

can only presume the story behind the pictorial theme and must be even more cautious when labelling an instrument. There existed a great wealth of instruments under various names in the popular and court cultures of the Balkans (for instance, see the survey on pp. 246ff). There is no simple rule for applying them in the interpretation of iconographic sources.

Obviously, the imperial ceremonial culture of Byzantium, together with the ancient pictorial tradition, is the iconographic basis for the middle-Byzantine period, i.e. until 1200. During the era of the Macedonian school of painting and into the 15th

century, local painters grew more assertive regarding the tradition; one also finds traces of contact with 15th-century Western culture. Finally, in iconography dating from the Ottoman rule, the popular culture of the lower classes is strongly felt; the popularity of Turkish instruments becomes evident. It is fascinating to follow Pejović's description of the impact of socio-political changes on the depiction of music. Her book is a product of an untiring and lifelong effort. We are deeply grateful to her for offering us a thorough understanding of the rich and variegated history of instruments in the visual arts in the Balkans.

Article received on 15th Jun 2014
Article accepted on 21st Jun 2014
UDC: 78.081.1/.4(086.76)(049.32)

Ivana Miladinović Prica

**The *Construction Site* Ensemble for
New Music: CD "4"**

(Recording Studio of the Faculty of
Music in Belgrade, 2013,
ISBN 978-86-89621-00-6)

The *Construction Site* Ensemble for New Music is one of those protagonists of cultural life in these parts that manage to keep the Serbian contemporary music scene 'alive' by various aspects of their work, in spite of the unstable transition milieu and institutional crises. Opening new fields of work that, apart from performing and ex-

ploring (the sound of) contemporary music, include organizational efforts in carrying out programme concepts and ideas, this young ensemble 'radiates' great energy, enthusiasm, and an astute sensibility.

Specializing for contemporary music performance, in terms of its artistic profile, the *Construction Site* are a unique presence on our scene. Since the very beginning, the group have rejected the idea of the standardization and schematism of the performing body, as well as sticking to the canonical repertoire, features that for a long time have been considered essential for any chamber ensemble. On the contrary, the *Construction Site* in its permanent line-up gathers 20 chamber musicians/soloists who perform in most diverse instrumental combinations. One of its main goals is performing domestic and foreign pieces written in the 20th and the 21st century, which are un-

derrepresented on the concert stage. Since its inception, the ensemble has pursued a vigorous concert activity, with well-received appearances at festivals of contemporary music, many ‘dedications’ and premieres of chamber and stage-music works, which demonstrates their genuine devotion to the affirmation of contemporary music expression on the Serbian scene, as well as the ensemble’s status of a representative agent in the domestic cultural and artistic environment.¹

In order to preserve, promote, and expand the repertoire of contemporary chamber music, in its second year, the *Construction Site* Ensemble in the second year of its existence initiated the endeavour of releasing compact discs. Although at this time we will not delve into an analysis of the cultural policy, music industry, and media situation in Serbia, we must note that the ensemble’s CD featuring chamber works by domestic authors, independently released in June 2013, is a rare example of a sound carrier made in Serbia containing works of contemporary Serbian music,

¹ The ensemble gave premiere performances of chamber works by Ivan Brkljačić, Svetlana Savić, Vuk Kulenović, Srđan Hofman, operas by Branka Popović (*Petrograd / Petersburg*), Tatjana Milošević (*Ko je ubio princezu Mond [Who Murdered Princess Mond]*), etc. Incidentally, it was this ensemble who at the 21st Review of Composers, in November 2012, took the brunt of the festival programme, whose motto that year – *Construction Site: The Newest Expanses of Sonic Architecture* – was inspired by the ensemble’s name. The repertoire of the *Construction Site* includes seminal works of modern music, such as Arnold Schönberg’s melodrama *Pierrot lunaire*, which they perform in a staged version at the *Madlenianum* theatre. <http://www.baustelle.rs>

which also fills a significant gap in the domain of presenting chamber music.²

This release was realized by, one may safely say, the ‘core’ of the ensemble – the pianist Neda Hofman, on whose initiative the ensemble was first established, violoncellist Srđan Sretenović, mezzo-soprano Ana Radovanović, and baritone Vladimir Dinić. However, the number four in the title refers not only to the performing line-up, but also to the contents of the release: four compositions by four domestic authors with whom these artists have been in close collaboration for many years.

Therefore, the programme was conceived as a sort of ‘dispersed’ cross-section of contemporary chamber music. Lacking a ‘macromusical’ signifier or grand ‘meta-narrative’, the composers came up with four ‘small’ stories, presenting their personal views of various social phenomena – from problematizing musical identities stemming from the society of the spectacle, in the work *Le beau est toujours bizarre* by Nataša Bogojević (1966), to searching for the lost *joie de vivre* in the age of globalization, in the cycle *Soneti [Sonnets]* by Svetlana Savić (1971), to conflicting and dramatic scenes, or, rather, comical stories emanating from interpersonal interaction and relationships, in *Lorem ipsum* by Branka Popović (1977) and *Proleće [Springtime]* by Ivan Brkljačić (1977).³

² The recording was made at the Recording Studio of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade; sound engineer and producer: Srđan Hofman; editor: Neda Hofman; design: Đorđe Vasić; total duration: 47’37”. The project was carried out with the support of Sokoj – Serbian Music Authors’ Organization.

³ The ensemble premiered this programme in their concerts held at the halls of Matica srpska

Although this is but a small sample, comprising only four works, the release offers an insight into various branches of the chamber genre. In the early 20th century, for instance, chamber music was where Arnold Schönberg's emancipation of the dissonance took place and today, in much the same way, composers turn to this genre in their quests and endeavours to find new dimensions of sound, new possibilities for vocal and instrumental expression, new representational aspects of music, as well as the influence of technology and media. All of this has therefore contributed to a kind of 'hybridization' and 'augmentation' of the chamber genre, as well as confirmed its vitality.

Hence, four completely different poetics have come together on this release and a close listening reveals that the composers found the specific timbre of this quartet (two voices, piano, and violoncello), inclined to a lower register, rather inspiring. Quite familiar with the performers' interpretative capabilities and individual features, they highlighted the traits of this specific medium in various ways, at the same time striving to impose on it their own musical expression.

in Novi Sad and Composers' Association of Serbia in Belgrade on 16 and 17 May 2013, respectively, and then made a recording of it in June 2013 in the Recording Studio of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. The pieces by Svetlana Savić, Branka Popović, and Ivan Brkljačić were completed in 2013, whereas the work by Nataša Bogojević was written in 2008, and the ensemble premiered it in 2010, at the 19th International Review of Composers in Belgrade. Apart from *Soneti*, written for a female voice, violoncello, piano, and (live) electronics, the remaining works are written for a mezzo-soprano, baritone, violoncello, and piano.

The opening work on the CD – *Le beau est toujours bizarre* by Nataša Bogojević – may be described as a postmodern, a-historical pastiche, featuring a 'schizophrenic decomposition' of language and temporality. With their suggestive rendering of a dialogue⁴ between Klaus Nomi, a German singer known for his extraordinary vocal abilities, which he sought to employ on the underground pop-rock scene of New York City, and a neo-postmodern pastiche, the performers succeeded in their intention to provoke the listener's sense of hearing, constantly motivating it to active participation. This poly-stylistic musical tissue thus includes samples of heterogeneous origins, stemming from the worlds of both high and popular music – from numerous transformations of Nomi's sonorities, melodic fragments of his pop songs, to simulacra and pseudo-quotations of Henry Purcell, Nomi's favourite composer.

While this work relates to the composer's own artistic experience and living abroad,⁵ the pieces by Branka Popović and Ivan Brkljačić are preoccupied with representing interpersonal relations. Thus, for instance, Popović emphasizes the musical and acoustic potentials of the meaningless, de-semantized text *Lorem ipsum*, which has been used in printing since the 16th century for presenting the appearance of a book. By putting the vocal and instrumental parts in various relationships – expositions of materials in reduction, the repetition of melodic and rhythmic patterns, which at certain times makes keeping precise beat and intonation difficult – the author presents, i.e.

⁴ Referring to a text by Milan Pribišić.

⁵ Nataša Bogojević has lived in the United States since the mid-1990s.

builds a latent drama between two people who have trouble communicating. The entire ensemble very convincingly demonstrates various expressive states of the characters, caused by mutual incomprehension, which was certainly facilitated by the author's good command of the features of this ensemble and most of all, the vocal capabilities of the singers (for example, the mezzo-soprano part is very animated and expressive in the high register).

Likewise in *Proleće* [Springtime] by Ivan Brkljačić, listeners will easily recognize the emotion that inspired the composer in the creation of this piece. Attempting to reinterpret Duško Radović's humorous nursery rhymes ("Hoće – neće" ["Will – Won't"]) from his cycle *Sve što raste* [Everything that Grows] and "Da li ili ne" ["To Do It or Not"] from the cycle *Sedi da razgovaramo* [Sit Down and Let's Talk]) through music as persuasively as possible and match them with the repertoire of a contemporary music ensemble, the author built a unique musical tissue by stringing together pronouncedly rhythmic sections and considerably calmer segments of a more rarefied texture. Although seemingly performed 'in one sitting', the composition is very challenging both interpretatively and technically, and special demands are placed before the vocal soloists (let us mention, for example, the many 'staccato moments', glissandi, chanting that sounds like folk singing, 'legato technique', etc.). The entire ensemble equally participates in rendering the overall atmosphere of the work – optimism and humour – which precisely determined its place in the 'finale' of the programme.

In terms of technique and performance, the cycle *Soneti* [Sonnets] by Svet-

lana Savić is the most extensive and challenging work on this release.⁶ Transposing the sonnet form into a musical context assumes not only the meaning of an encounter of different styles and codes, Renaissance, Baroque, Western, and Byzantine music, but also opens a space for dialectic movement between what is one's own and what is someone else's, the individual and the collective, variance and repetition, invention and convention, the electronic and the acoustic, interpretation and creation. This new 'mode' of music-making, which relies of synchronizing the metre and temporal structures of the electronic and acoustic parts, certainly presents a great interpretative challenge. While in the first two compositions the performers coordinate with the constant, fixed background of the electronics, a kind of acoustic *archive* that includes poetic declamation, the concrete sounds of birds chirruping, the human voice, a toy piano, lute, glockenspiel etc., the synergy of these layers is much more complex in the third movement, "*La vita fugge*". There, the performers, namely, have much more freedom; in fact, they *initiate* a great number of events in the electronic part, since the electronic modifications of the sound of the piano and violoncello happen in real time. Two layers – the acoustic and the electronic – although effectively present, are integrated (and per-

⁶ The cycle *Soneti* is made of three pieces: *La Douce Nuit* for violoncello, piano and electronics; *Looking on Darkness* for female voice, violoncello, piano and electronics; and *La vita fugge* for female voice, violoncello, piano and live electronics. The compositions are written after the sonnets by Michelangelo, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Baudelaire and Raša Perić.

ceived) as a homogenous musical tissue and it is their mutual listening, dialogues, multiple (micro)delays, echoes of instrumental motives and acoustic modulations that create the illusion of an unbounded, extended acoustic space. The electronics was, therefore, a challenge not only for the composer but also to the performers, who, in her words, were used as ‘permanent soloists’. Thus we may conclude that in these circumstances of performance, ‘the limits of the possible’ are pushed precisely thanks to the psychological sensitivity of the performers’ ears and their individual engagement, and not (only) due to the fact that “only the physiological sensitivity of the listener’s ear, and the artistic sensitivity of the composer’s, prescribe limits to the possible”,⁷ as Paul Griffiths has argued regarding the development of electronic music.

By their high-quality interpretation, purposefully but unobtrusively, in some of the pieces confronting what was almost a sort of *tour de force* (particularly in *Soneti*), the members of the *Construction Site* Ensemble succeeded in their efforts to bring together these diverse compositional writings. Therefore, one should approach this carefully directed recording debut with an open mind, as a listener-*flâneur*, embarking on an acoustic promenade, searching for the internal narrative that these compositions construct and the *Construction Site* Ensemble brings to life, confirming in the best possible way the claim that performance is (a secondary) creation.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

⁷ Paul Griffiths, *A Guide to Electronic Music*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1979, 7.