
COMPOSER /MUSICOLOGIST SPEAKS

Article received on 13 September 2013

Article accepted on 30 September 2013

UDC: 78.072:929 Веселиновић-Хофман М.(047.53)

LIVING ONE'S OWN THOUGHT EXPERIENCE WITH MUSIC AND MUSICOLOGY

Interview with Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman

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Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, PhD, is a musicologist whose scholarly activity is primarily oriented towards Serbian and European avant-garde and postmodern music, which made her well-known and recognized both in Serbia and in the broader musicological domains of Europe and the world. According to domestic critics, with her scholarly work, Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman “u našoj sredini prva izgradila, naučno osvestila i teorijski obrazložila savremeni interdisciplinarni model muzikološke kompetencije” [“is the first in our midst who has built, scholarly identified

and theoretically argued the contemporary interdisciplinary model of musicological competence”] (*Z. Premate*, “Pronalazači i otkrivači muzike” [“Inventors and Discoverers of Music”], *Politika*, 28th February 2009), while foreign musicological circles distinguish her as “one of the leading thinkers in the field of

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music and aesthetics in Central Europe” (*MUZIKI – Journal of Music Research in Africa*, Vol. I, No. 1, 2004).

She is a professor at the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade and Interdisciplinary Doctoral Studies of Arts and Media Theory at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She has also lectured at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, cooperated with the Hochschule für Musik und Theater [University of Music and Theatre] in Rostock and the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, while from 2003 to 2005 she worked at the Department of Music at the University of Pretoria. A great number of now established musicologists earned their BA, MA and PhD degrees under the mentorship of this exquisite educator.

Dr Veselinović-Hofman is the Editor-in-Chief of the bilingual scholarly *New Sound International Journal of Music*, a member of the Editorial Board of the *Zbornik Matice srpske za scenske umetnosti i muziku* [*The Matica Srpska Review of Theatrical Arts and Music*], member of the Editorial Music Board for compiling the *Serbian Encyclopaedia*, editor of many musicological publications and supervisor of scholarly projects at the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music and at *Matica srpska*. She participates in musicological conferences, national and international, and she is also a member of numerous international scholarly teams and selection committees.

She is the Head of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade; she was the Chairperson of the Serbian Musicological Society until 2013; she has been the Secretary of the Department of Theatrical Arts and Music at the *Matica srpska* since 2012; she is a permanent member and associate of *Matica srpska*, as well as a member of the Composer’s Association of Serbia and the International Musicological Society.

Building her methodology and musicological poetics on a contextual interpretation whose imperative is an analytical foundation, Dr Veselinović-Hofman published a large number of scholarly studies, analyses and scholarly essays, a special place among them being occupied by her books – for their originality, theoretical depth and innovativeness, subtle analytical considerations, frequent pioneering approaches to the illumination of the treated subject’s quintessence.

At the beginning of our conversation, I would like to mention just some of your books – Stvaralačka prisutnost evropske avangarde u nas [Creative Presence of the European Avant-Garde in Our Midst], which was written in the 1970s, right after the processes you wrote about had ‘finished’; then *Umetnost i izvan nje: Poetika i stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* [Art and Outside of It: Poetics and Creativity of Vladan Radovanović], published in 1991, which considers various topics in the context of the oeuvre of a very special artist, including current

forms of multimedia art; then Fragmenti o muzičkoj postmoderni [Fragments on Musical Postmodernism] which you wrote in the early 1990s, during the focal, highly 'incendiary' period of the times and the phenomenon you were thinking about! We should certainly mention compiling the capital edition Istorija srpske muzike [History of Serbian Music], published in 2007, which covers Serbian music up to 2005. Also, in the early 1970s, you initiated launching the festival Muzika u Srbiji [Music in Serbia], which until the 1990s (when the festival turned into the International Review of Composers) followed the latest production of Serbian composers each year. For a long while you were a musical critic (Radio Belgrade Third Programme and Politika daily), writing mostly about new works. For over twenty years you have been the Editor-in-Chief of the New Sound International Journal of Music, one of the main pivotal points of which is musical creation, i.e. its musicological interpretation, which in every issue of the journal is accompanied by a compact disc with the analysed works...

I wonder, and I am asking you too: what is the role and responsibility of thinkers (in general, and thinkers about music in particular) today? Is it only to testify, to bear witness, or can they still have some influence on the course of events (in general, and in music in particular)?

I believe that today, as I presume has always been the case, all authentic thinkers are aware of the importance of the roles that you mentioned, as well as a certain extent of their own responsibility regarding these roles. The roles are interdependent and interlaced; only the first one is, perhaps, self-contained – testifying *per se*, in the sense of 'dispassionate' registering the course of events. Nevertheless, to have any kind of influence on that course – and that influence is most realistic and, after all, expected primarily in your own profession and environment – it is necessary to be able not only to give evidence about appearances and manifestations of things by your presence and perception of them, but also to give the relevant information about them, i.e. to give a particular testimonial, and also to substantiate your personal opinion about them. Among thinker's roles, it is precisely this *substantiated critique* that opens up the possibilities of their influence – mainly on events in the domain of their expertise (thus in music too), on the position of that domain in the everyday ambience of social and cultural relations, but also on these relations as such.

However, it is not as simple as it might seem at first, because this influence also depends essentially on the social position of the thinker personally. The more dignified the position, the greater the potential influence – and the other way round. This is basically a reversible process whose initial point, nevertheless, is *that* social position which intends for the thinker the leading ideological

and political context by its attitude towards the authority of knowledge and the need for a hierarchically positive stability of criteria along the entire educational pyramid.

In our midst, unfortunately, the authority of knowledge has been fundamentally undermined since a long time ago. When I say that, I am thinking of depreciation of dignity of all the exponents of knowledge – from nursery assistants, teachers, instructors, to educational institutions, the status of a scholar or an artist... in fact, all of those who – in spite of so tiresome, so *chronically deficient* financial participation of the state! – fight for their dignity, i.e. for the unencumbered performance of their basic activities, for the promotion of their curricula and for results. Which, strangely enough, are not negligible. This is supported, for example, by the fact that in 2011 the University in Belgrade made it to the Shanghai Ranking (ARWU) of the 500 best universities in the world, a list compiled according to the achieved scientific, scholarly and research results. In our country, however, this is perceived as a sort of nature-given, indisputably self-grown yet welcome ‘decorative element’ of the society, given that the funding for education and science is dwindling by the year. Thus, recently published reports say that Serbia “sets aside [only] 0.9 per cent of the gross domestic product for higher education, and 0.26 per cent for science”! At the same time, according to Professor Branko Kovačević, who was the Vice-Chancellor of the University in Belgrade until recently, Croatia invests 1.5 per cent in higher education, and 0.5 per cent in science, while “in developed countries this reaches as high as three per cent, one third of which is provided by the state and two by the private sector”! In other words, what is in operation with us is an almost disparaging attitude towards education and knowledge, established on the full swing of the long-term process of reversal of the overall value hierarchy in our society.

Because, as you can see for yourself, for about three decades we have been in the phase of a policy of abolishing the distinctions between positive and negative developments in all the domains of our existence and work – in everyday life, as well as in the life of our individual professions; a phase exposing our civilizational and cultural profiles and reputations to far-reaching perils. Unfortunately, these profiles and reputations are already shaken quite clearly, yet this process *without any serious hindrance* still continues to destroy the fabric of our society, going deeper and wider. Regarding this, for instance, it is not irrelevant that the overall media attention in our country focuses excessively – though in a negative light – on people outside the law, outside civilized ways and behaviour, people who damage the society in every sense. Therefore, whether you want it or not, you are forced to remember their names, almost as if they were models of propriety. And do you have the opportunity to receive equally exhaustive information about scientists, scholars, artists, young winners of awards and

medals at international competitions – say, in mathematics? No. Bleak, one-off, lip-service reports about them and their accomplishments, for which I cannot even remember when was the last time they ‘earned’ to become the “Impact of the Week”,¹ are perceived in the described context of media and information almost as excesses. Let alone the state of affairs in music, which is also reflected in the media promotion of mostly reversed value scales, the promotion of tasteless banality, non-professionalism, ignorance, superficiality, simplification, everything that does not ‘fatigue’ one’s cognitive apparatus, in the aspects of all kinds of music, in the interest of profit. Or, for example, just look what we are doing to our own language. On the one hand, we are overwhelmed with grief over ‘pulling up’ and forgetting our roots, over losing our cultural identity, and on the other, in the *aggressively simplified*, petty-political perception of these categories we completely forget how necessary it is to cultivate and stand for our standard language while the media promote all kinds of its distortions. Just pay attention to the grotesque stresses of the words, abounding in certain television shows – even in news programmes – or to the elementary grammatical and orthographic errors in film subtitles or newspaper articles! At the same time, the *Politika*, a daily which used to take great care of the language quality, decided to publish a symptomatically cheap shot at the job of language editing, where those who look after the language correctness are labelled “Grammar Nazis”!!! I know, of course, that languages are living things – each of them has dialects and slangs and loanwords – but I know of no culture which has survived, built and preserved its authority by neglecting and looking down on its standard language and script. And so on, there are too many similar examples.

Therefore, it is not unusual that knowledge and its protagonists have become a laughing stock in such a context of confounded values and the inappropriate systemic response to them, in the context of a deranged cultural policy. So, what is left for the thinker then, in such an environment? To begin with, maybe an Adornian task: to confront that negativity by uncovering it through critique. But also, to try and contribute to a positive course of events in the most constructive way possible, first of all in their own profession and environment.

Is it the openness and polyphonic quality of these ‘troubled’ but also infinitely amazing, intriguing and provocative times we live in your primary reason for having dealt with and dealing with music that is created here and now, i.e. the music that still has to make history, or rather, to make history written here and now for the first time?

¹ “Utisak nedelje” [“Impact of the Week”], very popular in Serbia, is a weekly television programme presenting the most striking reports and events from Serbia and the world – though not necessarily those that made the general headlines. (Translator’s note)

I would say that my preoccupation with contemporary Serbian music – i.e. music created here and now, as you put it more precisely – originated from the fusion of my need to study unexplored fields and my interest in what is going on around me. And contemporary creativity ‘provided’ me with both. On the one hand, there is the possibility to analyse what has not yet been analysed; to systematize what has not yet been systematized; to interpret what has not yet been interpreted. Or, if all of that has already been done in certain cases, then to search for new angles of the analytical focus, to offer more appropriate systematizations, to present my own viewpoints on interpretation and elucidation. On the other hand, contemporary creation also ‘provided’ me with the opportunity to get acquainted with the current phenomena in and outside music: with technological and compositional-technical innovations, various efforts in media, style and theory, but also the possibility of contextual perception, necessarily related to the problem area of this often contradictory, disoriented, abused, provocative, above all complex, yet nevertheless beautiful *here and now*.

Therefore, I would say it is not just a matter of history as keeping track of current chronological events – but rather deliberation about historical problems in the field of the history of music as a theoretical discipline? Observing and contemplating the boom of music history in the musical avant-garde and post-historic time of musical Postmodernism? Witnessing the explosion and the destruction of the idea of progress? Registering a historical and analytical fact which is interpreted and contextualized in musicology as an interdisciplinary study field?

Yes, you are completely right. In my treatment of the subjects you have mentioned, like any other subject I deal with, I always travel the road from establishing a fact, which is a purely historical and/or analytical point of departure, to its contextualization as a scholarly goal.

*Is the historicity of the place from which the (musicological) ‘narrative’ is sought, as Fernando Catroga says in his book *Istorija, vreme i pamćenje* [*Os passos do homem como restolho do tempo*], that unavoidable imperative “to make the meaningful narrative confront the narrative of how, establishing the why, so that the historian can deal with the hermeneutics of what has happened”?²*

² Cf. Fernando Katroga, *Istorija, vreme i pamćenje* [Fernando Catroga, *Os passos do homem como restolho do tempo*], trans. Sonja Asanović Todorović, Clio, Belgrade, 2011, 11–12. (Translator’s note)

It largely is. Both as a historian who strives to explain the gist of the sense and the meaning of the events forming history, and as a musicologist pursuing the hermeneutical work which, admittedly, can never reach the ‘true’ meaning of a musical work but only approximate this meaning asymptotically, I think that it is necessary always to keep in mind the ‘call’ of historicity. For the historicity of the place of ‘narrative,’ to which ‘narrative is indebted,’ is an important context of the credibility of the *what* and the *how*, of the validity of establishing and comprehension of the *why*, and the meaningfulness of the hermeneutical *because*.

What is your first memory of the need, desire and then decision to deal with music and to speak and write about it? To be a musician and musicologist?

I have never spoken about it... but... yes, maybe we must ‘retrieve’ such things sometimes. The first memory... well, the search for it must lead me back to my earliest childhood, when music surrounded me in an unconventional way that was valuable for my general spiritual development. Namely, although my parents were not professional musicians, they had a certain musical education and they lived with music because they needed it in a sort of natural, implicit way (just as with books!). Not only did they attend concerts, operas and ballets, taking me with them too: they made music at home, just for themselves, for personal pleasure. My mother, who as a philologist taught French and Latin in a secondary school, had studied piano for a while in Zagreb, which came to an end because she had to focus on her principal studies in Paris. However, she liked to play at home whenever she had any time, both alone and with my father. He, in turn, chose scholarly work: he was a historian and archaeologist, and also a theologian. He played the tambura, the guitar and was able to sing very nicely (he had been a member of an amateur choir in his youth). Thus, in my truly youngest days, from when I have the earliest memories of myself, I was listening live ‘parental’ renditions of all sorts of things, including some of the most beautiful Schubert’s songs and ‘adapted’ popular fragments from some operas and ballets. The rich library of my parents contained works of music too, including a certain number of piano reductions of complete operas (which my mother sometimes played ‘in instalments’), as well as individual numbers from them. It was in those moments of music-making at home, which my parents enjoyed ‘contagiously’ that I experienced for the first time the magnetism of music, the need to get close to it somehow. And I wanted – to *dance* to it! To become a ballerina! During my tireless and childish jumping to the music, stumbling and turning round and round, I felt pleased and – now I would put it like this: *musically* useful. I was in fact still too small to start taking lessons on any instrument, and so, I guess, movement was the only thing I felt available to

me as the way to participate in these exciting ‘artistic’ expressions in my family. By the way, apart from the instruments I have already mentioned, we also had a violin and my grandmother’s cimbalom. She learned to play violin in the Normal School in Sombor, which she graduated from, while playing cimbalom (which my mother also learned how to do in her childhood) and piano (as well as taking lessons in certain foreign languages) was a part of the default educational standard for aristocratic families in Novi Sad, such as the one she was born into. She died relatively young, I do not remember her, but ever since my childhood days I have been surrounded by family memories of her extraordinary skill ‘with’ instruments and musicality.

In such an environment, it was natural for me to start entering the world of music. The need to deal with it professionally and, maybe even more importantly, the decision on how to do it – I think that came after a number of concerts which I had the opportunity to hear in Budapest, where my father was conducting an archival research. At the time, a several-day long festival was taking place, where Bartók and Kodály’s works were being performed. I knew almost nothing about their works at the time (I think I was in the tenth grade, and also in the eighth grade of music school), but I vividly remember that, at some point of the festival, I started spontaneously to listen to their compositions ‘comparatively’ and afterwards felt a great urge to verbalize my observations about the ‘dissimilarity of the similar’ in them. And I suppose I have chosen my profession then and there, without even realizing it. All the more so since my curiosity at the time was oriented towards natural sciences. But my *affinity* over the years guided me more and more towards the humanities, which, together with music, led me to choose studies in musicology.

