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The 23rd International Composers' Review

The 23rd International Composers' Review, held between 16 and 20 September 2014, was conceived to mark a jubilee – 100 years since the death of Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac. Also, 2014 was the 20th anniversary of the Mokranjac Award, which was established in 1994. The prize was established by the Composers' Association of Serbia and is awarded to the most successful new composition performed in the previous calendar year. Therefore, the programme of the 23rd International Composers' Review comprised works that have won the Award over the past 20 years, as works that made a significant contribution to Serbian contemporary music.

Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac is a unique figure in our musical culture, who, on the basis of folklore and, in that regard, following the footsteps of his predecessor Kornelije Stanković, as well as benefiting from his own musical training obtained in

Munich, Rome, and Leipzig, set the foundations of Serbian art music. He composed in the framework of a national romantic idiom, combining in his works, on the one hand, the creativity of folk music and, on the other, extraordinary technical skill in composition. His oeuvre, stylistically anachronous with regard to contemporary trends in European music, was, in terms of the socio-political circumstances of the time, a necessary and visionary beginning of professional music-making in Serbia. The works he created resulted from his surveying of what was needed and what could be done in his present environment. Therefore, he was a figure who understood his own time and had the imagination to conceive and articulate its artistic needs.

The 17 works that have won the Mokranjac Award since 1994 bear some of the qualities that also characterized the creativity and overall artistic activity of that great composer. Just as Mokranjac's oeuvre was a response to its own era, so these works, too, each responded to their own time. Contemporary tendencies in art have found expression in works by Serbian composers as well, and the selected works revealed the coexistence of different poetics and individual artistic expressions, as well as generic diversity.

The Forum was opened with a concert of the Symphony Orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, conducted by Bojan Sudić, which performed *concertante* and symphonic works by Vlastimir Trajković, Ivan Brkljačić, and Milan Mihajlović

that have won the Mokranjac Award in the past. The concert began with Trajković's Piano Concerto, an extensive work in three movements, featuring rich musical contents presented by an exciting alternation of dramatic/expressive and lyric sections, with a carefully constructed musical dramaturgy. A wealth of musical ideas is accompanied by a refined feeling for creating musical colour, creative combinations of instruments, along with well-balanced orchestral backdrops, resulting in a transparent and compact orchestral sound. The relationship between the soloist and the orchestra is carefully conceived, so that the virtuosic and technically rather demanding solo part gives the soloist a dominant role, without, however, preventing the orchestra from taking an active part in the construction of the musical flow. The pianist Natalija Mladenović performed as a rather inspired, precise, and strong interpreter.

This was followed by Ivan Brkljačić's symphonic cycle *Kada se SEDAM puta podigne zavesa* (When the Curtain Rises SEVEN Times) inspired by theatre and composed in 2002. This deftly written orchestral work rests on the precepts of minimalism and a dominantly repetitive mode of constructing musical form, but with rather expressive results. Using theatre as the source of inspiration infused this work with some other, "not so serious" musics, but dressed in new, "serious" clothes. The author's interest in different musical genres enabled him to combine them and allow them to coexist within a single work, with his extraordinary ability to unify and blend them into a compact whole – the composer first listened and observed, and then converted his impressions into music of his own. The seven miniatures were conceived

in such a way that their sum total produced a complex dramaturgical whole, while their diversified musical contents are posited with much skill, by means of an imaginative use of the medium.

The concert was concluded with a rendering of Milan Mihajlović's *Memento*, written in 1993 and inspired by the oeuvre of Vasilije Mokranjac. This remarkable work features a monolithic character in the construction of musical dramaturgy, harmony between form and content, and total control of all musical parameters. Its musical dramaturgy grows out of a careful development of musical material in a way that perhaps may be most aptly described as "organic growth", into a form that generates the impression that "it could not be any different". Although classical in terms of harmony and balance, this work is extremely effective, resting on an alternation of highly charged and touching, lyrical sections.

The second concert comprising previously awarded pieces featured the St. George Strings and the Construction Site New Music Ensemble, led by Biljana Radovanović, who, along with the soloists, Jasna Miličić Brandstätter (oboe), Ljubiša Jovanović (flute), Srđan Sretenović and Marko Miletić (violoncello), and Radoslav Milenković (narrator), performed works by Zoran Erić, Ivan Jevtić, Dejan Despić, and Ivana Stefanović.

Erić's *Oberon koncert za flautu i instrumentalni ansambl* (Oberon Concerto for Flute and Instrumental Ensemble), written in 1997, is the final segment of his cycle *Slike haosa* (Images of Chaos). Inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the work presents a post-minimalist score, whose musical flow is generated by repetitiveness. It rests on a reduced number

of musical cells, whose repetitions and minimal, subtle variations produce a musical flow based on alternating, juxtaposing, and combining musical blocks featuring a pronounced rhythmic activity and the flute treated as a solo part. The solo part is based on material that is occasionally pastoral in character, evoking another world, distant and fantastic. Unlike in minimalism, the repetitiveness does not produce a changed approach to musical time, a dilatation of the musical moment; on the contrary, each section in the work is compact and concise, and the result is not distanced, but expressive music. Filigree motivic working, combined with striking musical material of a specific harmonic-rhythmic setting, which dominates the piece, renders this work easily recognizable in terms of its author's compositional script. *Oberon koncert* is one of three works by Erić that have won the Mokranjac Award. The other two are *Šest scena komentara* (Six Scenes – Comments) for three violins and string ensemble, which won the award in 2001, and *Sedam pogleda u nebo* (Seven Glances at the Sky) for string sextet, which won it in 2008. Those two pieces were not performed at the 23rd Composers' Review.

Next on the programme was Ivan Jevtić's *Divertimento* for two violoncellos and string orchestra, which won the Mokranjac Award in 1999. This neoclassical work, with a special turn toward impressionism, unfolds in three movements of alternating tempi (fast–slow–fast), in a dynamic tangle of repetitive, prominently rhythmic sections, and lyric, broadly nostalgic melodic lines. Its diversified musical contents are skilfully presented in the medium, which resulted with a compact and clear sound of the ensemble.

Dejan Despić's *Diptych* for English horn and string orchestra, which won the Award in 2005, is another in a series of significant contributions that this prolific author presented to Serbian musical culture. It is a clever score, featuring a romanticist sensibility, in which the specific sonority of the English horn, skilfully retrieved and pronounced, delicately intertwines with the string orchestra. The score is minutely constructed, transparent in sound, and with a carefully carved dramaturgical curve.

The concert ended with Ivana Stefanović's work *Neobične scene sa Homerovog groba u Smirni – novi prilozi za Hansa Kristijana Andersena* (Unusual Scenes from Homer's Grave in Smyrna – New Additions to Hans Christian Andersen) for flute, chamber ensemble, and narrator, which won the Award in 2007. This work, complex in terms of genre, structure, and sound, was inspired by Andersen's fairytale *A Rose from Homer's Grave*. The work's dramaturgy is woven by means of building a refined relationship between the flute's solo part, the chamber ensemble, and the narrator's speech, and its complexity is reflected in the relationship between the music and the words – in the process of interpreting the verbal contents of the work, the music absorbs it, blends with it, encompasses it, and then, through an effect of synergy, the synthesis of those two media produces an entity more powerful than the mere sum of those two components. The composer's richness of musical ideas and sonic imagination were reflected in her careful treatment of the ensemble, with direct colours and a clear and clean sound.

The third concert dedicated to works that have won the Mokranjac Award featured the Construction Site New Music En-

semble, led by Biljana Radovanović, and the harp duo of Ljiljana Nestorovska and Milena Stanišić, who performed works by Ljubica Marić, Srđan Hofman, and Đuro Živković.

The concert began by playing a sound recording of *Sideral*, a work for mixed choir, piano, and strings by Vladan Radovanović, the 2013 Mokranjac Award laureate (recorded by the Choir and String Orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, led by Bojan Suđić, with Milivoje Veljić on the piano and Zoran Marinković as the sound recording engineer). In terms of structure, *Sideral* presents an extremely complex musical fabric, obtained through a hypertrophy of polyphonic thinking, with parallel leading of several polyphonic layers combined into a dense vertical axis and skilfully shaped into an exciting dramaturgical flow of a refined sonority. It was followed by Ljubica Marić's *Torzo* (Torso), the 1996 laureate. This major composer's last opus was woven by means of a delicate intertwining of violin, violoncello, and piano lines into a piece of developmental dramaturgy and compact sound, but ensuring that the individual parts remained finely carved, defined, and recognizable. The result of this fine weaving is a piece of profoundly introspective, contemplative music that compellingly consumes its listeners. Srđan Hofman's piece *Gledajući u ogledala Aniša Kapoor* (Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor) for two harps and sound processors won the Award in 2010. Works by the Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor are often covered with mirrors, whose curved surfaces provide a likewise curved reflection of their environment, which achieves the effect of blending the "reality" and its variant, almost identical, but still distorted

image, into a continual whole. In this piece, Hofman achieved an effect analogous to the effect that Kapoor's mirrors achieve in interference with the environment, by distorting and blending the sound of two harps in electronic processing with their acoustic sounds, into a unique sound event. The opening of the piece is characterized by a striking motive that strongly mobilizes the listeners' attention and then, through subtle transformations and relations between acoustic and processed sound, develops into a dynamic music-dramaturgical whole. In this piece, one may note a refined approach to sonority and a modernistic focus on the medium itself, on modelling sound as the primary material, but nonetheless with a firmly established link with the work's extra-musical inspiration, the analogy with Kapoor's sculptures, which broadens the domain of this piece and complements it with a visual dimension, making it almost immanent to the work.

The concert ended with Đuro Živković's *Asketska beseda* (Ascetic Discourse), which won the Mokranjac Award in 2012. The work's subtle sonic weaving, based on a text by Father Philimon, is a blend of exploring sound by means of extended instrumental performance techniques as the dominant mode of composing in Continental Europe, on the one hand, and the tradition of Byzantine and Russian church chanting, on the other. Živković pursued his search for his own individual expression by means of blending the traditional and the contemporary, similarly to the principle Stevan Mokranjac used in his own creative oeuvre.

Over the past 20 years, the Mokranjac Award was also given to three operas, which, however, were not performed on

this occasion, but the audience had an opportunity to see video recordings of their earlier performances. *Narcis i Eho* (Narcissus and Echo) by Aleksandra Anja Đorđević won the Award in 2002, *Zora D* by Isidora Žebeljan in 2003, and *Mileva* by Aleksandra Vrebalov in 2011. All three works follow contemporary trends in opera, the transformations this genre has undergone under its new social circumstances, and constitute a valuable contribution to Serbian cultural heritage. The author of *Narcis i Eho* skilfully combined various elements: the sound of Baroque opera with contemporary pop music. Isidora Žebeljan's *Zora D* reveals the composer's acute feeling for generating complex rhythmic structures and repetitive, almost hypnotic sections of a dance character, alternating with highly virtuosic vocal sections, whereas in *Mileva*, Aleksandra Vrebalov produced a rich and imaginative treatment of the orchestra by creating a series of specific and thoroughly conceived orchestral situations, as a dynamic background to what goes on in the vocal lines.

The 23rd Composers' Review also featured two concerts that did not comprise works that have won the Mokranjac Award. The first of those was given by the Forbidden City Chamber Orchestra from China, which presented new pieces of Chinese contemporary music. Following the spirit of Mokranjac's activities, the concert offered a blend of the traditional and the contemporary. The Orchestra consists of traditional Chinese instruments, which means that even contemporary music composed for it contains a layer of tradition. Still, the ensemble is treated with the experience of contemporary musical practice, which generates in these pieces a peculiar blend of

the old and the new. Along with pieces by Chinese composers, the concert also featured a piece by Aleksandar Vujić, *Kolo* (Round Dance), and the song *Pušči me* (Let Me Be) from Mokranjac's Tenth Garland, arranged for this ensemble. In this new instrumental colouring, these pieces assumed oriental overtones, and the concert as a whole revealed the potentials of combining various musical ingredients into a refined entity. The other concert was given by the Quo Vadis Trio from Ljubljana. In addition to works by Uroš Rojko, Pande Šahov, Vinko Globokar, and Nikolaus Brass, they also performed a work by Draško Adžić, *Od starina meh* (Olden Bellows), two tunes and a heterophony for clarinet and accordion, and a piece by Branka Popović, *Number 5* for clarinet, guitar, and accordion, especially written for this occasion. The concert was marked by the accordionist Luka Juhart's striking and virtuosic interpretation of Vinko Globokar's piece *Dialog über die Luft*.

The 23rd Composers' Review was marked by Mokranjac's jubilee, commemorating the creative figure whose activities set the foundations and direction of the development of Serbian art music, as well as by what came out of that beginning 100 years later. In his music, Stevan Mokranjac reacted to his own time, just as contemporary authors offer their visions of their own surroundings. That picture reveals extreme stylistic diversity, the coexistence of divergent individual author poetics, widely ranging from neoclassical, via expressionist, to post-minimalist scores, which also feature a blend of different musical genres. If in his lifetime, Mokranjac's style was anachronous with regard to Europe, today's outlook is completely different and current

trends in the field of classical music may be heard in these parts as well. The Symphony Orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, the St. George Strings, the Construction Site New Music Ensemble, the conductors Biljana Radovanović and Bojan Sudić and soloists Natalija Mladenović, Jasna Miličić Brandstätter, Ljubiša Jovanović, Srđan Sretenović, Marko Miletić, and the duo comprising Ljiljana Nestorovska and Milena Stanišić performed as confident, skilful, and inspired interpreters, faced with the daunting task of interpreting complex scores that are, unfortunately, seldom heard in our concert halls.

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**Fourth Symposium of the ICTM
Study Group on Music and Dance
in Southeastern Europe**

The ICTM Study group on music and dance in Southeastern Europe is a dynamic and rapidly growing group of scholars dedicated to capturing the complexities of music and dance genres in Southeastern Europe. Its fourth biennial symposium was

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organized jointly by the Faculty of Music in Belgrade and the Petnica Science Centre in Petnica, Valjevo from 24th September to 1st October 2014. This symposium was dedicated to the sisters, Ljubica and Danica Janković, whose pioneering work in dance research in Serbia laid the foundations for the discipline of ethnochoreology in Serbia and beyond. The guest of honour was professor Olivera Vasić from the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, whose long and productive career in ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology sets an example for sustained quality research in music and dance. As customary at the Study group meetings, the conference offered many additional activities including evening concerts, dance and singing workshops and an excursion to the Pustinja monastery. As usual, the hospitality of the conference organizers and informal get together sessions enhanced by the beautiful Petnica scenery were impeccable and memorable.

The conference themes were organized around three major research topics. The first topic was improvisation (17 out of 54 papers), which addressed, among many other issues, the following questions: spontaneity and competition (Lozanka Peychева, Daniela Ivanova Nyberg); identity: urban/ethnic/gender/religious (Alexander Markovic, Ivanka Vlaeva, Jane Sugarman, Şebnem Sençerman, Ahmed Tohumcu); teaching and learning (Elsie Dunin, Petac Silvestru, Miroslav Stoisavljević, Péter Lévai); community discourses (Nick Green, Ferruh Özdiñer); tradition and change (Athena Katsanevaki, Speranta Radulescu, Aleksandra Kuzman, Merve Eken-Küçükaksoy), and many more. Improvisation proved to be an important and potent topic for music and dance research. The