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A REVIEW OF THE FESTIVAL *ART OF SOUNDS*

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An international festival *Art of Sounds* is the first attempt at a cross-sectional view of contemporary local and global tendencies in the field of electronic multimedia art, electronic music and radio works on our artistic scene. Although the works belonging to this genre are, from time to time, included in the repertoire of the prestigious and artistic festivals in the capital, such as the International Review of Composers and Bitef, the Belgrade audience, so far, did not have the chance to see, in one place, various poetics and practices based on working with different electronic media. This festival, however, was not conceived purely as a presentation of the three artistic fields, but also, as the president of the selection committee Vladan Radovanović pointed out, as a manifestation opposed to the subculture, non-artistic and popular electronic and multimedia species. Namely, the idea is that, besides informative and educative, this festival should also have a propagative function, aimed at differentiating the high arts and culture from the popular; that is, preserving the identity of high arts practices. It seems that the promotion of this modernistic thesis gained special importance in the space of the Fine Arts Centre Guarnerius, which, in its visual codes, represents exactly the marker of the need to 'protect' the high arts.

Besides this criterion, the common trait of all the presented works was also the studying and emphasizing sound as an important constructive material, which is stressed by the very name of the festival. The carrying out of interdisciplinary research and experiments with sound in the context of multimedia, musical and radio works, was presented during the three festival days, or seven concert/events. The selection team which, besides Radovanović, included Katarina Miljković and Gordana Novaković, selected 43 works by almost as many artists, among which almost more than a half by foreign authors (from Europe, Asia, Australia, North and South America). The audience thus had the opportunity to hear the domestic works, which are rare –

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what may also be an indicator of the scarce production of our authors in these artistic fields – in a broader context, and compare the present foreign and domestic achievements. Unfortunately, in the field of electronic music, it was difficult to achieve a comprehensive view of different tendencies, since the programme did not include recent works by Serbian authors. Besides the compositions *Rebusi I i II* [*Rebuses I and II*] by Srđan Hofman – the works which, two decades ago, marked the evolution of Serbian musical postmodernism, and directed the further course of the development of Serbian electronic music by its conceptual, as well as technological innovations – the Belgrade audience could not hear the derivatives of the current domestic electronic musical production, and thus acquire a rounded picture of the contemporary tendencies in this field.

The search for diverse sound dimensions through three artistic fields integrated in the electronic medium created a platform for the homogenization of the programme, consisting of works arranged according to genres, so that, on the macro plane, there was a certain symmetry – the opening and closing of the manifestation was dedicated to multimedia works, during the second, third and fourth concerts we listened to electronic music, while the fifth and sixth evenings featured radio works. In spite of the division of the programme according to genres, it was obvious that multimedia, electronic and radio works are not isolated practices, and can function complementarily. The idea of the coexistence of different media was probably best represented at the very opening by broadcasting the television version of *Sazvežđa* [*Constellations*] by Vladan Radovanović, a key synesthetic work, very carefully chosen for the formal opening of the festival. The genre was not the only criterion for the categorization of the works, but the concerts/events were logically organized, chronologically, contextually, stylistically and critically problematized, with the aim of presenting a cross-sectional view of the development of electronic creative fields and their continuity, through examples of works created within the time span of two decades. As Radovanović pointed out in his introductory statement, ‘we often miss the perception of the continuity, and that continuity is the basis of the present, and the pledge of the future.’ In that respect, this festival was conceived as an ambitious project, which will determine and cover the further development of the electronic media and artistic procedures. Notwithstanding the mentioned categorizations, the plurality of the presented poetics, and synchronic coexistence of generationally various discourses, it is possible to single out certain problems and themes which the authors dealt with, and trace the direction of this year’s festival.

The main thematic thread, as already pointed out, was based on different types of sound research as well as finding out the mechanism for working with the sound, in accordance with the tendencies of the techno-cultural age, the development of new technologies, improvements in computers, and the expansion of computer programmes. So we were presented with works which basically demonstrate the technical process of making a certain sound result. For example, Adam Stensbie in the composition *The Bridge of Arta*, demonstrates the simultaneous use of the complex professional programmes, such as Composer's Desktop Project, as well as simpler programmes, available to amateurs at home, such as Sound Forge and ProTools, in the processing and the transformation of sound. Christopher Ariza presents a similar poetic idea by using different software and hardware in the work *Demiurgic Ecstasy Whispering in Streets of Ear*. Also important in this context is the scientific method used in the transformation of material, as shown by Marjan Šijanec (*Venus Orchestra*) and Katarina Miljković (*Cracking*). While Šijanec composes using his own computer programme with parameters set according to the model of integral serialization, Katarina Miljković, in order to synchronize sound happenings with choreography and video works, uses algorithms and the software Mathematica.

The work *Cracking* stresses another problem guideline of the festival – the process of visualization of the sound material, or the sounding of visual patterns, that is, the aspiration to examine the relationship between the sound and the picture, movement, and moving. These relations are analysed by Adrian Borza in the composition *Dusk*, by transposing, through the computer, the visual characteristics (form, light, colour), into sound characteristics (pitch, duration, timbre), while, in contrast, Čedomir Vasić tries to apply rhythmical musical logic to the structuring of the recorded pictures from city life (*Male teme za velike grafike [Small Themes for Big Graphics]*). The levels of communication between the sound and the moving pictures and spheres of their meeting were researched by Ge-Suk Yeo in the cycle *Gang Gang*, by implementing the concept of sound calligraphy, that is, the sound song in the rhythm of the traditional Korean dance, on the phone of calligraphic pictures, with the shifting of pictures signaling the building of the sound layer. The way the sounds 'occupy' space, or create the presentation of the space, was the subject of the composer Mathew Adkins in the electronic work *Panel No. 1* from the cycle *Five Panels*, while the investigation of the relationship between space and sound, but also of the conditioning of the spatial distribution of sound by moving in nature, inspired Fabio Barbagallo in a composition *Transferendo in luoghi*.

Besides discovering and intensifying the connections between visual and sound models, and researching sound as a space phenomenon, some participants of the festival uncovered the

principles of constructing sound structures against other media, for example, literal, philosophical, and cyber texts. This concept is the basis of the radio work *Mora* by Bojana Šaljić – the sound material of this work consists of the passages from the homonymic story about the semi-divine being, treated as a solo instrument going through different transformations. In that context, we also single out the multimedia co-authorial work *Evolution*, with music by Huba de Graaff, based on, as she pointed out herself, the verses in internet language or abbreviations used in chatting, in an attempt to initiate the discussion on forming, preserving and disintegration of identity. The above-mentioned problems, especially the changeable and unchangeable aspects of identity, inspired Vladimir Jovanović to create a radio work *Hodočašće u vrtove praznine* [*Pilgrimage to the Gardens of Emptiness*]. In this work, the author metaphorically presents the mentioned dichotomous relationship, using as the sound basis a segment of a St. Lazarus Day's song, and contrasting it with sound samples of popular music and the computer. Thus he offers a new reading of tradition, and reconsiders the relationship between traditional and modern phenomena, which is also one of the thematic footings of the manifestation.

The meeting of 'old' and 'new' was especially apostrophized in certain electronic musical works, based on experimenting with the sounds of traditional, archaic objects/instruments, within the electronic media, in order to effect a dialog with different cultural inheritances. Thus, Felipe Otondo, inspired by notes on Tarahumara Indians by Antonin Artaud, examines the inharmonious timbres of different kinds of bells (*Ciguri*), Zhou Jiaojiao uses the sounds of traditional Chinese instruments *pipa* and *guzheng* as the sources of sound (*Falling From the Sky*), while James Wynes, using electronic means, re-examines the timbre and textural qualities of highland bagpipe, uniting these sounds with interior and exterior sounds, the sounds of metal objects and a metal factory, or concrete sounds (*Ceol Mhor*).

From the above-mentioned it is obvious that, besides an interest in non-artistic tradition through examining the sound fundus, the composers were especially inspired by problematizing new West European music tradition/history, or, more specifically, the concept and technique of *musique concrète*. In that respect, we should mention the work *Shape and its Content*, in which Benoit Granier, after a thorough analyses of concrete sound patterns, brings forth a contemporary view of *musique concrète*, through the sounds of usable objects. The process of emphasizing the narrative function of concrete sounds was presented by John Mallia in the composition *Anastasis*, which depicts Christ's descent into Limbo, through a thick web of different recorded sound patterns (with almost no electronically generated sounds), thus creating a specific, condensed study of the usage of concrete sounds which do not have just a sonorous, but also a

conceptual significance. Similarly, through concrete sound recordings in the radio work *Prvi istočni san* [*The First Eastern Dream*], using dramaturgically well-segmented sounds, Ivana Stefanović manages to tell an authentic story about the tradition, culture and religion of one of the oldest cities in the world, Damascus.

Besides these authors, we must also mention those who dealt with the concept of acousmatics, among which a prominent place belongs to Dieter Kaufmann. In the symphony *Bridges and Breaks*, this composer inventively demonstrates the aspects of the acousmatic concept, acting continually according to his former personal poetic orientation. Unlike Kaufmann, the above-mentioned composer, de Graaff deals with the critics of acousmatic listening and perception/reception through a loudspeaker, as a marker of this practice, in the example of multimedia work *AAT-Bells*. In his radio work *Približavanja* [*Approachings*], Arsenije Jovanović also researches the reception, trying to elaborate metaphorically, through a concept of sound poetry, the post-structuralist thesis about the listener who registers the meaning of the work.

Finally, we can say that the festival *Art of Sounds* was an important event, since it brought together, for the first time in one place, the works from three different, but conceptually and substantially related artistic fields, for which praise is due to its selectors and organizers, Nada Kolundžija and Dragan Marinković. Although we encountered various interesting, innovative and complex poetics, there was no broader contextualization or search for examples which would present an opportunity for forming a more comprehensive picture of the achievements of domestic and foreign artistic production, or offer an informative cross-sectional view of contemporary artistic tendencies, while preserving the idea of the continuity by referring to prominent artistic achievements from the past. Although we are well aware that the process of selection is often conditioned by non-artistic criteria, we hope that this will not be an obstacle to the profiling of this festival towards conquering new artistic areas in the future.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović