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## NEW WORKS

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### **THE OEUVRE OF VLASTIMIR TRAJKOVIĆ (1947–2017): A POETICS OF THE TIME (AND) OF ART**

Art is not only, in Proustian terms, that privileged place where the material of life is accumulated, nor is it *time regained*, time retold, time that delineates, *time lost*, time lived; art is also the place where the material of art's own 'life' is accumulated, where it is found anew. Vlastimir Trajković's final work, *Suita española para flauta y 15 arcos*, op. 33 (2016), is the place where his oeuvre comes to an end and, at the same time, the place where his historical time acquires a new sense. Although *Suita española* rests on Trajković's aesthetic and poetic paradigms – the ancient Greek, mythical paradigm, the French music of Debussy and Ravel, and, in an imaginary way, the Spanish soundscapes of Manuel de Falla – its 'subject' is the time. Thus, rather than closing the circle by resorting to auto-poetic gestures, this piece reveals itself as the final, third pillar of the

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composer's musical edifice, which is essentially predicated on a creative examination of the encounters of music and time.

Trajković's early works, his final project at the university, *Tempora retenta, studija za simfonijski orkestar*, op. 2 [*Tempora retenta, a Study for Symphony Orchestra*, Op. 2] (1971); then, *Arion, Le Nuove musiche per chitarra ed archi*, Op. 8 (1979), and, finally, *Suita española*, constitute those three moorings, where time is thematized through music, so that, unfolding between them, music could address its own, historical time, as well as the individual history of the composer's creativity. That history, however, is further shaped, through these three pieces, by different modes of music encountering time. In *Tempora retenta*, time is deferred by means of music, retained, in the Barthesian key of the "melodic code" of the narrative: "What sings, what drifts, moves by accidents, arabesques or directed delays ... the series of enigmas, their suspended unveiling, their delayed resolution";<sup>1</sup> in *Arion*, there is "immobility in motion", continuity as a result of the self-production of a temporal series; in *Suita española*, however, a semblance of mutual derivation between the temporal and the narrative is achieved in timelessness, as eternity in time or out of time, and ... its secret relationship with death".<sup>2</sup> This 'moving' from one pole of Trajković's oeuvre to the next may be seen as a gradual suspension of time, all the way to its 'abolition': if Trajković's early work still featured, in a modernist, Ligetian, Messiaenian way, the aporia of continuity and rupture, the 'emergences' of the unpredictably new, which could appear at any point in the continuum of time; if his middle work, by means of a repetitive procedure and reduction, of difference amidst the same – by means of deviation – still reinstated mythical, 'circular time', then the last work concerns the paradox of a renewal of narration under the conditions of extra-temporality, a deep layer of extensive, historical time – from childhood to death – realized in a landscape where every history, every time, and every story are transcended. If, again using Proustian terms, the "time lost", or lived, was carved into a petrified time-space, or, if it is made present as a semblance of moving in immobility, then, finally, as the "material" of life, it is transcended in the "time regained", the time of art.

This tension between different kinds of time in Trajković has its semantic and affective and thereby also stylistic equivalents – as music, time, and *psyché* coming together – or itself results from them. For, resting on its three poles,

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, 32. ["...ce qui chante, ce qui file, se meut par accidents, arabesques ou retards dirigés... la suite des énigmes, leur dévoilement suspendu, leur résolution retardée."]

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit, II*, Paris, Seuil, collection "Points", 1984, 191–192. ["... l'éternité dans le temps ou hors du temps et ... du rapport secret de celle-ci avec la mort."].

the composer's oeuvre oscillates between searching for the ideal time-space, a 'frozen', distant, lost world where the contradictions of time and reality would be resolved, the contradictions of inevitable yet unpredictable, both intimate and subconscious manifestations, explosions of unrest, foreboding, despair, fear, discontent, drama, an expressionist, distorted image of the world, scattered, like in a James Ensor painting, in a multitude of un-reconciled oppositions. This tension is achieved in terms of examining the relation between continuity and discontinuity, *stasis* and *dynamis*, but Trajković was aware, in his oeuvre as a whole – and its ending showed that he had always occupied that same line, the line of the Bergsonian *durée* – of continuity as a condition for any kind of break, penetration, and difference. Consequently, in his pieces that belong to the same circle of works opened by *Tempora retenta*, such as *Duo for Piano and Orchestra*, Op. 4 (1973), *Sonata for Violin and Viola*, Op. 18 (1987), *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, Op. 20 (1990), however strongly those pieces might be penetrated by the world of life, one can even say that they entirely surrender to "lost", "real" time, the Augustinian *distentio animi* and its dissonances, which Trajković exposes by means of both harmony and, even more so, orchestration and texture, on the one hand, they are 'insinuated' by a repetitive and reductive immobility and, on the other hand, by immobilized, 'spatialized' time, scattered into a series of isolated moments, finally, by an almost absolutized linearity, continuity of melody or monody; through 'petrified', 'prolonged', and 'deferred' time and musical space compressed onto a single plane, they generate the impression as if all unpredictability and incident were *a priori* removed. All of these works manifest 'reversibility' as an essential bivalence and mutual conditioning between these paradigms of time. This is explicitly manifested in *Day, Four Hymns for Orchestra*, Op. 6 (1976), as well as in *Five Impromptus for Piano*, Op. 12 (1982). In the latter work, it is equally accomplished in its macro-form (the outer movements, featuring discontinuity and dissonance, frame the alternation of two paradigms in the second movement, the fragmented and spatialized third movement, and the repetitive fourth Impromptu) and in the correspondence between the second Impromptu and the piece as a whole. *Five Poems by Stéphane Mallarmé*, Op. 29 (2006), in a paradoxical way, prevent the imaginary, Symbolistic landscape from erasing Mallarmé's *anxiety* in Trajković's interpretation and thereby, in fact, reinstating the *affetto*, explicitate this emotional counterpart of contradictory, discontinuous, un-configured time.

When Trajković introduced the reference in his creative explorations of the relation between time and music, precisely, the Greek mythological reference mediated by early Baroque music in *Arion, Le nuove musiche per chitarra ed archi*, he, on the one hand, singled out the paradigm of moving in immobility

as the direction of his oeuvre's time and, on the other hand, tied it to the Greek,<sup>3</sup> Arcadian (and Baroque) beginnings, as his own model of modernity; finally, he also introduced the semiotization of time as a constant in his oeuvre. The circle of compositions embodying this paradigm also includes those that are paratextually linked to the mythical, unhistorical plane, to 'sacred time', that is, to the idea of the *return*: to Nature, to the classical thematic, formal, modal, as well as linguistic archetype. This is the case in *Zefiro torna*, Op. 25 (2001) and *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*, Op. 24 (1996), as well as in the epilogue, or final sanctuary of the entire oscillatory musical flow of the *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra*, Op. 23 (1993). The idea of 'frozen' time, lost in the distance, opened Trajković's oeuvre to communication with the time of art and not only that of music, but also the post-Hellenistic cultural context, which for Trajković comprised in the first place the cultural area of the Mediterranean. For Trajković, the time of art was mythical time and his postmodernism *qua* trans-textual and trans-stylistic dialogue may only be truly understood from this temporal paradigm. Hence, through the pillars of their creative evolution, Trajković's compositions, via a web of links with stylistic and textual references to European music, often multiply mediated, but also referring to each other, through auto-poetic gestures and self-quotations, retroactively also spatialize the time of his work: they construct their own mythical circle. They form a path toward the 'time regained', which is realized in his final work, not by accident, in the connectedness and resemiotization of self-quotations, precisely from those pieces of his that revive the Arcadian world, classical musical poetics, derivation and causality as the basis of historical, real time, which is transcended, however, in a post-historical, personal and artistic gesture, in an abolition of time and finitude.

Trajković thus rounded off not only the time of his art, but also his own, personal time, where music occupied the place of a perfect world, a place of harmony and serenity. After all, the 'life plan' of a subject, as a narrative subject, could not be realized, anyway, without or beyond art, *qua* moving along the border between the *time lost* and the *time regained*.

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<sup>3</sup> In his piano and viola concertos, the composer put the titles of the movements in Ancient Greek, hence they simultaneously denote modes of movement, as well as rhetorical patterns and affective states.