
REVIEWS

Article received on 13 September 2013

Article accepted on 30 September 2013

UDC: 78.087.612.1(086.76)(049.32)

78.071.2:929 Арсикин И.

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Serbian Musicological Society

RELEASES OF FMU, BELGRADE

Irina Arsikin

CD 1 / CD 2

FMU 002

Fakultet muzičke umetnosti

Belgrade / Serbia

Irina Arsikin (1938), a soprano, is an exceptional figure in the Serbian art of interpretation, whose career, in the general opinion, attests to her unique vocal and artistic individuality, exclusive dedication to concert singing, wide repertoire ranging from Baroque to the 20th century music, audacity to take on premiere performances of contemporary authors, particularly Serbian, on the one hand, and paradoxically – to the small number of preserved marks of all

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these valuable parameters, on the other. Numerous praises by critics and acknowledgments by peers and audiences, who followed most of her performances during her relatively short but intensive career which, from 1970 to 1985, gave a particular nuance to the rich musical scene of the then Yugoslavia, are not adequately reinforced in acoustic archives, discography and video recordings. The fact is that the fragile, most of all lyrical voice, symbiotical with lied and capable of transforming into a dramatic or coloratura soprano of this long-standing soloist of the Radio-Television Belgrade Mixed Choir, the ensemble whose reputation she has elevated to the international level, has not appeared on any sound carrier released by PGP, the label affiliated to the public broadcasting service. Neither were other performers spared this grievous negligence, even though they too were symbols of the RTB ensembles, such as mezzo-soprano Aleksandra Ivanović, who, during the 1970s, was also a trade mark of the RTB Choir.

Recently, these huge oversights were partly compensated by the Faculty of Music and their release of a double CD in homage to Professor Irina Arsikin, with a selection of the scarce live and studio recordings, preserved in the Radio Belgrade Acoustic Archive and in private collections. This valuable, although belated document was released with the help of the Ministry of

Culture of the Republic of Serbia in 1,000 copies, which are not subject to sale, and it was signed by the editor Katarina Erić and the sound engineer Đorđe Petrović.

With a very good dramaturgical concept, designed most probably in consultation with the artist personally, the release reclaims from oblivion her principal repertoire areas – and the most important instances of cooperation with famous ensembles, conductors and artists (the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation Choir and Orchestra, the Belgrade Philharmonic with Veronika Dudarova, the Belgrade Wind Quintet, pianists Dušan Trbojević and Stanko Šepić...)

The recording of the *Kyrie, Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei* from Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, made in January 1983 at the RTB Symphony Orchestra concert with Borivoje Simić conducting, and Vivaldi's *Laudate pueri*, also recorded live in 1978 with the ensemble *Pro musica* conducted by Đura Jakšić, are the symmetrical and extroverted frame of this double CD, in spite of being just excerpts from huge live vocal-instrumental production marked by Irina Arsičin's prowess. All the other included works – except for the cycle *Tražim pomilovanje* [*I am Seeking a Pardon*] by Stanojlo Rajičić, in a not exactly perfect but powerful and dramatic concert version with the Belgrade Philharmonic and Veronika Dudarova from 1981, and the decorative *Kolo* [*Round Dance*] by Josif Marinković with the RTB Choir – belong to the domain of chamber and intimate music, such as four songs by Kornelije Stanković, selected compositions from *Lirika* [*Lyric Pieces*] by Petar Konjović, *Nyolc magyar népdal* [*Eight Hungarian Folk Songs*] by Béla Bartók... The central section of the release,

carried on the last third of the first disc and the beginning of the second one – containing *Psalm radosny* [*Cheerful Psalm*] by Augustyn Bloch, extremely striking and demanding, in spite of the title; the lyrical substance of *Pokošeni osmesi* [*Smiles Swept Away*], one of the most exciting works by Zlatan Vauda, with the Belgrade Wind Quintet; and seven songs by Hugo Wolf, whose noble vocal aura is intensified by Stanko Šepić's pianism – represents the pinnacle of Irina Arsičin's art, her voice, refined, subtle and powerful at the same time, and her unfailing intuition which inspired the musicians she collaborated with... For all those who followed her performance, this is an evocation of the most perfect concert moments that she is remembered for.

Unfortunately, for those who will only become acquainted with Irina Arsičin for the first time through this release, the accompanying booklet provides only the most basic data on the artist and her career. One would think that the “eloquent interstices” in the brief text of the booklet and scant data on the front and back covers once again fulfil a double agenda – unquestioning acclamation and persistent silence at the same time – which has consistently followed this exceptional artistic personality. The fact that only the words IRINA ARSIČIN are written across the image of an open eye on the covers and the discs is more than a sufficient stimulus for recognition and enjoyment among the older Belgrade audience. However, younger listeners and/or foreign users and partners whom FMU probably presents with this non-commercial release, published with the aim of saving from oblivion the acoustic recordings of people who have built the history of

this scientific and educational institution, should at least have been familiarized with the vocation of this concert singer. Nor can the producer's note that these were live recordings refer to all the included numbers, since even a cursory listening will lead to the conclusion that Bloch's and Vauda's works have been highly professionally realized in a studio environment (in 1979 and 1978 respectively, according to the card file of the Radio Belgrade Acoustic Archive). Due to the omission of the recording date, one is unable to position various phases of Irina Arsikin on a timeline and to perceive her development, while the omission of the names of the sound engineer and the producers in charge of making these uneven live and studio recordings, created, as we ascertained, in 1972–1980, suggests a disregard of established customs when using copyrighted recordings.

Thanks to the publishing activities of the FMU, this album which freezes eight years of Irina Arsikin's creativity, besides the noted deficiencies, presents the period of her most intense stage activity and reveals the range of her artistic interests, the pinnacles of achievement and the skill of cooperation with a number of distinguished ensembles and soloists, and thus latently, in between the lines, it speaks of the music and repertoire policy thirty years ago and today, as well as of us all.

Article received on 13 September 2013
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 UDC: 786.2.083.089.6(086.76)(049.32)
 78.071.2:929 Трбојевић Д.

Dušan Trbojević,
Antologija srpske klavirske muzike /
Retrospektiva

Anthology of Serbian Piano Music /
Retrospective

CD 1 / CD 2, FMU 003

Fakultet muzičke umetnosti
 Belgrade / Serbia

A double album with the recordings of pianist Dušan Trbojević (1925–2011), released shortly before his death, bears additional significance as a monument looming over the finished creativity of this multifaceted, inquisitive and socially engaged artist. The carefully prepared and realized project by the FMU (Nataša Danilović, editor; Đorđe Petrović, mastering) is supplemented by a thorough, informative and expertly written text by Dragana Jeremić Molnar, PhD, which sheds light on various aspects of his professional career, over half a century long, as a soloist, chamber musician, composer, teacher, proactive participant in musical life and launcher of a large number of initiatives which marked the second half of the 20th century. Besides the restricted choice of recordings available to the producers, the discs' content reflects the important and most productive repertoire areas that promoted Trbojević into a cornerstone personality of Serbian pianism. The image would probably be more complete with appendices, such as a review of Trbojević's compositional creativity (*Sonata rustica* or *Tri igre* [*Three Dances*], for example, performed by the author), and

fragments of his warm and communicative spoken word which lent a special colour to all of his public appearances, especially when he performed pieces by Serbian authors. Also, by selecting material recorded from 1964 to 2010, the producers managed to outline the evolutionary processes and constants in a long and fruitful career.

The first CD, titled *Anthology of Serbian Piano Music*, includes works by composers with whom Trbojević had an unceasingly intimate and privileged relationship, such as Josip Slavenski (*Iz Jugoslavije* [From Yugoslavia]), Predrag Milošević (*Sonatina*), Milutin Radenković (*Concertino* for piano and orchestra), and Dejan Despić (*Nokturno* [Nocturne]), as well as three pieces by Vasilije Mokranjac, which occupy almost half of the total duration of the first disc and represent the centre-piece of the entire album. All the five authors (among whom one should also add Vlastimir Peričić) satisfy the double initial criteria which Trbojević, by his own admission, adhered to when approaching a new composition as a “practical performer” who pays attention to “...autorski tekst (pre svega njegovu sadržajnu stranu) i ličnost autora, njegov odnos prema muzici, i životu, eventualnu povezanost nekog događaja ili stanja sa određenim delom itd.” [“...the composer’s text (most of all, its content) and the author’s personality, his attitude towards music and life, possible relatedness of a certain event or condition with a particular work, etc.”]¹

¹ Dušan Trbojević, *Mesto „Odjeka“ i „Poeme za klavir i orkestar“ u opusu Vasilija Mokranjca* [The place of “Odjeci” and “Poema za klavir i orkestar” in the oeuvre of Vasilije Mokranjac], in: *Život i delo Vasilija Mokranjca – Zbornik sa simpozijuma povodom 20 godina od kompozitorove smrti* [Life and work of Vasilije

