beginning of the Serbian-Turkish war. The paper was published three times a month, and most of the texts were written and translated by Milićević himself.

<sup>17</sup> Absolutism of the regime, political turmoil, the multi-faceted activity of Svetozar Marković and the national liberation movement reflected on education and press. Cf. Андреа Јовановић, Слађана Суботић, *op. cit.*, 169.

<sup>18</sup> See: Наташа Марјановић, *Музика у животију Срба у 19. веку* [*Music in the Life of Serbs in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*], Нови Сад – Матица српска, Београд – Музиколошки институт САНУ, 76, 127.

well as the activities of singing societies and the musical audience.<sup>19</sup> From Milićević's notes it is also known that he was a close friend of Milan Milovuk. They met most often in the family environment of Milićević's home, where Milovuk frequently played music as a great "passionate musician".<sup>20</sup>

Milićević was one of the instigators of Serbian pedagogical theories and educational practice. On the one hand, he believed that the revival of the Serbian state was possible only if school reform was carried out.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, he was convinced that an efficient public school must be a state institution.<sup>22</sup> Milićević wrote about the need of the Serbian people to be educated, and considered teaching as one of the most important services in the state, because its aim was "moral, religious and political education".<sup>23</sup> According to Milićević's understanding, a teacher should be a highly developed moral personality, be humane and considerate of other people, in order to transfer these qualities to his students.<sup>24</sup> From Milićević's perspective, the teacher must cherish truth, because it relates to moral strength,<sup>25</sup> he has to be fair and even-tempered,<sup>26</sup> always striving to "help and influence children to

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<sup>19</sup> Milićević himself often attended concerts. He passed on his love for music to his children, who sang in the choir of the Church of the Ascension and privately learned to play the piano with Antonije Cimbrić, a music teacher at the Belgrade High School. Милан Милићевић, *Дневник I (1. јануар 1869 – 22. септембар 1872)* [*Diary I (1st January 1869 – 22nd September 1872)*], прир. Петар В. Крестић, Београд, Радио-телевизија Србије – Завод за уџбенике, 2011, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Милан Милићевић, "Легитимичан поглед на учитељску школу у Сомбору" ["A Quick Look at the Teachers' School in Sombor"], *Школа [School]*, 15, 1869, 154.

<sup>21</sup> Петар В. Крестић, "Милан Ђ. Милићевић о неким образовним и просветним питањима у Србији (1869–1877)" ["Milan Đ. Milićević On Some Educational Questions in Serbia (1869–1877)"], in: Петар В. Крестић (ур.), *Држава и политичке управљања (18–20. век)* [*State and Governing Policies (18–20th Centuries)*], Београд, Историјски институт, 2017, 136.

<sup>22</sup> Светозар Дунђерски, "Значај мисли и дела Милана Ђ. Милићевића (1831–1908)" ["Importance of the Thought and Work of Milan Đ. Milićević (1831–1908)"], *Педагошка стварност – часопис за школска и културно-просветна питања* [*Pedagogical Reality – Journal for School and Cultural-Educational Issues*], 59/3, 2013, 540, 545.

<sup>23</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагошке поуке за учитеље, родитеље и све пријатеље народнога образовања* [*Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers, Parents and All Friends of National Education*], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1870, 93.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Историја педагогије* [*The History of Pedagogy*], *op. cit.*, 562.

<sup>26</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагошке поуке за учитеље...* [*Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers...*], *op. cit.*, 6.

be better, more skillful and happier with his training, lessons and reproof”<sup>27</sup>

Milan Đ. Milićević was a person with firm and steady morals, and he built his pedagogical viewpoints and folk pedagogy on the basis of moral education and upbringing. He believed that teaching methods had to be in harmony with the child’s physical, mental, moral and religious nature, and that the main aim of teaching should be “the development of the body and mind, working habits, and the cultivation and strengthening of moral emotions in children”<sup>28</sup> He was convinced that music had a great effect on the moral upbringing and education of a child, because upbringing “treats the heart” and education “educates the mind”<sup>29</sup>

Regarding Milićević’s ethical beliefs, the basic role of the school system was to spread the awareness of national unity.<sup>30</sup> In order to achieve this, it was necessary for the teacher, on the one hand, to build and maintain the students’ religious feeling and to teach them to sing in church.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the teacher should develop the students’ patriotism, by teaching them to sing patriotic folk songs.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, learning church chants and folk songs in education was the basis of Milićević’s concept of folk music pedagogy.

### Chanting in church and teaching church chant in schools

Teaching liturgical singing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a powerful tool for achieving national education goals. It contributed to the understanding of the nation as a community of individuals,<sup>33</sup> particularly pertaining to choral po-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>28</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Пољед на народно школовање у Србији* [A View on National Education in Serbia], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1873, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Светозар Дунђерски, op. cit. 544.

<sup>30</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Пољед на народно школовање...* [A View on National Education...], op. cit., 6.

<sup>31</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагошкије поуке за учитеље...* [Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers...], op. cit., 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20–21.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ивана Перковић-Радак, “‘Образовање је насушни хлеб’: црквено вишегласје, образовни процеси и српски национални идентитет између четврте деценије 19. века и 1914. године” [“Education is our Daily Bread’: Church Polyphony, Educational Processes and Serbian National Identity Between 1830 and 1914”], *Музикологија/Musicology*, 7, 2007, 203.

lyphony, the role of which was considered progressive in education.<sup>34</sup> However, throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional Serbian church chant, the so-called “Karlovci chant”, was part of the music curriculum in primary schools, high schools, teacher’s schools and theological seminaries.<sup>35</sup> The first chant teachers primarily came to the Principality of Serbia from schools in Sremski Karlovci.<sup>36</sup>

In Milićević’s notes, we find valuable documentary sources, not only of chanting in church, but also of teaching church chant in schools – especially in the Saint Sava Theological Seminary in Belgrade. At the time when Milićević was studying in the Belgrade Seminary (1846–1850), there were teachers from diverse educational backgrounds. Nevertheless, former students of the schools in Sremski Karlovci had exceptional singing abilities. In this regard, Milićević classified teachers in the Theological Seminary into three categories: 1) *Karlovci theologians*, who were well-trained singers; 2) *Kiev seminarians*, who were not skilled singers, nor did they particularly appreciate church chant; and 3) *Russian academics* “who graduated from the Russian Theological Academy<sup>37</sup> and who did not interfere in any matter.”<sup>38</sup>

Milićević’s comments on the evaluation of the quality of chanting practice in Belgrade (including teaching church chant in the Saint Sava Theological Seminary), including outside of Belgrade, indicate that he was familiar with church chanting because of his family’s experience of liturgical life.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as a candidate for admission to the theological school, he expressed his proficiency in chanting. In the entrance exam, Milićević was first asked to read a few verses from the Psalms, which he already knew by heart, and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>36</sup> Даница Петровић, “Патријарх Јосиф Рајачић – просветитељ, заштитник појања и чувар баштине” [“Patriarch Josif Rajačić – Enlightener, Protector of Church Chanting and Guardian of National Heritage”], in: Радомир Поповић и Дејан Микавица (ур.), *Патријарх Јосиф Рајачић и његово доба (1785–1766) [Patriarch Josif Rajačić and His Epoch (1785–1861)]*, Сремски Карловци и Београд, Епархија сремска Српске православне цркве и Архив српске православне цркве, 2017, 241.

<sup>37</sup> This refers to professors of Russian origin, most likely educated in Moscow and/or Saint Petersburg.

<sup>38</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Из својих усјомена: белешке за просветну историју Београда [From my Memories: Notes for the Educational History of Belgrade]*, Београд, Државна штампарија Краљевине Србије, 1895, 51.

<sup>39</sup> Наташа Марјановић, *Музика у живоју Срба... [Music in the Life of Serbs...]*, op. cit.

then to sing the Transfiguration Troparion. The commission was pleased and announced that not only had he passed the examination and was told to come to school “on Saturday after Vespers,” but also that he received a bursary.<sup>40</sup> Later, as a young teacher, Milićević was offered the chance to try his hand at teaching this subject, and he did it successfully. After completing his education in 1850, Milićević, in fact, was offered a teaching job in the primary school in the village of Lešnica beside the Drina River. In addition to another subject, he was also teaching church chant in both semesters of the second and third grade, following the primary school curriculum. Milićević was very pleased with the progress his students were making.<sup>41</sup>

Milićević’s teacher of church chant with the rule in the Belgrade Theological Seminary was Archimandrite Teodosije Mraović (1846–1850), later the Metropolitan of Serbia (1883–1889). Mraović was a student of the Karlovcı Seminary and a great connoisseur of church chanting, which he mastered through his work with his teacher Janićije Popović, one of the followers of the renowned psalt Dimitrije Krestić.<sup>42</sup> It is known that in 1885, in an effort to improve the mastery of the chanting skill, Teodosije Mraović established the *Chant Sight Reading Fund* [*Fond za učenje crkvenog pojanja iz nota*]. Its purpose was to develop and nurture notated church singing, and to try to publish the *Octoechos* (*Osmoglasnik*) by Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, as a chant textbook.<sup>43</sup>

Complimenting Mraović for his great chanting skills and the beauty of his voice, Milićević wrote that he was an exceptionally good vocalist and that he sang like a nightingale.<sup>44</sup> Twenty years after his studies, in his diary entry from April 10, 1870, Milićević recalls that in the church, during the Exposition of the Holy Shroud at Good Friday vespers, he heard Archimandrite

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<sup>40</sup> See: Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Из својих усјомена: белешке за њросветну истјорију Београда* [*From my Memories: Notes for the Educational History of Belgrade*], op. cit., 28.

<sup>41</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Из својих усјомена: две године у служби учитељској* [*From my Memories: Two Years in the Teaching Service*], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1896, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Наташа Марјановић, *Музика у животију Срба...* [*Music in the Life of Serbs...*], op. cit., 176.

<sup>43</sup> Зорислава Васиљевић, *Раји за српску музичку њисменост: од Миловука до Мокрањца* [*A Struggle for Serbian Musical Literacy: from Milovuk to Mokranjac*], Београд, Просвета, 2000, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Из својих усјомена: белешке за њросветну истјорију Београда* [*From My Memories: Notes for the Educational History of Belgrade*], op. cit., 42.

Mraović singing the sticheron “Tebe odjejuščagosja” impressively, as he had perhaps never done before.<sup>45</sup>

Reviewing the history of church chant education at the Belgrade Seminary, Milićević highlighted the psaltic and pedagogical qualities of Gavriilo Popović, the first professor of church chant with a rule at the newly established Teacher’s School (1836). Milićević also focused on the teaching methods of Evgenije Simeonović, who taught in the same school from 1841.<sup>46</sup> Milićević made a note of Popović, who was educated at the Theological Seminary in Sremski Karlovci, and his beautiful singing of church hymns, along with the effort to teach others to sing them nicely as well.<sup>47</sup> He was also convinced that older Belgraders, who were Popović’s students in choirs, still remember his singing in church. Milićević assumed that some priests, who were also Popović’s students, sing *irmoi* like they used to be sung “at the time when the ancient singing of Fruška Gora was flourishing in Belgrade”.<sup>48</sup> Milićević wrote about Evgenije Simeonović, a former student of the Karlovci Gymnasium and the Vršac Theological Seminary, and a student of philosophy in Budapest. He stated that Simeonović was an excellent singer and that he strived to teach his students to chant correctly.<sup>49</sup> Here is how Milićević described Simeonović’s teaching method, characterized by an almost fanatical persistence in sharing knowledge: “Sometimes he would spend two hours drilling 120 students, instructing them how to sing just three words: “The Divine Mercy” [“И велију милост”]. He did not give up until the students learned how to moderate the tone-of-voices in order to express the harmony, beauty and correctness of a song.”<sup>50</sup>

The compliments Milićević paid Dimitrije Popović, the Karlovac theologian, priest in Sombor and catechist of the Serbian Teacher’s School in Sombor, testifies that Milićević was very familiar with the chanting practice among Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy. Milićević asserted that Popović

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<sup>45</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Дневник II (23. септембар 1872 – 6. април 1877)* [*Diary II (23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1872 – 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1877)*], приредио Петар В. Крстић, Београд, Архив Србије, 2015, 198.

<sup>46</sup> Сава Вуковић, *Српски јерарси од 9. до 20. века* [*Serbian Hierarchs from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*], Београд – Евро, Подгорица – Унирекс, Крагујевац – Каленић, 1996, 186.

<sup>47</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Кнежевина Србија* [*The Principality of Serbia*], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1876, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

knew the ancient singing of Fruška Gora perfectly and that he sang beautifully and gladly in church.<sup>51</sup> Milićević strongly recommended that Popović, who was the author of the first chant textbooks<sup>52</sup> and compiler of an extensive collection of church hymns,<sup>53</sup> leave the Sombor parish and start teaching in the Belgrade Theological Seminary. Milićević strongly believed that Popović would improve teaching church chant in this institution.<sup>54</sup>

During the reigns of Miloš Obrenović (1815–1839; 1858–1860), Mihailo Obrenović (1839–1842; 1860–1868), and Prince Alexander Karađorđević (1842–1858), church chant was taught in the first four grades of primary schools in the Principality of Serbia.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the primary school curriculum from 1844 implies that church singing should be taught from the second semester of the first grade to the end of the fourth grade. It also determined that the shared responsibility of teachers and students was to attend church regularly and to sing during church services.<sup>56</sup> The Law of 1857, regulating that schools had to be next to churches and within church communities, led to teachers becoming dissatisfied. They believed that students had been learning to chant only for the purpose of the church.<sup>57</sup> In 1840, teaching church chant was included in the Belgrade Theological Seminary curriculum for all four grades.<sup>58</sup> The law from 1853 prescribed that church chant became compulsory for all gymnasium students. They learned to chant on holidays and Sundays before the liturgy, but only more talented singers took additional afternoon classes.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Поменик знаменијих људи у српској нарада*, [*Heritage Dictionary of Notable People from Serbia*], Београд, Чупићева задужбина, 1888, 362.

<sup>52</sup> *Велика катавасија* [*Great Katavasia*], 1867, 1880, 1898; *Мала катавасија* [*Small Katavasia*], 1868, 1879. Станиша Војиновић, “Заборављени Вуков сарадник Димитрије Поповић” [“Vuk’s Forgotten Collaborator Dimitrije Popović”], *Братство* [*Brotherhood*], 22, 2018, 60.

<sup>53</sup> *Велики зборник* [*Grand Collection*] (1878). Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Поменик знаменијих људи...* [*Heritage Dictionary of Notable People from Serbia*], op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Школе у Србији...* [*Schools in Serbia...*], op. cit., 24.

<sup>56</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Историја педагогије* [*The History of Pedagogy*], op. cit., 534.

<sup>57</sup> Марина Гавриловић, *Музичко образовање као семенити културној развоја града Ниша 1827–1940* [*Music Education as a Segment of the Cultural Development of Niš from 1827 to 1940*], doctoral dissertation, Нови Сад, Академија уметности, 2012, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Школе у Србији...* [*Schools in Serbia...*], op. cit., 84–85.

<sup>59</sup> Марина Гавриловић, op. cit. 55.

Since the second reign of Prince Mihailo, when Milićević was the Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Church Affairs, the status of church chant as a subject in the secondary education system had changed significantly. After 1863, when teaching music and violin was officially part of the secondary-school curriculum,<sup>60</sup> mastering the art of church chanting was no longer the only form of musical education in gymnasiums, gymnasijum-based real schools, and in the Higher Women's School, founded in Belgrade in 1864.<sup>61</sup> However, church chant and teaching violin mostly were elective subjects, intended "only for those who have talent"<sup>62</sup> and "who wanted to learn them willingly."<sup>63</sup> The circular sent to all directors of gymnasiums and real schools, written by Milićević on behalf of the Minister of Education and Church Affairs in 1869, indicates that the educational authorities were very aware of the importance of learning church chant:

It is well known that church singing, when it is beautiful and when it is taught properly, can arouse religious emotions and ennoble human hearts, and thus attract people to church. It is recommended that principals motivate church singing teachers to be dedicated [...] and students to attend school regularly, to listen and to learn.<sup>64</sup>

However, the curriculum from 1874 proposed the temporary dropping of church chant in the aforementioned schools.<sup>65</sup>

Church chant was a subject only in teacher's schools, where it was compulsory for all students who were expected to have a certain level of musicality, a good ear and a good voice.<sup>66</sup> However, in 1881, secular singing was made a compulsory subject in teachers' schools for all grades, two hours a week.<sup>67</sup> As for primary schools, the so-called "Novaković Law" of 1882 re-

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>61</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Историја педагогије* [*The History of Pedagogy*], op. cit., 543.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 545.

<sup>63</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Школе у Србији...* [*Schools in Serbia...*], op. cit., 80.

<sup>64</sup> Сф. Димитрије Матић, "Распис Г. Министра просвете и црквених дела свима директорима гимназија, полугимназија и гимназијских реалчица" ["Circular by the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs to all directors of gymnasiums, semi-gymnasiums, and gymnasium-based real schools"], *Школа* [*School*], 2/27, 1869, 627.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Марина Гавриловић, op. cit., 63.

<sup>67</sup> Александар Растовић, "Стојан Новаковић као министар просвете" ["Stojan Novaković as the Education Minister"], in: Михаило Војводић и Александар Костић (ур.), *Стојан Новаковић – њоводом сто седамдесет њиј година од рођења* [*Stojan*

quired six-year compulsory education, and included teaching singing among ten compulsory subjects two hours a week. Besides church chant, secular singing first appeared in the primary school curriculum in 1884.<sup>68</sup>

### **Secular Musicianship – Folk Songs and Dances at Schools**

The idea of an ethical value of folk songs was particularly emphasized in the eighties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its historical significance, as well as its centuries-old role in the preservation of Serbian folk life and folk customs, is romantically idealized. Milićević noticed that the more a place, town or city was intertwined with people's lives, the more often it was mentioned in their songs. That is why, Milićević believed, there were more songs that sing, for example, about Belgrade or Šabac.<sup>69</sup> A small number of songs about Aleksinac and the Vranje districts, and the Morava river valley, is most likely due to the unfavorable historical circumstances. Namely, as Milićević pointed out, the folk song "carries the signs of the people's fate, it bears the marks of circumstances under which people's lives unfold".<sup>70</sup>

In this turbulent time of the formation of Serbian national identity, Milićević underlined the crucial role of a folk school and music education on a national basis – by which he meant singing Serbian folk songs and dancing Serbian folk dances. He believed that, in addition to church singing – which represented the responsibility of the school to the church – folk singing had to be included in the primary school curriculum.<sup>71</sup> Milićević pointed out that Serbs were "known worldwide for their folk songs", but that our folk school "is not yet capable of giving its unmotivated child a moment of lightness and renewal",<sup>72</sup> and that the Serbian folk song was not yet used in education. Thus, in April 1875, after a concert held in the hall of the Women's High School, Milićević criticized the conductor Milan Milovuk for not having any Serbian

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*Novaković – Regarding One Hundred and Seventy Five Years Since Birth*], Београд, САНУ, 2018, 99.

<sup>68</sup> The suggested songs to be taught were: "Uskliknimo s ljubavlju" and "Ja sam Srbin srpski sin" (in second grade), "Ustaj, ustaj, Srbije" and "Bože pravde" (in third grade), "Uzò deda svog unuka" (in fourth grade). Марина Гавриловић, op. cit. 207.

<sup>69</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Кнежевина Србија [The Principality of Serbia]*, op. cit., 514.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 318, 816.

<sup>71</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, "Педагогијске поуке" ["Pedagogical Lessons"], трећи део, *Школа [School]*, 26, 1870, 404.

<sup>72</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Појед на народно школовање у Србији [A View on National Education in Serbia]*, op. cit., 30.

pieces on the program. In Milićević's words, Milovuk "defended himself with all but the right reason", saying that "there is nothing Serbian".<sup>73</sup>

In addition, to emphasize the importance of Serbian folk songs, Milićević highlighted the importance of the Serbian national instrument the *gusle* in primary school education – in terms of their influence on children's musical expression and socialization, as well as in upbringing – in terms of fostering Serbian spiritual unity, preserving geographical unity, and remembering historical events and heroes from the past. Milićević pointed out that teachers in Belgrade would fulfill their patriotic and teaching duty if they introduced the songs of Sima Milutinović Sarajlija – "Juriš na Beograd", "Stališ Turak' u tvrđinji" and "Uzeće Beograda konačno" to their students. These songs were based on the victory of the Serbian army, which seized the city of Belgrade from the Turks on November 30, 1806, and "there is as much history as there is poetry".<sup>74</sup> Milićević advised teachers to sing these songs accompanied by the *gusle*; to remind students what was pleasant and what was not when practicing this type of music; to explain the ways in which other nations sing and what instruments they use as accompaniment;<sup>75</sup> to ask the student "who knows how to fiddle" to sing a song "along with playing the *gusle*", or to do it themselves.<sup>76</sup> Although Milićević noted that Serbian epic ballads in almost all Serbian districts were sung mainly with a *gusle* accompaniment, the fact is that this instrument was rarely heard at gatherings and meetings of Serbs. In this respect, Milićević noted that there was a dwindling number of singers who, besides having fun, would "portray history to people, the ideals of Serbian heroes, the chapters of family life from various parts of Serbia and thus, incidentally, give [...] interesting geography lessons."<sup>77</sup>

From reading Milićević's diary notes, we learn that he recommended cross-curricular links between the Serbian language, history, geography, physical and musical culture by using the instrument, the *gusle*, in primary education. He also found the cross-curricular connection between musical and physical culture (sound and movement), especially by involving folk dances in primary school. He believed that folk dances and circle songs should be used for gymnastic performance, because then „the work would be

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<sup>73</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Дневник II [Diary II]*, op. cit., 266.

<sup>74</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Кнежевина Србија [The Principality of Serbia]*, op. cit., 14.

<sup>75</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Историја педагогије [The History of Pedagogy]*, op. cit., 23.

<sup>76</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Појед на народно школовање у Србији [A View on National Education in Serbia]*, op. cit., 30.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

more enjoyable and [...] the monotony of the command would not take away the child's happiness."<sup>78</sup>

Ethnomusicologists consider Milićević the predecessor of Serbian ethnochoreology and the ethnographer who gave the first information about traditional dances.<sup>79</sup> Milićević compiled a list and systematized titles of folk circle dances by regions, or districts, and published them in his books *Кнежевина Србија* [*The Principality of Serbia*] (1876) and *Краљевина Србија: нови крајеви* [*The Kingdom of Serbia: New Regions*] (1884).<sup>80</sup> His facts about the number and title of dances that were typical for each individual district, as well as about the instruments that were used to accompany dance, are valuable.<sup>81</sup> The dance genre "Kolo u tri" was notated for the first time by Milićević in the area of central Serbia, under the names Kukunješte<sup>82</sup> and Moravac.<sup>83</sup> Milićević only gave a description of how to dance the Osmica from the Užice and Ćuprija districts: "Step to the right, step to the left, then eight steps in place".<sup>84</sup> This description corresponds to the description of "Kolo u tri" of later ethnochoreologists which is a symmetrical eight-bar structure of the basic step pattern.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>79</sup> Оливера Младеновић, "Милан Ђ. Милићевић као претходник српске етнокорологије" ["Milan Đ. Milićević as the predecessor of Serbian ethnochoreology"], рад прочитан на научном скупу *Животи и рад Милана Ђ. Милићевића*, Београд, Српска академија наука и уметности, 1982; Биљана Миленковић-Вуковић, "Библиографија др Оливере Младеновић (1914–1988) – поводом стогодишњице рођења" ["Dr Olivera Mladenović's Bibliography (1914–1988) – On the Occasion of the Centenary of Her Birth"], *Гласник Етнoгpафског института САНУ* [*Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnography SASA*], 62/2, 2014, 283; Selena Rakočević, "Tracing the Discipline: Eighty Years of Ethnochoreology in Serbia", *New Sound International Journal of Music*, 41, 1/2013, 68–86.

<sup>80</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Краљевина Србија: нови крајеви* [*The Kingdom of Serbia: New Regions*], Београд, Државна штампарија, 1884.

<sup>81</sup> Folk musical instruments – "svirke", were: surla (zurla) – longer pipe, wide at the bottom; goč or drum – the instrument used by Đorgovci ("Serbianised Gypsies", Milićević's note); duduk – the long pipe; šušeljka – the small pipe; bagpipes, kaval, frula; šargijata – typical for the Podrinje District. Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Кнежевина Србија* [*The Kingdom of Serbia*], op. cit. 330, 572, 858.

<sup>82</sup> In different districts the same dance had different names – Kokonješte, Kukunjica or Kokonica. Ibid., 303, 514, 930.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Здравко Ранисављевић, *Коло: традиционални њлес у Србији – контекстуални и формални аспекти* [*Kolo: Traditional Dance in Serbia – the Contextual and Formal As-*

Faithful to his idea of national music education, Milićević was categorically against the incorporation of new Western European songs and dances in Serbian schools. He wrote that the fast polka and the “awful waltz”,<sup>86</sup> *tramblan*, *šotiš-polka*, *polka-mazurka* and some other dances “with which Western civilization makes us happy nowadays” were already heard at that time.<sup>87</sup> During his visit to the primary school in Crvenica, Milićević noted that “Berber freak songs were already very popular in some places in Austria-Hungary, but they can also be heard on the streets of Belgrade on Sunday evenings”.<sup>88</sup> He was very critical of the old town songs, and wrote that they are “like some kind of contagious disease”.<sup>89</sup> Milićević believed that Serbian schools “on the other hand”<sup>90</sup> should play a decisive role in suppressing these and introducing Serbian folk songs. He indicated that *svirala* (but did not specify which type, authors’ note) had a harmful effect on humans, because its music “spoils the sense of beauty”. He also suggests that dividing music into instrumental and vocal was damaging, because “voices, separated from the content, have something that makes people become spoiled and softened.”<sup>91</sup>

However, despite Milićević’s strong commitment to music education on a national basis, there was a need to balance national and pro-European musical features, that is, to harmonize the national idiom with the elements of musical language typical of the heritage of Western European music. On the one hand, patriotic verses were the most common content of songs in songbooks for primary school, and they corresponded to patriotic musical accents firmly established over time such as: the marching tempo, even meter, forte dynamics and, above all, punctuated rhythm.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, Western European musical specificities – upbeat, augmented fourth, lower leading tone and agogic accents (*rittenuto* and *corona*) – appeared more often in songbooks for older grades. They were the favorite musical trend of the time and equally used in Serbian romantic lieder and folk song arrangements.

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*pects*], doctoral dissertation, Београд, Факултет музичке уметности Универзитета уметности у Београду, 2022, 18, 257.

<sup>86</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Кнежевина Србија [The Principality of Serbia]*, op. cit., 865.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 821.

<sup>88</sup> Милан Милићевић, “Летимичан поглед...” [“A Quick Look...”], op. cit., 373.

<sup>89</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Кнежевина Србија [The Principality of Serbia]*, op. cit., 821.

<sup>90</sup> On the territory of today’s Vojvodina (authors’ note).

<sup>91</sup> Милан Милићевић, *Историја педагогије [The History of Pedagogy]*, op. cit., 23.

<sup>92</sup> Милена Петровић, *Улога акценџа у српској соло џесми [The Role of Accent in the Serbian Lied]*, Београд, Службени гласник, 2014, 16.

## Teaching Methods

In his pedagogical writings, Milićević also dealt with the teaching methods. Thus, he mentions that the following teaching methods were used in primary schools: the *analytical or synthetic method* – of native language teaching and teaching the natural sciences, history, literature, religion and foreign languages; the *genetic method* – which combines both previous methods, and the *descriptive method* – based on apparently known models to represent unknown models in geography and history.<sup>93</sup>

Milan Đ. Milićević advocated an obvious method<sup>94</sup> and that each method was good if it was used by skillful teachers: “Even an incomplete method, when used by a clever teacher, must give progress [...] it is not the method that makes the teacher progress, but the teacher that makes the progress of a method.”<sup>95</sup> Milićević advised teachers to beware of “all widely publicized methods”, because a good method “should be simple, concise and understandable, clear, specific and natural, i.e. that its rules and regulations were more palatable. The method should proceed from known to unknown, from simple to complex.”<sup>96</sup> According to Milićević, the general values of each method were: „*simplicity* – that it is easy to understand, *definiteness* – that its elements leave no doubts, and *accuracy* – that its rules are easy to adopt.”<sup>97</sup>

At the beginning of the seventies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students in primary schools learned to sing troparions by ear, but they previously did not receive any explanations about the textual contents.<sup>98</sup> Although at that time church melodies were written on a five-line staff, oral tradition was the dominant way of mastering the art of chanting, due to the fact that musical literacy was the privilege of a small number of people.<sup>99</sup> Milićević believed that this way

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<sup>93</sup> Милан Милићевић, “Основна школа” [“Primary School”], *Школа [School]*, 7, 1874, 184–185.

<sup>94</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Појед на народно школовање у Србији [A View on National Education in Serbia]*, Београд, Државна штампарија, 1873, 34.

<sup>95</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагогијске поуке за учитеље... [Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers]*, op. cit., 51.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, “Педагогијске поуке” [“Pedagogical Lessons”], други део/second part, *Школа [School]*, 19, 1870, 290.

<sup>98</sup> Марина Гавриловић, op. cit., 51.

<sup>99</sup> Марина Марковић, *Песме Србљака у једногласним зајисима српских мелографа [Hymns of Srbljak in Monophonic Anthologies of Serbian Chant]*, Београд, Сигнатуре, 2006, 23. About church singing teaching methods see: Предраг Ђоковић, *Српско*

of learning “cannot make progress in chanting”.<sup>100</sup> It is well known that teaching sight singing was introduced at the Belgrade Theological Seminary in 1877, although teaching singing by ear remained the basic method of mastering church chant until the time when Mokranjac, at the St. Sava School of Theology, taught students to sight sing.<sup>101</sup> Milićević observed that from December 30, 1865, music started being taught by reading sheet music in Serbian high schools.<sup>102</sup>

Before the appearance of the first teaching guidelines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even good singers did not know singing methods, nor were they able to explain to students how to sing.<sup>103</sup> The same was the case with teaching secular songs: even in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no plan, system or evolution of the curriculum in singing lessons, nor was the singing taught with understanding. The aim of teaching singing, therefore, was to teach a repertoire list of songs for each grade.<sup>104</sup> Milićević believed that teachers were the most responsible for a poor knowledge of singing methods and a lack of respect for the subject, because they were not sufficiently trained. He was convinced that they had to acquire singing skills at a training school in order to learn how to pass them on to the students.<sup>105</sup> He wrote that teachers did not know how to achieve a teaching goal faster, and that their musical taste was not developed.<sup>106</sup> He pointed out that it would be necessary to have an expert in church singing in the Teacher’s School, who would also, at least, be

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*црквено појање – теоријске основе и практична примена [Serbian Church Chant – Theoretical and Practical Issues]*, master’s thesis, Нови Сад, Академија уметности, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Дневник I [Diary I]*, op. cit., 25.

<sup>101</sup> Предраг Миодраг, “О једногласним записима црквеног појања Корнелија Станковића за време патријарха Јосифа Рајачића” [“On Recordings on Monophonic Church Chanting by Kornelije Stanković During the Ministry of Patriarch Josif Rajačić”], in: Радомир Поповић и Дејан Микавица (ур.), *Патријарх Јосиф Рајачић и његово доба (1785–1861) [Patriarch Josif Rajačić and His Epoch (1785–1861)]*, op. cit., 255.

<sup>102</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Школе у Србији... [Schools in Serbia...]*, op. cit., 80.

<sup>103</sup> Марина Гавриловић, op. cit., 142.

<sup>104</sup> Александар Јорговић, *Песарица за православне вероисповедне српске народне школе. Према наставној основи изданој од вл. школској савети [Songbook for Orthodox Serbian National Schools]*. Сремски Карловци: Српска манастирска штампарија, 1897.

<sup>105</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, “Педагогијске поуке” [“Pedagogical Lessons”], четврти део/fourth part, *Школа [School]*, 33, 1870, 510.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

a virtuoso pianist and violinist.<sup>107</sup> However, the situation in schools was unsatisfactory: there were few schools where singing was compulsory, and an even smaller number of schools where singing had an appropriate place in the curriculum.

For Milićević, singing served “an aesthetic interest”,<sup>108</sup> since in his pedagogical work he tended to develop a sense of beauty.<sup>109</sup> He was convinced that beautiful singing had a great influence on a child’s soul and heart, especially on a child who had just started school.<sup>110</sup> He emphasized the importance of learning “beautiful songs and sweet melodies”, which help children tame their feelings and soften their personalities.<sup>111</sup> He advocated training priests how to chant and reported on the poor quality of chanting. Therefore, it is not surprising that children would not listen to this kind of music and that there was a religious and moral decline among the Serbian people. In this regard, Milićević pointed out that if children learned to sing church hymns properly, they would take a step forward in understanding and respecting the art of singing. They would be “a step closer to the church of their ancestors, to the church of the sad and unhappy past, and the happy and bright future days of national life”.<sup>112</sup>

The first methods of teaching singing in elementary schools appeared in the early seventies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and were described by an anonymous singing teacher (with the initials A. A.) in Milićević’s magazine *Škola/School*.<sup>113</sup> He focused on the basic features of singing methods: *regularity*, *equality* and *sequence*. *Regularity* meant that the teacher sung the precise tunes of each melody to the children, and took care to ensure that all the

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<sup>107</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, “Педагогијске поуке” [“Pedagogical Lessons”], четврти део/fourth part, op. cit. In 1970, it was considered necessary that, in addition to mastering the art of singing, a teacher should be able to play at least two instruments.

<sup>108</sup> Милан Милићевић, “Основна школа” [“Primary School”], op. cit., 154.

<sup>109</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагогијске поуке за учитеље...* [Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers], op. cit., 86.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>111</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Појед на народно школовање у Србији* [A View on National Education in Serbia], op. cit., 28.

<sup>112</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагогијске поуке за учитеље...* [Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers], op. cit. 86.

<sup>113</sup> Considering that the sequel text of the anonymous author entitled “Singing in the National School” [“Певање у народној школи”] was published in the magazine edited by Milićević, we believe that he was well-acquainted with the methods of this teacher.

children in a group repeat the melody exactly as they heard it.<sup>114</sup> *Equality* meant that a particular melody was sung always in the same way, so that the children would know which so-called trile to remember.<sup>115</sup> It was especially important that the teacher was well prepared for singing, that the first singing was good and correct, that the teacher did not make mistakes while singing, and that every single time the singing was the same. *Sequence* meant that simple songs were chosen first and then complex songs (“entangled”). The melody was not sung as a whole to children since they were not able to memorize long phrases. Hence, it was important to divide them into smaller sections and turn each of them into a lesson, in order to awaken the beauty of singing in the children.<sup>116</sup>

Milićević stressed three teaching methods: *personal training* – individual work with one student, *group training* (dividing students into groups) and *landing training* – when one of the best students was engaged to replace the teacher in lessons.<sup>117</sup> The aforementioned anonymous teacher described that group training was mostly used in music education practice.<sup>118</sup> He stated that the teacher would first sing the scale by himself, properly and clearly, by using conducting gestures. He would then introduce the scale degrees to students and write them on the board.<sup>119</sup> When the children’s attention waned, the teacher would sing certain tones and point them out with a hand or a ruler. The next step would be to *divide a class into groups*, when the older children or those who could sing properly would sing with the teacher. Finally, the students would sing the scale by themselves, two or three times in

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<sup>114</sup> A. A. “Певање у народној школи” [“Singing in the National School”], први део/ first part, *Школа* [School], 34, 1870, 527.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 528. So-called trile are an auxiliary teaching tool that visually represents the pitch contour. Namely, these are signs used to indicate the melodic movement and tone duration, for the purpose of reminding the singer of the musical phrase details, which he normally knows well as he knows a certain melody by heart. Therefore, so-called trile could not be used by a singer who had not mastered church chants. Cf. Petar Bingulac, “Crkvena muzika u Jugoslaviji – Srbija” [“Church Music in Yugoslavia – Serbia“], in: Krešimir Kovačević (Ed.), *Muzička enciklopedija* [Music Encyclopedia], I, Zagreb, Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod, 1971, 371; Предраг Ђоковић, op. cit., 116.

<sup>116</sup> A. A. “Певање у народној школи” [“Singing in the National School”], op. cit., 528.

<sup>117</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагојичке поуке за учитеље...* [Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers...], op. cit., 290.

<sup>118</sup> A. A. “Певање у народној школи” [“Singing in the National School”], први део/ first part, op. cit., 528.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

a row, without the teacher's help. The teacher would constantly keep the tempo and show the scale degrees on the board.<sup>120</sup> He would then call on the oldest children in one bench to sing the scale as many times as it took to learn to sing it together as one.<sup>121</sup> Next, he would call on the pupils sitting in the other benches, until the whole class learned to sing the scale. Afterwards, the teacher would sing the descending scale together with the pupils. Lastly, he would ask the children to recognize the tones he would show on the board with his hand or a ruler.

This would be followed by introducing tempo in singing a scale: first, the teacher would sing it slowly and conduct with a ruler; second, he would sing it quickly. Then, the children would sing the scale slowly, several times, and later they would sing it quickly, upward and downward.<sup>122</sup> At that point, the teacher would sing a scale with dynamics: he would perform the ascending scale quickly, using crescendo, and the descending scale using decrescendo.<sup>123</sup>

The anonymous teacher further writes that before learning any melody, sacred or secular, children would sing the scale while standing. Then, they would read the text from the songbook or the blackboard. It is significant that the teacher would write the text on the board before the lesson started, so as not to waste time on copying the text during the lesson. First-graders would receive the text earlier and were supposed to learn it by heart. First they would pronounce the text and then sing it three to four times. At this moment the *landing training method* would be used. According to Milićević's words, it was one of the three main teaching methods.<sup>124</sup> Namely, the teacher would choose the child who knew the song, to sing it several times together with him, and then to sing alone – two or three verses. In the next breath, the students in the same bench would join him, and they would sing together until they learned it well. After a while, the students in the other benches would join in singing, etc. While the children sang, the teacher would keep the beat, because the beat had the power to encourage the children to sing joyfully and enthusiastically.<sup>125</sup> The new topic, i.e. the new song section

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 527.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> А. А. “Певање у народној школи [“Singing in the National School”], други део/second part, *Школа [School]*, 35, 1870, 541.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>124</sup> Милан Ђ. Милићевић, *Педагојијске поуке за учитеље...* [Pedagogical Lessons for Teachers], op. cit., 290.

<sup>125</sup> А. А. “Певање у народној школи” [“Singing in the National School”], други део/second part, op. cit., 541.

would be learned in the next class – the following day – using the same method. It was very useful for the teacher to ask the children about the similarities and differences between the class on that day and the lesson of the previous day.<sup>126</sup> In this way, the children learned music according to the well-known association principle and discover the similarities between known and unknown musical contents.

In Milićević's time, songbooks mostly contained verses, but not sheet music. Without sheet music, the space for improvisation was opened. In order to facilitate learning songs by ear, the children often changed the melodies according to their performance skills. In particular, they modified difficult parts, contrary to the teacher's wish.<sup>127</sup> On the one hand, the teachers had the freedom to set different melodies to the same text, and on the other, to add different texts to the same melodies, which were learned in the first and then in the second grade. This second principle – adding a new text to a well-known melody – is typical for the creation of a Serbian folk song, but it is inappropriate in primary music lessons, because children memorize melodies by recalling the words of songs and vice versa. However, the teachers of that time did not recognize the potential problems of this practice and considered it progressive in a certain sense. They claimed that continuous development did not mean that everything would remain the same over time.<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

The oeuvre of the versatile writer, Milan Đ. Milićević, helped us to complete the current image of Serbian music pedagogy in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Namely, in his historical, pedagogical and ethnographic works, Milićević dealt with the position of Serbian education, giving a significant overview not only of global trends in education and upbringing, but also of development strategies and teaching methods in music pedagogy. However, this chronicler of social events did not do so directly, but indirectly – considering current educational laws and curricula, publishing the minutes of teachers' unions, and texts by other authors on singing methods, but also

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 543.

<sup>127</sup> Александар Јорговић, *Песмарица за православне вероисповедне српске народне школе* [Songbook for Orthodox Serbian National Schools], op. cit.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

notating observations about musical events, cooperation and socializing with famous musicians, especially with Milan Milovuk.

Milicević was not a professionally trained musician. However, brought up in a traditional Serbian family, he was a great lover, admirer and connoisseur of church music. Milićević's writings bear witness to his firm conviction that teaching music has a crucial role in the moral development of the individual and the community only if it is based on singing church and folk songs. This corresponds to the concept of folk music pedagogy, which was in accordance with the general guidelines in music education in Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Milan Đ. Milićević was one of the first educators of the modern Serbian state, with far-reaching and significant influence in the field of school organization. He supported the decentralization of education by organizing teachers' unions in local communities, which represented the beginning of local teachers' associations. He also advocated the improvement of teachers' professional training, and organized and personally conducted the compulsory teacher and professor examinations for the entire teaching staff. All of the above was a precursor of the modern concept of continuous professional development for teachers.

Milićević's leadership spirit and advanced comprehension are reflected in recognizing the need for integrated teaching, based on connecting knowledge from different fields. In other words, Milićević encouraged the cross-curricular connection of the Serbian language, history, geography and music, by using the gusle in teaching. He also propagated the integration of musical and physical education through movement, i.e. by including elements of dance folklore in physical education.

Milićević's general pedagogical methods are also applicable in music teaching, since they are characterized by simplicity, clarity, perseverance and accuracy. Likewise, the teaching methods that Milan Đ. Milićević encouraged in teaching – individual work, group work, but also the inclusion of gifted students in the process of sharing knowledge – were already recognized in the Serbian music education practice of that time, and they are still relevant today.

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## Summary

Milan Đ. Milićević, the Serbian educator, writer, pedagogue and ethnographer, lived during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was one of the famous, but today insufficiently known figures from the history of Serbian pedagogy. In this article we reviewed the oeuvre of this versatile writer in order to complete the scene of Serbian music pedagogy (and musical life in general) at the aforementioned time. In his historical, pedagogical and ethnographic works, as well as in his diary notes, Milićević dealt with the position of Serbian education, giving a significant overview not only of global trends in education and upbringing, but also of development strategies and teaching methods in music pedagogy of the second part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this chronicler of social events did not do so directly, but indirectly – considering the contemporary educational laws and curricula, publishing the minutes of teachers’ unions, texts on singing methods and other education literature, but also writing diary

entries about being acquainted with famous musicians of that time. Brought up in a traditional Serbian family and well aware of the importance of teaching music for the moral development of the individual and the community, Milićević strongly recommended the concept of folk music pedagogy, based on singing church and folk songs. This concept was in accordance with the general guidelines in music education in Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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***Mirjana Zakić\****

University of Art in Belgrade  
Faculty of Music Art  
Department of Ethnomusicology

***Sanja Ranković\*\****

University of Art in Belgrade  
Faculty of Music Art  
Department of Ethnomusicology

## **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ENSEMBLES OF FOLK DANCES AND SONGS IN SERBIA**

**Abstract:** In this paper women's leadership will be reviewed through the professional biographies of two women who, in the role of director, managed the stage presentation of folk dance and music in Serbia. One of them is Olga Skovran, who laid the foundation of folklore professionalism in Serbia and the region and established the Ensemble "Kolo". She was the Ensemble's general manager from 1948 to 1965. The other woman is Snežana Jovanović, who has been the head of the Folk Dance and Song Ensemble of Kosovo and Metohija "Venac" from Gračanica since 2013. This paper will reflect on the professional positions of these two female figures who worked in historically different times. In addition, special attention will be given to defining leadership within two temporal and spatial dimensions, as well as the competences required for leading a professional ensemble in specific political, economic, artistic, and other conditions.

**Keywords:** women's leadership, Olga Skovran, Snežana Jovanović, Ensemble "Kolo", Ensemble "Venac"

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\* Contact details of the author: mira.zakic@gmail.com.

\*\* Contact details of the author: sanjaetno@gmail.com.

The consideration of women's activities in the creation of global music history is represented in various disciplines, especially after the expansion of feminist music research during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of ethnomusicology, there have been numerous studies about women as performers and creators, with special reference to the problem they encounter in their desire to express their musical talent.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the least attention has been paid to female cultural leadership as a sphere of expression of the specific role of women in the creation of cultural policy at the local and state level.<sup>3</sup> Bearing in mind the assumptions about women's competences and stereotypes about gender roles, it is important to focus on the broader context of their actions.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the leadership position of women in managing professional folklore ensembles in Serbia is intriguing. This time, their actions are observed through the significant and successful activity of Olga Skovran – the founder and the first director of the Ensemble of Folk Dance and Song “Kolo” in Belgrade, and Snežana Jovanović – director of the Ensemble of Folk Dance and Song of Kosovo and Metohija “Venac” (“Wreath”) from Gračanica. The leadership positions of these women are reflected through different historical periods (in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and in the initial decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) and through cultural and political circum-

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<sup>1</sup> Iva Nenić, “Uneven Terrains of Struggle: Towards the Transformative Notion of Female Music Leadership”, in: Iva Nenić and Linda Cimardi (Eds), *Women's Leadership in Music: Modes, Legacies, Alliances*, Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2023, 15–33.

<sup>2</sup> See more: Ellen Koskoff, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1987; Pirkko Moisala, Beverly Diamond, *Music and Gender*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000; Tullia Magrini, *Music and Gender. New Perspectives from the Mediterranean*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2003; Iva Nenić, *Guslarke i sviračice na tradicionalnim instrumentima u Srbiji: identifikacija zvukom [Women gusle players and musicians on traditional instruments in Serbia: sound identification]*, Beograd, Clio, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The research for this paper was supported by the project FLIM (“Female Leadership in Music: a Cross-Genre Research of Women's Roles, Agency and Collaborative Music-Making Practices in Serbia”) within the PROMIS program of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (2020–2023). The project was carried out by the Department of Ethnomusicology, Faculty of Music in Belgrade, in collaboration with the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade.

<sup>4</sup> See: Karin Klenke, *Women in Leadership: Contextual Dynamics and Boundaries*, United Kingdom, Emerald Publishing, 2018, 10, 20; Louise Wrazen, “Daughters of tradition, mothers of invention: music, teaching, and gender in evolving contexts”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 42, 2010, 44.

stances. With their leadership abilities and artistic activity, they contributed to establishing, cultivating and developing professional folk dance ensembles in Serbia.

### **Olga Skovran's activity in folklore professionalism**

In shedding light on the personality of Olga Skovran as a choreographer and long-term director of the “Kolo” Ensemble requires an insight into the cultural and historical context of the time in which she lived and created. Namely, the establishment of the FPRY – the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia after World War II, as well as a communist system meant an ideology of equality of all the nations, expressed in the term “fraternity-unity”. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) created the entire societal life of the population and followed the Soviet model entirely where it concerned the state, society and culture.<sup>5</sup> The ruling political circles, as well as the country's President Josip Broz Tito, quickly realized that the opportunity which existed in folklore art, having an ideological impact on the youth and using the potential of traditional music and dance for the purpose of a cultural revolution and the promotion of the State itself.<sup>6</sup>

That is how many amateur cultural-artistic societies appeared in the post-war period, where multiculturalism was encouraged through music and dance, with the tendency of mitigating the differences between the nations and religious denominations.<sup>7</sup> In that regard, the newly formed state recognized the need to act in the field of cultural diplomacy and to create professional folk dance ensembles that would represent it worldwide. That is why at the proposal of the Ministry of Education of the Government of the People's

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<sup>5</sup> Zoran Janjetović, *Od internacionale do komercijale (popularna kultura u Jugoslaviji 1945–1991)* [From international to commercial (popular culture in Yugoslavia 1945–1991)], Beograd, Institut za novu istoriju Srbije, Biblioteka “Studije i monografije”, 2011, 31.

<sup>6</sup> See: Богданка Ђурић, *Олиа Сковран: Коло с љубављу* [Olga Skovran: Kolo with love], Beograd, Ансамбл народних игара и песама Србије “Коло”, 2021, 53; Сања Ранковић, *Певачка љракса ансамбла народних иџара и љесама Срдије КОЛО* [Singing practice of the National Ensemble of Folk Dances and Songs of Serbia KOLO], Beograd, Ансамбл народних игара и песама Србије КОЛО, 2022, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Shay, *Choreographic Politics. State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power*, Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2002, 114; Дуња Ђаради, *Књиџа о љлесу: љтрадиције, љтеорије, љметодџи* [The book of dance: traditions, theories, methods], Beograd, Ансамбл народних игара и песама Србије “Коло”, 2018, 65–66.

Republic of Serbia, on 12 May 1953, the first folk dance ensemble in the territory of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, named the "Ensemble of the Folk Dances of the People's Republic of Serbia" was established.<sup>8</sup> In 1953, this house of arts was given the name it bears today – the "Kolo" Ensemble of Folk Dances and Songs of Serbia.<sup>9</sup>

The first director of the Ensemble "Kolo" was Olga Skovran who served in that position during her most fruitful years of work, from its establishment in 1948 until 1965. During this period, she laid the foundations of folklore professionalism in Serbia and Yugoslavia, demonstrating her abilities as a director, teacher and choreographer.<sup>10</sup> Olga Skovran was born in Pančevo, where she graduated from primary school and the gymnasium. In the course of her education, she had joined the Sokol association in Belgrade,<sup>11</sup> and later enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy where she was unable to graduate because her family had financial issues. The knowledge she had obtained as a member of the Sokol movement as a leader of children and youth groups, in the Cultural-Artistic Society "Ivo Lola Ribar", as a professor of gym at the Second Girl's Gymnasium, as well as at courses in folk dance organized by the

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<sup>8</sup> The founding act of "Kolo" is framed in the office of the Managing Director of this institution and it reads the following: "The Government of the People's Republic of Serbia, upon proposal by the Ministry of Education, made the decision on establishing the Ensemble of Folk Dances and Songs of the People's Republic of Serbia. This is the first ensemble in our country. The Ensemble will start working immediately so that its first performance before the audience would take place in May 1948. The permanent Ensemble of folk dances of Serbia will cherish dances of all nations. The Folk Dance School will operate within the Ensemble, which will be attended by the members of the Assembly. Apart from folk dances, the attendees will study acting, ballet, history of music etc. They will obtain capabilities for teachers in folklore departments which will be established in all music schools in the country. Belgrade, 1948". See more: Љиљана Кузмановић Тудић, *Коло национални ансамбл [Kolo national ensemble]*, Београд, Ансамбл "Коло", 2008, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Олга Сковран, "Сценска примена народних игара у ансамблу Коло" ["Stage application of folk dances in the Kolo ensemble"], *Годишњак прага Београда*, XI–XII, 1964/65, 434.

<sup>10</sup> Б. Ђурић, *op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> It is an organization initiated in 1882 by Miroslav Tyrš in Prague, with no limitations regarding racial, religious or gender affiliation. The goal of the association was that "the youth, by physical exercises and gymnastics become physically healthy persons, morally strong people with national awareness, with developed patriotic feelings, and among whom the idea of Slavic cooperation and unity would be propagated." This association was founded in 1882 in Belgrade. See more: Богданка Ђурић, *op. cit.*

ethno-choreologists Ljubica and Danica Janković, helped her to lay the foundations of folklore professionalism in Yugoslavia and the region after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. This task was quite demanding because there were no appropriate institutions for the education of professional dancers. That is why the first generations of employees were predominantly amateurs from workers' families and young people who were lacking in general and dancing education.<sup>12</sup> In order to compensate for their ignorance about the art of folklore, Olga Skovran created an educational program and gathered a team of experts to implement it. So, the practical work of dancers took place during the morning hours, and in the afternoon, after working hours, their education in the history of music, the history of dance, ethnology, choir singing, and solfeggio was organized.<sup>13</sup> Since most of the members of the Ensemble came from poor families, before important trips and meetings with world statesmen, Olga Skovran organized training in etiquette, table manners and nice behaviour.

Olga Skovran transferred her experience from the Sokol movement also to the "Kolo" dancers, by working with them on the culture of movement and by creating the first choreographies that are part of the repertoire of this Ensemble even today. The dancing lessons that she taught the Ensemble were elaborated in detail and described in a *Workbook* which is kept even today in the "Kolo" Ensemble. In order to familiarize the dancers with traditional dances she often brought dancers from rural environments who demonstrated the dancing style that was characteristic of their own local environment.<sup>14</sup> Apart from the notebook for planning dancing lessons, Olga kept a special book where she wrote down her impressions on the artistic achievements of each individual dancer, but also data on their origin etc. When creating choreographies, it enabled her to make the correct selection of soloists who would give the best performance of certain elements of drama.<sup>15</sup> She turned her exceptional creative potential into 25 choreographies that presented the dancing characteristics of different parts of Yugoslavia. Among them "Dances from Serbia" occupy a special place, and which are today considered to be symbolic of this institution's repertoire. One can distinguish particular aspects of her work as being the knowledge of stage rules, the creative shaping of stage images and an exceptional sense of networking the

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<sup>12</sup> Д. Њаради, op. cit., 67.

<sup>13</sup> Б. Ђурић, op. cit., 48–51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 45–46.

symphonized music background with the dancing forms, many of which were created or quite altered when compared to the data she collected in her field research.

Olga Skovran did not only contribute to the artistic field, she was also extremely successful as a manager because she created the management structure and operation of the entire institution. She was in charge of employment policy in regard of different staffing. She defined the work contents and repertoire, which comprised dances of all the nations of Yugoslavia. She performed managerial tasks (scheduling concerts and other activities) and participated in the organization of Yugoslavia's cultural diplomacy. Under her leadership, the "Kolo" Ensemble gave numerous concerts on the most important world stages and met numerous statesmen.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, these concerts augured political meetings or events organized by the Government of Yugoslavia. That is how "Kolo" played an important role in presenting Yugoslav national art to the world of capitalism and "breaking down" prejudice about Yugoslavia as a communist country. In that regard the following tours were organized: in Switzerland (1950), America (1956), Australia (1959), Japan (1959), Germany (1963) etc. The Ensemble was entrusted with the special task in getting closer to other cultures in 1955, when several month-long tours were organized in the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (China, India, Egypt, Burma, Morocco, Tunisia, Indonesia, and other countries).

Based on the aforementioned, one can draw the conclusion that the broad spectrum of capabilities, knowledge and talents of Olga Skovran define this woman as an unprecedented leader in folklore professionalism in Yugoslavia and the region. The book published by the former dancer Bogdanka Đurić testifies to her life and dedicated work, and highlights Olga's fairness, authoritativeness, and respect for the principles of "order, work and discipline."<sup>17</sup> Memories of her and stories about her life are remembered even today in the world of folklore so that a kind of an urban myth has been created about the personality and work of this woman.

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<sup>16</sup> During multidecade long presenting of folklore arts abroad, the artists of the Ensemble "Kolo" performed at the prestigious world stages such as the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, Theatre National de Chaillot, Teatro la Fenice, Большой театр, Cambridge Arts Theatre, Sydney Opera House and others.

<sup>17</sup> Б. Ђурић, *op. cit.*, 38.

### **Snežana Jovanović's leadership position in the folklore professionalism of Kosovo and Metohija**

Snežana Jovanović, was born in Priština, in 1980. She has been the director of the professional "Venac" Ensemble of Folk Dances and Songs of Kosovo and Metohija in Gračanica since 2013. She was appointed to this function by the local authorities, with the aim of improving the success rate of this Ensemble's financial operations and its working method. The specificity of managing such a cultural institution in the given political circumstances (right after the bombing of Serbia and the mass expulsion of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija) implied a great responsibility not only for "Venac" as an institution, but also for the entire Serbian community in this area. Snežana's education and experience, which she acquired after she graduated in Marketing and Entrepreneurship at the Faculty of Economy at the University of Priština, with an interim head office in Kosovska Mitrovica, served multiple purposes in resolving problems (administrative head office, work space and technical equipment, archives, and lack of professional staff) at the time. In other words, her professional competences combined with exceptional organizational capabilities paved the way for resolving the majority of technical, legal and administrative problems. Even though Snežana's education is not related to the domain of arts, she noticed the lack of a program strategy and the creation of the Ensemble's artistic work. To establish the proper program and artistic content of the Ensemble, she initiated cooperation with educational and cultural institutions and formed the Artistic Council, composed of renowned experts in the field of culture, as well as professors from the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Due to the lack of employment opportunities for a larger number of employees, she herself took on the position of artistic director, and engaged in the field of marketing and management of financial affairs. During the last ten years of leading the "Venac" Ensemble, Snežana's numerous contributions are reflected in the following achievements: obtaining work premises for the Ensemble within the House of Culture in Gračanica; increasing the number of full-time employees and part-time associates; improving the technical conditions for work; increasing the number of concerts (to over 50 annually in the country and abroad) and expanding the repertoire with new choreographies. She also worked to achieve significant visibility for the Ensemble's activities by posting its results on public social networks. She established the youth ensemble in Gračanica and several children's groups in Serbian settlements in the cen-

tral part of Kosovo and Metohija. She has supported the idea of conducting ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological research on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija and in 2020, launched the Center for Digitization which contains the music and dance materials of “Venac”.

The progress of the Ensemble “Venac” in all fields, under the leadership of Snežana Jovanović, resulted in the development of folklore professionalism with a clear definition of the strategy of this institution, which has been carried out in several directions. One of them is to nurture and sustain the intangible cultural heritage of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija and its stage presentation in the country and abroad.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, positioning “Venac” as a socially accountable institution that is an important factor in connecting the Serb community in the mentioned area is of the utmost importance.

The good outcomes that Snežana Jovanović has achieved in her job testify to her great commitment to work and her strong organizational skills. In subordinating her private life completely to her professional engagement and at the same time expecting a high degree of discipline and responsibility from her employees, she has often encountered misunderstandings in the collective and the local environment. In other words, her dedication to work was mostly interpreted as careerism, marked also by her determination to apply adequate legal measures to protect the interests of the institution she represents. Fully aware of her leadership position in the cultural milieu and specific socio-political circumstances of the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija, whose success is accompanied by a constant willingness to fight, and her great persistence, professional and expert competence, Snežana points out that women in this area are still reluctant to engage in different types of professional challenges, and have the tendency to be satisfied with the female roles and stereotypes established in the patriarchal community.

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<sup>18</sup> Здравко Ранисављевић, “Кореографске (ре)интерпретације плесног наслеђа Косова и Метохије у пракси националног Ансамбла `Венац`” [“Choreographic (re) interpretations of the dance heritage of Kosovo and Metohija in the practice of the National Ensemble `Venac`”], in: Драгана Цицовић Сарајлић, Вера Обрадовић, Петар Буза (Eds), *Традиционално и савремено у уметности и образовању*, Косовска Митровица: Факултет уметности Универзитета у Приштини са привременим седиштем у Косовској Митровици, 2018, 361–370.

## Conclusion

Based on the data presented about the professional positions of Olga Skovran and Snežana Jovanović, the contextual – cultural-historical and socio-political – influences on the formation and manifestation of female leadership in various spheres of public life are clearly visible. On the one hand, Olga Skovran's work took place in the time of socialist Yugoslavia, when the political authorities initiated and carried out cultural diplomacy through the presentation of folklore art. This implied the state's significant financial support to the Ensemble "Kolo", which made managing this institution much easier for Olga Skovran and paved the way for the development of folklore professionalism. On the other hand, Snežana Jovanović's activities took place in the early decades of the 21st century, when the Republic of Serbia was facing a delicate political situation in the area of Kosovo and Metohija. Although the Ensemble "Venac" led by Snežana Jovanović received financial assistance from the state as time progressed, the process of bringing its ideas and goals to fruition has been accompanied by a series of aggravating circumstances caused by the unpleasant, present day, post-war events and danger the Serbian communities face in this territory.

The educational profile of the female directors of the mentioned state ensembles determined their professional activism, which is common in the field of a successful organizational structure, the meaning and visibility of the accomplished results, as well as selfless dedication to achieving the highest goals. The specific nature of Olga Skovran's leadership position is reflected in her direct professional-artistic (choreographic) engagement, which is why she is still an important name in the world of Serbian choreographed folklore.

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## Summary

Bearing in mind the assumptions about women’s competences and stereotypes about gender roles, it is important to focus on the broader context of their actions. In this sense, the leadership position of women in managing professional folklore ensembles in Serbia is intriguing. In this paper their actions are observed through the significant and successful activity of Olga Skovran – the founder and the first director of the

Ensemble of Folk Dance and Song “Kolo” in Belgrade, and Snežana Jovanović – director of the Ensemble of Folk Dance and Song of Kosovo and Metohija “Venac” (“Wreath”) from Gračanica. The leadership positions of these women are reflected through different historical periods (in the mid-20th century and in the initial decades of the 21st century) and through cultural and political circumstances. With their leadership abilities and artistic activity, they contributed to establishing, cultivating and developing professional folk dance ensembles in Serbia. Based on the data presented about the professional positions of Olga Skovran and Snežana Jovanović, the contextual – cultural-historical and socio-political – influences on the formation and manifestation of female leadership in various spheres of public life are clearly visible. On the one hand, Olga Skovran’s work took place in the time of socialist Yugoslavia, when the political authorities initiated and carried out cultural diplomacy through the presentation of folklore art. This implied the state’s significant financial support to the Ensemble “Kolo”, which made managing this institution much easier for Olga Skovran and paved the way for the development of folklore professionalism. On the other hand, Snežana Jovanović’s activities took place in the early decades of the 21st century, when the Republic of Serbia was facing a delicate political situation in the area of Kosovo and Metohija. Although the Ensemble “Venac” led by Snežana Jovanović received financial assistance from the state as time progressed, the process of bringing its ideas and goals to fruition has been accompanied by a series of aggravating circumstances caused by the unpleasant, present day, post-war events and danger the Serbian communities face in this territory.



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## REVIEWS

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### **RASTKO BULJANČEVIĆ\***

Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg

Graduate School “The Future of Democracy: Cultural Analyses  
of Illiberal Populism in Times of Crises (FUDEM)”

Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad

**Tobias Pontara, *Andrei Tarkovsky’s Sounding Cinema: Music and Meaning from Solaris to The Sacrifice*, New York & London: Routledge, 2020, 206 pp.**

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Few figures in the history of cinematography have managed to achieve cult filmmaker status like Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–1986). This versatile Russian director, screenwriter, film theorist and aesthetician crafted unique sonic worlds in his short film oeuvre by weaving together fragments of original and pre-existing music. Yet, despite his distinctive poetico-narrative exploration of cinematic soundscapes, Tarkovsky’s contributions have been sadly overlooked in academic circles for decades. In his latest monograph, *Andrei Tarkovsky’s Sounding Cinema: Music and Meaning from Solaris to The Sacrifice*, Tobias Pontara attempts to fill this “gap” in film music scholarship

by delving deeper into the musical aspect of five of the director’s feature films.

The extensive research and decades of dedication that have gone into this monograph underscore the author’s unwavering commitment to the subject matter and his profound expertise in the research field. This book, comprising 163 bibliographical references, 15 digitally edited film stills and three score fragments, consists of seven thoughtfully crafted chapters that together form a coherent whole. The author initiates the discussion by introducing the reader to the metaphysical dimensions of Andrei Tarkovsky’s cinematic world, primarily through a hermeneutical exploration of the narrative. Significantly, throughout the book and notably in the introductory chapter, Pontara meticulously points out

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\* Author contact information:  
rastko.buljancevic@gu.se

factual errors and omissions in the musical discourse that have found their way into discussions among Tarkovsky's film theorists. Accordingly, he bases his discursive flow on musicologico-narrative analyses, demonstrating the complexity and diversity (but not unlimited interpretive freedom) of comprehending genre- and stylistically diverse musical references.