In your opinion, does a person’s way of thinking (in general, and about music in particular) depend on the language?

“We are born into a [certain] language” and we adopt its intonation from our earliest days (I have read that some researches show that even a baby’s cry can reveal the phonology of their native tongue!), we start to master its words and constructions; it is the language that we first speak, communicate in and express ourselves with. We use it to describe things that we see, i.e. those that are objective in nature, but also those that are not. We express our feelings in that language, our thoughts, observations, memories, assumptions, judgments, therefore we shape our thought. Most generally, we use both its referential and its semantic function. The way we do it is intrinsically conditioned and limited by the language in which we do it, its grammatical and syntactic ‘model’ and fine points, i.e. the specific qualities and autonomy of its logic and its means.

From that aspect, language essentially shapes our way of thinking, our comprehension of reality, hence music too. However, at the same time, the way in which we think in ‘our’ language also influences that language in return. We can say, for example, that a creative thought will motivate the creative use of language (e.g. it will bring metaphorical enrichment, neologisms, etc.), use which is semantically and stylistically individualized. Because, as Derrida says, what is at work is a constant process of making new connections between notions, and that certainly has an influence on the development of language.

Thus, language and the way we think are closely linked. Regarding this, it is typical that in the language of a certain culture we will not find words or notions which do not exist in their mental practice. And if the language does not ‘cover’ certain notions, you will either not speak of them, or – if the development of thought makes it necessary for you to speak of them – you will borrow the missing notions and words from another language; or perhaps you will create them in that ‘limiting’ language. For example, in some languages of Sub-Saharan Africa you can hardly speak and write about mathematics, since they are notionally constrained to just a few numbers. Hence, if you are born into such a language and if you remain in it culturologically, your way of thinking will form and range within those boundaries.

It seems that, linguistically, one must not remain average, i.e. that one must impose oneself by means of language? In that respect, is language the fate of musicologists from so-called small cultures?

At the same time, is it their advantage to have the curiosity that makes them acquire the greatest possible education, to live through as many experiences as possible, to keep adding new layers to their inner richness, and thus, like a knot that constantly ties together the experiences about themselves and the world, to ensure the vitality of their studies, among other things?

Language is the fate of musicologists from all cultures, either ‘big’ or ‘small’, because it is the musicologists’ main tool and the domain of their expression. Musicologists should become skilful with this tool, because if they use it in the wrong way or with insufficient precision, they cannot articulate their thoughts clearly and distinctly, nor can they build their own style. And it is very important for musicologists to be positively recognizable as thinkers and writers. They are writers who integrate many kinds of knowledge in a way that allows and helps them to carry out the scholarly treatment of the chosen subject in the most credible, universal and individual way possible, thus contributing to the development of their profession. Therefore, curiosity and the need for constant education, which motivate them to it, are certainly their advantage.

However, in the process, musicologists from a ‘small’ culture face a serious additional problem – the unfavourable position of their language surrounded by the ‘big’ cultures. For, on the world scale, earning recognition is difficult even for the most professional and most creative musicology – or any other scholarly or scientific field! – in a language that almost nobody from the appropriate scholarly population in the world understands. Therefore, this is another sense of language being the musicologists’ fate. Language can open or close the ‘door’ of musicological communication for them. Thus, for example, the translation of our publications into some of the world languages is crucial for the full recognition of our musicology. For this exact reason, the *New Sound* has been published for a whole twenty years, i.e. from the first issue, in English too, contributing increasingly over the years to the presence of our studies of music on the rich stage of musicological events and trends in the world, and, of course, to the international promotion of music it deals with on its pages. Also, our musicologists write their papers directly in a foreign language ever more often. But however commendable this may be, there is also a downside to it. Namely, one’s expression in a foreign language can never be as precise and free and creative as in one’s mother tongue. Undoubtedly, by writing in, say, the English language we considerably improve our command of it, we can even form a certain style in that language, but at the same time we thus stray from our native language, we somehow turn a deaf ear to the qualitative enrichment of our own expression in it.

What does it mean for you to write about music?

Generally, writing about music can mean a lot of things. For me personally, it is the satisfaction of my creative need, a ‘response’ to a creative excitation. Days without a sentence written are insufficiently rewarding for me, somehow incomplete, although on such days I delve into literature more intensively and/or listen to music itself – unless they are just fully occupied by some of my responsibilities outside the domain of scholarly work.

Writing as a creative act – is it at the same time a passion, the fullness of enthusiasm, a kind of liberation, perhaps a rebellion in the broadest sense, or something else entirely?

I think that writing (about music) also has some elements of a passion, as does anything that one exercises as a profession which they deeply like. From the perspective of my dealing with words about music, writing is a challenge, a space in which ideas sprout, in which knowledge is enriched and applied,

perceptions sharpened; it is the domain of creative freedom, freedom of thought and expression, and so it sometimes is and has to be a rebellion and incentive for the change of the existing constellation in one's own profession, culture and society. Writing, therefore, is also a way of social existence and action. And due to all the personal elements in it, writing is a kind of self-croquis too. Made unintentionally and unconsciously.

At the same time, you attach great importance to the style of expression?

Yes. I think that the interdependence of the way of thinking and the language, which I spoke about a little while ago, includes the comprehension of the language as a living thing. This implies that writing should include the continued mastering of expressive powers and richness of the language, i.e. cultivating the style of one's own expression. Style is important not only because it is the 'means' of precision and clarity of presentation, which are fundamentally important for a musicological text, but also because it is largely the symbolic embodiment of authorial recognisability. As I understand it, style forms, matures and develops to a great extent in the process of working on a sentence. This process is creative and, as such, marked by personal poetics.

I love to work on a sentence, to feel that it is alive – that it becomes richer, more beautiful, more careful, more biting... Because while you are shaping it, you are in fact a subject who establishes a relationship with that sentence, with that object being created, like you would do with someone else, an opposing subject with whom you 'communicate' closely but unsparingly. Namely, the emerging sentence can 'support' you right away, but it can also fiercely 'oppose' you; by the nature of things, it surrenders to your thought, but it also 'verifies' it by its logic, coherence and clarity. Thus, the sentence helps you to hone the thought you wished to express in it; and you, in turn, acknowledging these tests and 'observations' made by your sentence, change it in order to make that thought as convincing as possible in/by the sentence. It is of no consequence whether you start with a rough sentential 'coat of paint' used only to outline your thought, and then move on towards precision and fine points; or you go the other way round, building the entity of your sentence step by step starting with a detail (whose particular impulse need not even be linguistic in nature!), with some notional constellation or some phrase, which you are convinced is the core or a hint of what you want to express. This process lasts until you feel and estimate that the sentence 'has become' the thought itself. And of course, that it is organically connected with the thought content and the sentential fabric of the text.

Therefore, as I see it, attaching importance to the style of expression is decisively manifested in the 'communication' between the text's author and their

sentence as two alternating subjects; during the transfer of the role of the subject in this ‘communication’, as Eggebrecht might have put it, the other ‘becomes’ the object. So, as the subject who shapes the sentence, the author is at the same time the object scrutinized by that sentence.

I think that this process of ‘communication’ with a sentence in order to achieve maximum intelligibility and beauty of expression within a thought system can be felt very nicely while translating a text (particularly one’s own) to a foreign language. Then the sentence changes completely, even though its meaning remains the same. But in order to achieve this, the sentence must be ‘relocated’ not only to the lexical, grammatical and syntactical system of another linguistic field, but also to the entire *logical* and *symbolical* system of that other linguistic culture.

Bearing in mind your book Fragmenti o muzičkoj postmoderni, which was also published in Germany, in the German language, is the fragment as a musicological genre something that is able, at least seemingly, to circumvent the language, to ‘just pass through’ it? Something that can be the linguistic representation of an immediate experience of music? A moment of ostensibly simultaneous living the music itself and the words about it? A moment of living musicology as a personally experienced thing, a direct personal experience?

The word *fragment* in the title of that book of mine is not related to the issue of the fragment as a musicological genre, but to the issue of polysemy as one of the fundamental determinants of Postmodernism. At the same time, this word suggests that my book is but the possible *fragment* of a polysemic musicological context about music in the age of Postmodernism. The book therefore demonstrates, to paraphrase Derrida again, establishing a personal semantic comprehension of the relation between existing notions in/about the field. In that respect, the book does not ‘pass through’ the language, it is ‘in it’.

On the same note, it is also a kind of architecture of moments of my personal experience of musicology and living my direct thought experience both with music and musicology. This can probably be best corroborated by the manner of formal articulation of this book.

The *fragment* as a musicological genre, however, which I understand primarily as a parenthetical note on the ‘margins’ of the acoustic unfolding of a musical tissue, can be – and mostly is – a companion and representative of immediate aesthetic experience. But even as such, the fragment does not ‘circumvent’ the language, in my opinion – it just requires a greater ‘linguistic speed’.

If a book, certainly a scholarly one too, is the life or a part of the life of its author that opens them up to the external world, is it the task of the book to be a challenge, to give a shock, to question certain things, to change the readers' 'lives' in one way or another? I would say that your books, among other things, have always been such a challenge.

Regardless of its type, every book influences the readers by its content and information, providing them with new facts and expanding their knowledge. Also, books confront readers with various problems and questions, offering them interpretations and answers, motivating them to think. And regardless of whether they agree with the insights, the way and the course of thinking, the viewpoints offered by some book, no matter whether they like them or not, accept them or not, the readers will have certain awareness of them. And sometimes, perhaps, under the impression and influence of these viewpoints, they will make some changes in certain aspects of their life and work.

When a scholarly book is concerned, its primary characteristics – the thesis, facts, analytical apparatus, methodology, argumentation and interpretation – should bring innovation to the field it belongs to. And arouse the appropriate creative responses, inspire further research, encoding and reactions, depending on the degree of its originality in all these elements and the author's courage and unconventionality.

If my books are indeed a challenge of that kind, they have fulfilled their purpose.

Could we say that one of the essential features of beings – one which they hide, but which anyway appears in spite of what they say – is indeed music? If music is such a feature, does writing about it reveal the musicologist as an authentic subject of history?

Even if music were not one of the essential features of beings (which is primarily a subject to be elaborated in the field of general psychology and the psychology of music), writing about it would be an endeavour to penetrate into what it is hiding (given that its nature is notionally inexplicit) and to explain that openly. Of course, a musicologist will not perceive and discover always the same things, nor – more importantly for the question you posed – will they interpret them always in the same way. On the contrary. In substantiating personal insights and perceptions, especially if they are historically contextualized, a musicologist adopts the attitude of an authentic, unique subject (building 'their own segment') of history.

Does musicology need utopia and delusion (about freedom and/or free will)?

I think it does. Because both utopia and delusion, each in their own way, can stimulate the development of musicology and make it better, since both imply high standards of the unfeasible. Thus, the challenge of utopia can compel creative forces to devise solutions directed at reaching the *ideal*, “the place that does not exist [in musicology]”, and the challenge of delusion can lead to inventing instruments for ‘transposing’ illusion into reality; for the reality of the illusion. In that sense, for example, the delusion of (creative) freedom has proven to be indispensable, particularly in repressive historical circumstances. Still, we should not forget that delusion in its aspects of perception, insight, experience, and judgment, can also have ‘negative’ connotations. As such, it is extremely dangerous because it can even become a strong driving force in the opposite direction.

Does anything exist today that could be qualified as nostalgia and melancholy of music and musicology, i.e. of those who create music and those who interpret it in words? Or the central points are the activism of musicology, any kind of it, and unquestionable technological progress apparent also in music?

Nostalgia is a very complex phenomenon, the same as melancholy, to which it is closely related. They both belong to the broad range of emotions that are both individual and collective. Individually, the manifestation of sorrow for what does not exist anymore usually takes the form of idealization of a time past which – like childhood, for example – has left a ‘soft’ trace in our lives. Collectively, this idealization becomes superindividual in character, and is shown not only as the collective idealization of a historically happier, common, collective past, but also of the tragic times, of the past marked by historic losses and suffering. This idealization is almost always coloured by nationalism and politics, since it is also manifested as a longing for the restoration of what is historically lost, either effectively or fictitiously: a place of residence, an ideological context, a social and economic formation, and so on.

And both kinds of nostalgia can suffer a sort of melancholic exaggeration. In that case, ‘healthy’ sorrow and pain for what, and because of what, is a part of the past and cannot be restored ever again may remain lingering as unintegrated emotions and turn into a self-pitying sense of loss. Constant in its intensity, this emotion gradually becomes detached from its actual reason; it becomes generalized, often turning into an attitude, demand, ideology, policy, aesthetics...

From the perspective of what I have said, one could conclude that the elements of nostalgia and melancholy do exist even today, in the highly ramified

activism of musicology and in the increasing technological expansion of the possibilities for musical expression. We can look for them in all the associations of the past and in making connections with the past in music – especially in concrete musical solutions and contents which can induce feelings of nostalgia or melancholy in the listeners; also, in musicological thematisations and elaborations of the musical past, especially the national one. But also in exaggeration that puts a negative label on the entire matter whenever it suggests an almost vindictive ‘lamentation’ for what is lost and denied, and does this in a ‘coercive’ way that is sometimes quite open, and sometimes hidden. Thereby falling into the trap of obtrusively ‘tacky’ simplification of style and problems. Both in music and musicology.

In this regard, has music already given its best? Are all the great musics behind us? As well as all the great theories of music, as part of the great modern delusion of unlimited progress?

We can hardly claim such a thing unconditionally, because we cannot predict the future with complete certainty in order to be sure that neither the music nor theory of tomorrow will ever accomplish anything better than what they have already reached. Because, you see, we are witnessing the expansion and improvement of the expressive means of music and its continued technological enrichment, as well as the intensification, ramification and deepening of theoretical thought, which together – whether we interpret it as progress or not – open up the possibility for new, *valuable* achievements, both in music and theory. Such achievements are being accomplished even today, regardless of the destruction of the modernist delusion, and I believe that this will keep happening in the future.

Nevertheless, looking precisely from within this post-delusional, postmodern situation, we could also state that, as you say, all the *great* musics and all the *great* theories are indeed behind us. But not because the works that constitute the foundation and indispensable reference points both for music and theory today, for their contemporary character and current developmental stage are indeed the many musical and theoretical works written in the past, but mainly because today there is no longer a *system of criteria* within which the notion of *great*, of *great* music or *great* theory, could be defined and sustained. Therefore, today we could have long and, I am afraid, futile discussions over what could be understood as *great* music and *great* theory, given that many contradictory phenomena, incongruous in every way – both within music and within theory – can be substantiated as *great*. Because the views and practice of the postmodern age do not include the notion of *greatness* in the *systemic* sense, in the sense

of a *leading* authority, of a *leading* and unquestionable musical and theoretical orientation and guidelines. On the contrary: in the postmodern synchronicity, all the options are equally valuable and, as such, have the opportunity to ‘become’ *great*. And not necessarily (or mostly not at all) warranted by primarily professional criteria, but based on a sort of *production of importance* by structured marketing. Thus, we can register that the increased presence of certain music (a certain piece/author) on the concert stage, in the spoken and written word, and most of all in the commercial media network, makes this music (piece/author) ‘greater and greater’. It is much the same with theory: if you stand for a theory not only in the appropriate branches of your professional activity, but also in the media with enough obstinacy, its *greatness* will ‘grow’. Therefore, I would say that the *great* works of today are made great not by a professional consensus or system of criteria and values, but by the available network of ‘product’ *marketing*. In the process, I do not disregard the fact that *great* works in history so far have also been promoted in ways appropriate to the practice of the times, but today, they are made *great* not by, for example, *genius* and its poetics, but by the successful functioning of the supply and demand mechanism.

