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**THE 2005 “STEVAN MOKRANJAC” AWARD  
DEJAN DESPIĆ: DIPTIH  
for English horn and strings**

**Abstract:** The winner of the 2005 “Stevan Mokranjac” Award by the Association of Serbian Composers was Dejan Despić for his composition *Diptih (Diptych)* for English horn and strings (op. 166, 2003). This paper analyzes the circumstances in which the composition was created and, by way of a concise review of the composition, it determines its place in the extensive output of the author, who marked half a century of creative work in 2005.

**Key words:** Dejan Despić, *Diptych* for English horn and strings, “Stevan Mokranjac” Award, Jasna Miličić-Brendšteter (Yasna Brandstätter).

It has been precisely ten years since composer Dejan Despić, moved by Borges’s inspiring poem *Moments*, composed his “small musical autobiography” for chamber orchestra, giving it, one might say, a rather pessimistic title: *Na kraju puta (At the End of the Road)*. It was Despić’s 125<sup>th</sup> opus, a composition with which the author achieved one of the pinnacles of his creative career and at the same time created a work whose formal logic, based on “total self-quotation”, remains, as far as we know, unparalleled in music history.<sup>1</sup> Since then, in the past decade, Dejan Despić has been unflinchingly active in numerous fields of his diversified activity, gratified, as an author, to witness some of his “old” works, actively performed on domestic and international podiums, become anthological; meanwhile, he has composed as many as 55 new works, providing an opportunity for at least another, considerably extended, and somewhat altered, edition of his musical autobiography.

Over the course of 2005, which saw the celebration of Despić’s important anniversary – his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and half a century of prolific creativity! – the repertoire comprising six authorial concerts held in Novi Sad, Kragujevac, and Belgrade<sup>2</sup> was, for the given time span, not only a remarkable retrospective of

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see: Katarina Tomašević, *Dejan Despić, “Na kraju puta”, poema za kamerni orkestar...*, Novi Zvuk, Beograd, 1998, 11, 57-71.

<sup>2</sup> The performed compositions are listed in chronological order: *Nocturno (Nocturne)*, op. 5a; *Jadranski soneti (Adriatic Sonnets)*, op. 17; *Dubrovački divertimento (Dubrovnik Divertimento)*, op. 18b, *Vinjete (Vignettes)*, op. 43a and 43c; *Concerto grosso*, op. 45; *Triptih (Triptych)*, op. 63; *Koncert za Natašu (Concerto for Nataša)*, op. 67; *Tri sonatine (Three Sonatinas)*, op. 72; *Mančester trio (Manchester Trio)*, op. 93; *Jefimija Lazaru (Jefimija’s Eulogy of Lazar)*, op. 94; *Dubrovački kanconijer (Dubrovnik Chansonnier)*, op. 96; *Tri meditacije (Three Meditations)*, op. 99 and 99a; *Concerto sereno*, op. 110, *Đulići (Rose Buds)*, op. 118, no. 1; *Na kraju puta (At the End of the Road)*, op. 125; *Koštantina pesma (Koštana’s Song)*, op. 128; *Partita concertante*, op. 129; *Ditiramb (Dithyramb)*, op. 131; *Počasnica Stevanu Mokranjcu (Tribute to Stevan Mokranjac)*, op. 132b; *Reformator (Reformist)*, op. 133; *Knjiga madrigala (Book of Madrigals)*, op. 147 (5); *Dvopev i igra (Duet and a Dance)*, op. 151; *Prolećne pesme (Vernal Songs)*, op. 167; *Blizina proleća (Spring is Nigh)*, op. 171. Part of the celebration of Despić’s jubilee was the presentation of the compact disc *Dejan Despić – Aleksandri Ivanović – Vokalna lirika (Dejan Despić to Aleksandra Ivanović – Vocal Lyric Poetry)* at the concert held at Belgrade City Hall on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2005, while in the period from May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 17<sup>th</sup> of the same year, 10 author programs entitled “Self-portrait of the Composer” were broadcast on the radio program *Stereorama*, presenting a total of 47 compositions commented by Despić himself. Relevant

the most representative pages of the composer's output, diverse and rich in terms of both genre and content, but also a unique opportunity to once more reexamine and test, "at the gathering" of the compositions created in different "stages" of the author's life, the well-known theses about the "stable constants" of his music identity.

Carefully conceived as a unique musical self-portrait, the repertoire "time travel" of Despić's successful authorial concerts included three newer works which had not been previously performed: the 2001 suite for flute and clarinet *Pas de Deux*, op. 159, was sounded for the first time at the Gallery of Matica Srpska on March 30<sup>th</sup>, while the compositions *Dosta je već... (Es ist genug...)*, *Rečitativ (Recitative)*, *Koral i varijacije (Chorale and Variations)* on the theme of Felix Mendelssohn for two violoncellos and strings, op. 141 (1999), and *Diptych*, op. 166, for English horn and strings,<sup>3</sup> were premiered at a well-attended and highly successful Belgrade concert held at the Atrium of the National Museum on November 29<sup>th</sup>. In addition to another 65 works by local authors, all three compositions were competing for the prestigious "Stevan Mokranjac" Award for 2005.<sup>4</sup>

*Diptych* won the award, and the prize was presented to the author at the Hall of the Kolarac Foundation on November 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 (the year in which the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mokranjac's birth was being celebrated!), on the same day when the 15<sup>th</sup> International Review of Composers was opened, precisely with the performance of the award-winning composition. The performing ensemble were the strings of the Symphonic Orchestra of Radio Television of Serbia conducted by Bojan Sudić and the soloist – the marvelous Yasna Miličić-Brandstätter, who deserves much credit for the creation of *Diptych*.

#### *Background – The Book of Fairy Tales...and Other Stories*

The vitality of Despić's output on the current concert scene is due, at least in part (and not a small part at that), to the author's close collaboration with outstanding and at times first-class performers, whose reproductive skills has often inspired the creation of his works. The composer's gift for continuous, constructive dialogues with eminent performers is complemented by his inexhaustible curiosity to conquer the scantily explored territories of the classical instrumental medium. It was precisely on these roads of Despić's recent composing path that *Diptych* was created, another one in a series of the author's

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information was obtained from the author, whom we also wish to thank for lending us the score and sound recording of *Diptych* and, not least, the interviews surrounding this work.

<sup>3</sup> *Diptych* was premiered by members of the orchestra *Gudači svetog Đorđa*, conducted by Petar Ivanović, and the soloist Yasna Miličić-Brandstätter.

<sup>4</sup> The "Stevan Mokranjac" award for the most successful repertoire premiere of a local work within the country or abroad was established by the Association of Serbian Composers in 1993. Ten prizes have been awarded so far, and Dejan Despić himself was chairman of the jury from 1993 to 1996. Members of the ASC expert jury for awarding the prize for 2005 were composer Rajko Maksimović, chairman, musicologists Ivana Trišić and Sonja Marinković and composers Miroslav Savić and Miloš Zatkalik. Three compositions were shortlisted: *Hadedas* for violoncello and piano by Srđan Hofman, *Pet pesama na stihove Malarmea (Five Songs Set to Mallarmé's Poetry)* by Vlastimir Trajković and *Diptych* for English horn and chamber orchestra by Dejan Despić. Relevant information was obtained by Katarina Lazarević, fellow of the Association, whom we wish to thank for her assistance.

concertante compositions, which has enriched not only domestic, but also world literature intended for certain instruments, such as the English horn, which are seldom treated soloistically.

The decisive step in the creation of *Diptych* was taken by the agile Yasna Miličić-Brandstätter, the oboist whose dynamic artistic biography, fashioned mainly on the international scene, is marked by a collaboration with the world's most eminent conductors and soloists, as well as by frequent performances with leading European ensembles for new music.<sup>5</sup> The first joint creative dialogue between the artist and the composer was their work on the CD project *Knjiga bajki (The Book of Fairy Tales)* (1999), realized in German production: Despić was entrusted with the "task" of composing for the oboe miniature programmatic "preludes" that would constitute musical "stitches" between the texts of "the world's most beautiful fairy tales", read by two actors.<sup>6</sup> Guided by a desire to provide a more distinct colouring relief for the musical interludial ambience on the one hand and assert her own interpretative individuality on the other, Yasna Miličić-Brandstätter decided to perform some of Despić's miniatures, originally written for the oboe, on the English horn. Since their first joint project had met with a positive reception, a new step in the collaboration ensued – the compact disc *Knjiga bajki II ili ...i druge priče (The Book of Fairy Tales II or ... and Other Stories)*, Despić's opus 152 from 2002,<sup>7</sup> a more extensive cycle of miniatures, this time composed for the *Märchen* wind trio (oboe, clarinet and bassoon), which was subsequently also presented as an autonomous music work, and with much success, in joint concert performances by the members of the ensemble – the "leading" Yasna Brandstätter, Yoko Koyama and Chiahua Hsu. Dating from the same year, 2002, is Despić's *Quartetto per due* (op. 154), conceived as a "mathematical variation" on all the possible "duetic" combinations of the oboe, English horn, violin and viola,<sup>8</sup> a composition that bears testimony to the composer's growing focus on the coloring and timbre specificities of the English horn as an instrument. Soon afterwards, in 2003, Despić gladly accepted Yasna Brandstätter's suggestion that he should enrich the meager concertante literature for the English horn by a separate, concise and economical, albeit expressively composed concertante work which, according to the members of the jury for the 2005 "Stevan Mokranjac" Award, "captivates and charms with its liveliness

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<sup>5</sup> Yasna Miličić-Brandstätter has been performing as a soloist and as a member of such ensembles as the *Bonn Telecom Classic Philharmonic Orchestra*, *Musik Fabrik Ensemble*, *Ensemble Modern*, *Ensemble Intercontemporain*, *Folkwang Kammerorchester* from Essen, *New Rhine Chamber Orchestra* from Cologne, *Chamber Opera Orchestra* from Cologne, *National Opera Orchestra* from Helsinki, *Symphonic Orchestra of RTS* and *Gudači sv. Đorđa* from Belgrade. She has collaborated with the finest conductors such as Seiji Ozawa, Kurt Masur, Peter Eötvös, Pierre Boulez and with outstanding oboists such as Thomas Indermuehle, Maurice Bourge, Han de Vries, Sarah Francis, Joseph Robinson and Jean-Louis Capezzali. The information has been taken from the program of the opening of the 15<sup>th</sup> International Review of Composers and from the Internet.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from the index of Despić's works: *Knjiga bajki*, op. 140 (1999), 10 small preludes and an epilogue for solo oboe/English horn, running time 13:40. The disc was published in Germany under the title *Die Wiesheit der Völker liegt in ihren Märchen*; actors-readers Jens Gottschalk and Hans-Otto Holzapfel; relevant information about the disc was found on the Internet.

<sup>7</sup> *...i druge priče (Knjiga bajki II)*, op. 152 (2002), miniatures for wind trio (oboe, clarinet, bassoon), running time 24:13. The disc was published in Germany under the title *Märchenhafte Kleinode aus aller Welt*; read by Jens Gottschalk; performed by the *Märchen Trio*; relevant information about the disc was found on the Internet.

<sup>8</sup> *Quartetto per due* was performed by Borislav Čičovački (oboe/English horn) and Peđa Milosavljević (violin/viola) on May 13, 2002 at a concert within the 11<sup>th</sup> International Review of Composers.

and content, taking the reader into (...) a world of a musically inventive dialogue between the soft, warm sonority [of the soloistic instrument] and the string chamber orchestra”.<sup>9</sup>

*Gebrauchsmusik or “music as untold poetry”?*

In an attempt to determine the place of *Diptych* in the author’s complete oeuvre, one might say that the work, at least ostensibly, belongs to the bulk of instrumental and, as the composer himself calls it, “absolute, abstract” music of mostly neoclassical orientation<sup>10</sup> which, having been predominant in Despić’s output until the early 1980s, was long considered as the identifying marker of the composer’s musical identity in the early phases of his work. The composition’s neutral title, *Diptych*, merely suggests the fact that it is about “two sonic paintings”, while the results of a formal analysis clearly identify typical features of Despić’s architectonically neat, melodically articulate, rhythmically and agogically plastic music discourse, enriched with subtle textural details. A significant indicator of the author’s keen sense of proportion is the composition’s timeline. Between the “two sonic paintings”, complementary rather than contrasting in character, is an axis of symmetry; both “paintings” are, so to speak, of the same duration (about 3 minutes) and the tempo of the first is twice as slow as that of the second. The effect of a delicate contrast between two thematically apparently independent formal entities that are, however, essentially related on the micro-motivic plane is realized on the global plane by, among other things, the distribution of sound volume: the melancholy-elegiac sung narrative of the soloistic part of the first “painting” unfolds in a dialogue with the parts of the string quartet, while the more dynamic “second painting”, now lively and playful, then nervous and punctuated by sharp accents, is realized with the participation of the entire string orchestra. Economizing on the volume of the accompanying sound of the strings serves to provide a sufficient mass of acoustic space, necessary for the “free breathing” of the English horn. Bearing in mind the information about the work’s origin on the one hand, and the exact facts about the formal aspects of the composition on the other, a logical conclusion on the “musical nature” of *Diptych* would confirm the aforementioned thesis according to which it is a clear example, understood in the Hindemithian sense, of “music for use” (*Gebrauchsmusik*).

According to Despić’s own definition, “the focus of absolute, ‘abstract’ music [is] on the sound *structure*.” However, the focus of “music that proceeds from literary, primarily poetic inspiration is on *the expression of emotions*.”<sup>11</sup> Far from being an indifferent, detachedly objective and rational expression, Despić’s music discourse flows spontaneously and naturally, first creating a meditative-nostalgic, “faun-like”, so to speak, atmosphere of the “first painting” (example 1), while in the “second” – painted with an energetically sparkling, exuberant agogic motion in a bright and slightly more cheerful gamut (example 2) – it occasionally allows a penetration of “conflicting”, dissonant and rhythmically pregnant motives

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted from the exposition of the jury for the 2005 “Stevan Mokranjac” Award.

<sup>10</sup> Miloš Jevtić, *Sazvučja Dejana Despića*, Beograd, Kej (Valjevo) i Beogradska knjiga, 2000, 53.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

(example 3) that disturb the music flow, which is generally elegantly harmonious and of Ravelian refinement. Gestures of the “poetization” of instrumental narration can be identified in the macro-dramaturgy, based on the procedures of withdrawing from and reapproaching the basic, lyrical platform of expression,<sup>12</sup> as well as in the elastic, supple structuring of the melodic-recitative physiognomy of the soloistic part which is, at least in the first part of the composition, given the role of a narrator of sorts. In a manner very much related to the sounding of poetry in Despić’s inspired cycles of vocal lyric poetry,<sup>13</sup> *Diptych*’s dramaturgical and emotional relief is built by changing the intensity of the tension between the modal and chromaticized areas of sound, where the former impart an archaic colour to the music and the latter provide expressionistically charged kinetic potential.

In the concluding part of this concise review of *Diptych*, we intended to merely point out, by briefly focusing attention on the composition’s affective spectrum, the high degree of correspondence between Despić’s so-called “absolute” and “programmatic” works, particularly the recent ones, and his instrumental and vocal compositions. Being a direct result of the author’s intensive preoccupation with the phenomena of poetry “as unsounded music” and, on the other hand, of “music as untold poetry”<sup>14</sup>, this correspondence is manifested in the ongoing, mature phase of Despić’s creative work on a new level and by new meanings, but it remains recognizable as one of the key constants of the author’s creative path, based on the “esthetics of harmonious, pleasing and lovely”<sup>15</sup> and on the poetic view of “music as a language of emotions”.<sup>16</sup>

Translated by Dušan Zabrdac

## Summary

In 2005 academician Dejan Despić celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday and 50 years of his fruitful work (180 opuses!). Six concerts held in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Kragujevac were the excellent occasion for the remarkable retrospective of Despić’s most successful works. Still extremely active on many various fields, during the last decade Despić composed 55 new works; many of them were the results of composer’s close collaboration with most prominent musicians, whose art often inspired his investigations for new coloristic combinations within the classical, mostly chamber sound. Previous excellent collaboration with Yasna Miličić–Brandtäter, world-wide known oboist and English horn player, encouraged Despić to compose an inspired concerto piece for English horn and strings – *Diptych*, op. 166 (2003). The work had its premiere in Belgrade, on November the 18<sup>th</sup>, at the concert in the Atrium-hall of National Museum. The following year, the jury of the Serbian Composers’ Association

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ana Stefanović, Dubrovačke poeme Dejana Despića, *Muzikologija*, Beograd, 2005, 5, 317.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 313-345 and Branka Radović, Dejan Despić, “Pesmarica” (1950-2004), *Novi Zvuk*, Beograd, 2006, 27, 25-39.

<sup>14</sup> Dejan Despić, *Moja pesmarica (Preface: Lutajući brdima prolaznosti)*, manuscript, 1. Cf. Branka Radović, op. cit., 25.

<sup>15</sup> Dejan Despić, Nova jednostavnost u muzici – povratak ili ne? (Speech delivered at the 4<sup>th</sup> conference of the Department of Fine Arts and Music of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences on June 19, 1987, when Despić was elected a corresponding member of the SAAS), *Glas*, Beograd, SANU, 1998, CCCLVI, Odeljenje likovne i muzičke umetnosti, 4, 67.

<sup>16</sup> Dejan Despić, preface to the review of the work “Tri meditacije”, *Glas* CCCLXXXII Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, Odeljenje likovne i muzičke umetnosti, 6, Beograd, 1996, 9. (offprint)

recognized Diptych as the best achievement of Serbian composers in the previous concert season and awarded it with the prestigious prize “Stevan Mokranjac.”

This article gives a concise description of the awarded composition and searches for the answer whether the work represents just an excellent, typical example of Gebrauchsmusik or – as the author would say – the piece of “music as unsaid poetry.”

# DIPTIH

za engleski rog i gudački orkestar

Dejan Despić, op.166 (2003)

**I** ♩ = 52

This system contains the first five staves of the score. The top staff is for the English Horn (Corno inglese), with the instruction '(suoni reali!)'. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff is Violini I, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third staff is Violini II, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *v* (vibrato) marking. The fourth staff is Viole, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *v* marking. The fifth staff is Violoncelli and Contrabassi, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *pizz.* (pizzicato) marking. The music is in 3/4 time and includes various dynamics such as *mf* and *mf*.

This system contains the next five staves of the score. The top staff is for the English Horn, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and a *tr* (trill) marking. The second staff is Violini I, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The third staff is Violini II, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The fourth staff is Viole, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The fifth staff is Violoncelli and Contrabassi, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and an *arco* marking. The music continues with dynamics like *mp*, *p*, and *crescendo*.

II ♩ = 104

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the second in treble clef, the third in treble clef, the fourth in bass clef, and the fifth in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a melodic line with a crescendo. The second staff also begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and has a melodic line with a crescendo. The third staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and has a melodic line with a crescendo. The fourth and fifth staves are empty.

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the second in treble clef, the third in treble clef, the fourth in bass clef, and the fifth in bass clef. The time signature is 4/4. The first staff begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and features a melodic line with a crescendo. The second staff begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and has a melodic line with a crescendo. The third staff begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and has a melodic line with a crescendo. The fourth staff begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and has a melodic line with a crescendo. The fifth staff begins with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and has a melodic line with a crescendo. The system concludes with a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic and a *div.* marking.

First system of a musical score. It consists of six staves. The top staff is a single melodic line with a dynamic marking of *f* and a triplet of eighth notes. The second, third, and fourth staves are piano accompaniment, each starting with a *ff* dynamic marking. The fifth and sixth staves are bass accompaniment, also starting with a *ff* dynamic marking. The system concludes with a *f* dynamic marking.

Second system of the musical score, continuing from the first. It consists of six staves. The top staff begins with a *ff* dynamic marking and features a triplet of eighth notes. The second, third, and fourth staves include dynamic markings of *f* and *ff*, along with performance instructions: *pizz.* (pizzicato), *unis.* (unison), and *arco* (arco). The fifth and sixth staves also include *pizz.* and *arco* markings. The system concludes with a *f* dynamic marking.