
MUSICOLOGIST SPEAKS

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A CONVERSATION WITH MARIJA BERGAMO



Your journey in musicology has not been purely academic – it has been a voyage through a world infused with music. How did you first enter this world, and I refer here especially to the experiences you had with music in your youth?

Time and space are given for everyone of us, and they are our destiny. I did not expect we would be discussing details from my biography. But to put it shortly: children and the young learn from everything that surrounds them. I was surrounded by music. I would actually prefer to structure this conversation in the manner of Flaker's 'autotoponymy', as the recollections of the musical locations of my professional career seem more interesting than stories from my personal life.

What role did your parents play in the formation of your musical taste and what was the immediate and extended environment you grew up in?

Their role was significant. My father Anton Koren was an opera singer and a director, and my mother came from a traditional middle-class family Milavec,

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in which a humanistic education was highly valued. It was considered normal for us to receive a parallel general and music education. My brother and I effectively grew up in theatres, attending both operas and plays while we were still children in Ljubljana and Zagreb. Then came Rijeka: the entire core opera repertoire, from Gluck to Puccini, including domestic authors (Gotovac, Papandopulo, Parać, Lhotka) and operettas, was represented in the Rijeka Opera House of my youth, in the 1940s and the 1950s. Those performances, conducted not just by Italian conductors, but also by Lovro Matačić and Boris Papandopulo, were performed at a very high level. Our family life consisted of everyday evening visits to the theatre, only two houses away, which continued in vibrant discussions at home. These initial impressions are deep and lasting. Music school was just one part of that practical experience. This symbiosis continued in Belgrade, complemented by a rich offering of symphony, chamber and soloist music. It was inconceivable not to follow everything that went on in those areas. And the growing awareness of the fact that all those sensations should also be understood gradually guided me to my future profession.

School. Let us briefly return to the present – what would be your approach if you were once again faced with the challenge of teaching musical education in an elementary or secondary school, or of being a university professor?

Unlike my husband, who is capable of finding appropriate methods and metaphors to explain Einstein's relativity theory, even to an elementary school pupil, I am not sure that I have the skills needed to use games, anecdotes, animation that would enable me to bring music closer to children. My intense experiences with music have always demanded explanations, rationalisation (in the sense of Eggebrecht's *rationalised emotion*). I believe that this is the reason I have always had more to give to an older auditorium, to those who could not only recognise my enthusiasm for music, but could also readily participate in my attempts to work together on explaining the phenomena, explore the reasons for the appearance of and the connections between the facts that we were working on, between the structures we were analysing. I believe that on any level of teaching music it is precisely the subjective experience of the auditory phenomenon that is the starting point, which – if one is a responsible and educated individual – determines the choice of means used to motivate and capture the audience. This is the basis, which then readily accepts all sorts of necessary factor-oriented, analytical and other additions. Naturally, it takes years to develop, harmonise and verify one's own teaching system. I have never been interested in a mere transfer of facts. Facts are nowadays readily available to everyone.

What are your memories of your formative musicological years – of your studies in musicology? People, events, circumstances...

I first started studying law, but, after I enrolled in the Music History Department of the (then) Music Academy in Belgrade, my professional path was de-

