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Under the slogan of ‘Splendour of Voice’, the *International Review of Composers*, marked its jubilee – twentieth anniversary – in Belgrade between the 11th and 14th November 2011. Justification for the concept of this edition of the festival, presenting contemporary creativity in vocal music, lay in the fact that such a theme had never previously appeared in the *Review*’s programmes, while this argument was only supported by the statistic that choral music in the last fifteen years has been absent from the festival stage. With a certain symbolism, possibly in the fact that the important anniversary of the festival was celebrated with the ‘splendour of voice’, the *Review* organized a digest of vocal

music, unusual for our music scene, and arranged in one venue a rare meeting of the most significant domestic soloists and choral ensembles, as well as referential guests from abroad. The presence of diversely profiled ensembles could be interpreted through the *Review*’s ambition to establish itself not only as a narrowly professional, yearly digest of contemporary compositional creation, but also as a top-class festival of musical performance. Thus, the ensembles that took part in the *Review* included the leading domestic choirs, such as *Obilić – AKUD Branko Kršmanović* and *Collegium musicum*, as well as the younger entities, such as the *Liceum* choir from Kragujevac, already well-known around the world, and the newly established *Ars Divina* choir. We also heard chamber vocal-instrumental ensembles, such as the *Donne di Belgrado* trio, and the *Secondhanders* ensemble, unconventional both in concept and the performing point of view. The *Review*’s foreign guests included the *Vrškova–Načevski* piano and voice duo, and the internationally renowned Austrian chamber ensemble *Klangforum*. The fact that the said participants presented themselves on stage not only as performers, but as the inspirers and commissioning clients of a great number of the works performed, suggested an amalgamic fusion that traditionally connects the compositional and

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performing aspect of the festival's programme, certainly contributing with sincere energy and appreciable quality. Relying on the vestibule of the National Bank of Serbia as the 'central stage', the *International Review of Composers* maintained the practice of guest performances in other institutions. Therefore, beside the parent hall of the Composers' Association of Serbia, the 'Review's spaces' included the Belgrade Youth Centre and the Terazije Theatre. This 'mobility' of the festival definitely led to its greater visibility and attendance by the Belgrade (not only musical) audience. Apart from these introductory observations, we noted that the state's support, apart from the usual financial form, also had a special symbolic dimension in the presence and welcoming address of the Minister of Culture, Information and Information Society of the Republic of Serbia at the Review's opening ceremony, which certainly emphasised the status the festival has reached among the domestic cultural public.

The *Review's* programme, divided into six concerts in four festival days, included thirty-eight compositions by authors from fourteen countries. Most of them were from Serbia (22 participants), as opposed to 16 authors from the region (FYR Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia) and other countries (Italy, France, Germany, Cyprus, Russia, Argentina, USA, South Korea, Japan).

The first festival evening, dedicated entirely to choral music, was opened by *Que-si-na-ching-ching*, a work by South-Korean artist Hye-Kyung Lee for mixed choir, three tom-toms, piano and triangle. With an effectively organized interchange of energetic rhythmic pulsation between

the percussion and the vocal parts, conceived in the varied repetition of syllables of a Korean folk song, Lee produced a dynamic, tonally grounded and smooth musical tissue whose propellant energy brought optimism at the beginning of an all-evening choral marathon. While we could note the essence of the author's minimalist expression in *Kvintal* [*Quintal*] by Vladimir Tošić, where the basic element of the repetitive procedure and processuality is a fifth interval, the work *Šta sam to rekao?* [*What Did I Just Say?*] by Srđan Hofman for the same ensemble presented the author's transposition of contemporary Chinese verses, in which we could glimpse flashes of the Post-Modern way of thinking, apparent in establishing subtle associative links between the original music and some more or less recognizable references taken from the history of music, and used primarily as *paradigms*. American composer Rodney Waschka presented his *Sayings*, a collection of pieces for mixed choir, where he departed from the serious musical-poetical theme, and used intentionally simplified music language and semantically free fragments of folk sayings of various geographic origins, so that the musical event as such would be as communicative as possible. Inspiration from the national music heritage was the origin of the creative process in the works by Rajko Maksimović and Milorad Marinković. In the composition *O-trim-pa-ra* for a three-part female choir, Maksimović built a personal reflection of the domestic choral tradition, not only reaching for folklore motives but employing self-quotations as well. Maksimović executed a simulation procedure using the syllables of an imaginary language that remind one of the lexis and melody of the

Serbian language. A different attitude towards national idioms was displayed in the work *Srpska narodna uspavanka* [*Serbian Folk Lullaby*] for a six-part mixed choir, in which Milorad Marinković chiefly gave a harmonic arrangement of authentic folklore material, using diverse tonal-modal variants. As the last composition on the first festival night, we heard the work *Idi vidi dedu!* [*Go and See Grandfather!*] by Aleksandar Sedlar Bogoev, for mixed choir, string orchestra and piano. The postmodernist concept of the work, perceived in the tendency to cancel the qualitative differences between the idioms of high and popular cultures, was carried out through the dichotomy of a complex musical structure built by moderately modernistic means, on the one hand, and a jargon text based on everyday experience, on the other.

Placing special emphasis on the performance aspect, the *International Review of Composers* designed a programme engaging various ensembles that, in turn, gave an interpretative ‘shape’ to each of the concert evenings. The second concert, realized in collaboration with *Mladi pevači i prijatelji* [*Young Singers and Friends*], an informal ensemble of soloists (Jelena Banković, Maja Mijatović and Marija Mitić, sopranos, Ana Radovanović, mezzo-soprano, Slaven Čiča, tenor), included compositions written for solo voices accompanied by smaller chamber ensembles. In the works that were poetically divergent, we could perceive even very contrasting forms of the conceptualization of voice treatment – from postmodern ones, centred around making connections with certain musical idioms in the works by Diego Soifer, Evis Sammutis and Miloš Zatkalik, then diversely articulated relationships be-

tween voice and electronics in the piece by Svetlana Maraš, or exploring the relationship between voice and the sound of acoustic instruments in the works by Ana Gnjatović and Ada Gentile, to the treatment of voice as an extension of the standard acoustic universe in the composition by Maja Matić. Hideki Kozakura approached the voice as an onomatopoeic medium, while Mirjana Živković settled for artistic treatment of the patterns of old-town and folk songs. The postmodernist procedure in the composition *Lost and Found* for soprano, clarinet, harp and violoncello, by Argentinean-Dutch composer Diego Soifer, was achieved through the author’s specific response to Renaissance music, shaped by its sound ‘matrices’ that were reproduced in the instrumental parts, as well as in certain vocal lines that treated the historical models as *paradigms*, and the Cypriot composer Evis Sammutis, in his work *Fearing Apparitions* from the cycle *Ghost Shadows* for soprano and piano, enriched the content of the Expressionist acoustic world with the unconventional use of the instrument (plucking the piano strings, as one would of a harp), by playing with the text (through numerous repetitions of words and phrases), as well as the theatrical gestures of the performers. The gist of the poetic message (verses by Momčilo Nastasijević) reduced to a haiku form, as well as the asceticism of the musical motive accompanying it, were the main characteristics of the work *Reči u kamenu* [*Words in Stone*] for mezzo-soprano and English horn by Miloš Zatkalik, where the author – through transforming the sound of the English horn into the sound of an aulos – re-enacts a motive from ancient Greek music, but also quotes his own music. The work *Poetica micro-mix*

for tape, by Svetlana Maraš, was created as a *sound-art* piece in a specific technique of pasting micro-excerpts of recordings of vocal music, vocal improvisation and works in the genre of *sound poetry*. A different kind of use of technology, incorporated in a classical instrumental medium, was presented in the composition *Soneti* [*Sonnets*] for soprano, violoncello, piano and electronics, by Svetlana Savić, combining different samples of spoken verses by poets from various periods, as well as Medieval and Renaissance music, but also samples taken from an extra-musical context, such as recordings of marsh birds' calls. Italian author Ada Gentile, in the work *Notti di Gato* for voice and bayan, explored multiple ways of generating voice from an instrumental accompaniment, both at the intonation level and through the instrumental treatment of the vocal part, while Ana Gnjatović, in the work *Fashion Victim V* for voice, recorder, violin and double bass, organically bound the vocal and instrumental parts, functionalizing them through the idea of expressing inner, psychological turmoil while intimately remembering 'small personal defeats'. The dramaturgical concept of this work was transposed to music partly through a punctualist technique, and partly through the circulation of short and simple motives that – whether tonally defined or not quite acoustically articulated – together represented the 'voices' of one's own troubled soul. In the composition *Insectument* for mezzo-soprano, violin, clarinet and percussion, Maja Matić executed the idea of evoking the movements of an insect, as well as the space in which those movements occur, relying on the complementarity of indented and discontinuous

instrumental lines, on the one hand, and the vocal part that, in short and self-contained entrances, played the role of semantic signposts through the work, on the other. The enrichment of the musical tissue brought about by the vocal part was achieved both by exploiting certain motivic clichés taken from the extensive practice of solo entrances in the operatic tradition, and by impressive spoken moments. In the composition titled *Two Owls*, Japanese author Hideki Kozakura treated a multitude of vocal affectations of a predominantly imitative character, superposing a reduced and artificial melody onto them. In the work *Mali pijac* [*Small Bazaar*] for soprano, tenor, clarinet, violin, double bass and accordion, Mirjana Živković transformed the inspiration drawn from revisiting old and forgotten songs from the folk repertoire into a musical-poetic structure of an 'allegoric and ironic character', where the original musical-poetical motives were subject to variation under a simulated acoustic environment similar to those in authentic folklore ensembles.

Aleksandar S. Vujić used somewhat different means to arrange original folk tunes in his work *Iz Istočne Srbije – Zareko se, poreko se* [*From Eastern Serbia – 'He vowed, he denied'*] for soprano, flute, violin, viola and violoncello, where he carried out the artificialization of the authentic musical pattern: the folk melodies are rendered by a conventionally trained solo voice, and the harmonic dimension of the tune, which runs through the energetic melody in the instrumental parts, undergoes a complex development and creates a counterpoint to the vocal part. Together with works by Božo Banović, Dušan Bogdanović, Dorothea Hofmann, Vladimir Genin, Milana

Stojadinović-Milić and Ivan Brkljačić, this composition was performed at the concert dedicated to the *Donne di Belgrado Trio*, whose members are Aneta Ilić, soprano, Stana Krstajić, flute, and Natalija Marković, piano. The stylistic pluralism, which marked the programme of the entire 20th International Review of Composers, was also apparent in this concert's repertoire, although an approximate genre compatibility appeared as a certain cohesive element among the works (the compositions were written for solo voice and various chamber ensembles), as well as the orientation of all the authors to classical instruments. The work *Prolećna pesma* [*Springtime Song*] for voice, flute and harp by Božo Banović presented the author's musical rendition of Desanka Maksimović's verses, shaped with the intention of the music, in a somewhat academic guise (Romantic-Impressionist procedure), acoustically embodying the semantic dimension of the literary basis, corresponding with it also in the simultaneously achieved dramaturgical development, while the composition *Mala kutija* [*Small Box*] for voice, piano, flute and guitar by Dušan Bogdanović was based upon the eponymous poem by Vasko Popa and constructed according to the poet's principle of structural autogenesis. In Bogdanović's work, that principle was transformed into the concept of harmonic and melodic development from one generic origin, namely harmonic series, while the formal aspect of the work was determined by the palindromic principle. Dorothea Hofmann, a German author, drew inspiration for her song cycle *Remembering Shakespeare* for soprano, violin and piano from Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, striving to find a musical reflection of the playwright's

personifications of an archaic world in the movements *The Moon*, *The Fates*, *Love*, *The Fairy* and *Bottom's Dream*. Stylistically heterogeneous, Vladimir Genin's song cycle *The Last Moments* for soprano, violoncello and piano was built on combining compositional techniques such as dodecaphony, rhythmic and melodic variation and minimalist procedures in order to depict the rich emotional and notional world of the poems by Xenia Evangelista. In Milana Stojadinović-Milić's work *Suze* [*Tears*] for soprano, alto flute and piano, the collage structure of the book *U senci Hermesa – zbornik vekovnih maštarija* [*In Hermes's Shadow – Collection of Age-Long Reveries*] by composer Dušan Radić, created from many fragments written by novelists and poets from different periods, was treated by music that was functionalized as 'tone painting', but also as 'narrative', executing sudden contrasts in atmosphere and mood. According to the composer, the collage character of the music becomes a destabilizing factor with respect to the ingrained intellectual and emotional world of the listener, intending to shock it and purge it. In the work with a suggestive title – *Mokranjac* for soprano and string quartet – Ivan Brkljačić established an attitude towards the national musical heritage not only by quotation procedures, but also through working with a *model*. Conceiving the work as a theme with variations, the author, in a dramaturgical sense, rendered the fragments of Mokranjac's opus (*Na kameni ispovjedanija* from the movement *Njest svjat* from *Opelo* [*Funeral Mass*], as well as excerpts from the I, III, V, VI, VIII, IX, X and XI *rukovet* [choral song cycles]), placed in the soprano part, as a kind of intermezzi between instrumental sections

