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**Milan Mihajlović: *Memento*
PGP-RTS, CD 431 425 SOKOJ (2005)**

The usual practice of the management of every successful publishing house in the music industry is to entitle the products “greatest hits” or use the most attractive number on the CD edition for its title. Thus, in the case of the second CD featuring works by Serbian composer Milan Mihajlović (1945), this unwritten rule has been followed and the edition published in the production of PGP-RTS has been named after one of the most performed (most popular?) Mihajlović’s pieces – *Memento*. Although the former explanation of the choice of title could be a rather convincing one, it seems that in the case of the pieces presented on this CD, as well as in the case of Mihajlović’s entire creative output, the notion of “memento” is more far reaching, comprehensive, polysemic and, in a way, one of the crucial constituents of the composer’s poetics. Comparing the auditory impressions with the collected biographical data and data concerning individual pieces and their performances the questions were raised addressing the nature, provenance and function of Mihajlović’s various memories in the realization of this edition.

Bearing in mind that the CD was published in 2005, the year of the composer’s 60th birthday and the marking of almost forty years of his professional engagement, we cannot help but assume that this edition has a specific weight of some kind of summing up the results and of the composer’s looking back on the past decades. Although the CD consists of the pieces composed in a short period of time, from the mid-eighties (track 1 – *Tri preludijuma /Three Preludes/* for piano, 1985) to the beginning of this century (track 8 – *Povratak /Return/*, 2002), it looks as if they were selected with the purpose of testifying to their author’s creative maturity. And not only in terms of the maturing of technical and expressive means, but also, and most importantly, in terms of Mihajlović’s specific reliving of atmospheres, influences, circumstances, personalities and events, in a specific leafing through the sheets of his own music diary that “narrates”, through its music, the genre-diverse recount of the composers’ current relationship to his own pieces, the times in which they were composed, the people who influenced his composing, the moments in which the pieces were performed...

Hence, *Memento* turns out to be a multidirectional and multilayered album of memories in which some memories can be read in all of the pieces and others only in a few, an album in

which some memories are explicitly “musical” and others extra-musical, but still “expressed” through music, an album in which some memories are eternal and relatively changeable and others only temporary.

The memory which, like a recurring theme, runs through and connects the pieces of this edition and to which the author himself points directly (track 9, *Memento* for orchestra, 1993) by referring to the motive for composing the piece and by the piece itself, is based on the importance of Vasilije Mokranjac’s (1923-1984) life and work to Milan Mihajlović. Less overtly and somewhat indirectly, through Scriabin’s mode, attempting to draw a maximum of expression from a minimum of music material and allow for different sonorities to be heard (the aforementioned *Three Preludes, Lamentoso* for clarinet, violin and piano, 1997, track 4), Mihajlović once again “echoes” Mokranjac’s sonority (at the same time he seems to be pitting his wits against Ljubica Marić or Vuk Kulenović). The echo of these memories continues to appear more or less in all the other recorded pieces depending on which memories directed and marked them.

Mihajlović’s typical quotation technique, spotless and unparalleled in its effectiveness, which has characterized most of his output in the past twenty years or so, thus marking one period of Belgrade’s postmodern music memory book of the same period, could this time be perceived and experienced as “musical” memory of various musics, conditioned either by the demands of another medium and the program of the pieces (*Bagatele /Bagatelles/* for solo violin, string ensemble and harpsichord, 1986, track 5-6), or by the free selection of poetic inspiration and musical sample (*Silenzio* for female choir, string ensemble, flute, bass clarinet and piano, 1996, track 7), and through the specific autobiographical/auto quotation procedures (*Povratak /Return/* for violoncello and orchestra).

In addition, it could be said that the genre diversity of the pieces could be understood as a comprehensive memory of various spheres of genre predilections, and the bold decision to include recordings of live performances of *Silenzio* and *Povratak* as a special tribute to the performers and commemoration of the occasions when they were performed. Also, our prominent performers (Aleksandar Serdar, Ksenija Janković, Slobodan Mirković, Olivera Đurđević, Mladen Jagušt, Darinka Matić-Marović, Aleksandar Pavlović) and ensembles (Trio Žikić, BSO “Dušan Skovran”, Academic Choir “Collegium Musicum”, SO RTS, the Belgrade Philharmonic) who often inspired Mihajlović to compose, or gladly responded to his invitations, including those “invisible” colleagues who commissioned his works, once again bear witness to the memories of events, people, atmospheres, inspirations, Mihajlović’s own artistic challenges and dilemmas.

Furthermore, the way in which the booklet of this edition was conceived and organized is another proof that there are good reasons to review this edition as a memory album of sorts. The booklet is a bilingual “album within album” in which various generations of musicologists, music critics and composers (Branka Radović, Zorica Premate, Zorica Kojić, Danijela Kulezić, Svetlana Savić) inscribed their memories about Mihajlović’s selected pieces, with the introductory “note on the author” by Sonja Marinković, Ph.D. and Mihajlović’s “auto-reminiscent” notes on the origin of each piece.

Owing to its aura of an unusual document chronicling an epoch and a composer in it, realized in an emotionally exciting and disarmingly straightforward way, so typical of Mihajlović, and additionally strengthened by extremely professional performances and production, *Memento*’s seventy minutes of music could inspire listeners of various generations to either listen to their own memories or compare the pulse of their times to that of some “distant” times. Thus, in a strange way, and thanks to music, Milan Mihajlović’s *mementi* become our own, too. And what more could a composer hope for?

Translated by the author