cided. Today, I know that I was extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to study at that school. It was still quite new at that time (my Department of History and Folklore had been founded in 1951/52, and I was only the tenth person to graduate from it). The curricula, just defined, were subject to *pro primo* original interpretations of the people carrying them out, but – unlike musicology studies at faculties of philosophy – they already incorporated a strong support for the major (the history of music) through a series of mandatory music disciplines. All the professors were strong personalities and distinctively creative people. When your principal subjects are taught by Nikola Hercigonja (we called him *Digression* because of the numerous sidetracks that complemented the main current of his lectures with insights into the most diverse fields) and Stana Đurić Klajn (who beamed with noble love towards her own musical past), and you spend four years mastering analytical harmony and forms analysis under the strict guidance of Petar Bingulac, receiving from him the widest possible range of technical expertise, but also of aesthetic judgements – the foundations are most solidly set. There was also the unique Ljubica Marić (she taught the fugue, and she made even the most complex counterpoint tasks a joy to work on), Mihovil Logar (instrumentation), Vasilije Mokranjac (playing from scores), Miodrag Vasiljević (folklore)... All these exceptional and inspirational teachers made our university studies a valuable process not only of acquiring knowledge, but also of forming a personal attitude both towards the subject matter itself and towards the methods of transferring it to others. I knew whom I would and would not have liked to ‘copy’ and why. (Even later, as a teacher, I always warned my students that they should not be perplexed by different approaches and methodologies, as it is only after we are exposed to differences that we can make comparisons and choose for ourselves.) The lack of systematisation in the brand new curriculum was made up by the enthusiasm among both professors and students, by an intense coexistence with music. Also, our everyday interaction with the students of composition and conducting, and the many specialised classes we attended together, made it clear to us, even then that all three curricula must have joint and identical accompanying, ‘professional’ programmes. The future reform of the curriculum was in that sense already being indicated at that time. Our education was enriched by concerts, which we could attend free of charge. Lots of music, familiarisation with literature from all periods and fields, guest performances by great interpreters of musical works – all this defined our tastes and expanded our knowledge. Our second home was the well-organised and, considering our modest situation, exceptionally well-equipped library, open from morning until evening. Even then I began to realise that musicology must be able to find support in other humanities, so I voluntarily attended select courses in art history and philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy.

What musical instances (concerts, institutions, personalities, shows, etc.) from your youth do you find particularly memorable and why?

The formative years are decisive. One absorbs and remembers quickly, and builds order and overview with ease. One has but to listen, work, compare, think and discuss. What do I remember in particular? The premieres of many domestic works of those times: we attended rehearsals, listened, analysed, had discussions after performances. Some other unforgettable details: the performances of *Le sacre du printemps* and *Les Noces*, the symphony of Shostakovich, in the opera, works by Prokofiev, Musorgsky and Borodin, Janaček, guest performances by Mario del Monaco, conducting performances by L. Stokovski, S. Šulek, the young Zubin Mehta, the pianism of Monica Brucholerie and Aldo Ciccolini, the cellistic pearls by Fournier, Navarra and the young Rostropovich. On the third channel of the radio, cycles by Petar Bingulac on the music of the twentieth century opened our eyes and ears to the things that in those times we could not hear in any other way... The possibilities we had, limited by today's standards, were, in fact, sufficient to feed our student's curiosity and stimulate insights amid lively comments.

The period immediately after university: your wishes and opportunities?

All of us who were young at that time had a feeling that someone (and something) needed us. We felt that we could in some way contribute to common goals, no matter what field we worked in. It was not important if we did not find the ideal job right away – one could find ways to be useful, no matter where one worked. I did not worry about such things. I continued with my master's degree and I worked (first, at the foreign relations department at the Union of Yugoslav Composers, then as a teacher in a secondary music school, as a music critic, a contributor for Radio Belgrade, Music Youth Association, a translator...). My work at the Union of Composers enabled me to come into contact with numerous authors from other parts of Yugoslavia, as well as with foreign authors that came to Belgrade on exchange (including Igor Stravinsky, Dmitri Shostakovich, Karen Khachaturian, Arno Babadjanjan, Vitold Lutoslawski, Grazyna Bacewicz, Alois Hába, Rodion Ščedrin, Zofia Lissa...).

A scholarship to study in Moscow (1963-1964) allowed me to attend numerous lectures on various subjects at the Moscow Conservatory. I was fascinated by the approach to and the methodology used in teaching music history by N. S. Nikolayeva and N.V.Tumanina – those were my first insights into an approach to music sociology. The wealth of concert programmes and operas in Moscow of the time can barely be expressed in words. It broadened my horizons considerably and was my first contact with Russian literature in theory of music, which I always strove to maintain later on.

Back home: living around composers, having composer friends, our common themes and plans inspired us to mark an anniversary of Vojislav Vučković by publishing his works and texts, and brought forth the idea of producing monographs of Serbian authors. As usual, the first to act was Vlastimir Peričić with his monograph on Josif Marinković, and he and his circle also initiated my monograph on

Milan Ristić. This developed naturally into an interest for the so-called 'Prague students', i.e. the Serbian facet of expressionism as the theme for my dissertation. *It would seem that it was precisely your work on that subject that inspired and directed you towards issues that you continued to pursue later on?*

Absolutely. Many things are more clear in retrospect, because they are sharpened both by the passage of time and the subsequent experiences of the observer. My work on the 'Prague generation' of composers at that time (and we should keep in mind that in the late sixties they were all active participants in the musical life of their surroundings) was enticed mostly by the fact that their pre-war works were practically unknown. They were also generalised as an 'avant-garde' shift and a sort of an incision into the expected 'development' of music, and the famous 'turn' after the war was interpreted in a variety of ways. I found all of those terms and descriptors insufficiently precise, so I used the music itself as a starting point for the clarification of terminology and gaining insight into the works, for the first analyses of their structure, and for attempts at understanding the reasons and manners in which their poetics *came together* and changed over time. This first *ordering* of the materials and the first contact with *the synchronicity of the asynchronous* made me realise early on how unclear and how unsupported by any meaningful theoretical or analytical concepts the terms such as *new, progress, development, avant-garde, traditional* were in our, at that time mostly receptive, peripheral cultures. But I also realised that the sort of *incapability for orthodoxy* and for consistent adherence to the teachings of selected teachers and accepted aesthetic systems could on occasion produce a creative spark that was then actualised in some of those works with authentic youthful energy. Sufficient time has passed since then for that initial insight to be amended by further reflections on the subject.

The transition to the academia (Faculty of Music in Belgrade) and new personal horizons?

The knowledge and insights into literature had settled in, personal aesthetic criteria had gradually formed, and contacts with former professors, and especially with younger colleagues, were turning into friendships. The sense of musical community was strong at the time, and team plans and endeavours were the norm. Working as an assistant professor at the Music History Department entailed not only working with the young, but also participating in the vibrant life of that vital institution. I joined the project of reforming university-level music education, which, initiated by Petar Bergamo, Berislav Popović, Petar Ozgijan and their circle, brought together the old and the young. The initial scepticism of the older professors gradually transformed into support that made the project possible. The idea of differentiating between students' departments and professors' cathedras (from which courses were 'exported' into departments) and the demand to make the core university education of future composers, conductors and musicologists identical (so that university curricula differed only in majors) was put into prac-

tice in that school in the best possible way, and later, in practice and with certain modifications, produced excellent results.

A look at the places where you have lived: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia – national experiences and nationalism?

Ever since I was a child, having moved around frequently, I always thought of all the places I lived in as my own. My genetic and familial Slovenian roots always remained an unquestionable foundation. My mother tongue was the basis for all others. In every place I lived, I both received and gave. And I always attempted to be a part of it. My success was not always entirely up to me. The common denominator was always music, as well as my wish to make my own contribution in that area wherever I lived. I believed, and I still do, that loving the nation you come from by no means implies reservations towards others. On the contrary: it is from a broader perspective, comparisons and experiences with the Other and the Different that one emerges enriched. Not even recent history has shaken this belief.

Books: you have worked in quite diverse areas: expressionism, national topics, humour in music. You do not have 'your own' area like some musicologists, but are drawn to issues of manner and form of the existence of music. The issues of its expressivity, effect and the possibility for a spatial, and after all, also temporal determination of music in a given context (the national in music) are among the supreme, core thematic areas of musicology. What are your thoughts today on, if you'll allow, 'your topics' of those, but to a significant degree also of later times?

My generation was forced to disperse its energy and to react to many specific tasks in the most diverse (organisationally speaking as well) fields. This was all in a time of 'scattered' theoretical concepts that came and went at an unprecedented velocity. I am fond of Gombrowicz's formulation that what we are witnessing today is a *status quo on the go*. The acceleration of history has in fact really changed the 'normal' state of conflict between those who fight to preserve the existing state of things and those who seek to overthrow it and replace it with something else – it has now become a constant alternation of various seductive theoretical and analytical proposals. In times like these, it is easy to become disoriented.

But in the apparent versatility of topics one can always recognise the same, perpetually intriguing common denominator: the attempt at understanding a work of music (I belong to those who could not and would not renounce that term), primarily by means of emotional intelligence, and then by analytical instruments adapted to the object being observed. The quest for the original idea, for the reasons behind the composing choices used to realise it, an interest in the interactions between the irrational and the rational in building a structure, in the relationship between the musically autonomous and the functional in various historical contexts, in the criteria used in judging the work – these are issues for which specific opuses, tasks, occasions were just 'excuses', or rather inducements.

Leaving to work abroad: the work, the benefits and weaknesses (or even greater benefits?), the gain.

Circumstances of life are unpredictable. But, during the decade, I spent in Vienna, in the musical publishing house Universal Edition, musicology was only seemingly pushed into the background. Aside from having enjoyed rich and unforgettable musical experiences of all sorts, working in a musical publishing house could be considered a sort of applied musicology: practical insight first of all into the creation of new works and their first recording, into the always stressful preparation of the scores and orchestral materials for the first performance, and later on for print. There was also the music editing of the famous works of the 20th century. One must also not forget the daily contact with composers, co-workers, printers – in other words, engagement in a dynamic musical organisation. A useful and taxing experience. In any case, it allowed for some important progress and maturing precisely in the core area of my interest: the creation and moulding of a work of music, the transfer of the notation into sound (interpretation) and reception, i.e. decoding the meaning encoded in the work.

Arrival in Ljubljana: who, with what intention, under what conditions and in what circumstances?

After spending some time in foreign surroundings, one always reaches a breaking point, when one must decide whether to stay forever or go back. The decision was not easy. Aside from family reasons, it was made easier by invitations from Zagreb and Ljubljana for my husband and myself to return. Professor Cvetko was getting ready for retirement, and he suggested I transfer to the Department of Musicology at the Ljubljana Faculty of Philosophy, outlining the areas I was to fill. He was sweet, convincing and, as always, expeditious. At first, I travelled from Vienna to Ljubljana and back every week; later we moved to Zagreb and Ljubljana – that commute was considerably shorter.

Establishment of a new environment: Slovenian musical culture – Slovenian musicological thought.

It was not a new environment for me. Ever since I was a child, I had spent my winter and summer vacations with my grandparents in Ljubljana, where I attended theatres and concerts. As a university student, I attended the examinations of my colleagues at the Academy (home to the Music History Department before it was moved to the Faculty of Philosophy), and exchanges and meetings of the students of the Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade Academies took place in a different city every year. We all knew each other and spent time together. My work in the Union of Yugoslav Composers entailed contact with most of the Slovenian authors, and my translations of Slovenian contributions for *Zvuk* magazine were

an additional source of information. I knew all of my colleagues at the Ljubljana Department, I was familiar with their work and specialisations, I followed all the editions and the dynamics of work in music in that environment. And finally, I had studied from books by Prof. Cvetko, who had mentored my doctoral dissertation. I received my doctorate from the Department in Ljubljana. I arrived at a well-organised, friendly and very stimulating environment where we had a lot to do and did it well.

Department of Musicology at the Ljubljana Faculty of Philosophy. People and events in light of your experiences in Yugoslavia and Austria up to that point.

Thanks to the energy of Prof. Dragotin Cvetko and his two loyal co-workers, Andrej Rijavec and Jože Sivec, in the early 1980s the organisation of the Department was already very stable, with numerous valuable associates. The team of professors was later expanded by Katarina Bedina, Lojze Lebič and Jurij Snoj. Aside from teaching selected chapters of music history (19th and 20th centuries), I was assigned the task of gradually preparing for the introduction of two previously unrepresented subjects: aesthetics and sociology of music. Since I viewed both of those subjects as an important systematic complement of the already ordered, systematised ways of teaching history-related subjects, I strove to incorporate them in the best way possible into the existing educational processes and my own research efforts. (It gives me great satisfaction to see that those initial foundations are today splendidly expanded upon by my successors Matjaž Barbo /aesthetics/ and Leon Stefanija /sociology/, who have already published textbooks on the subject.) The advantages of studying musicology at a faculty of philosophy are obvious: the possibility for forging direct connections with related humanistic specialities, easier comparisons and partial transfers, i.e. using related theoretical systems, complementary education necessary to a musicologist attained by attending select courses at other departments within the same school. Attempts have been made over the years to overcome the shortcomings in the mastery of disciplines related to music theory and of the techniques of the 'craft' by introducing changes into the curriculum, but I fear that this remains the most sensitive and the most lacking area in musicology education.

Ljubljana students and studies: generations of young musicologists – difficulties and joys...

Musicology is love. Those who approached it out of a need to understand those fluid and at the same time extremely organised systems filled with such power and beauty, and who armed themselves, other than with curiosity, with a willingness for thorough and painstaking work, regularly completed their studies by exclaiming: 'Only now I know what musicology really is!' Such eye-opening moments were my favourite. So were the questions we answered together, and the analyses that lead to 'discoveries'. It was precisely you, Leon, who close to the

end of your studies surprised and enchanted me with a list of musical terms that all of us, professors, used, but in various ways: you asked each of us to fill in their own definition, i.e. the meaning. I cannot remember if we all answered you... But I had always been aware of the fact that the issue of scope and content of the terminology we used to attempt to auditively 'translate', to verbalise, was one of our most demanding and most sensitive tasks. This is why I always instructed my students to use glossaries.

Alongside us teachers, the best students became teachers themselves. One of my old professors claimed that a true professor was he whose students have managed to surpass his own limitations. The results of our students, of those who are educating the future musicological generations today or are active in various areas, prove that that task has been accomplished. In a sense, I look upon everyone I have worked with as 'my children' and I am proud of them.

An overview of the once unified area after 1991, when the former Yugoslav republics began breaking off into separate countries: what changed in the musical sense?

A lot and little. All areas are continuing their own way, following the logic of their own priorities, goals, current possibilities and available resources. But they are also deprived by the lack of insight into their neighbourhood, by the inability to compare and transfer ideas, not to mention joint projects. Despite today's easy access to information, neighbours do not know one another well enough. And it is only in the broader context that one's own identity is clearly defined and affirmed.

Musicological research methodology: theory and practice – past and future?

I remember a witty remark by Professor Dahlhaus that musicology is always dealing with some currently very important issues, which it soon – without resolving them – replaces with others, equally important and pressing. I believe he was speaking from experience. My own experience confirms his words. Time and space bring the currently hot issues into the spotlight (such as, for us, *the musically national*, or *music identity*, or the relationship between *the little* and *the big*, or *the falling behind* – whatever that means, or the relationship between *the musically autonomous* and *the functional*). These issues are tackled by methodological tools that are available to the scientific community at that moment, that are recognised by it and are considered 'common'. And when the paradigm changes, the terminology must be redefined, i.e. its historicity must be pointed out. It is no coincidence that a number of valuable and important glossaries have appeared in recent years (Šuvaković, Biti, Gligo, Srak...).

The ways of practicing our profession have always been, and will always continue to be very diverse. They depend on the assumptions and expectations incorporated into the foundations of the scientific work. A recent surge in theo-

retical interpretative models has significantly expanded the musicological instrumentarium, and mastering it has become a *conditio sine qua non*. I have great and sincere admiration for the young musicologists, who are prepared and able to follow and master all those propositions. The transfer of interest from the cognitive aspect, from the organisation of the work and the search for the foundations of its meaning, to the new technical, technological and media circumstances that significantly contribute to the creation, interpretation and reception of music also entails the expansion of the ways of looking at musical phenomena. Our musicological past was simpler. It was also more direct, guided, I would say, by an organic musical impulse. I hope that the future musicological generations will not deny their personal experience of the happiness produced by contact with art.

Looking back at how far you have come – how satisfied are you with all you have accomplished and what are your plans for the future?

At my age, the goals are usually beyond the wishes. The road I have travelled has been bumpy and circuitous, but also rich and full. I consider myself privileged on several levels: first, by the 'choice of parents' and by the family from which I originate. Then by having lived in different places, despite all the consequences this entails. Also by the opportunity for continued work with young people that fulfilled and inspired me, and by encounters with influence people of whom many became my friends. But above all by the decades I have spent with Petar, the captain of the ship of my life, a lucid, Mediterranean-free (even in his thinking), tireless everyday collocutor on the issues of music, but also on the widest variety of topics that made us both alive in our time, and aware of the many facts and flows of the past that determine every present. I believe this awareness to be the greatest profit I can boast at the end of the road. Visible results should have been more numerous. My scattered life did not work in their favour. Perhaps at the close of the day some of it will come together, some loose ends will be tied, and our joint thoughts will become fixated after all – if our olives, our cat Šime, our boat 'Vuk' and our health allow it.

A word of advice for the younger colleagues?

I am afraid I might be reproached for idealising the past. I am also not comfortable suggesting professional models and paths. But I can share with you that of which, as I like to convince myself, I am certain: in a time that no longer believes in the ideal nor any sort of idea of education as a basic human 'adjustedness' and an 'essential state' of a human being, the scientific, including musicological, knowledge is in danger of becoming increasingly narrow. It has become harder to realise the desire for completeness. And such completeness is the first requirement for work in musicology (alongside other fields). The second is understanding (and feeling) the special quality of musicology as a science of art. As a *science* of art it

is frequently not in touch with the art it is supposed to explain, and as a science of *art* it battles the issues of system and is faced with difficulties when having to verify its scientific status. The former unity of music and the thinking about music has long been dissolved, and the myth of dualism separating the intellect from intuition has marked the musicological work of my generation. I am convinced that the meaning of a work of music as an art form transcends the rational level. It touches upon a wholeness of the world that can be approached only through authentic phenomenological curiosity. It presupposes a union between a sober distance (objectified reflection) and an emotional and rational engagement. The level of the researcher's talent and his artistic, creative sensitivity determine the level of mastery of methodological scientific tools, and, in the process, also the reaches of his musicological work. The creative, the artistically alive is always hidden in distancing oneself from the rules and the schematics, from the usual and the known. A musicologist must also be prepared for such creative ingenuity. Musicology, in my opinion, should be an *art* in order for it to be meaningful as a *science*.

And, finally, a practical recommendation: listening, everyday immersion in the live and recorded sound, familiarity with a wide selection of music literature, personal experience of music as basis for the scientific work. For us 'old-school interpreters' all these things were a given, but I am not sure how much of a priority they are for our younger colleagues.

Biography

Marija Bergamo was born in Celje (Slovenia). She graduated from the Music Academy (today Faculty of Music) in Belgrade, Department of Music History (today Department of Musicology), where she also obtained her master's degree in 1964. In 1973 she received her doctor's degree from the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana with the thesis Elements of Expressionism in Serbian Music before 1945 (Elementi ekspresionističke orijentacije u srpskoj muzici do 1945). Between 1964 and 1969 she was the head of the Department of Music Theory at the 'Josip Slavenski' Music School in Belgrade, where she gave courses on Music History and Theory. Between 1969 and 1972, she was assistant of Music History at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Between 1972 and 1981, she lived in Vienna, where she first worked as a music editor and afterwards as a head of the music editorship of the Universal Edition Publishing House. From 1981 to her retirement in 1997, she lectured at the Department of Musicology in Ljubljana.

Since 2006 professor emerita at the University of Ljubljana, Marija Bergamo has won recognition as musicologist especially interested in the fields of epistemology of music research (primarily within aesthetics and sociology of music), 19th and 20th century music and national music histories.

Main Publications

- *Delo kompozitora. Stvaralački put Milana Ristića od prve do šeste simfonije*. Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 1977.
- *Elementi ekspresionističke orijentacije u srpskoj muzici do 1945. godine, (Posebna izdanja, Odeljenje likovne i muzičke umetnosti, knj. 526, Knj. 3)*. Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1980.
- *Srpske teme u delima ruskih i sovjetskih kompozitora, (Magistarski radovi, knj. 2)*. Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 1983.
- *Humor kao sredstvo realističkog muzičkog jezika u muzici do XIX veka*. Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 1985.

About Marija Bergamo

- *Rationalism of a Magic Tinge – Music as a Form of Abstract Perception*. Edited by Leon Stefanija & Katarina Bogunović Hočevar. *Musicological Annual* XLIII 2007/2, Ljubljana.