Which musicologists are you truly connected with? By that, I do not mean just real and direct contacts, but rather those who cause a fundamental ‘resonance’, regardless of time and space?

I think that your question already contains the point of my answer, implied by the phrase *fundamental ‘resonance’*. What we are talking about here are in fact musicological “relatives”, to paraphrase Pavle Stefanović; in particular, the authors of the theories that respect, problematize and elaborate either the entire methodological pyramid, from what is autonomously musical in a work to what is latently semantic in it, or certain aspects of it, *in a way* that implies or stimulates personal insights as a sort of hermeneutical completion.

Can you specify your musicological position?

First of all, it would be a position that links musicology to the aesthetics of music, in the sense of the musicological aesthetics of music. I base it on personal *existence in a musical work* – as Roger Scruton interprets it – on the experience of music, on the analytical reading of music, and I build and expand it by thematising and studying many phenomena related to music and a musical work, but also to musicology itself.

It is undoubtedly the common thread of your years-long educational work, i.e. it is inseparably woven into it. It seems, namely, that your musicological position even stems from it partially? For you, what is the fundamental meaning of conveying knowledge, uncovering mysteries and, in that context, 'growing up' with generations of young people, future experts and colleagues?

Yes, you are right. My musicological and educational views, musicological and educational work are closely linked to one another, through feedback, stimulation and verification. How did this come to be? The foundation of my musicological standpoint, in the sense of the musicological position I tried to specify a little while ago, was hinted as early as when I graduated from university, only to be consolidated, deepened and articulated, both poetically and aesthetically, during my further intensive studies and expansion of acquired knowledge – including the knowledge of the musicological discipline itself. But at the beginning of this process, I became involved in education and had to deal right away with its specific tasks and challenges. My approach to solving them – then and since (because these challenges are the open problems of education!) – has retroactively influenced refining my musicological poetics and aesthetics. This process of the feedback and mutual verification of musicological and educational principles and experiences is active with me even today, and it is an important impetus for their enrichment. Looking precisely from this perspective, one could say that – as you have perceived – my musicological position is partly derived from my educational work. And this, in turn, fundamentally determines my attitude towards the meaning, sense and value of *conveying knowledge*.

In other words, as an important 'wave' interfering with my musicological views, conveying knowledge is a part of my creative work, and thus in itself implies a sort of creative act. For this conveying, in my case, does not end with mere presentation, a lecture in the sense of treatment of a particular subject or teaching unit according to appropriate methodical procedures; it also involves 'digressions' into creativity on the spot. These digressions, of course, do not occur every single time. They require inducements, and these inducements, for me, come from immediate communication with the students, depending on the type of their response during the actual lecture, or from some mental resonance with them, which sometimes I even feel very strongly. To the extent that, for example, even while I am speaking at a lecture, an idea happens to strike me about a possibility for some new, additional aspect, for paving a new way in the direction which I stand for when interpreting a certain problem area. You know, there was more than one lecture after which I have immediately noted down the sparks of new ideas that occurred to me precisely while presenting the matter.

I think that this creative flexibility in conveying knowledge is very important in educational work. Not only does it ‘freshen up’ your thought, it also indirectly includes students into the lecture as a creative act, thus demonstrating to them a certain sense and value of both musicological and educational work.

This way, the immediate educational proximity and creative interchange with students allows you to discover and evaluate their *individual* abilities, interests, cognitive styles, endeavours, wishes, dilemmas; to orient, support and follow them in their individual development. And so, you actually ‘grow up’ with each new generation, always keeping in mind that, as a scholar and educator, you also have to be in a constant process of acquiring knowledge.

Almost from the very beginning of your educational work, you have been teaching at the University of Arts in Belgrade, where you are also the Head of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music. For years you were teaching at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, you cooperated with the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Rostock and the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, you were a lecturer at the Department of Music at the University of Pretoria... Based on all these experiences, can you say how, in fact, does one learn musicology? Or rather, how does one become a musicologist?

In different ways. From the viewpoint of the systems of studies employed at various universities / music academies / high schools, one can recognize – at least in my experience – three general principles. They are distinguished primarily by the systemic starting points of the studies, and thereby, the direction of education and reaching the goal. And the goal is, more or less, always the same: to build a musicologist – or, to be more realistic, to provide students with the knowledge that will allow them, after graduation, to move freely in the domain of our studies, to keep developing independently as musicologists. Therefore, the first starting point relies on ‘attentive music reading’, with an orientation towards the contextual interpretation of what lies ‘behind the music’, i.e. towards the theoretical expounding of what analysis showed to be a noteworthy problem. The second starting point systemically includes all kinds of material ‘around the work’, focusing immediately on the context. And the third, on the other hand, gives priority to the immediate experience in performing music as the prerequisite of mastering the musicological trade. Each of these systemic principles has merits and downsides, but generally, they suggest that, starting from different musicological points, heading in different, or even opposite directions, it is possible to reach some musicological agreement. So, I will now answer the second part of your question: one can become a musicologist within every consistent and consequent educational system.

But regardless of the system they are developing in, only those students who master the appropriate skills and acquire knowledge from all the narrowly professional disciplines of music and musicological relevance will become musicologists.

On the other hand, you are a member of the International Musicological Society, whose activities you actively participate in; until recently you were the first Chairperson of the Serbian Musicological Society; and since recently you have been the Secretary of the Department of Theatrical Arts and Music at the Matica Srpska. You have participated in many musicological conferences in the country and abroad and worked within various international scholarly teams. Regarding this, what is the place, in your opinion, of Serbian musicology in the broader contexts of Europe and the world?

My appraisal is that this place is satisfactorily prominent. It is the consequence of the reputation that our musicologists have earned in the last three decades (and which, in all likelihood, will continue to improve!), most of all by their individual appearances on the European and the world stage: as participants in musicological conferences (now ever more often on direct invitations, while some of them have also been asked to be keynote speakers), gatherings, panel discussions, university lectures, as associates in various scholarly teams and projects, thematic article collections, proceedings of various conferences, journals, some as authors of books published abroad, as members of university examination committees, various selection and programme committees, etc. This reputation of our musicologists is the result of our conforming to the highest musicological standards in our educational and scholarly work. Thus – as you know from personal experience – our results often draw special attention because of the intriguing quality of their subjects, solid arguments, the scope, curiosity, often even because of the provocative theoretical considerations, authoritative participation in expert discussions, as well as the intensity and structuredness of our output so far. With regard to the last item, I would like to underline that our publications, which are, by the way, increasingly published in the English language, are based on a concept, within thematically elaborated scientific projects.

This musicological presence of ours, in all the mentioned forms of professional activities in the world, is ‘met’ with the interest of foreign colleagues in taking part in the same type of activities as those that we organize here at the institutional level: within the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, the Musicological Institute of SASA, the Serbian Musicological Society, the Department of Theatrical Arts and Music at the *Matica Srpska*.

Therefore, today our institutions are equal partners in cooperation with the corresponding institutions in the world. Here, let me illustrate this with just three things. For example, in 2008 the International Musicological Society entrusted the Serbian Musicological Society with the organization of an international musicological conference as part of their activities within the IMS Regional Association for the Balkan Countries; the *New Sound* journal made it to the coveted ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities); and the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Music received the proposal from the Society for Minimalist Music to respond to the invitation by the organizers and hosts of the Fifth International Conference on Minimalist Music.

Everything that I have emphasized – and regarding this matter, there is so much more to mention and substantiate! – indicates without any doubt that our musicology is an equal participant in contemporary musicological activities in the world, and that by all the important elements – interests, methodological trends, aspects and the intensity of activities and, most importantly, the professional level – corresponds with the musicology in other environments. However, I am far from letting myself idealize this place of our musicology in today's world. I just want to emphasize that its coordinates are correct and stable, but that the place determined by these coordinates must be confirmed and upgraded over and over.

And not only because we are, unfortunately and all else notwithstanding, vulnerable due to the fact that we are somehow always subjected to an 'initial sizing up' according to the power of 'our passports', i.e. our economy and the cultural image of our country in the world, but mostly because *etiam cum multum actum erit, omnis tamen aetas quod agat inveniet*.

At the end, just as at the beginning of every 'musical thing', we are facing a musical work. Your latest book, Pred muzičkim delom – Ogledi o međusobnim projekcijama estetike, poetike i stilistike muzike 20. veka: jedna muzikološka vizura [Facing a Musical Work – Essays on Mutual Projections of Aesthetics, Poetics and Stylistics of 20th Century Music: A Musicological View], published in 2007, is a sort of quintessence of your work so far. What are the crucial points of its scholarly considerations that you would like to underscore? Can we expect, in the near future, further 'dialogic ramifications' of this work, in the form of some new book of yours?

This book is my effort to present and interpret, but also upgrade selected theoretical opinions of some of the most relevant foreign and domestic musicologists, composers and those aestheticians, philosophers and sociologists of the 20th century who included their personal experiences in making music in

their theoretical deliberations. These are the opinions on the crucial issues of a musical work taken as *opus perfectum et absolutum*: on the manifestations of autonomous musical logic, on the ontological ‘places’ of music, on its phenomenological aspects, hermeneutical and sociological questions. However, I did not conceive the book as a historical, factual and objectivist overview of these opinions, but as their interpretation from my personal musicological viewpoint. In the first part of the book, titled “Muzikološko klatno” [“Musicological Pendulum”], I define its fundamental traits as postmodernist interdisciplinarity and interpretational freedom within the model of musicological competence that I designed, though stating at the same time that it is rooted in modernism and ‘verifiability’. Such a view oriented me towards a synchronic rather than a diachronic analysis, towards choosing not only explicit, systemically founded and elaborated theoretical opinions, but also those that are non-systemic, or even implicit, latent. Hidden perhaps in just a few observations, in a succinct and ambiguous sentence, or even in an incidental thought while leaping from observation to observation on music, those unspoken or perhaps only hinted opinions were a true creative challenge for me, and the motivation for theoretical, musicological *discovery*. But also an encouragement, regarding this very discovery, to leave quite deliberately one question in the book as a mere hint.

Will this question as a ‘signpost’ lead to further “dialogic ramifications” of my musicological poetics any time soon... I do not know... possibly.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