In contrast to the other chapters of the book, which contain the usual case study components, the second chapter is characterised by a strikingly dense content structure and a taxonomically fractured discourse. Namely, in the film *Solaris* (1972), the author observes various non-binary narrative musical structures. The discussion of the nuanced levelling of musical narration applied to the cinematic use of Johann Sebastian Bach's chorale prelude *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* is enriched by theoretical and methodological insights drawn from Claudia Gorbman's concept of "metadiegetic music" and Robynn Stilwell's exploration of the "fantastical gap between diegetic and nondiegetic". At the same time, special attention is paid to the specific dichotomous relationship between electronic and classical music in film, a topic that will be further elaborated theoretically in the following chapters of the monograph. For instance, the electronic score of the film *Mirror* (1975) is associated with a supernatural humanist presence, marked by a sonic abstraction that delves into the realm of existential Otherness and abjectness. Fragments of classical music, on the other hand, deepen the

intimate space of the main character in a meaning-related and conceptual way. Therefore, although the selected examples from classical music are crucial in expressing the protagonist's mental images and emotional depth, the author also attempts to determine how electronic music enhances the effect of his alienation.

The film *Stalker* (1979) receives a distinct theoretical elaboration in the fourth chapter of the book. The discussion extends to the realm of composite film sound, exploring the intricate divide between classical and electronic film scores. By introducing the term sonic figure – a "unified sound gestalt" (17) merging the triumphant pathos of Ludwig van Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" or Maurice Ravel's "Bolero" with the noise of trains – the author establishes the link between the recognisable sound image at the end of the film and a symbol of the technological, political and ideological development of post-Enlightenment society. The concept of the sound figure, however, is anything but static. As the author asserts, it undergoes a dynamic transformation or recoding that fundamentally reshapes the meaning of both musical and non-musical sounds in the film. Tarkovsky's remarkable aural imagination is particularly evident in the film's ambivalent use of classical music, which differs markedly from his earlier works that foregrounded baroque compositions and electronic sounds. In the context of this cinematic masterpiece, the director strategically dispensed with baroque musical content. He also eschewed long, flowing musical

phrases, opting instead for a distorted and fragmented use of pre-existing sonic material. This remarkable stylistic, structural and conceptual shift in the treatment of classical music probably led Pontara to classify the non-Baroque musical fragments in Tarkovskian cinema as “Post-Baroque music”. Accordingly, the author has rightly identified *Stalker* as an important turning point in the director’s sounding cinema, because instead of a somewhat predictable dichotomous relationship between classical and electronic music, it instead sheds new light on the nuanced interaction between the composite film score, human emotions and the socio-political climate.

Various forms of deep nostalgia characterise Andrei Tarkovsky’s next feature film, which is rich in emotionally stimulating musical examples. In *Nostalghia* (1983), the complicated interplay between Beethoven’s and Verdi’s music is explored in depth. Pontara refrains from attributing the peculiar blending of classical and local musical elements (such as Verdi’s Requiem and the Russian folk song *Oi Vi Kumusciki*) to arbitrary directorial choices, for their poetics are remarkably compatible. It is particularly commendable that the author recognises the profound layers of meaning in the Requiem Mass and its multi-layered role in the film’s narrative, avoiding a simplistic description of the musical flow. While exploring the evident associations between the music and the visual narrative (e.g. the Requiem Mass’s connection to the protagonist’s death and his shattered ideal of Italy), Pontara congruently aligns

the musical practices with the film’s distinct spiritual resonance.

In the book’s sixth chapter, the author deepens the hermeneutic discourse using the liminal musical spaces of the film *The Sacrifice* (1986) as an example. Through an analysis of the film’s ambivalent narrative – whose paradoxical simultaneity oscillates between dream and reality, the ideological critique of utopian socialism and capitalist consumerism – the author observes a specific kind of non-binary sonic spatiality, which he calls “transcendental diegetic music”. It is a remarkably heterogeneous level of musical narration that coexists at the margins of narrative diegesis while manifesting itself aurally in *The Sacrifice* through pastoral Scandinavian music and the sound of the Japanese flute. The author logically connects these sonic fragments to the existential brokenness of the protagonist, thus acknowledging the central role of music in emulating and conceptualising humanistic inner spirituality. Considering the unique structure of the film, which blends black and white with colourful moving images – a technique Tarkovsky had employed in his earlier works – Pontara presents the reader with multiple interpretations of film scenes. These interpretations explore the role and significance of film music as a catalyst for perceptually evoking transformative elements, such as love and spirituality on the one hand and the stark emptiness of everyday life on the other.

The utopian function of music in Tarkovsky’s films is the subject of the book’s concluding chapter. Although the

author first summarises the already known research results in this chapter, he also provides the reader with alternative interpretations of Andrei Tarkovsky's specific diegetic world. Thus, the paradigm of the "Tarkovskian diegesis" is used to deepen the discussion of the narrative indulgence of applied music, and alternative options to the transcendental diegesis are considered using the example of interpretative diversity and hermeneutic flexibility. A special space is devoted to the oft-initiated discussion of the meaning of artistic, electronic and traditional music, with reference to the director's philosophico-aesthetic experiments on musical art and film. Pontara devotes the last subchapter to a discussion of the director's problematic utopianism, concluding that artistic music in the Russian creator's films is always compromised by the presence of conflicting sonic, visual and stylistic elements.

The book *Andrei Tarkovsky's Sounding Cinema: Music and Meaning from Solaris to The Sacrifice* is distinguished by exceptional methodological insights, a solid dramaturgical structure, a discursively consistent tone and remarkable re-

search findings. It represents a valuable scholarly contribution to the Russian cinematographic tradition and to film musicology in general. The particular value of the monograph lies in the recontextualisation of the director's own autopoetic utterances, which bring the reader closer to his artistic and aesthetic ideal of music. For the way Andrei Tarkovsky introduces the (listening) spectator to the world of cinematic reality/illusion confirms that it is the musical component that provides unique expressive possibilities beyond the clichéd affective stimulation of romantic sound. Nonetheless, the omission of the first two feature films, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) and *Andrei Rublev* (1966), may leave the reader longing for more insight into the director's initial artistic poetics, given that music plays a crucial role in the audio-visual storytelling. This should not, however, overshadow the overall positive assessment of the monograph, bound to be a valuable resource for film theorists and aficionados alike, offering a holistic understanding of the Tarkovskian provocatively unique sounding cinema.

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**IRA PRODANOV\***

University of Novi Sad

Academy of Arts

Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology\*

**Borislav Hložan (Ed.): *Opsednute vedrine Dušana Radića* [The Besieged Gaieties of Dušan Radić]. A Collection of Papers Presented at the Musicological Conference Held in Novi Sad on 25 and 26 November 2021. Novi Sad: Kulturni centar Vojvodine “Miloš Crnjanski”, 2022, 242 pp.**

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Eleven years after the death of our esteemed composer, pedagogue, fine artist, and author Dušan Radić (1929–2010), an academic conference was held in Novi Sad, where invited participants discussed his oeuvre from various aspects. The gathering was hosted by the Miloš Crnjanski Cultural Centre of Vojvodina in Novi Sad, but an equal part in the conception and realization of the event was played by the Institute of Musicology at the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. Finally, as a result of their joint efforts, in 2022 this collection of essays was printed and published by the Cultural Centre, encompassing a total of 13 scientific papers and an appendix offering analyses of Radić’s oeuvre from various angles, from his art and applied music to

sound recordings, wherein it found its “mode of realization”.

The collection is framed by two papers that, in different ways, shed light on the biography of Dušan Radić. In “Kompozitorska poetika Dušana Radića u kontekstu njegovog vremena i estetike modernizma” [The Composition Poetic of Dušan Radić in the Context of His Time and the Aesthetics of Modernism], Katarina Tomašević reminds us right at the outset that it is both commendable and worrying that a conference on such a deserving artist took no less than 11 years to organize following his death. She asserts that part of the reason may also be that Radić was an introverted and modest man. In reality, he was an erudite intellectual *par excellence*, who pursued a rich palette of professional activities crowned with his pedagogical work starting in 1979, thus at a time when he had reached

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\* Author contact information:  
iraprodanovkrajisnik@gmail.com

full maturity. Tomašević interprets Radić's biography by comparing him to his university classmates: Dragutin Gostuški, Vladan Radovanović, Enriko Josif, and others. Her paper mentions Radić's musical models: Debussy, Scriabin, Mahler, later Bartók, Shostakovich, as well as his literary tastes, including Gide, Bora Ćosić, Zmaj, Dis, Ujević, and the philosophers Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Spengler, Bergson, and Freud. One of the composer's statements quoted by Tomašević explains his position in the contemporary world of art (as well as, perhaps, the 11 years it took to organize a scientific conference about him!), with the composer concluding that, however good or bad the times were, whatever was happening, he was never on the "chosen side of the successful". Tomašević's lines imply the conclusion that Radić may have chosen that path himself, striving to spend much of his creative working life as a free artist. There is also the conclusion that the composer, judging from his works, had decided to "approach life not too tragically, but rather like a burlesque, comedy, grotesque..." and to engage in a "harmonic dialogue with the national tradition, contemporary poetry, his own historical and musical time". Borislav Hložan's paper, which concludes the collection, titled "Ozvučavanje nemira veka – odjeci stvaralaštva Dušana Radića" [Sounding the Restlessness of the Century – Echoes of Dušan Radić's Creative Oeuvre], underscores the importance of Dušan Radić in various aspects of his work in a manner that is perhaps warmer and more intimate. The atmosphere of

this concluding text demonstrates a thorough familiarity with the poetics of Dušan Radić, coming from an author who also made a documentary film about the composer.

The remaining essays in the collection are focused on Radić's early oeuvre, innovative procedures in his musical language, the impact of national cultural heritage, etc. It goes without saying that these texts also include those that are focused on Radić's work in the sphere of applied music. Thus Borislav Čičovački in "Elementi originalnog stvaralačkog izraza u ranim delima D. Radića" [Elements of Original Creative Expression in the Early Works of D. Radić] analyses his works *Spisak* ["The Name List"] and *Opsednuta vedrina* ["The Besieged Gaiety"], noting in both a unique type of integration of musical elements from folk and popular music, an "authentic integration that led toward a peculiar type of stylistic expression gesturing toward repetitivism, i.e. minimalism in Serbian music". He also singles out Radić as the first Serbian composer to introduce elements of polystylism, citing his cantata *Čele kula* ["The Skull Tower"] as an example. In "Različite emanacije stvaralačkog duha Dušana Radića: *Spisak, Upravna zemlja i Smrt majke Jugovića*" [Different Emanations of Dušan Radić's Creative Spirit: "The Name List", "The Stand-up Country", and "The Death of the Jugović Mother"], Melita Milin explores the kinships and differences between the neo-classicist shaping of these three works by Radić, made in different periods of his life. In the first piece men-

tioned in her title, Milin notes a radical type of modernism, while in the remaining two, later works, she finds a musical language reflecting Radić's "national affiliation". In "Pijanistički izazovi mladosti u 'Sonati lesti' Dušana Radića" ["The Pianistic Challenges of Youth" in *Sonata lesta* by Dušan Radić], the pianist Dubravka Jovičić reminds us of Radić's student oeuvre created under the supervision of his professor Milenko Živković. The author, drawing from her own experience of having interpreted the piece, asserts that the composer's exquisite familiarity with piano music, choice of keys and harmonic design of the piece enable the pianist to imprint the work with their own mark and type of expression. In 1972, this Sonata formed part of Jovičić's final examination at the end of her secondary music piano degree, under the supervision of Prof. Mirjana Šuica Babić, the dedicatee of this opus, who had premiered it in 1954. The paper quotes Radić, who always used to say that "it is not enough just to compose fine music – it is also important to serve it well", asserting the importance of adequate artistic interpretation. In her contribution, titled "*Spisak* Dušana Radića i Vaska Pope" ["The Name List" by Dušan Radić and Vasko Popa], Marina Aleksić, a young scholar stemming from Novi Sad's "school of musicology" at the Academy of Arts, surveyed for the first time Radić's *Name List* from the perspective of a suite cycle, highlighting some of the work's semiotic aspects that no one had discussed before. Therefore, her paper might be considered an entirely novel view of this

anthological work by the composer. In her paper, "Dušan Radić i film: prodaja duše Mefistu poručene muzike" [„Dušan Radić and Film: Selling His Soul to the Mephistopheles of Commissioned Music"], Gorica Pilipović, an expert on Radić's oeuvre who has also published a monograph about the composer, surveys his work in the domain of applied music, noting that he never emphasized his works made in this genre, in which he was especially active during the 1960s. The reason for that, Pilipović maintains, must reside in the fact that contemporary critics savaged him at the time, viewing applied music as an inferior type of music, based on a compromise and made for the sake of monetary gain. Pilipović rightly challenges that view, citing many examples to suggest that this is an extremely rich oeuvre of music for feature and documentary films in which one may recognize the same poetics that made Radić stand out in the creation of music beyond the sphere of applied music. The same subject encompasses Ira Prodanov's contribution, "Muzika Dušana Radića na nosačima zvuka" ["Music by Dušan Radić on Sound Recordings"]. It cites every recording and CD with music by Radić. Furthermore, several examples are singled out as study cases, whether on account of their status as rarities or unusual publisher and performer. Thus special attention is paid to a re-release of Radić's music soundtrack for the 2001 Hollywood spectacle *Genghis Khan*, praised by foreign critics as a "must have", as well as a recording published by the Russian label Melodiya, featuring an in-

terpretation of Radić's *Simfonijski stav* ("Symphonic Movement") by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra in 1962. It turns out, according to Prodanov, that numerous works by Radić found their way onto LP or CD recordings, and that Radić gave a big contribution to sound recordings of fairytales that used to be released in large numbers in our country. An extremely interesting view of Radić as an artist is found in Ivana Medić's "Uniformnost vodi entropiji. Dušan Radić u prvom licu" [Uniformity Leads toward Entropy: Dušan Radić in First Person]. Medić analyses the contents of an interview she conducted with Radić in 2005, for which he had written down his answers in advance, and the revised version he published in his book titled *Tragovi balkanskih vrleti – vreme, život, muzika* [Traces on the Rugged Terrain of the Balkans: Time, Life, Music]. A comparison of these two texts suggests that Radić later partially revised his initial answers, the way he often did with his musical works as well. In his contribution, "Modernizam svakodnevnog života u delima Dušana Radića" ["Lifestyle Modernism in Works by Dušan Radić"], Miloš Bralović draws on a phrase coined by the eminent American musicologist Richard Taruskin, "lifestyle modernism", and seeks to explore it in Radić's "French years", when he was pursuing further training with Darius Milhaud, and even later. "Idejna preplitanja Dušana Radića" ["The Conceptual Entanglements of Dušan Radić"] by Dragana Bedov discusses the modernist performances of the authors Vasko Popa and Miodrag Pavlović, who,

in 1952 and 1953, made the first dramatic deviation from post-WWII ideological stylistic premises. Bedov compares these two authors with Radić and Josif's performance at a concert in 1954. Her text also analyses the link between music and literature, which was always relevant for Radić. In his study, "Dušan Radić i Jugoslovenska muzička tribina" ["Dušan Radić and the Yugoslav Music Forum"], Miloš Marinković addresses a hitherto lesser known side of Radić's work – music criticism. Older composers, musicologists, and performers remember very well the Forum in Opatija as a meeting point for all the leading musical poetics in what was then Yugoslav music. In this contribution, Radić is presented as a reporter who provided a realistic and uncompromised view of this festival's modernist tendencies and politicisation. The pianist Julija Bal, whose talent in producing piano transcriptions has already won her multiple awards, presented a paper titled "Muzika kao dah sa drugih planeta i Radićeva vokalno instrumentalna dela" ["Music as a Whiff from Other Planets and Radić's Vocal-instrumental Music"]. Her contribution begins by defining the phenomenon of transcription and then proceeds to analyse results in the field by Busoni and Radić. It is well known that the composer in his later years transcribed his vocal-instrumental works for smaller instrumental ensembles, seeking to have them performed in those versions as well. Of course, Bal includes in her contribution an analysis of Radić's "Five Songs" for a low voice and orchestra Op.

7, No. 2 and her own transcription of the work for a piano duo.

At the very end of the collection, as an appendix, there is an essay by the recently departed composer Svetozar Saša Kovačević, who sought to present his professor and mentor from an entirely personal perspective, full of respect and appreciation.

The editor, Borislav Hložan, ensured that the volume, apart from scientific

studies, contains appendices featuring the composer's works in the domain of fine arts. These works, at times strange, at other times surreal or witty, comprise collages by Radić, which provide for moments of respite in between the texts, lending an artistic atmosphere to this scientific volume and bringing the reader closer to Radić as a composer and visual artist.

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**RADOŠ MITROVIĆ\***

University of Arts in Belgrade  
Faculty of Music  
Department of Musicology

### **Review of the 31st International Review of Composers in Belgrade (October 4<sup>th</sup> – October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022)**

As part of the 31<sup>st</sup> International Review of Composers, 50 compositions of diverse poetics were presented as part of eight concerts. In adherence to the long-standing tradition, accolades were also presented: the *Mokranjac* Award was given to composer Jasna Veličković for the work *Underneath*, musicologist Stefan Cvetković received the *Pavle Stefanović* Award for musical criticism and essay, and the Metamorphosis Ensemble was the recipient of the *Aleksandar Pavlović* Award, for an outstanding contribution to the promotion of Serbian music domestically and abroad, as to cellist Nemanja Stanković, for the young artist contributions. During the course of the festival the audience had the opportunity to experience works of diverse quality and divergent stylistic frameworks.

The festival was opened by the Metamorphosis Ensemble, led by Saša Mirković, which performed Ana Gnjatović's composition *Music for Missing Butterflies*. The composition is characterized

by subtle and sparse sounds, and short-sustained tones. Following this, the Ensemble presented Ana Kazimić's *Sol Invictus*, based on less profiled and developed melodic lines within a narrower ambitus. This led to a more daring and original composition by Lazar Đorđević, whose piece *D Madness* features an elaborate solo viola section with furious outbursts and excellently guided anticlimactic passages. Rooted in the theme of *La Folia*, this composition includes variant presentations while maintaining its recognizable foundation. With great attention to dramatic logic, the composer gradually builds towards the culmination through the dynamics and layering of sections. The intriguing harmonic clashes and, in general, the tempo of movement that draws us into a specific manipulation of time created a highly impressive imagery.<sup>1</sup>

*Plucked* by Maja Bosnić was written for harpsichord and strings, and it re-

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\* Author contact information:  
radosh.mitrovic@gmail.com

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<sup>1</sup> <https://xn--p1acc.xn--90a3ac/page/radio/sr/story/24/radio-beograd-2/4973210/.html>

quires the performers to use various techniques such as tapping, plucking, or dragging a plastic card over the strings to create a unique sound palette. Playing with sound dispersals and accumulations, while establishing an imitative relationship between the harpsichord and other ensemble instruments, the performance created a vibrant sonic atmosphere. Rhythmic games reach their peak in the final section and serve as the primary manipulative tool for the composer. Traces of *La Folia* are evident in this composition as well, primarily within the rhythmic elements. Further musical exploration of the 15th-century theme could also be heard in Dragan Jovanović's work *Metamorpholia*. By more explicitly exploiting the melodic foundation but altering it harmonically, the composer created a compact and dramatically uniform realization.

Finally, the first evening concluded with *Damar* by Darija Andovska. Skillfully coloring the sections harmonically, the composer actually retells a familiar musical story, interrupting it and dressing it in new attire. Thus, the well-known folk song *Jovano, Jovanke* becomes a key element of the piece, passing through various manipulative techniques, transitioning from one instrument to another, accompanied by, at times, an energetic rhythmic support. The Metamorphosis Ensemble performed this, as well as all other pieces in the repertoire, consistently, devotedly, and passionately, with Saša Mirković expressing his interpretative capacities in full. He strives for sound perfection, meticulously inter-

preting and energetically playing each note, which achieved a special meaning in his rendition.<sup>2</sup>

The piece *Snake Fiction* by Jug Marković was commissioned by the *Studio 6* ensemble. As stated in the program booklet, the electronic part, subtly present here, was composed on the Synthi 100, utilizing archival materials from unknown authors of the seventies who worked in the electronic studio of Radio Belgrade. This reinterpretation of existing elements aligns with the postmodern foundation of Marković's poetics, along with a communicative musical flow, tense rhythmic impulses, and an overall thoughtfully conceived dramatic thread.

Next was an interestingly conceived and excellently executed piece, *Sparkling Dark* by Vladica Mikićević, in the interpretation of Rastko Popović. Unfortunately it lacked clearer dramaturgical direction, with insufficiently impactful utilization of the electric viola medium, somewhat of a monotonous character. The same can be said for a somewhat more dynamic composition, 85 by Aleksandar Savić, within which the electronic part was not elaborated enough. Nina Perović's piece *Blur* was very delicately and tonally precisely performed by pianist Neda Hofman-Sretenović and mezzo-soprano Ana Radovanović. It is based on repeating patterns and transparent sounds.

In the second concert of the second day, the composition *Thoughts* by Andela Milić for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, and electronics was performed. It

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

also relied on repetitive patterns, the complexity and sonic enrichment of which bring dynamism to an otherwise monotonous dramatic framework. Next came the piece *This Time, Let Me Be Happy* – by Pablo Neruda for flute and double bass by Ivana Stefanović, performed by Ljubiša Jovanović and Damjan Milosavljević. This musical vignette is based on complementary sections, with an animated flute part in continuous flow and a rhythmically robust bass line.

Following the non-musical concept characteristic of schizophrenia, “characterized by a sudden interruption of thought processes and a very emotional reaction”<sup>3</sup> Predrag Radisavljević created a composition (*Schizophrenia*) that musically transposes elements of this thematic idea. Passionate and adept performers – cellist Nemanja Stanković and accordionist Nikola Peković – approached the interpretation virtuosically, but also thoughtfully at times, abruptly initiating and similarly concluding fragmentary musical thoughts. These thoughts sonically embody the inconsistency of mental processes associated with the mental illness – from tranquility to expressive aggression.

Drawing on the poetic imagination of Fernando Pessoa, composer Miloš Zatkalik wrote a piece based on several verses of this poet. The composition *A Beleza do Alberto Caeiro* has a four movement structure, each of which presents a translation of the poem in four languages. Harmonically rich musical language, with broadly conceived melodic lines and

a clear division within the instrumental texture, transparently establishes an atmospheric foundation.

Next, *The Voice of a Nun*, based on verses by Desanka Maksimović, by Milana Stojadinović Milić. The composer has succeeded in musically enhancing the dramatic foundation, creating a theatrical character, and illustratively using the voice, which transitions from spoken word to high mezzo-soprano notes.

In the continuation of the festival, members of the Metamorphosis ensemble presented a largely eclectically conceived piece, *Wanderings* by Jovica Mutavdžić. The composition encompasses diverse musical languages, ranging from neoclassical to somewhat more dissonant harmonic movements. Following the communicative realization of the neo-classical excursion *Uncanny Pact* by Aleksandar Simić for violin and piano, with transparent harmonic frameworks and a clear division of sections into soloist, concertante, and accompaniment, comes the composition *1010011010* by Eliot Delafosa for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. It consisted of two contrasting sections based on homorhythm and, in the second part, polymetry, evidently exploring relationships between instruments and creating a lucid, albeit somewhat monotonous, picture. Following the already established path of his poetics based on post-minimalist frameworks, Vladimir Tošić presented *Motus* – a composition based on simplified repetitive processes, i.e. sequential repetitions of a short melodic pattern. The last piece of the evening was Jiyoun Chung’s

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<sup>3</sup> [https://composers.rs/?page\\_id=7705](https://composers.rs/?page_id=7705)

thoughtfully crafted *Freestyle Battle* for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, which transposes the logic of movements within a breakdance into the musical medium. Following the brisk rhythm consistent throughout the composition, the composer created a virtuosic work with an interesting language and concept.

The Aratos Trio performed the composition *Hymn* for violin, clarinet, and piano by Marko Kovač. The author himself described it as a miniature “inspired by a blend of minimalism, the music of Olivier Messiaen, and *sevdalinka*”.<sup>4</sup> This eclectically conceived piece actually relies on an impressive sound, a slow flow of time and sequences.

Following the excellent interpretation by Ljubiša Jovanović of *On Fever* by Jee Seo, where the performer demonstrated excellent breath control and understanding of the virtuosic score which imposes complex rhythmic demands on the performer, a neoclassical piece *Second Month of Autumn* for bassoon and piano by Božo Banović was performed by Goran Marinković and Tea Dimitrijević. The elegiac composition *Between the Moon and a Desolate Space* by Svetlana Maksimović for piano contains a high level of contemplation and emotional intensity, almost of a romantic sensibility. Similarly, the piece for solo guitar, *Oktagon* by Damjan Jovičin, possesses a very strong dose of emotional saturation, deviating in many ways from what is the recognized poetic core of the author’s expression.

<sup>4</sup> [https://composers.rs/?page\\_id=7731](https://composers.rs/?page_id=7731)

*Il culto del dio Fujin* by Ugo Raimondi was expertly interpreted by Ljubiša Jovanović, moving through a wide register, incorporating elements of quasi-folkloric Japanese outlines, paying attention to phrasing and dramatic orientation of melodic lines. Tea Dimitrijević rounded off this second concert on the third day of the festival with an interpretation of the ambitiously conceived, extensive, and expressive composition *Fanfare* by Stanko Simić. Clearly inspired primarily by the musical world of Vasilije Mokranjac, the author, well-acquainted with the piano medium, conceived a work with a strong rhythmic impetus, imaginative sequences, and energetic virtuosity.

On the fourth day of the International Review of Composers, pianist Neda Hofman Sretenović presented a series of compositions written for solo piano and electronics.<sup>5</sup> The composition *Three Autumn Nights* by Svetlana Savić featured consistently guided dramaturgy with repeating patterns and rhythmic elements that continually propelled the piece forward. Subtle electronic sound complement and color the piano part with transient sounds or rapid ostinato. Like a musical “race against time”, the composition unfolded in constant changes, building tension, resulting in an exceptionally exciting and effective realization.

Using electronic sound as a sonic complement to the piano, with the auditory relationship between the generated and pianistic sounds often obscured,

<sup>5</sup> <https://m.rts.rs/page/radio/sr/story/24/radio-beograd-2/4975171.html>

Draško Adžić, following his already shaped poetic credo, created a somewhat elusive sonic image with numerous nuances and layers in composition *Baba pusta, Study No 6*. Considering the often imperceptible influence of electronic manipulation, the listener may remain uncertain about the category of sound actually heard. In this sense, it may seem that the pianist's performance transcended into the impossible, which is indeed a successfully executed illusion that functions until the very end of the composition. Neda Hofman Sretenović's excellent, dedicated, and inspired interpretation, navigating skillfully through often opaque but certainly not easy scores of compositions like *TaleSpin* by Russell Pinkston, *In Tempore* by Joao Pedro Oliveira, *Los murmullos* by Per Bloland, *El alma al cuerpo* by Patricia Elizabeth Martinez, *Interaction* by Mei-Fang Lin, and by Ivana Ognjanović, enhanced their artistic value.

During the second concert of the same evening the Belgrade Trio presented an interpretation of *Phase Two* by Vladimir Korać. As Korać notes in the program remarks: "The initial point in the process of creating the piece was recording various samples of ensemble instruments, which, through spectral analyses, would provide the basic building element for creating the acoustic layer of the composition. Simultaneously, it would serve as material for building electronic instruments and/or fixed media segments."<sup>6</sup> The result is a remarkable sonic image with heightened intensity,

possessing multidimensionality and radiating divergent acoustic sensations in a confined space.

As part of this second concert, we also had the opportunity to hear *Dreams of a Little Dwarf* by Milana Milošević, *Idioma* by Tomislav Oliver, *Insects* by Sofia Jen Ouyang, *Interruptive Clatters* by Ivan Elezović, and *Black Holes Are Not So Black* for violin, cello, and piano by Branka Popović. Branka Popović's composition possesses a dramaturgy of sudden changes, with the piano maintaining rhythmic stability through chord strikes and string instruments ranging from potent energetic outbursts to receding into the background, featuring dense musical movements in subtle dynamics. The piece actually resembles a well-executed musical essay with a clearly formulated idea, a transparent and precisely crafted form, and causally guided dramatic threads. The restrained language and, at times, very transparent texture carry a sense of emotional detachment from the events, akin to observing certain inevitable processes unfolding in the initiated musical turbulence, which then extinguishes itself as it began.

The final concert of the Review of Composers featured performances by the LP Duo and the St. George Strings ensemble. Following the simple, lyrical, tonal, and texturally highly simplified composition *Summertid* by Andreja Andrić, LP Duo presented Miloš Raičković's post-minimalist play *Lovely Permutations*. Moving within the characteristic expression, with repeating patterns that are gradually manipulated, changing in-

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<sup>6</sup> [https://composers.rs/?page\\_id=7780](https://composers.rs/?page_id=7780)

dividual elements that vary the primary pattern, Raičković wrote a slowly unfolding piece, distinctly nostalgic in character. The excellent LP Duo, playing in four hands, expertly maintained tension, naturally guiding the flow, breathing in harmony with Raičković's musical thoughts, and following the dynamics of their movement.

Following this was an exceptionally interesting piece by Sonja Mutić *Resound II*, performed by the St. George Strings under the direction of Ivan Josip Skender. Exploring the voicing of harmonics, with long sustained tones and subtly layered harmonies, Sonja Mutić created a delicate work with an almost meditative quality. We could hear all the nuances within the revealed harmonics, with the careful use of instruments, crafting a rich tonal landscape. Achieving a subtle dynamics, the ensemble sounded compact and highly concentrated, sustaining tones and creating an inspirational atmosphere.

After the skillful use of contrapuntal devices and intellectually engaging composition *Reading Dante* by Predrag Repanić, the compositions *Hep 32 C-o* by Szilard Mezei were performed, followed by the work *Devana* by Smiljana Vlajić, *Devana* for flute and string orchestra, inspired by folklore, presented in perhaps insufficiently polished craftsmanship. However, undoubtedly, the highlight of the evening was the performance of *Three Songs About Us* by Tatjana Milošević Mijanović.

*Three Songs About Us* is a work that carries an exceptional intensity and genuine emotion, breaking through each often

cold tone, devoid of romanticized pathos. Melancholic themes, expressionistic contours, possess the power of expression that permeates all three parts of this composition. The climax, yet simultaneously an anticlimax, comes in the third segment, with a transparent texture and a simple structure that implies a descending arpeggio movement. It begins in the piano, and then other instruments join in, creating a sense of sonic *decay*, fading into the darkness of silence. *Three Songs* carries the subtext of the death of a loved one, so in that sense, the melodic movement possesses depth, symbolic, connotative meaning. The excellent performance by Ana Radovanović, purposefully singing *dry*, without vibrato, with a certain coldness, objectivity, effectively conveyed the essence of the emotion, fatigue, and suffering with which the work is imbued.

The 31<sup>st</sup> Review of Composers has continued to cultivate a specific *format* directed towards a composer's perspective. Without significant stylistic leveling, which would be necessary if it were a festival of contemporary expression, the Review persists in its mission to promote contemporary creativity in all its facets. Despite limited resources and within its established concept, it manages to remain a relevant platform that provides composers with a space to present their work. It stays open to often distant poetic contours, aiming to familiarize an engaged audience with a wide range of musical languages that legitimately coexist in the current musical landscape, both on a local and global scale.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ISSUE

**Rastko Buljančević** is an employed doctoral researcher at the Department of Cultural Sciences at the University of Gothenburg and at the Graduate School “The Future of Democracy: Cultural Analyses of Illiberal Populism in Times of Crises (FUDEM)”. Simultaneously, he is pursuing a PhD at the Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad, where he has completed all doctoral courses with top grades. For his academic work, he received two exceptional awards from the University of Novi Sad. He was an exchange student at the Complutense University of Madrid for one semester. His research interests cover a wide range of topics, including the study of film music, video game studies, audio-visual culture, poetics of music, piano literature, performance studies and music criticism.

**Natasa Crnjanski**, PhD, Music Theorist, Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. She finished her postgraduate (2008) and doctoral studies (2014) in Music Theory with Music Semiotics as her main field of research. Beside articles, which have been published in edited books and journals, she is an author of three books: *Music Semiotics through D-S-C-H* (2010), *Prokofiev and Musical Gesture* (2014) and *The Glossary of Music Semiotics* (2019) which are among the first scientific publications in the field of musical semiotics in Serbia. She is the manager of the ARSFID project (2023–2025), which is financed by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia. She was the editor-in-chief of the scientific journal *Zbornik radova Akademije umetnosti* (2016–2023). Nataša Crnjanski is an Associate Professor at the Department for Composition and Theoretical Subjects. Her scientific work is focused on questions of musical sign and meaning, as well as research on the connection between music, language and the physical domain.

**Aleksandra Kovač** holds a Master of Science degree in Composition for screen from Edinburgh University, as well as a BA in Music theory and education from Belgrade University. She is a film composer, songwriter, music producer and educator from Belgrade, Serbia. In addition to being the 2015 BAFTA Scotland New Talent award nominee, she is also the first Serbian MTV award winner and has won awards for her work in theater, TV, and film. Concurrent with her successful songwriting career, Aleksandra garnered acclaim as a composer for theater, TV and film. Since 2015, she has composed music for many TV series and films produced in Serbia and distributed worldwide, such as *Dara of Jasenovac* (2020 Serbian candidate for Golden Globes and Oscars), *Civil servant*, *Legacy* and others. As a lecturer in film music, she has given lectures at the American University in Beirut, SAE Institute in Belgrade, Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb, Faculty of Music in Belgrade.

**Marina Marković**, PhD musicologist, Assistant Professor at the Department of Musicology, Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Her main research interests include Serbian and Russian Orthodox Church music, as well as interdisciplinary music studies. Marina Marković participated in *Endangered Archives. Voiceless Choirs. Serbian Musical Collections from Zemun in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, a research project conducted by the British Library (London), the Historical Archive of Belgrade, and the Faculty of Music at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is the author of the book *Hymns of Srbijak in Monophonic Anthologies of Serbian Chant* (2006, Belgrade: Signature). She publishes her research papers in journals and thematic collections of national and international importance, and participates in national and international scientific conferences.

**Radoš Mitrović**, PhD, Assistant professor of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade. He published articles in *New Sound*, *Zbornik Matice Srpske za scenske umetnosti i muziku*, *Art and Media*, *Muzika*, and is an author of the e-book on Mauricio Kagel. He is a member of Serbian Musicological Society and his work includes music critiques and reviews for the Radio Belgrade 2.

**Jelena Novak** works as a researcher at CESEM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. Her fields of interests are modern and contemporary music, recent opera, singing and new media, capitalist realism, voice studies and feminine identities in music. Exploring those fields, she works as a researcher, lecturer, writer, dramaturge, music critic, editor and curator focused on bringing together critical theory and contemporary art. Her most recent books are *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body* (2015), *Operofilia* (2018) and *Einstein on the Beach: Opera beyond Drama* (co-edited with John Richardson, 2019). Most recently she collaborated as a dramaturge at the opera in 17 songs *Deca (Children, 2022)* by Irena Popović at the National Theatre in Belgrade. Currently, she is working on a book *Opera in the Expanded Field* and is researching about what it means and what it takes to sing beyond human.

**Milena Petrović**, PhD musicologist and music educator, Full Professor at the Department of Solfeggio and Music Education, Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Since 2016, she has organized the Pedagogical Forum of Performing Arts as an annual international conference in Belgrade. She is the president of the Serbian Forum for Research in Music Education. She is the author of three books and more than 100 articles published in proceedings and journals in the country and abroad. She is the member of program committees of national and international scientific conferences and has participated at more than 50 conferences in the country and abroad. Her main fields of interest are music education, the psychology of music, the origin of music, music linguistics and zoomusicology.

**Ira Prodanov**, PhD musicologist is full time professor at the Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. Areas of her competences are European and Serbian music of 20th and 21st-century music. She investigates interdisciplinarity in music, especially relationship of music and media, music and religion, theory and practice of popular music. She regularly lectures Life Long Learning courses accredited by Serbian Institute for Advancement of Education in the field of transferring knowledge, communication and presentation skills and popular music. She has published several books and more than 50 scientific papers. She has introduced a new master program Music and Media at her faculty within the frame of Tempus InMusWB project.

**Sanja Ranković** is associate professor of traditional singing at the Department of Ethnomusicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. The topics of her ethnomusicological interest are from the field of applied ethnomusicology, as well as the issues of vocal practices. She has delivered numerous lectures, seminars, concerts and workshops in the country, as well as abroad. For almost two decades, she collaborated with the Ensemble of Folk Dances and Songs of Serbia “Kolo” and created the vocal practice of this artistic institution. She is the author of three books and two full-length musical stage performances, which were performed at the National Theatre in Belgrade.

**Bojana Radovanović**, musicologist and art theorist, is a research associate at the Institute of Musicology, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. She obtained her PhD at the Department of Musicology, Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, studying the relations of voice to vocal technique and new technologies in contemporary art and popular music. Her research interests include contemporary music and art, voice, metal music, art and media, and transdisciplinary research. She has published three books, and co-edited one collective monograph and a posthumous collection of papers by Prof. Vesna Mikić. She is a co-founder and the editor-in-chief of the scientific journal *INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology*.

**Sara Savović** is a Junior Researcher and a third-year PhD student at the University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Music, specializing in Music Pedagogy. Her primary research interests lie in preschool music education, particularly focusing on children with autism spectrum disorders. She has authored and co-authored papers presented and published in the proceedings of the Pedagogical Forum of Performing Arts (2023, Belgrade), the International Forum of Music Pedagogy Students (2018, 2021, Croatia), and the International Forum of Music Pedagogues (2021, Croatia). As a member of the organizing team for the international conference and student forum of the European Association for Music in School - EAS, she has collaborated with numerous music pedagogues, researchers, and scientists across Europe in the field of music pedagogy (Belgrade, 2022; Lyon, 2023).

**Mirjana Zakić** graduated at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, Department of Ethnomusicology, and defended her M.A. thesis: “Instrumental and vocal-instrumental heritage of Zaplanje region in the light of traditional music opinion”, as well as her doctoral dissertation “Ceremonial songs of winter season – systems of music signs in the tradition of the southeastern Serbia”. Since 1990 she has been employed at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. She was the Vicedean at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade (2012–2015). Since 2018 she has been the head of the Department of Ethnomusicology at the Faculty of Music. So far, she has published four books and a large number of papers in national and international publications. She is especially interested in ritual music, instrumental music, musical semiotics, relation between text and context. She is the chairman of the Serbian Society of Ethnomusicology.

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