that either develop these materials or evolve independently, although constantly keeping a close or distant reference to the mentioned fragments. Mokranjac's music is therefore brought to life as an 'echo' that is crucially shaped by the 'acoustics' of contemporary music language.

A special segment at the International Review of Composers was the concert of the *Secondhanders* ensemble, held in the Hall of the Belgrade Youth Centre. The ensemble, whose members are the founder Nebojša Ignjatović, double bass, Julijana Marković, violoncello, Aleksandra Stanić, viola, Gordana Čurguz, harp, and Jugoslav Hadžić, accordion, was assembled around a musical concept based on the idea about 'a workshop for remaking music'. It is carried out by using ready-made music templates and their recycling, whereas the emphasis is often on parody and each participant in the 'workshop' employs improvisation to a significant extent. In that respect, the audience was presented with Nebojša Ignjatović's authorial project containing six works – *Words of the day*, *Hardware agnostic*, *Draftwerk*, *Homeopatska sonatina* [*Homeopathic Sonatina*], *Žustro i bezveze* [*Strong and Wrong*], *Madopares and Jupreniles* – where the works of various composers (Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Philip Glass, Brian Eno, Dragana S. Jovanović) are taken, partly or entirely, and then reshaped in the act of performance, according to models found in the singing or playing practices of different styles of artistic and popular music. Apart from the potpourri of the aforementioned works by Nebojša Ignjatović, the *Secondhanders* ensemble performed compositions by Ivana Stefanović, Dragana Jovanović, Anica Sabo and Robert C. Cohen. The

composition *Duboki do* for electric guitar, double bass, marimba, piano, voice and crutch-o-loncello, by Ivana Stefanović, was conceived as a *work in progress*, i.e. as the not entirely fixed musical tissue made of an electronic recording to which various musical segments are added – quotations, excerpts, patterns. For this performance, a special instrument was constructed: the crutch-o-loncello, made of an orthopaedic aid repurposed into a musical instrument. Dragana Jovanović presented her work *Sounds of Mama Duna* for mixed vocal-instrumental ensemble that, apart from the instruments of the *Secondhanders*, included a saxophone, voice, CD player and an improvised instrument made from a fishing device – 'bučka' (a splashing rod for baiting catfish). Based upon a personification, where the Danube is presented as the 'aquatic primordial Mother', the work is executed to a significant extent through various vocalizations and noises made by the performers, while the life of the river is coloured by the musical idioms of the countries it flows through. The work *Nikomur ne povem* [*I Shall Tell No One*] for mixed choir, flute, violin, viola and violoncello by Anica Sabo was conceived as a vocal-instrumental underscoring of the hidden meaning of the poetry by the Slovenian poetess Barbara Korun, while Robert C. Cohen's *Sleep, little baby, sleep* for mixed choir and string quartet, after the verses of the English poetess Christine Rossetti, is akin to popular choral literature with its simple melodies and transparent texture, and it was presented to the Belgrade audience in one of the many existing arrangements.

The concert *Prijatelji iz Makedonije* [*Friends from the FYR Macedonia*], in the

Hall of the Composers' Association of Serbia, featured Maria Vrškova, piano, and Goran Načevski, baritone, who performed works by Pavle Merkù, Tomislav Zografski, Branka Popović, Ionel Petroi and Dejan Despić. The concert was opened by Merkù's cycle *Three Songs op. 15*, which showed the author's signature expression, based on respect for the traditional postulates of musical creation, expanded by certain more modern compositional means. Next, the work *Zapisi [Writings]* by Macedonian composer Tomislav Zografski was performed, presenting him as a declared Neoclassicist equipped with a rich palette of associations to the musical past. Inspired by the poetic style of the American poet Jerome Rothenberg, based on an experiment in syntax, form and content, as well as by the poetry of the North American natives, based on non-verbal phonetic sounds, dance or gesture, Branka Popović wrote the song cycle *Red Easy a Color* for baritone and piano, constructing the musical-poetical structure with decidedly reduced verbal means. The dominant acoustic and visual component included the use of sentences or phrases that suggest the theme of the work, but to the extent that allows the listeners to finish the story from their own point of view. In radically simplified musical language reduced to onomatopoeic models of jazz, French composer Ionel Petroi, in his work *Les melodies de Sancho Pansa* for baritone and string quartet, reacted to the banality of musical contents that are omnipresent in the modern environment. Choosing a fragment of a well-known Latin saying for the title, Dejan Despić, in his composition *Homo homini..., Opus 221*, subtitled as 'a behest', for baritone and piano quintet, created a short, hence effec-

tive musical underscore for the disturbing verses by the poet Jovan Nikolić, which in correspondence with the aforementioned saying reflect to a large degree the nature of human relations in the world we live in today.

The Review's closing concert, held in the Terazije Theatre, was reserved for the renowned Viennese ensemble *Klangforum*, who performed works by Đuro Živković, Hans Zeder from Germany, and Salvatore Sciarrino from Italy. The fact that this ensemble, specialized in performing contemporary artistic music and, at the same time, one of the most distinguished among such ensembles in the world, appeared for the second time at the International Review of Composers (the ensemble performed for the first time in 2009), not only additionally emphasized its international character, but gave the opportunity to the domestic audience to enjoy a musical event of the highest performance quality. Đuro Živković's composition *On the Guarding of the Heart* for chamber orchestra is conceived as an 'instrumental cantata', based on the concept of music as a medium of fathoming the depths of the inner world, the spiritual world of a human being and the quest for the 'hidden treasures of the heart'. This introspective musical process was carried out through a seemingly inarticulate acoustic mass, made of a host of auditory stimuli produced by the most diverse treatments of the instruments. The concept of the musical work as primarily a sound event tinged the entire concert evening of *Klangforum*, showing its different forms in the works by Hans Zeder and Salvatore Sciarrino. Zeder's *Cabaret Voltaire* for soprano and chamber orchestra, based on the 'sound poetry' of Hugo Ball and its

‘verses without words’, stressed the ‘structural thinking’ that the author achieves by making the performers utter syllabic forms as ‘structural germs’, with the idea of their sequencing and integration into a complex (sometimes even polymetric) network. Through creating colouristic, dynamic and character ‘sounds of silence’ in the work *Quaderno di strada* for baritone and chamber orchestra, and with the emphasis on the process of listening, which he understands as an emotional experience, Salvatore Sciarrino strove to sharpen the hearing and deliver it from layers of experience that could functionalize it towards any kind of semantic framework. Thus, the composer conceived the work as the ‘renewal’ of audibility, as a prerequisite for opening the spirit for the unmediated experience of sound.

Keeping up with the practice of the specific conceptualizations of the yearly programmes, this edition of the *International Review of Composers* also proved the sustainability of such a selectorial approach, which greatly contributes to a clear insight into recent artistic musical production at home and abroad, and additionally profiles the identity of each edition of the festival. However, it seems that the festival’s character of a panoramic digest – which is still present and is not bypassed in the aforementioned conceptualizations – could be articulated in the future by focus-

ing on one particular kind of production, which could be related, for instance, to the *mainstream* of contemporary artistic music, in order to create a reflexivity of domestic production compared to world tendencies. But rerouting the Review in this direction would certainly necessitate the re-examination of its function and role in the context of the domestic music scene, and also its place in a wider international context, which it already aspires to belong to, by its title. This edition of the festival presented a fertile landscape of Serbian music at the beginning of the 21st century, enriching it with an insight into the diverse poetical directions of foreign authors. The stress placed on vocal production showed that the human voice is still a provocative medium of musical expression, even for contemporary authors, while the aesthetical and poetical contours of the presented works showed the same kind of discursiveness that can be found in other genres. With its high-class performance aspect, as well as the wide interest of the (mostly musical) public, the *International Review of Composers*, in its jubilee year, affirmed its solid position on the cultural map of the capital city, which could certainly be further refined by building in more ideas for the festival’s programme concept.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović