
CD REVIEWS

Article received on 22nd March 2010
Article accepted on 27th April 2010
UDC 784/.785:78.071.1 Maksimović R.

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POETSKE NITI [POETIC THREADS]

Double compact-disc with vocal and vocal-instrumental works of Rajko Maksimović, PGP RTS

Since PGP RTS pays ever less attention to classical music – hence to the music of our contemporary authors as well – a double compact disc with works of Rajko Maksimović is a special event. However, its value is primarily in the content and interpretation. For an author so strongly attracted to text, who in choosing it demonstrates such a delicate and refined taste and who through his music always prolongs the emotion of the verses – it was natural that the discs be populated with vocal-instru-

mental works. And since Rajko Maksimović has always carefully selected the performers of his works – often being inspired by their nature and skills – both the works and the interpretations are the first-rate achievements of our music.

Vocal and vocal-instrumental works are not concentrated in a single period of Rajko Maksimović's opus. Instead they are a continuing thread which, as the two discs show, spans for over two decades. The earliest work in this line is six madrigals *Iz tmine pojanje* [*Chanting from Darkness*], composed after the collection of texts by Serbian chroniclers and monks from 16th and 17th centuries, gathered by Đorđe Trifunović. Since that was the golden age of Italian madrigal, Maksimović's work was an effort in 'napravi madrigale sa našeg tla' ['making madrigals grown on our own soil']¹. Although the madrigals have often been performed separately, the integral version was performed and recorded only by the RTB Choir with Borivoje Simić as the conductor, and it is exactly this recording which is released on the discs. That happened in the late seventies, when the ensemble was at the peak of its performance powers. Hence the wails, reflections and sighs contained in

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1 Miloš Jevtić, *Govor muzike*, Belgrade, Beogradska knjiga, 2008, 29.

the text and the music found their proper counterparts at the interpretation level.

While the RTB Choir and Borivoje Simić, the conductor, inspired Rajko Maksimović in the early years of his work, later on the author felt the same kind of reverence for the Krsmanović-Obilić Choir and the conductor Darinka Matić-Marović, because that was the exact place where he found the most fertile ground for expressing that part of his nature 'koja je vezana za našu tradiciju – književnu tradiciju i istorijsku i kulturnu prošlost – za naše spise, koji su iz davnih doba nekako proizvedeni u novo vreme, ne samo kao *remake*, ne samo kao podsećanje, nego kao novo stvaranje, i novo čitanje, i novo komponovanje, i novo slušanje' ['which is connected to our tradition – literary tradition and historical and cultural past – to our written materials, which from the ancient times somehow advanced to the new age, not only as a *remake*, not only as a reminiscence, but as a new creation, and a new reading, and a new composing, and a new listening']². Upon this part of his nature and his interests *Pasija svetog kneza Lazara* [*Passion of Saint Prince Lazarus*], *Buna protiv dahija* [*Rebellion against Janissary Leaders*] are based, and the discs contain *Testament* and *Iskušenje, podvig i smrt svetog Petra Koriškog* [*Temptation, Exploit and Death of Saint Peter of Koriša*]. Both works are pinnacles of the vocal-instrumental genre in contemporary Serbian music. Besides, every performance of *Testament* establishes a deep comprehension and an honest bond between the performers, the audience and the work. The reason may be the simplicity of the music in the best possible sense, or perhaps a wide scale of emotions it encom-

passes, and which Darinka Matić-Marović with her choir and the Dušan Skovran Orchestra brings to life with fullness and affection. The work was first conceived for a bass solo and a choir *a cappella*, and in that form it was awarded the Stevan Mokranjac Award for choir music. Later on, by the author's own words, the dramaturgical considerations prevailed and the work came close to the form of a requiem. *Testament* is undoubtedly one of the most communicative Maksimović's works, which on the reflective level ponders upon the issues of eternity, attitude towards death and relationship to God.

The other extensive vocal-instrumental work was made after Theodosius's *Hagiography of Saint Peter of Koriša*, which Maksimović transformed into a libretto, delving deeply into the details of the text 'koji ima ogromnu emotivnu energiju, pun je dramskog naboja i nosi u sebi sasvim nesvakidašnju moralno-psihološku dilemu savesti' ['which has an enormous emotional energy, which is full of dramatic suspense and brings forward a completely unexpected moral-psychological dilemma of conscience']³. Thus those were strong incentives for a reflective and dramatic music, for a large apparatus – narrator, soloists, choir, chamber orchestra – which Darinka Matić-Marović brought to life as a compact entity.

We should point out that there are two natures to Rajko Maksimović – one mentioned above, epic, related to our history, tradition, old texts, hagiographies, and another, delicate, lyric, directed towards love and reflective poetry. It is interesting that Maksimović is attracted to poetry both by the content *in itself* as well as the sound of

2 Branka Radović, a text at the promotion of the book *Govor muzike* in Belgrade, 29th June 2006.

3 Rajko Maksimović, *Iskušenje, podvig i smrt Svetog Petra Koriškog*, the program booklet, 4.

language *by itself*. Thus, in Mexico, he noted the poetry of indigenous tribes in Spanish language and composed *Tri madrigala* [*Three Madrigals*], while five haikus, under the common title *Za mirisom rascvetale trešnje* [*Following the Scent of Blossoming Cherry*] he composed in Japanese. Besides, haiku poetry attracted him by its brevity and terseness. Those translucent, subtle verses in a transparent orchestral texture, with the vocal part full of delicate nuances, were interpreted by Irina Arsikin, soprano. As an exemplary performance, the very same recording was included by the Dušan Skovran Chamber Orchestra and Aleksandar Pavlović, the conductor, in their *Antologija srpske muzike 20. veka za gudače* [*Anthology of Serbian String Music in the 20th Century*], as well as Maksimović's cantata *Možda spava* [*She May Be Sleeping*].

We already emphasized that Rajko Maksimović, while writing music, most often had particular performers in mind. He was especially inspired by the soft, well-rounded mezzo-soprano of Aleksandra Ivanović, which thus was most suited for the vocal lines of many of his works she sung – first and foremost, the parts of Milica in *Pasija* and Mother in *Petar Koriški* – and on the other hand, she herself interpreted his music in a very special way, deeply understanding its messages. The cantata *Možda spava* for a mezzo-soprano and a chamber orchestra was composed in 1992, after one of the most beautiful poems by Vladislav Petković Dis, perhaps one of the most beautiful love poems in Serbian poetry in gen-

eral – hence, in a turbulent period of our recent history, when Maksimović took a clear political side and actively stepped forward in the storm of tragic events. The author himself defined that feedback very succinctly: 'Pesma mi je odavno bila izazov. Kada je prestao onaj nesrećni i besmisleni rat sa Hrvatskom, a pripremao se još besmisleniji sa Bosnom – prepustio sam se ovoj divnoj pesmi, kao nekoj vrsti utehe. Muzički senzibilitet i čudesni glas božanstvene Aleksandre – Dude Ivanović bili su mi dodatni podstrek. Muzika je sama potekla iz ove pesme...' ['The poem had been challenging me for a long time. When that unfortunate and pointless war against Croatia had stopped, and while an even more pointless war against Bosnia was coming our way – I resigned to this beautiful poem as a kind of solace. The musical sensibility and wonderful voice of divine Aleksandra 'Duda' Ivanović were an additional spur. The music came out of the poem by itself...'].

With two extensive vocal-instrumental works, two *a cappella* choirs and two works for soloists and a chamber orchestra, Rajko Maksimović in these two discs presented a wide circle of his interests for poetry and various ways of its transposition into music. These recordings thus confirm the significance of his opus in Serbian music, and the interpretations, touched up and deeply felt alike, show stratifications and multiple meanings of his music.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović