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**THE 13TH INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF COMPOSERS
(Belgrade, October 25-29, 2004)**

In the past several years, organizing the International Review of Composers, as the until recently only festival of contemporary art music in our country, has proven in many ways to be a mission impossible and a challenge which no longer refers merely to issues of profession, but also to walking the tightrope of a scandalously small budget that is uncertain almost to the last moment. Financial limitations not only influence the content, concept and duration of the Review, but also call into question the very holding of this festival. Last year's Review was held in a compressed, zipped variant which was also self-ironically indicated in its title. And for the first time in the history of this event, instead of in the second half of May, the 13th Review was held at the end of October. In this way, and with numerous compromises that were non-artistic in character, it fulfilled the imperative of its own continuity which now seems to be even more seriously threatened. It was with this most unpleasant and strongest impression of a renowned festival faltering in its 'tilting at windmills' that we monitored its progress this year.

The International Review of Composers was this time also conceived through two dominant programme modalities: a presentation of recent domestic and foreign music production through a selection of received material, and a promotion of topical performing practices in contemporary music. In the course of five days we heard 19 compositions selected by the Art Council and attended the concert of the *Slavko Osterc* trio – made up of a very unusual combination of piano, flute and saxophone in all the register variants, which our audience has not often been privileged to hear – which, arrived in Belgrade as part of a famous ensemble with a decades-long tradition after many years of negotiation and as the only foreign ensemble. Most of the concerts consisted of music-making by chamber ensembles: the Ensemble for New Music of the Faculty of Music under the direction of Vladimir Milić (October 29) and different *ad hoc* collaborations of domestic musicians of the younger generation under the direction of Aleksandar Djurov (October 28) in the Great Hall of the Student Cultural Centre, as well as the aforementioned Slovenian trio (October 26) in the "Cvijeta Zuzorić" Art Pavilion, which was for the first time included in the map of the Review. The custom of presenting the "Stevan Mokranjac" Award at the formal symphonic opening of the festival in the Great Hall of the Kolarac Foundation (The Symphony Orchestra of Radio and Television Serbia /RTS/ under the direction of Biljana Radovanović) was reintroduced at this year's Review. A thematic concert of electronic

music at which Elizabeth Sikora, soprano, made a guest appearance (October 27) promoted for the first time since the festival was established the hall of the Faculty of Music into one of the Review's venues.

This year's Review, like its predecessor, was conceived as a festival, but the presented compositions were not united by a firm criterion. Apart from an evening dedicated to electronic music, the rest of the concerts were very heterogeneous. The performed works – under the 'blissful' and yet not so liberating motto "everything is allowed" – advocated different aesthetics: from post-modern to utterly uninteresting academicism. The only thing uniting them was the fact that, as the rules prescribe, they were all created in the last three years. It was only at the concert of the *Slavko Osterc* trio that we heard older works (Osterc's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* and Uroš Krek's *Appassionato* for flute and piano). Although these works, being classical works of Slovenian music, did have their logical place at the concert of the said trio, they were not in conformity with the prevailing content of the Review.

Even though this Review, like the previous one, was truly international – almost twice as many foreign compositions as domestic ones were performed – that was still not enough to get an adequate impression of current trends in world music. The question is whether the received works represented an appropriate sample in terms of number and quality to provide the Art Council with greater and freer 'manoeuvring space'. In this regard, we should also point to the fact that the works of certain foreign composers (Sungji Hong, Dieter Kaufman, Filippo Perocco, Arvydas Malcys and Jakob Diehl) appear to have become regular factors of the Review programme so that we have had the opportunity, year after year or with shorter breaks, to 'follow' the creative phases of these artists. Accidentally or not, it was precisely the compositions of some of them (Kaufman's *Adaggio 2003* for soprano and electro-acoustic installation, Perocco's *pxf (piece of friend/fa)* for horn and piano and Malcys's *Land of the Disobedient*) that stood out from the other works by their quality.

At the 13th Review, like at the 12th, Serbian music was represented by members of the youngest generation of composers: the majority of them either as academy students (Teodora Stepančić, Maja Lučić) or with works created during their education (Stanoslava Gajić, Irena Popović). This fact in itself does not carry negative connotations. On the contrary! However, if the programmes of the past two Reviews have not seen a single work by an older author, then one is justified in asking what the reasons are for their low productivity.

A partial answer to this question was musically formed by Ivan Brkljačić in the composition *Kada se sedam puta digne zavesa (When the Curtain is Raised Seven Times)*, which opened the festival. The number seven, which is the number of movements in this work, has a personal meaning to the author, but it also symbolizes the very act of creation in general. By belonging to the genre of applied music and with its symmetrical structure, this work can also point to the vicious circle in which domestic production has found itself: if there are not enough opportunities for (good) performing, if there are no appropriate institutional

incentives and supports, what then is the fate of contemporary Serbian music? The Art Council of the Review provided a partial solution for encouraging domestic production by re-establishing the institution of commission, this time intended for the *Slavko Osterc* trio. Ivan Brkljačić was entrusted with the task and it was the right choice: the author's comment offered a multilayered and multidirectional provocation, and 'through' it sounded the *Cutting Edge* – the sharp, robust and witty result of established and clear authorial writing.

At this year's Review we could also hear qualitatively diverse performing achievements. The *Slavko Osterc* trio was impeccable. It was also a pleasure to attend a kind of comeback of the Ensemble for New Music of the Faculty of Music. Performing on the last evening of the festival, the members of this ensemble played with the kind of professionalism, understanding and seriousness that imbues a work with life and spirit, which was unfortunately sometimes lacking in the music-making of their younger colleagues the previous evening. And, despite the extraordinary efforts of conductor Biljana Radovanović, we had a similar impression at the concert of the Symphony Orchestra of RTS at the opening of the festival.

In this review we have presented only some observations about the 13th International Review of Composers. All these observations, even the critical ones, are overarched by a concern that is least of all professional, yet it seems crucial – the fate of this festival on the sidelines of the cultural policy. We, therefore, await the next review in the hope that our renowned festival will find a way to redefine the hub of contemporary artistic and music practice in our country.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić