

Branka Radović

NEW WORKS INSPIRED BY NJEGOŠ (MARKING THE BICENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF P. P. NJEGOŠ)

Abstract: Celebrations of Njegoš's anniversaries have always been an opportunity for the artist to approach – Njegoš. This also happened on the latest, 200th anniversary of Njegoš's birth. Compositions commissioned from Montenegrin authors Žarko Mirković, Aleksandar Perunović and Nina Perović were premiered in Podgorica on 20th April 2013, and later performed in Negotin, at the *Mokranjčevi dani* [*Days of Mokranjac*] festival, on 19th September 2013.

Key words: celebration, lament, *Gorski vijenac* / *The Mountain Wreath*, vocal language, choral texture, harmonic language

The first great celebration of a Njegoš jubilee took place in 1901, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death. The newspapers and weekly magazines of the time wrote about it, particularly emphasizing the importance of the commemoration organized in all the Serbian lands, but the most lavish was in Novi Sad. We believe that the music of Isidor Bajić (1878–1915), written for a performance of *The Mountain Wreath* contributed to this. Documents about this, even reviews of his music, have survived:

“Mladi kompozitor Isa Bajić pritekao je takođe u pomoć svojim umetničkim muzičkim darom. Koliko mu zameramo što je, markirajući muzikom kola crnogorska, izvodio to na sremački način, a nije uneo nikakvih crnogorskih motiva (poznato je bar ono iz ‘Balkanske carice’: ‘U Ivana gospodara’), toliko mu ističemo s pohvalom što je pokušao da tužbalicu sestre Batrićeve ‘izveštači’, pa opet da ostane na narodnom osnovu narodnih crnogorskih tužbalica.”¹

¹ “The young composer Isa Bajić also came to the rescue with his artistic musical gift. Inasmuch as we hold it against him for evoking Montenegrin round dances in his music using the manner of Srem without including any Montenegrin motives (at least ‘U Ivana gospodara’ from ‘The Balkan Empress’ is well-known), we give him credit and commend him for trying to make the lament of Batrić's sister ‘artful’, and yet not to deviate from the folklore

Another great celebration was in 1951 in Cetinje, when the entire state of (former) Yugoslavia backed up the event and when the commissioned works by eminent composers were performed to mark the event: Vojislav Vučković (posthumously performed the first movement of *Herojski oratorijum* [*Heroic Oratorio*]), Svetolik Pašćan (choral song *Bješe oblak* [*A Cloud Caught the Sun*]), Jovan Bandur (choral song *Crnogorski madrigal, Lovčenu* [*Montenegrin Madrigal, To Lovćen*]), Svetomir Nastasijević (choral song *Čašu meda* [*A Cup of Honey*]), Božidar Trudić (*Pjesma svata Crnogorca* [*Song of the Montenegrin Wedding Guest*], bass and orchestra), Ljubica Marić (*Stihovi iz Gorskog vijenca* [*Verses from The Mountain Wreath*], baritone and orchestra, i.e. piano), Nikola Hercigonja (cantata *Gorski vijenac* [*The Mountain Wreath*]). These works met with a resoundingly favourable public reception, and Nikola Hercigonja's cantata in subsequent years became the stage oratorio *Gorski vijenac* (1952–1957), performed more than 35 times in the country and abroad.

The idea from 1951 seems to have inspired and influenced the concept of the celebration in 2013, in the sense that this time the works were commissioned not only from renowned Montenegrin composers (Žarko Mirković), but also from two very young authors, unknown to the general public: Aleksandar Perunović (1978) and Nina Perović (1985). These two young authors are still students (doctoral studies of composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, with Professor Srđan Hofman). All these works, as well as some previously written, were performed in Podgorica, on 20th April 2013.²

The same concert was held at the *Mokranjčevi dani* festival in Negotin, on 19th September 2013, within the events marking Njegoš's jubilee.

One of the authors of the new works, Žarko Mirković (1952), turned to Njegoš – just like Ljubica Marić and Dejan Despić had done for the second time

foundation of Montenegrin folk lament." *Brankovo kolo*, 31st January (13th February) 1902, Sremski Karlovci, VIII, 4 and 5, 192.

² On 20th April 2013, the concert titled "Njegoševe armonije" ["Njegoš's Harmonies"] was held in the National Theatre of Montenegro in Podgorica, at the close of the festival *A Tempo*. The Montenegrin Choral Ensemble took part, consisting of the Choir of Stanko Dragojević Cultural Society; the Choir of the Vasa Pavić Music School from Podgorica; the Choir of the Music Academy in Cetinje; and the Choir of the Vida Matjan Music School in Kotor. The ensemble of 150 singers was conducted by: Darinka Matić Marović, Ilija Dapčević, Zoja Đurović, Aleksandra Knežević and Mihajlo Lazarević. The programme included *Tužbalica* [*Lament*] by Dejan Despić; *Počitajemi* [*Honourable*] by Vojin Komadina; parts of *Testament* [*Testament*] by Rajko Maksimović; and three premieres: *Trenos* [*Threnody*] by Žarko Mirković; *Kletva* [*Oath*] by Aleksandar Perunović; *Neka bude* [*Let It Be*] by Nina Perović. The soloists were Ivana Petrović, soprano; Srđan Sretenović, violoncello; Ols Sinčo, violin; Petar Novaković, narrator, and others.

– several decades after the first performance of his *Pisma* [*Letters*], a vocal-instrumental work inspired by excerpts from Njegoš's *Pisma* and *Luča mikrokozma* [*The Torch of the Microcosmos*].

Trenos [*Threnody*] by Žarko Mirković was composed on the verses of *Tužbalica sestre Batrićeve* [*Lament of Batrić's Sister*] and Sirdar Vukota's monologue from *Gorski vijenac*, for two soloists (soprano and violoncello) and mixed choir. The title of the work brings forth the forms of Ancient Greek art and cults from which this art originated. Lamentation, threnody, as well as glorification and praises, hymns and paeans, constitute the major part of Ancient Greek musical art, stemming from archaic and mythical traditions. The work has no common ground with Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, nor with the New Polish School in general.

This is the author's comment on the work from the Programme Booklet:

“Kada sam poslije decenija oklijevanja odlučio da ponovo tražim svoju muziku u Gorskom vijencu, privukli su me naricanje sestre Batrićeve i vapaj serdara Vukote, potresni monolozi u kolektivnom biću tadašnje Crne Gore, naviknute, ali ne i pomirene sa smrću; uzvišeni dvoglas izvan i iznad vremena, koji čine da opšte i herojsko začuti pred dubinom ličnog bola. Otuda *Trenos*, tužna pjesma o onome koji zauvijek odlazi, i nemoći onih koji ostaju.”³

The verses are combined so that the recognizable introduction “Kuda si mi uletio” [“Where have you flown away from me”] is omitted; thus the composition begins with the verses from the second part of Njegoš's text and is freely and randomly merged with other verses from *Tužbalica*, interpolated with verses recited by Sirdar Vukota in the so-called Turkish Scene, as his response to Skender Aga's speech during the earliest attempts at negotiating with the Turks. This part of *Gorski vijenac* is written in decasyllabic verses, unlike *Tužbalica*, which is in octosyllables with a tetrasyllabic refrain.

Both internally and externally, the structure of the composition is highly symmetrical. Internally, it is made up of eight-bar long units. Atypical textual beginning corresponds to an atypical musical beginning, which is conceived in long parts of solo soprano, in the melismatic and ornamented chant of a female voice in harmonic G minor. Initially, the choir has the role of bourdon. The

³ “When after decades of hesitation I decided to look for my music once more in The Mountain Wreath, I was struck by the lament of Batrić's sister and the cry of Sirdar Vukota, tragic monologues in the collective being of Montenegro at the time, accustomed, but not resigned to death; the sublime duo outside and above time, which renders the general and the heroic silent in the face of the depth of personal pain. Therefore *Threnody*, a sad song about the one who leaves forever and the powerlessness of those who stay.” Programme booklet, International Music Festival “A Tempo”, Montenegrin Music Centre, Podgorica, 2013, 10.

violoncello creates a dialogue with the soprano, in bitonal structures rendered by the soprano and choir voices. The whole first part of the composition is entrusted to the soloists, while the middle part is taken over by the mixed choir, leading to a *fortissimo* culmination on the words “Da ti crne oči vidu” [“Again to look into your dark eyes”] and “Da ti očešljam dugi perčin” [“To comb again your locks of hair”]. The cadential incantation in the middle section is rendered by the violoncello, followed by the solo soprano. After the dialogue is over, the curse of Sirdar Vukota begins in the male choir (“O prokleta zemljo, propala se!” [“O accursed land, may you perish in doom!”]). The middle, lyrical part is entrusted to the female choir, replaced in turn by a fierce curse, and everything ends in an emanation of pain, where the entire apparatus is employed on the words “Kud će tvoja mlada ljuba” [“What will happen to your young wife”].

By many features of its language and expression, *Trenos* belongs to post-modern poetics and stylistics. The melodies have a basic affiliation with folklore, but the truly ethnic lamentations and their roots in cults and myths are merely outlined and hinted.

Teaching Assistant at the Music Academy in Cetinje, Aleksandar Perunović (1978) for his composition *Kletva* [*Oath*] chose the verses spoken by Sirdar Vukota in *Gorski vijenac*. The work is written for mixed choir.

About his own work, the author wrote:

“Kompozicija *Kletva* zasniva se na odlomku iz *Gorskog vijenca* (2407–2437) koji predstavlja svojevrsnu kulminaciju ovog Njegoševog djela. Riječ je o (za)kletvi koja je izrečena na kraju skupštine o Malom Gospođinu dne. Najavljuje je serdar Janko riječima: ‘Izdati se nećemo, ama treba da se utvrdimo kletvom; zdravi je posao’, a izgovara je serdar Vukota, kome se Vuk Mićunović obraća sa ‘Kuni serdare Vukota, ti, e ti najbolje umiješ, a mi ćemo svi vikati: Amin’. U vezi sa izvođenjem ovog rituala zaklinjanja u Crnoj Gori, Vuk Karadžić u svom *Riječniku* pored ostalog napominje i to da oni što sjede oko onoga što kune valja da viču ne samo ‘amin’ već i ‘da Bog da’, što sam takođe unio u tekst/kompoziciju. Konstantnim ulančavanjem ovih dvaju govornih instanci želio sam – u skladu sa značenjskom pozadinom datog odlomka – da proizvedem ritualno-repetitivni proces koji je, uz to, potcrtan i time što pjevači u horu udaraju nogom o pod pri njihovom izgovaranju. Čitav ovaj muzičko-ritualni proces/kompozicija počinje ‘od nule’, a zatim se postepenim pojačavanjem aktivnosti svih muzičkih komponenti (tempa, dinamike, fakturano-strukturnih elemenata itd.) stiže do vrhunca – maksimalnog stepena egzaltacije na samom kraju.”⁴

⁴ “The composition *Oath* is based on an excerpt from *The Mountain Wreath* (2407–2437) which is a sort of culmination of Njegoš’s work. It is an oath (in the form of a curse) uttered

The work unfolds according to more modern compositional procedures than the opuses of the other authors. Perunović does not hesitate to overlap lines of text simultaneously, losing parts of the words in the process, i.e. making the words unintelligible. Besides the stomping, instead of timpani or some other percussion instrument, he uses the confirmation of the oath – first as a refrain, and then as a constant inner voice, i.e. a counterpoint in the recapitulation – to underscore the oath itself. Regardless of the vivid and devastating verses, the main idea was dislocated from them into the mixed choir, rendering a trichordal, terse, short melody, which, by means of repeating it, represents the musical expression of taking an oath.

Although it seems short, the composition contains over 240 bars. The development follows the meaning of the spoken verses and text, but in the way the composer heard it – in a dramaturgical structure with a few smaller culminations and a large and hymnic one, at the end.

The harmonic language of the work is based on the Phrygian mode, and at the very end, after a multitude of dissonances, the musical language approaches tonality by introducing tertian chords.

Basically, the formal structure is monothematic, with numerous repetitions of the same themes – motives – archetypes, as if in a mantra or a cult. The musical formula is repeated like in a ritual, in order to determine the truth, so that the mantra would have the most direct effect on the senses, on the listeners, those whom the oath is directed to.

The third name among the authors is also the youngest. Nina Perović (1985) composed the work *Neka bude* [*Let It Be*] for solo violin and mixed choir, on the verses “Neka bude borba neprestana / neka bude što biti ne može” [“Let the struggle go on without respite. / Let it be what men thought could never be.”],

at the end of the assembly on the day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sirdar Janko heralds it with the words, ‘We will not betray you, but we must confirm it with an oath; it will be sounder business,’ and it is uttered by Sirdar Vukota, to whom Vuk Mićunović says, ‘Administer the oath, Sirdar Vukota! You know it best, and we shall all cry out: Amen!’ Regarding this ritual of taking an oath in Montenegro, Vuk Karadžić in his Dictionary wrote that those sitting around the person taking the oath should not only exclaim ‘Amen’, but also ‘God grant it’, which I also included in the text/composition. By the constant interweaving of these two spoken phrases, I wanted – in keeping with the semantic background of the chosen excerpt – to produce a ritualistic and repetitive process which would also be emphasized by the choir singers stomping the floor while pronouncing them. The entire musical and ritualistic process/composition starts ‘from scratch’, and then, by gradual increase of the activity of all the musical components (tempo, dynamics, textural and structural elements etc.), a climax is reached – the highest degree of exaltation at the very end.” The programme booklet, 7.

from Bishop Danilo's second monologue. This monologue takes place during the assembly on the day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, after the second Round Dance, where the verses "Čašu meda" ["A Cup of Honey"] are sung.

The author wrote about her work:

"Kompozicija *Neka bude* za mješoviti hor i violinu nastala je 2012. godine povodom 200 godina od rođenja Petra II Petrovića Njegoša. Djelo je napisano na stihove *Gorskog vijenca*. Hor iznosi riječi vladike Danila, koji poziva na borbu:

*Mlado žito, navijaj klasove,
pređe roka došla ti je žnjetva...*

Pored borbenog karaktera koji se ogleda u stihovima i koji je dat u središnjem dijelu kompozicije, očigledno je prisustvo lirskog elementa naročito izraženog u stihovima na završetku djela:

*Na groblju će iznići cvijeće
Za daleko neko pokoljenje!*

Dionica violine asocira na arhaične folklorne elemente karakteristične za tradicionalni crnogorski instrument, gusle."⁵

The first part of the composition (Andante) consists of four verses. The second (Moderato espressivo) is based on the next section of the monologue, from "Čujem lelek đe gore prolama" ["Wailing echoes I hear in the mountains"] to "Neka bude borba neprestana" ["Let the struggle go on without respite"]. The first grand culmination coincides with the words "Nek ad proždre" ["Let Hell devour"], while the remaining verses are treated as Sprechgesang, a combination of talking and singing, "whispering", as marked in a footnote to the score explaining the desired performing technique of the choir. This section is dominated by the solo violin accompanied by the whisper of choral voices. The third section takes us back to the initial tempo (Andante), with a musical reminiscence of the beginning of the piece, now with the words "Na groblju će iznići cvijeće / za daleko neko pokoljenje" ["Flowers will sprout and grow in

⁵ "The composition *Let It Be* for mixed choir and violin was written in 2012, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Petar II Petrović Njegoš. The work is composed on the verses from *The Mountain Wreath*. The choir utters the words of Bishop Danilo, calling to battle: 'Ripen, young wheat and corn, into the grain! / Your harvest has arrived before its time.' Apart from the fighting spirit, evident from the verses and presented in the middle section of the work, there is also a lyrical element, particularly prominent in the verses at the end of the composition: 'Flowers will sprout and grow in our graveyards / for some distant future generation.' The violin part brings forth archaic folklore elements typical of the traditional Montenegrin instrument, the gusle." The programme booklet, 9.

our graveyards / for some distant future generation”], which are the final verses of Bishop Danilo’s monologue.

Between struggle, fear, uncertainty, pain and hardship of all kinds, life is victorious in this composition with four sections (**a b a c**), which includes complex techniques, from counterpoint to homophony, from the wailing of the violin at an indefinite pitch (approximately a quarter-tone scale) to broad and developed lines which are often juxtaposed in the choir. One of the culmination points, on the words “Nek ad proždre, pokosi satana” [“Let Hell devour, let Satan cut us down”], is the defiant pause before the hymnic, homophonic finale.

The vitality and inspiring quality of Njegoš’s work has proved itself over a long period of time, from the first composition of the earliest authors from Njegoš’s time, to addresses from the time of King Nicholas, to professional composers of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. So far, we have found 50 compositions inspired by Njegoš’s verses and prose. Most of them used the verses from *Gorski vijenac*, but in the late 20th and the early 21st century, some works are inspired by *Luča mikrokozma*, such as performances (Tatjana Prelević, *Concerto ma nongrosso*) or video-clips (Jelena Tomašević).⁶ Borislav Boro Tamindžić planned to compose an opera after *Lažni car Šćepan Mali* [*Šćepan Mali, a Fake Emperor*], but after his death only the first movement was found, and it was a choral with a piano reduction. The largest-scale works to date remain Hercigonja’s opera-oratorio *Gorski vijenac* and Rajko Maksimović’s *Testamenat* [*Testament*], the most frequently performed work since its emergence (1986). For the most part, composers turn Njegoš’s works into songs and choral pieces, and the most frequently used verses are those from *Tužbalica sestre Batričeve*.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

⁶ Both artists live and work in Hannover, Germany, and deal with contemporary and multi-media forms.