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**Vladimir Jovanović: *Kamerna opera  
 Madlenianum***

[*The Madlenianum Chamber Opera*]

Author of the voluminous publication *Madlenianum Chamber Opera* (520 pages, hardcover, Latin, Serbian Theatre Museum, Belgrade 2014), vocal pedagogue Vladimir Jovanović, retired professor of the Novi Sad Academy of Arts, 2000-2005. Artistic Secretary of the Chamber Opera and at the same time performer-soloist, known to the Serbian public from books about Nikola Cvejić, baritone, Djurdjevka Čakarević, mezzo soprano, members of Yugoslav and foreign opera houses, from publications dedicated to the guest appearances abroad of the National Theatre in Belgrade's Opera Company (so far the only detailed testimony about the Belgrade Opera Company's tours), as well as on other topics that touch upon the Serbian scene (Massenet's *Don Quixote*) and Serbian literature (*Poetry of Desanka Maksimović as an inspiration to Serbian composers*).

A new work, a history of the Chamber Opera in Zemun, is evidence that Vladimir Jovanović did not "draw a line" (a collection of his verses and stories *I draw the line* came out in December 2013). The book covers the period from when the Chamber Opera began its activities in 1998, until

they ceased in 2005; in fact, until the termination of its existence according to the conception of what had been defined and maintained by its Administration from the beginning. Jovanović's book is a comprehensive and very detailed history of the "youngest" opera institution in our country, about the work of the Madlenianum Chamber Opera, a privately-managed opera company – the endowment of Madeleine Zepter-Janković.

In the "overture" to the book, a kind of pre-history of Serbian operatic endeavour, entitled *From the Opera on the Boulevard to the Chamber Opera in Zemun* (11–45), Jovanović set out from 1868, i.e. 1882, when the Royal National Theatre performed *The Fortune-Teller* by Davorin Jenko, the first Serbian operetta. On pp.13–15, he gives a concise and clear presentation of the first, privately-run opera house in Serbia, Belgrade's "Opera on the Boulevard", a musical and theatrical institution founded by bassist Žarko Savić, which only lasted from 1909–11.

Regardless of the fact that Savić (an artist himself, and a vocal pedagogue of international reputation, with considerable organizational skills) had invested a large part of his personal wealth in the "Opera on the Boulevard", numerous obstructions, as we know, led to its closure. This is followed by a summarized but very meaningful overview of the history of the National Theatre in Belgrade, which covers the period from 1920 to 1990 (pp. 16-33). One should not lose sight of the fact that we have a history of our (Serbian) opera, which has been dealt with thoroughly only in the period between the two World Wars.

The author informs us on pp. 33–43 about how the Madlenianum Chamber

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Opera came into being, leading us into the turbulent times of a disintegrating Yugoslavia, the bombing of Serbia and Montenegro, and the change of government at the turn of the millennium. It was at such a time that Gordan Dragović, organizer and director, successfully achieved his idea of creating the first chamber opera, not only in Serbia but also in the Balkans, as it turned out. Official factors had little understanding for Dragović's ideas, though there were rare exceptions. However, intelligent and wealthy friends were at hand, the agile Janković-Zepter couple, Milan and Madeleine, who were ready to make such an investment.

But neither were these important patrons immune from obstruction that came from many quarters, so we are aware of how much courage and endurance (not just money), Mrs. Zepter, an art benefactor, must have had in an environment where any mention of "private" regarding various cultural or educational activities in Serbia was met with antagonism. We only have to remember the incredible resourcefulness of the dancer, Maga Magazinović, at the end of 1910, in opening her private school for "rhythmic and plastic movement" in Belgrade, who - unlike Žarko Savić and Madeleine Janković - was without any means, at all. The same can be said of Gordan Dragović, who had the courage to introduce a new organizational model in our country, using the experience of modern theatrical institutions across Europe.

Namely, the Chamber Opera was a company without a permanent artistic ensemble that focused primarily on young and capable performers, who were engaged for a project, which means that separate teams were created for each show. These

contemporary experiences were also reflected in the structure of the Madlenianum building, i.e. the former "Zemun Opera House" which was rebuilt from its foundations. We would like to add that the new opera house had a shelter, where the people of Zemun sought refuge during the NATO bombing.

The first chapter *Testimony* (pp. 47–194) contains interviews the author of the book had with the artists directly linked with the activities of the Chamber Opera, which soon became a ballet (and publishing!) institution, as well. First, there is Gordan Dragović, head of the Madlenianum Opera, its artistic director, with the most comprehensive text (50 pages), followed by Vesna Marković, Dragović's deputy coordinator, Mladen Jagušt, conductor, Krunoslav Simić, dancer and choreographer, Nono Dragović, director, Konstantin Kostjukov, the principal and head of Belgrade's National Theatre Ballet, the first baritone of the National Theatre's Opera, Miodrag Miša Jovanović, Balint Varga, concertmaster of the Madlenianum Orchestra, and director and writer Radoslav Lazić.

The testimonies of those who were interviewed are especially valuable. Gordan Dragović starts off the interviews, and his presentation, packed with interesting data, reads like a thrilling adventure story, with progress and peaks, but no happy ending. The Chamber Opera ceased to exist in April 2005, without its repertoire being repeated anywhere else, again. Besides Dragović, its leader, all of the interviewed artists and organizers regretted the demise of the young opera theatre that in 2002 had joined the international "Operas of Europe" association, and argued rightly that changing the conception of the Madlenianum as a cham-

ber opera, by introducing drama components in its program had created a method of theatre organization that had already been in existence and was now mostly abandoned on the modern world scene.

The kind of repertoire we were thereby deprived of is recounted in another chapter *Criticism* (pp. 195–351), which includes articles on the Madlenianum's performances each season, of which there were six. In short, the author presents what has been written about the operas *Il Matrimonio Segreto* (The Secret Marriage) by D. Cimarosa, *The Rape of Lucretia* by B. Britten, *Signor Bruschino* by G. Rossini, *Die Kluge* (The Clever Girl) by K. Orff in two versions, *Two widows* by B. Smetana and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and about the ballets *Orpheus in the Underworld* by K. Simić, *Nijinsky-The Golden Bird* by G. Dragović, *Liederabend* of D. Sifnios and V. Logunov and *Triptych* by R. Ulea.

Performing activity was by means exhausted with the aforementioned. In the third chapter *Theatrology-Bibliography* (pp. 361–436), there is a list of performances and concerts that were held in the Madlenianum Chamber Opera from 1998 to 2005, with all the available data on the number of performances, and guest performances in Serbia and abroad (which is extremely important), participants in the per-

formances and concerts of soloists, singers and dancers, conductors, directors, choreographers, stage and costume designers, members of the chorus and orchestra, librettists and translators, including publishing activities, which ceased in 2003, its last publication being Wagner's *Opera and Drama*. Coloured photos from the opera and ballets performed appear on pp. 351–360

The fourth chapter *Personalities and Documents* (pp. 441–518) contains a chronologically updated selection of writings about the beginnings and the activities of the Chamber Opera from 1997 till 2005, followed by the usual indexes with names of personalities and stage shows as well as information about the author, and an abstract in English.

This impressive book by Vladimir Jovanović, which represents a real treasure for historians of culture, musicologists and teatrologists is intended for professionals, but it is also accessible to the general reading public, who are interested in cultural life of Serbia.

Excellently conceived and systematized, the history of the privately owned Madlenianum Chamber Opera, should in any case serve as a model for a future history of opera and ballet activities in the national theatres of Belgrade and Novi Sad.