

Article received on 24th October 2012
Article accepted on 26th November 2012
UDC: 78.091.4(497.11)"2011"(049.32)

*Stefan Cvetković**

KoMA '8

If the review of a festival dedicated to contemporary art music had to begin with a statement arising from a contextual insight regarding the cultural climate, as well as the conditions under which it was organized and carried out, then this statement in the case of the *Young Authors' Concerts* [Концерти Младих Аутора] should primarily be intoned with emphasis on respect for the very existence of this event. The reason for the initial idea stemmed from the fact that this year's, eighth edition of *KoMA*, shows that the festival continues to survive as a solitary (and even extravagant for the generally, art-unfriendly environment) event, which shines on the domestic music scene unquestionably with a special, though premonitorily flickering light. If it were possible to get a glimpse of the inner side of the wind that is steadily and persistently threatening the already not-so-intense festival flames, indeed one would perceive that same pestilence which, in the turbulent circumstances of the recent decades at the broadest level managed to push music, among other arts, to the margins of society's interest. Sentenced to self-pro-

mote within a community that is still unable to establish an adequate order and system of identification and evaluation in the domain of culture, contemporary art music is still struggling for its place on the public (media and concert) stage. These facts certainly reflect on festivals such as *KoMA*, whose perception and reception still remain confined within the narrowest professional discourse. (In that sense, this sole review is only confirmation of the aforesaid statement...) Nevertheless, it is important to point out that despite all the objective causalities it encountered – certainly not for the first time – the festival managed to maintain its much needed continuity, and refresh and refine the musical season in the capital with its specific program. Rescheduling the date of the event from the end of the calendar year (when it used to be held previously) to the month of March, brought a certain novelty to the latest edition of *KoMA*, which could in the future contribute to a clearer perception of the festival, given that in this way perhaps a desired calendric distance has been created in relation to another important festival of contemporary music – *The International Review of Composers* [Међународна трибина композитора]. Traditionally held in the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra Hall, *KoMA '8* in a two-day program, on March 10 and 11th was designed in four concerts that individually covered genre related works. Although much less reliant than some of its earlier editions, on the involvement of foreign participants – either as creators or performers – *KoMA '8* mainly offered a cross section of the annual production of students of composition from the Belgrade Faculty of Music and the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. Such a festi-

* Author contact information: stfnale@ptt.rs

val “offer” managed to provide more than a orientational picture of the recent creative achievements of the youngest generation of domestic authors.

The first concert, which presented works written for solo instruments, or smaller chamber ensembles of students in different years of study, began with *Piano Trio No. 1* by Đorđe Marković, a three movement work for violin, ‘cello and piano. Overwhelmingly dramatic in character, this work draws its energy in equal measure from the rhythmic pulse and the exploitation of the cluster’s potentials in order to achieve different motions of sound and color. The unconventional treatment of the piano, with percussive gestures achieved on the resonance board of the instrument or harp, was placed in the movements as one of the cohesive elements providing not only sound enrichment, but figuring as a kind of generator of its dramatic mood. Mirjana Veljković’s *Pastor’s Flute* [*Pastorova svirala*] was based on spinning the music flow, which in three contrasting parts of the composition changed its character – from archaic tones colored with reflections of the Octoechos carried in the first, through associatively composed and rhythmically and melodically playful motifs similar to birds chirruping in the second, to sonorous multiphonics in the somewhat more subdued, third part of the composition. Vladan Gecin introduced himself with a *Suite* for piano, a three-part work that builds its sound form on the exploitation of the various potentials of the instrument, bearing the closest resemblance to those present in the works of the early twentieth century expressionist composers. Based on two contrasting themes, the first movement builds and reaches its dramatic climax by

means of multiplying more complex forms out of the musical material exposed at the beginning of the flow. Unlike the second movement, which represents a view in which the lyrical mood discreetly runs only in certain specific facture and register sets of the harmony, the third movement is conceived, in the words of the author, as “an avalanche of sound”, in which the musical flow, based on an imaginary folk melody, develops into a kind of toccata movement. In *Variations* for guitar, bass, harp and piano, Jelena Srdić focused on researching the contrast which one thematic material can convey not only in the process of compositional and technical variations, but also in terms of entrusting it to instruments of different types that have the potential for different sounds and for the broader musical transformation of a given material. Assigning each variation to a different combination of instruments, the composer brings the musical flow to a culmination accomplished by all the instruments in the last, eighth variation. A kind of contrasting interlude within the first concert from the series was the appearance of the harpist Milana Zarić, who appeared in the role of an improviser, performing Brazilian composer Jed Gibson’s work *Improvisation 15*. In the absence of a pre-determined form or content, from the beginning to the end, the piece requires the performer to possess the capacity to improvise. Following only the principles of improvisation given by the composer, Milana Zarić built a musical flow which, by the author’s alternation of different improvisational procedures (in some cases using non-musical objects), in general, he achieved an arched dramatic flow. Relying on the programmatic subtext, based on the idea of traveling the “thorny

road from darkness to enlightenment”, Lazar Đorđević built his *Suite* for piano in five-movement form in which each movement contrasted the previous one in terms of its thematic material. Building his musical expression in correspondence with the piano works of particular late Romantic and Expressionist composers, Đorđević presented a personal inner reflection of this historical period’s musical heritage. The composition *The Spaceman [Kosmonaut]* for clarinet, bassoon and piano by Ivan Vukosavljević, inspired by a quotation from Carl Sagan, is a serene music flow built on a background predominantly in major, and with the emphasized simplicity of its theme achieves a certain neoclassical expression, enriched with inventive rhythmic-melodic elaborations that rely upon jazz music legacy.

The second concert, presenting the works of Ivana Ognjanović, Stanko Simić and Nemanja Sovtić, was marked by the participation of The St. George Strings ensemble (and numerous soloists on wind and other instruments), which certainly contributed not only to the quality of the performing aspect of the festival but, moreover, confirmed that the quality of the achievements by the young authors, to a large degree merited interpretation by one of the best domestic chamber orchestras. Ivana Ognjanović’s composition *Mister Moroni’s Catapult [Katapult gospodina Moronija]* for an unusual ensemble comprised of bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, trumpet, trombone, piano, percussions, six violins and two double basses, was created as a response to the author’s reading of one story from the novel by Niccolò Ammaniti *I’ll Steal You Away [Ti prendo e ti porto via]*. The absurdity of the story, based on

the imaging of a useless weapon – a catapult which Citizen Moroni built in his backyard to settle accounts with his neighbor in a trivial and harmless way, presents an allegory of the state of mind of society as a whole. The structure of the ensemble and the consistent emphasis of specific features of the instruments (such as avoiding middle registers in favor of high and low ones) enabled Ivana Ognjanović, within the frames of major mode, with numerous melodic leaps, reduced motive work and very lively rhythm to capture a sound image that in character describes Ammaniti’s story. Stanko Simić presented his work with the composition *Landscapes of the Heart, Two Fantasies for 18 strings [Predeli srca, dve fantazije za 18 gudača]*, for which he found inspiration in the works of Serbian composers, which he partly indicated with the subtitles of the cycle *Lyrical Fantasy, Talea Fantasy*. Presenting the “spiritual struggle of the individual interwoven with his will and ability to experience success and failure and share them with the outside world, at the same time influencing it” Simić relies on a romantic view of human existence. While the emotional tonus in *Lyrical Fantasy* is achieved with long dissonant “frictions”, which through their movements form a modal-tonal radiation inside a mostly atonal harmony, in *Talea Fantasy* the energetic rhythmic movements constitute to some extent a softer musical structure within which the brief, emotionally very powerful stops create a character correspondence with the first movement. In *Variations for thirteen strings on the theme Kocka do kocke Tatatatira [Varijacije za trinaest gudača na temu Kocka do kocke Tatatatira]* for string orchestra, Nemanja Sovtić used the musical material of a well-

known children's song for different types of stylistic and character variations. Placed in the medium of string orchestra and sonically transformed, the familiar theme becomes a carrier of the pulses of differently styled dances. By taking well-known material for the construction of new musical structures, Sovtić showed how different reflections of this material can be produced by changing the performance context, changing the medium, as well as each individual element of the music language.

The third concert in the eighth edition of the festival of *Young Authors' Concerts* began with the composition *Triglav* by Nikola Pacek-Vetnić, subtitled as *Variations* for clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone violin, viola, cello and double bass. The three motivic materials exposed in the first part were different in nature, which the author described as "modal-linear", "derival-linear", and "harmony" materials. In the remaining three parts, they were individually subjected to variation, reuniting again at the end of the composition. Faithful to his committed musical expression, Branislav Stevanić presented his work with *Solo Song 12, "Our Autumn"* [*Solo pesma 12, "Naša jesen"*] for baritone, *gusle*, violin and double bass, composed on the text of Čedomir Minderović, a veteran of the Yugoslav People's Liberation War. The content of the song, based on a discourse on class consciousness, and the need and desire to fight for a classless society, was intentionally put to music with ascetic means and periodical reminiscences of some famous musical idioms or examples from music history – from singing to the *gusle*, to bars from the anthem of the Soviet Union. This musical arrangement of a song is not intended for communication with the

wider audience in the manner of, for example, massive songs, but remains within the hermetic world of art itself. With his *Fantasy "The Beginning"* [*Fantazija "Početak"*] for piano, Jug Konstantin Marković demonstrated different possibilities in the treatment of an instrument, possibilities integrated by a uniquely impressionistic sound, whose expression refers to the Debussian, Scriabinian and Messiaenic heritage. *Rain Charm Folk Song* [*Narodna dodolska pesma*], Miniature for soprano and piano by Marko Kovač, was written to the verses of a Serbian folk song, and interpreted more as a musically, succinctly shaped impression than as a narrative musical flow in which the piano part takes over the function of illustrating the epic mood, the base on which the tremulous voice part develops. Placing the notion of major and minor thirds as the carriers of two moods – happiness and sorrow – as the musical foundation of his fixation on a Venetian anti-carnival, Matija Anđelković develops his composition *Da ništa a ništa* [*That Nothing And Nothing*] for flute, alto flute, alto saxophone, cello and piano as an emotionally and doubly distorted "view" of a carnival, a "view" from which the celebration of exaggeratedly sensory characteristics and stimuli turns into its negative.

The final, fourth concert of the festival was dedicated to Concerts by three authors – Miša Cvijović, Vladimir Korać and Marko Marić. The composition *Trolls* for clarinet, trumpet, violin, cello and piano by Miša Cvijović was inspired by the fantastic creatures from Nordic mythology, which the author presented in a series of "portraits", seen in the mythical descriptions of trolls as dangerous and solitary beings the one side, and the author's personal fantasy

that constructs them through a certain emotional prism on the other. This dualism is painted with music through the equivalence, established between specific melodic movements, instrumental gestures, and the imagined movements and gestures of the trolls. Within this structure, the orchestration solutions and harmonic developments (which along with the other musical elements fit into the stylistic frames of Late Romanticism, Expressionism and Neo-Classicism), form a role of discovery of the emotional world of the trolls or perhaps the author's emotional experience of these fantastic creatures. The composition by Vladimir Korać, *Epilogue or Lasciatemi morire* for string quartet, with its name suggesting the aria from Claudio Monteverdi's opera *Ariadne*, reveals the reference according to which the author built the entire work. Setting it up as the result of "personal readings and the experience of Claudio Monteverdi's music", Vladimir Korać builds this work on an intonative equivalency with the historical model, achieving a closeness with it, in atmosphere and mood. Still, the work elaborates in a significant measure the basic motifs of Monteverdi's aria, while in a Postmodern manner it strives to apply authentic compositional solutions, primarily in the way it treats the model. The composition by Marko Marić *Towards The Sky [Ka nebu]* was the last work performed at the festival. This composition for harp, piano, percussions and string quintet, was written in a cycle form of four movements,

as a result of the author's inspiration by the life and work of the two composers – Béla Bartók and Vasilije Mokranjac. Close in sound to the music of the two composers, the cycle is developed on the basis of several initial motives that in the course of the work collide and blend, forming a dramatic ascent almost to the finale itself, which, in the spirit of Mokranjac, echoes, as it disappears, in the piano part.

The eighth edition of *Young Authors' Concerts* was an opportunity to continue monitoring the creative range of the generation which at this moment is entering the world of musical professionalism and to which, one might say, it already belongs in terms of its achievements. This insight into its musical orientation shows that it was less oriented to the multimedial, the experimental and to creativity in the domain of electronic media, and more to expression in conventional musical language, which it has mastered with considerable compositional and technical skill, while the heterogeneity of the poetic orientations promises a potentially colorful mosaic of Serbian art music in the new century. The festival of *Young Authors' Concerts*, in that sense, represents not only a review of current production, but also a kind of window into the future, which would certainly have to remain wide open because of the future itself.

Translated by Rastko Jakovljević