
NEW WORKS

Article received on 15th August 2012
Article accepted on 24th October 2012
UDC: 785.4 ; 78.071.1 Живковић Ђ.

Milan Milojković*

University of Novi Sad
Academy of Arts – Department of Music
Section for Musicology and Ethnomusicology

ON THE GUARDING OF THE HEART BY ĐURO ŽIVKOVIĆ: ANOTHER VIEW ON THE SYMBIOSIS OF RELIGION, STATE AND MUSIC

Abstract: *On the guarding of the Heart*, is an ‘instrumental cantata’ by Đuro Živković, performed at the 20th *International Review of Composers* in Belgrade, by the ensemble *Klangforum Wien*. This „spiritual“ composition, as Živković describes it, is connected to *Philokalia*, a collection of Orthodox texts assembled in the 18th century around the idea of ‘love for beauty’. By linking his compositional actions to the Church and large, important traditions – and today, when the rawness of all these ideas clashes with both the recent past and the actual crisis – Živković offers a Utopia of new stability and order that, within the social chaos, can be found only in society’s ‘antipode’: the individual. However, since a work of art is a phenomenon whose ‘ontological’ and ‘phenomenological’ foundation relies on institutional support and social engagement, it stems from the place it occupies in a society’s production structure. Thus, the knowledge on ‘the guarding of the heart’ comes from a composer who mastered the technique, and is not likely to use all of those fantasies to snap the audience out of their lethargy and confront them with the current problems. On the contrary, by eliminating uncertainty he induces us to ‘descend’ somewhere where ‘eternity’ overpowers current problems, and that place he calls ‘the heart’ of ‘the spiritual’.

Keywords: *The International Review of Composers*, spiritual music, contemporary music, Orthodoxy, society, production.

* Author contact information: milanmuz@gmail.com

Апстракт: *О чувању срца* [*On the guarding of the Heart*] је „инструментална кантата“ Ђуре Живковића, изведена у оквиру 20. *Међународне трибине композитора* у Београду од стране ансамбла *Klangforum Wien*. Ова “духовна” композиција, како је Живковић одређује, повезана је са *Филокалијом*, збирком православних текстова окупљених у 18. веку око идеје “љубави према лепом”. Повезујући своје композиционе поступке са црквом и великим и важним традицијама – данас када огољеност тих идеја варнички како у погледу на блиску прошлост тако и на “кризну” актуелност – Живковић нуди утопију нове стабилности и реда која се може пронаћи управо у “антиподу” друштва, појединцу. Међутим, како је уметничко дело појава која своју “онтолошку” и “феноменолошку” заснованост темељи управо на институционалној подршци и друштвеном ангажману, оно има своје место у устројености производње једног друштва. Тако, знање о “чувању срца” долази из пера композитора који влада техником и није неко ко ће све те фантазме употребити да би публику пренуо из летаргије и суочио је са актуелним проблемима. Напротив, он је елиминацијом неизвесности, наводи на “силажење” негде где “вечност” надвладава тренутне проблеме, а шта он назива “срцем” или “духовним”.

Кључне речи: *Међународна трибина композитора*, духовна музика, савремена музика, православље, друштво, производња.

‘Intelektualni silazak u dubine srca, potreba da se ono sačuva i da se tamo pronađe skriveno blago unutrašnjeg kraljevstva’ [‘The intellectual descent to the depths of one’s heart, the need to preserve it and to find the hidden treasure of its inner realm’]¹ was, as composer Đuro Živković said, the thought that induced him to write the work *On the Guarding of the Heart*, performed at the 20th *International Review of Composers* in Belgrade, by the ensemble *Klangforum Wien*. Živković’s orientation, if we could speak of one, is not surprising, since this author has already flirted with religion and ‘spirituality’, striving to shroud his works with the desired semantic veil. Continuity is also apparent in the claim that his composition was directly inspired by his previous two works: *I Shall Contemplate...* and *Le Cimetière Marin*.¹ Živković described *On the Guarding of the Heart* for chamber orchestra as a cantata, emulating Bach, although there is no vocal part to logically substantiate this allusion.² However, such connections obviously are not Živković’s goal and he deftly and conspicuously avoids them. By this act of association with Bach, Živković, first and foremost, presents himself as an author who respects ‘the great tradition’ of the history of music, which begins and ends with Bach, and then as an author who has a necessary individualized attitude towards that tradition.

¹ Quoted from http://composers.rs/?page_id=1757

² Ibid.

Thus, to begin with, we can say that Živković's special quality, i.e. his identity as an author, has a plausible alibi, which he personally is also aware of, judging by his emphasizing that aspect. It is an important reference for the audience who, particularly in their approach to contemporary music and in our midst, are somewhat apprehensive, as it seems, of the premieres of new works, since they cannot know for certain if they will be able to form a notion about the performed composition with their (conceptual) mechanism. In Živković's case, one can say that the threshold was crossed by means of a safe positioning close to the dominant musical canon, so it seems that, in a certain sense, a kind of favourable judgement is assured *a priori*. However, this is only part of Živković's artistic strategy.

We need not particularly emphasize how often the results of the symbiosis of religion and art have been favourable for both sides. In that respect, Živković does not introduce innovations. He embraces the usual benefits of indoctrination, connecting them to purely musical components, as he personally stressed in his resumé and the programme booklet: 'Rano se zainteresovao za folklor, pravoslavnu tradiciju i vizantijsku muziku, što ga je podstaklo da razvije niz kompozicionih tehnika poput poliritmije, improvizacije, lestvičnih nizova zasnovanih na osobenim harmonijama, polifonije slojeva (multipolifonije) i heterofonije' ['Developed an early interest in folklore, Orthodox tradition and Byzantine music, which encouraged him to master a whole range of compositional techniques, such as polyrhythm, improvisation, scales based on peculiar harmonies, layer polyphony (multi-polyphony) and heterophony].³ Again, it is of no particular significance whether this connection is indeed logically justified, but the author is surely influenced by linking compositional techniques with religion, tradition and folklore, since he does not reassess the 'nature' of that link, but affirms it as natural. Neither the 'nature' of Živković's activism in the present day is challenged, since he never refers to the role of religion and, in our context, Orthodox tradition in the social reality, nor to society's attitude towards the Byzantine and, generally, ecclesiastical heritage in music and beyond.

In the context of the *Review* 2011, a truly deep impression was made by Živković's comment on his work's theme – 'potreba povratka samom sebi' ['the need to return to my own self']⁴ – since it can be assumed that, after the welcoming address by a government representative at the opening ceremony, many who had perceived that address as appallingly inappropriate for both the Minister of Culture and the *Review* – especially the younger people – considered Živković's

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

idea as an alternative to the painstaking struggle to preserve a certain cultural level in Serbian society. Indeed, it seems that Živković fits into the existing social and cultural paradigms since he openly respects and cultivates ‘Serbian traditions’, embodied in the Orthodox religion, and that, in a state where the influence of the Church is extremely strong, definitely cannot hurt. Also, his work is not too provoking. As the author himself says, it induces the ‘intellectual descent’ that, whatever it may be like and wherever it may lead to, certainly agrees with the repressive mechanisms of authority, because, so long as someone is descending, there is no danger that they will stand up and say what they think about themselves and the society they live in.

Also, Živković connects his ‘spiritual’ composition, as he personally describes it, to *Philokalia*, a collection of Orthodox texts assembled in the 18th century around the idea of ‘love for beauty’. ‘Tranquility and watchfulness’, as well as ‘solitude and exile’ are the notions with which Živković, through his work, wants to establish certain relations. In *Philokalia* – which was actually assembled in order to comprehend spiritual guidance (or the father) – these are in fact operands that refer to *nepsis*, a Greek notion whose meaning is related to contemplative prayer and watchfulness. Prayer and watchfulness, although seemingly an unusual conjunction, in this context refer to rejecting anything that could influence a person and divert their thoughts from God. In that sense, love for beauty is understood as the supreme feeling of total commitment that endures thanks to watchfulness and the persevering denial of the corporeal. Among other things, such ideas are also known from the cases of religious fanaticism, which relies on a similar mechanism of collectivization of human corporeality by rejecting the body in order to comprehend the ‘higher’ idea. Although music has been united with various abstract and transcendental concepts throughout history, Živković’s act of creating a particular *applied Philokalia* actually reflects the delicate combination of religion, state and artistic technique that, in my opinion, deserves more detailed consideration.

This composition, as well as a prayer, stems from persisting on one musical idea, which is in that respect exceptional. It undergoes certain transformations during the course of the work, but those are intended rather to demonstrate resistance to changes than to expand its potential for development. That idea includes working with tones and noises that can be produced on the instruments, as well as insistence on the improvisational character of the musical tissue. Such *improvisando* is more Oriental in origin and is reminiscent not only of Byzantine, but also of Arabic and Indian music practice. It is also marked by a sort of *ison*, which resounds almost without interruption throughout the whole work. It is rendered by various instruments, while the piano emerges as the leading

protagonist, since the better part of the motivic content is placed in its part. In a certain way, such articulation of the musical tissue is reminiscent of Byzantine practice, where the singer was accompanied by the supporter's drone. However, such procedure is present only in certain segments of Živković's work, since the piano, in the course of the composition, also takes part in rendering the *ison*. The *ison* is transformed during the work, hence it has two forms that can be discerned – the one where it is made up of a multitude of short notes scattered all around the acoustic texture, and the other where it is made up of held notes and/or pulsating chords in the piano part.

The composer begins his work with a heterogeneous acoustic background, an *ison* consisting of noises and creaks, with the notable employment of strings playing *col legno* and/or behind the bridge (ex. 1). Soon the prominent motive enters in the piano part, made of definite pitches, unlike the 'accompaniment' over which it is sounding (ex. 2). After several variations of this motive, which occasionally develops into a virtuoso passage, another pitch departs from the background and conquers the acoustic space of the work. Then the piano recedes 'off centre', continuing to develop previous material, while the violins persistently impose their melodic phrases in high register. The tumultuous background, without interruption, asserts its creaking component, as a contrast to the melodic and harmonic 'polje' ['array'] – to use Živković's term⁵ – which the musical tissue thus far has reached. Following the dynamic increase, the texture becomes denser, leading to a peculiar climactic plateau, which is, above the tremulous pulsation of the piano chords, crisply penetrated by high notes and noises. With the entrance of the double bass in its deepest register, the acoustic mass begins to dissipate, creating a kind of ostinato, above which events from the already established acoustic pool are interlaced. The piano ostinato occasionally gets ahead of the other parts, while 'behind' it a cluster is formed; after the escalation of that cluster, the percussive-harmonic matrix transforms into a trill. It will become part of a long composite sound, whose timbral changes will assume the structural activity of this segment. Such '*Klangfarbenmelodie*' will be interrupted by the re-establishment of the acoustic situation from the beginning.

The piano motive again rips the veil made of held notes, in which the most prominent are the muted trumpet and the violins. Unlike the first time, now this segment subsides, by the gradual reduction of the texture to a few elements. The background is now being interrupted by occasional tremolos in the piano part, which reaches deeper and deeper registers, and then, with the sound of bells, the *ison* disappears, leaving only the variations of the motive in the piano part.

⁵ Ibid.

After a short silence, a deep pizzicato marks the re-establishment of the background, somewhat calmer than at the beginning, but without significant differences. It is again articulated into a long note, but a greater dynamic growth is absent. This time, the held note activates not only the timbral, but the melodic component as well, which, in spite of its narrow range, plays an important role in this context. After a mild increase in the dynamic, the timbre of the strings occupies the better part of the acoustic situation. The changes of its intensity occasionally draw the contours of a 'chant', or even a chord. A short appeasement re-introduces a tremolo in the piano part. Above it, a melody in the high register of the violins starts to unwind, increasing the tension by long held notes and *passionato* articulation. After a short development, the musical tissue almost disappears in *pianissimo*, which nevertheless continues to sound. As a kind of breathing, the *ison* begins to wax and wane, while the piano part once more renders the variants of the main motive. An escalation of the events again leads to the initial intensity of the work. The piano tremolo develops concurrently with the background, until a fourth-interval ostinato is established, which will first be a 'foundation' for held notes, and later the bustle of noises and definite pitches will melt into an acoustic mass which will occasionally be penetrated by flickers of usual sonic articulation, mostly in the brass instruments. As the work draws closer to the end, their emergences abate, and a chord pulsation is established, which is later reduced to a fourth interval in the piano and the held notes of stringed and wind instruments (ex. 3). After sustaining this chord for almost a minute, the composition ends.

The relationship established between this work and the existing social situation in our culture can be perceived with respect to the currently dominant mode of production – not only artistic, but general. Although Živković lives in Sweden and not in Serbia, it is very important to consider his work in the domestic context, since it corresponds with the dominant cultural practices in our midst. Bearing in mind Živković's previous compositions (e.g. *I Shall Contemplate...* from 2011, *White Angel* from 2006 etc.), *On the Guarding of the Heart* apparently adheres to the concepts established in those works, meaning that, in spite of the composer's foreign engagement, the most significant social relations that his work creates are those with a Serbian cultural context. Testimony of this is the fact that, in spite of Živković's compositions being premiered and performed abroad, the reviews and reports from such occasions cannot be found on the Internet. Thus, one can assume that the author seeks (and finds) the 'spirituality' of his music, which is obviously crucial to him, in the orderly and functional Swedish cultural context, while its implementation with the audience can be most complete only in the Serbian cultural practices.

Although it may not be apparent at first, everything in the music ‘itself’ is very carefully organized, without the intention of leaving or challenging the autonomous musical domain. In his poetics, the composer focuses on chord(s), i.e. the harmonic array, as he says, which already implies a certain order and stability, and it goes without saying that such a universalistic way of thinking has an anchorage in history. Furthermore, the author often creates a tension between the tone structures, both horizontal and vertical ones, and the background made of inarticulate sounds of instruments displaced from their usual habit. The total acoustic result, bearing in mind the composition’s ‘guiding idea’, mostly leaves the listeners with the impression of monumentality and can make them delve into themselves, ‘intellectually’ of course, due to the sublime quality of the sound they hear and the ‘spiritual cognizance’ such a sound induces. In view of that, it is not surprising that Živković ascribes great significance to technique and connects his procedures to religion. Developing his compositional idiom in the 21st century, all the while linking his actions to the Church and great traditions – when the rawness of all these ideas clashes with both the recent past and the actual crisis – Živković offers a Utopia of new stability and order that, within the social chaos, can be found only in society’s ‘antipode’: the individual. However, the ‘information’ about their own depths to which they allegedly descend is conveyed to the individuals through a work of art, a phenomenon whose ontological and phenomenological foundation relies on institutional support and social engagement – in other words, it stems from the place it occupies in a society’s production structure. Also, the knowledge of ‘the depths of the heart’ comes from a composer who mastered the technique, and is not likely to use all of those fantasies to snap the audience out of their lethargy and confront them with the current problems. On the contrary, by eliminating uncertainty he induces us to ‘descend’ somewhere where ‘eternity’ overpowers current problems, and that place he calls ‘the heart’ of ‘the spiritual’.

Since the Serbian economy – or production, to be precise – is in an extremely grave condition and often unprofitable, the public sector is still more alluring than private enterprise. This implies that the state, behind a smoke-screen of caring for the well-being of society and market regulation – in a symbiosis with private capital which, on such a market, always has the advantage if it is on friendly terms with the state – retains its authority by promoting animosity towards activism, justifying this with the fear of the menace of liberalism, i.e. crisis, and the main operand in such a strategy is the preservation of the national tradition and the identity that corporate capitalism allegedly threatens to annihilate. Although authority in a state such as Serbia could not even be established without this kind of corporate capital, since it directly depends on money, either from those same corporations or from loans by banks that, naturally, work in the

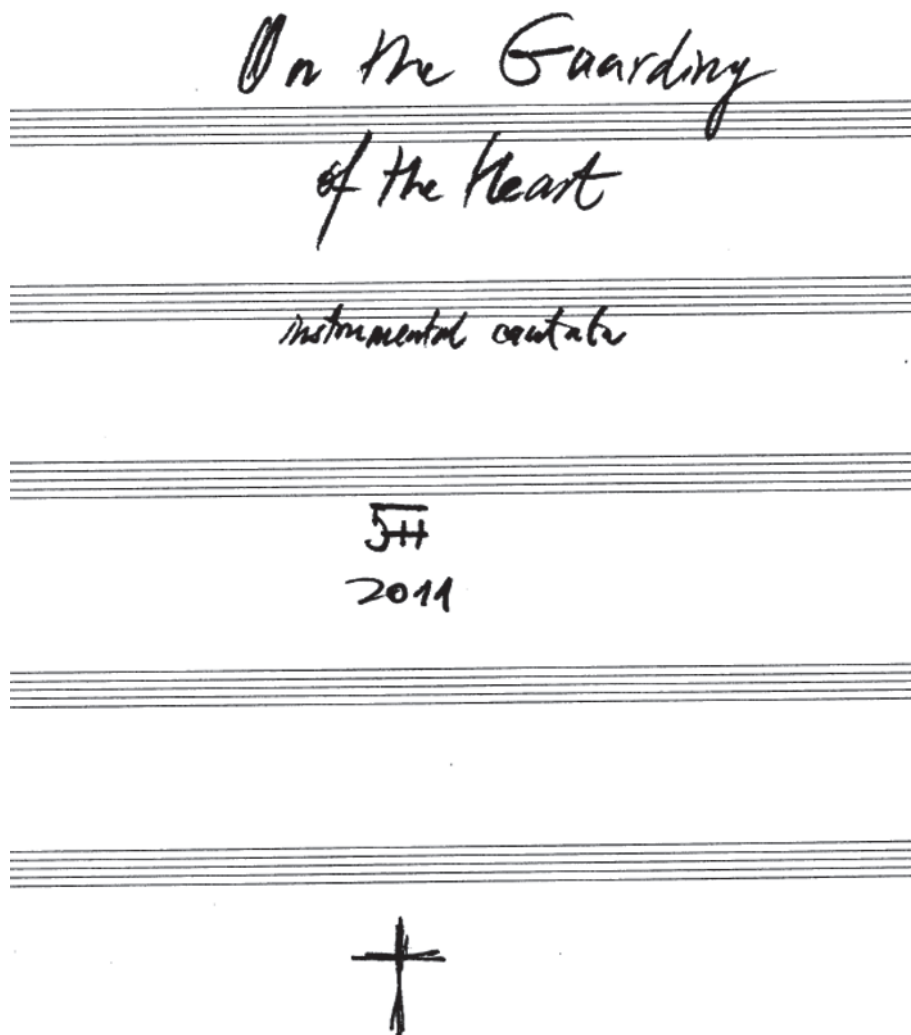
corporations' interest, the Serbian authorities nevertheless manage to maintain a mood of reconciliation in society, under the guise of 'protection', in order to preserve non-competitive market relations. In that respect, 'permanence', 'eternity' and 'tradition' are terms that are readily used in domestic culture, probably for the very reason that almost nothing in our midst is really permanent (in its stable condition), starting with the state. However, given the production relations described above, whose contradictions are glaringly obvious, particularly the ratios of production and consumption in Serbia, it is very stimulating to promote compositions such as Živković's. They are not trite, they do not insult cultivated taste, and as in this case, they could even be well-balanced regarding 'the intellectual and the spiritual spheres', which are all indicators of stability and reliability. Also, the sound of the work and its compositional-technical execution correspond to world trends in music, so foreign ensembles often include Živković's works in their repertoires. However, performers are not focused on the conceptual but on the technical aspect of the works, although the composer stresses the connection in both the programme comments and his resumé. Their link, beyond doubt, reaches completeness only in the Serbian context, particularly if one bears in mind that an important 'foreign' mediator is acting between the Serbian composer and the Serbian audience, such as the *Klangforum Wien* or the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, where Živković is a lecturer. Thus, the local 'spirituality' of Byzantine (Orthodox) provenance obtains a universal platform in the unspoken placability of the technique, which emerges as a general and 'neutral' quality. Živković, therefore, as a creator, builds the image of a guardian of tradition who, thanks to his technical skills, transcends national boundaries, proving the 'propriety' and 'extra-temporality' of his construction of Serbian heritage, which, if adequately mediated, will demonstrate its value by closeness to universal 'truths'.

REFERENCES

- Altiser, Luj, „Ideologija i državni ideološki aparati“, in: *Marksizam u svetu*, br. 7–8, Belgrade, 1979, 87 – 92.
- Dickie, George, *Art and Aesthetics: An Institutional analysis*, Ithaka, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Levi-Stros, Klod, *Mit i značenje*, Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2009.
- Lukić, Sveta: *Umetnost na mostu*, Belgrade: Mala edicija „Ideja“, 1975.
- Mikić, Vesna, *Lica srpske muzike – neoklasicizam*, Belgrade, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti u Beogradu, Katedra za muzikologiju, 2009.
- Veselinović-Hofman, Mirjana, *Pred muzičkim delom*, Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007.

Appendix and examples courtesy of the author.

Appendix: title page of the manuscript



Example 1: the beginning, the forming of the ison

Musical score for Example 1, showing the beginning of the piece. The score includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The music is marked with various dynamics and performance instructions, including *Con sord.*, *flautando estremo*, *pppp*, *ten.*, and *stesso*. The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing multiple notes and rests. The overall texture is dense and complex, with many overlapping lines and dynamic markings.

Example 2: piano motive, bar 4

Musical score for Example 2, showing a piano motive in bar 4. The score is for Piano (Pno.) and includes a single staff with a piano motive. The music is marked with *ord.* and *pp*. The motive consists of a few notes, followed by a rest, and then a few more notes. The overall texture is sparse and focused on the piano part.

Example 3: the forming of the 'final' ostinato, bar 216

Musical score for Example 3, showing the forming of the 'final' ostinato in bar 216. The score includes staves for Piano (Pno.), Violin I (Vn. I), Violin II (Vn. II), Viola, Violoncello (Vcl.), and Contrabbasso (Cb.). The music is marked with various dynamics and performance instructions, including *fff*, *ancora più e crescendo sempre poco a poco*, *stesso sempre*, *pp*, *staccatissimo poco*, *flautando molto*, *pp*, *segue più*, *poco f*, *p*, and *pp*. The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing multiple notes and rests. The overall texture is dense and complex, with many overlapping lines and dynamic markings.