Although this album also combines studio and live recordings, the acoustic result and the performance level are well-balanced, which suggest strict production criteria when selecting among several available versions of certain works. However, the best are the studio recordings, such as the brilliant and rich Milošević’s *Sonatina* from 1926, and Radenković’s lesser known *Concertino* from 1958, which is surprisingly vital even today. Hence, it is all the more regrettable that we are denied information about the recording date and the names of the radio crew to whom we owe these successful and well-preserved moments of Trbojević’s pianism. Three of Mokranjac’s compositions from three different periods of his creativity – *Sonatina* in C major from 1954, *Odjeci* [Echoes] from 1973, and *Poema* [Epic Poem] for piano and orchestra from 1983 – have certainly not been included at random. Trbojević in the said text perceives them as a kind of triptych in which “...se iskristalisala i muzička i ljudska ličnost Mokranjčeva... uvek prisutan, rekao bih neizlečiv bol, uz stalno osećanje tragičnog... ali i uporna traganja, napor da se čovek oslobodi čvrstih okova nemira i sumnji, čežnja za mirom, skladom i slobodnim visinama i prostorima” [“...Mokranjac’s musical and human personality have crystallized... an ever present pain, I would say incurable, with a permanent feeling of tragedy... but also a persistent quest, an effort to liberate the human being from the heavy chains of turmoil and doubt, a longing for peace, harmony and free skies and spaces”].²

Mokranjac – Proceedings of the symposium on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the composer’s death], SOKOJ-MIC, Belgrade, 2005, 101.

² Ibid., 104.

Although he constantly returned to these scores over the decades, performed and recorded them, always discovering some new details, some deeper dimension, the chosen versions of all three works are *live*: the first two at a concert in 2004, while *Poema* was realized at a RTB Symphony Orchestra tour, with Vančo Čavdarski as the conductor, in Spain in 1986. The golden centre of the album are the classical *Odjeci*, with their condensed yet enigmatic form, pianistic and harmonic splendour, which Trbojević, through numerous performances (140 times, according to his tally), recordings and teaching, elevated to the level of a symbol of Serbian piano music of the late 20th century, leaving them as a legacy to the following generations of pianists.

Retrospective, which is the title of the second CD, concisely reminds us of Trbojević's standard concert repertoire, which, unlike the domain of contemporary pieces which he approached as a member of chamber ensembles (especially within the Studio for Piano Sound), mostly included the celebrities of Classicism, Romanticism and Impressionism, with such cornerstone authors as Beethoven, Chopin, Wagner, Scriabin, Debussy. The digitalized (occasionally fuzzy) recording of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, made in 1964 with the RTB Symphony Orchestra conducted by Živojin Zdravković, presents a rising 39-year-old pianist, who exudes the energy and self-confidence gained in his studies with Kendall Taylor, and who manifests his objective nature, mostly lyrical. His interpretation of Beethoven, though not technically flawless either in the soloist or orchestral parts, unfolds in a confident understanding with the conductor and the

ensemble, convincing formal organization and musical interpretation, not so dramatic as *concertante* in character, and relies on large and expressive dynamic arches without particular insistence on details. Apart from showing the serious promise of the young Trbojević, this recording, after five decades, is an interesting acoustic document about the aesthetics of interpretation and the listeners' response in the 1950s in Belgrade, when *moderation* and *balance* in all parameters overruled attempts at individualistic interpretations of music. The other included works, which Trbojević performed publicly when he was older – in 2000 and 2010 respectively – especially Debussy's *Preludes*, are marked by a different sensibility, becoming absorbed in new tonal colours, with an insistence on rests full of eloquent silence and *reverberations*. One could say that near the end of his life, after decades of activity, investing energy into maintaining the dynamism of musical life, and promoting authentic musical values, Trbojević in the miniatures strived to reveal his inner voice and reach, as in Debussy's *Clair de lune*, "peace, harmony, free skies and spaces" which he evoked when talking about V. Mokranjac.

Given our state of affairs, even before this album, Dušan Trbojević's art had relatively good sound-carrier coverage and valuation, but in spite of that, this ambitious release by the Faculty of Music, initiated during the pianist's life, today represents a valuable cornerstone document about a finished creativity and a tribute to a striking personality in the Serbian art of interpretation.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović