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Vladimir Tošić: *Vokalni kontrapunkt renesanse* [Renaissance Vocal

Counterpoint; Belgrade: Faculty of Music, 2014. 371 pp.

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Музика за клавир [Piano Music; Belgrade: Faculty of Music, 2014; 204 pp. ISBN 979-0-802022-04-1]

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With his activities in Serbia's musical world, Vladimir Tošić has literally sought to implement the basic premise of the subject to which he has dedicated almost all of his teaching career: "note against note", which lies in the basis of vocal counterpoint, has grown in Tošić's work into a multipart polyphonic texture, combining and intertwining artistic creativity in music and multimedia and activities in teaching and theory. However, contrary to the postulate of complementary contrapuntal lines and so closely adhering to his accumulated artistic and professional experience, these individual contrapuntal lines are simultaneously presented to the musical public of Serbia, in a prominent and unique way. The

collection and CD under the title of *Piano Music* and the textbook on *Renaissance Vocal Counterpoint* constitute a pinnacle in Tošić's work. In addition, these publications are a real feat in the rich publishing activity of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade.

The *Piano Music* collection encompasses the entire piano oeuvre of Vladimir Tošić. It is no accident that the composer chose to present his oeuvre for this instrument. For, the piano occupies a special place in Tošić's oeuvre for at least two reasons. First, the composer has actively written music for this instrument since the very beginning of his career in the mid-1970s. Due to its technical capabilities, the piano, better than any other instrument, has allowed him to organize his works by means of long repetitions and continual changes and thus realize his reductionist *credo*.¹

Second, the piano performs the function of a sort of "basic colour" in Tošić's prominently research-oriented composition. For, this instrument is practically an unavoidable "stop" in different instrumental and vocal-instrumental variants of a piece. Since the 1990s, this procedure has grown into a sort of stylistic trait in the composer's musical language. Specifically, Tošić has arranged some of his pieces initially written for the piano for other solo instruments and instrumental ensembles, and vice versa: he first wrote some of his most significant works (*Dual*, *Voxal*, *Altus*) for other instruments and then arranged them for the piano. Therefore, Vladimir Tošić's piano music also testifies to important features in his overall artistic orientation.

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¹ Cf. Vladimir Tošić, *Музика за клавир*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 2014, I.

The *Piano Music* collection comprises works written between 1982 and 2014. They are classified by media (solo piano, then two pianos or piano four-hands) and then presented in chronological order. Therefore, the collection clearly presents the transformation of Tošić's compositional technique from modernist rigour and consistency in using a repetitive mode of working with material and the processuality of musical flow to a post-minimalist "softness" in terms of the range of his means of expression, as well as the flexibility of developmental musical procedures themselves. Solo works *Fisija* (Fission), *Retida*, and *Aludium*, as well as *Di/fuzija* (Dif/fusion) and *Ne/zavisnost* (In/dependence) for two pianos from the 1980s and early 1990s, present a highly profiled system of reducing musical components and a total control of all the elements that inform the basis of an arc-shaped musical process. The works from the 1990s and 2000s (*Varial*, *Dual*, *Ostial*, and *Voxal* for solo piano and *Dual*, *Trial*, *Altus*, *Motus*, and *Echo* for two pianos), some of which are Tošić's most commonly performed works, initiated a sort of *accelerando* not only in terms of dramaturgy, but also in terms of expanding the set of musical means used. Solo works *Medial 1*, *Medial 2*, and *Simetral*, as well as the tree-movement work *Medial 9* for two pianos took off from a new and much freer range of expression and compositional technique toward a domain that opened up only during the last several years.

The *Piano Music* CD contains all of Vladimir Tošić's solo piano pieces interpreted by the pianist Vladimir Cvijić. Unlike the sheet music collection's chronological order, the CD conception follows a different logic that practically enables the

listener to hear the author's solo piano opus as a single piece. The building blocks of that "integral work" enter various mutual relations and thereby keep revealing the richness of their variety. In the ordering of the pieces featured on the CD one may note three dramaturgical and characteristic wholes that in macro-structural terms reflect the arc-shaped process represented in all of Tošić's works. The endpoints of that process include *Fisija*, *Medial 2*, *Varial*, and *Medial 1* on one side, and *Retida*, *Aludium*, and *Ostial* on the other. The central position is occupied by *Dual* – as a sort of scherzo culmination; *Voxal* – as its lyrical opposite; and *Simetral* – as the transition toward the ceiling of that formal arc.

The demands that Vladimir Tošić's music sets before the performer are quite specific and significantly different from those of the standard piano repertory. Therefore, in his foreword to the collection, rather informative and concrete in theoretical terms, the author took great pains to explain how a potential performer should approach his works, not so much in technical as in intellectual terms. The composer demands complete objectivity in the treatment of time, extremely regular pulsation, total absence of agogics, absolute continuity, no abrupt cuts, and playing the repeated models without any changes from their initial appearance.² In the pianist Vladimir Cvijić, his collaborator for over 20 years, the composer found the right interpreter. Not only does Cvijić fully realize the demands described above, but also does it with a thoroughly conceived ease, clarity of sound, sureness of tone, and intrinsic serenity, which help him to find a direct path to the listener.

² *Ibid.*

Vladimir Tošić's *Renaissance Vocal Counterpoint* is the first university-level textbook on vocal counterpoint in Serbia. With this publication, the author has filled a void that had existed for many decades in Serbian higher-education music-theory literature on vocal counterpoint, practically since the founding of the Music Academy in Belgrade in 1937. At the same time, he thereby provided a counterpoint to Vlastimir Peričić's monumental textbook *Instrumentalni i vokalno-instrumentalni kontrapunkt* (Instrumental and Vocal-instrumental Counterpoint, 1987).

The textbook by Vladimir Tošić is without precedent in its field, but it still did not appear in a totally empty space. That space was already populated by the high-school textbooks of Marko Tajčević (1958) and Vlastimir Peričić (1979, 1991), Peričić's notes *Counterpoint I–II* (1973), the translations of books by Otokar Sin (1949) and Bruno Cervenka (1981), as well as articles on specific issues in counterpoint, which have preoccupied – over the last 15 years or so – Serbian music theorists more than before. In his book, Tošić does not cite all of these sources, but his text does more or less directly refer to that entire context. Tošić's textbook stands out of that context by its sheer extent, exhaustiveness, and analytical detail, with his pedagogical impulse finding the right balance.

Renaissance Vocal Counterpoint is a result of Vladimir Tošić's many years of pedagogical practice. It was primarily written for the purposes of teaching counterpoint at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade and is entirely compliant with the current curriculum. Although conceived as a wide-ranging integral work, it is geared toward

three aims, which precisely delimit the topic of the book and to a large extent determine its contents and conception.

First, the author sought to enable the reader to find in one place “all that is needed for a practical and theoretical mastery of renaissance vocal counterpoint”.³ The result of that intent is a rather large and exhaustive book. The range of contrapuntal techniques and procedures discussed and interpreted in the book rests primarily on the oeuvre of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525–1594), because the author regards his work as the “model of a purified style in renaissance vocal polyphonic music”.⁴ Contrapuntal procedures used by other renaissance authors are discussed to a much lesser extent. Every individual element of that spectrum is consistently discussed in terms of the mode and context of its presence in Palestrina's works. The finesse and precision that the author pursued in such places, explaining important factors in various contrapuntal procedures, bring a special and, in music-theory literature, quite rare quality in the treatment of the topic. Thereby, Tošić provides his readers/students with a broad basis for engaging in a practical and creative production of compelling renaissance-style vocal textures, which the author considers an important part of the process of teaching counterpoint. In his textbook, theoretical mastery of renaissance vocal counterpoint is viewed as a finely nuanced understanding of the stylistic norm, taken as Palestrina's individual style, as I already mentioned above.

³ Vladimir Tošić, *Vokalni kontrapunkt renesanse*, Belgrade, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 2014, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Second, keeping in mind not only his primary target audience, but also the widest professional auditorium, Tošić intended to accomplish “a gradual presentation of the topic to the highest possible degree”.⁵ In the Introduction, the author defines certain basic concepts in music theory and sets the platform for approaching the topic: for him, polyphony – just like homophony – is above all a principle of organizing a work of music.⁶ The chapter titled “Polyphony” provides a concise overview of the development of polyphonic forms and techniques from early polyphony to the Flemish School. In terms of its position and extent, the chapter titled “Renaissance Polyphony” is central, comprising the following sections: “The Modes”, “Properties of Renaissance Music”, “Melodic Features of Contrapuntal Melody”, “The Use of Text”, then “Two-part Counterpoint”, “Contrapuntal Techniques”, “Three-part Counterpoint”, and “Four-part and Multi-part Counterpoint”. The author deliberately repeats some definitions and descriptions, seeking to make chapters as rounded and comprehensive as possible for those facing vocal counterpoint in an academic setting for the first time. While this occasionally engenders circularity in the presentation of the topic, it does no damage to its overall “crescendo”. Besides striving to present the matter from – so to speak – simpler toward more complex issues, one may also note the author’s intent to direct the reader/student, from the very beginning, to create “small” musical (and artistic) compositions in the renaissance style, rather than mere technical exercises. Accordingly and quite

justifiably, the treatment of text is discussed before and not after two-part writing, unlike in the curriculum of first-year counterpoint at all departments of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. In the fourth and final chapter, the author discusses renaissance vocal polyphonic forms in a clear and analytical manner. Finally, the Index of Names and Concepts at the end of the book is a rather valuable addition to the whole work.

The author’s third objective was to corroborate every argument with a corresponding music example from an actual polyphonic work, so that every phenomenon he discusses might be surveyed “in the right way”.⁷ The book contains a total of 520 music examples, most of which are excerpts from Palestrina’s works. The examples are meant to illustrate and corroborate certain arguments, as the author notes in his foreword, and many of them *are* music analysis in action. Without it, neither the author’s theoretical work nor the learning process facing a potential reader would be possible. Therefore, the textbook also constitutes a rather extensive chrestomathy, which prevents the text itself from “slipping” into abstract universal “rules” and ties it closely to “living” music.

Just as the three objectives described above delimited the legitimate music-theoretical domain that Vladimir Tošić intended to encompass, so they also, at the same time, delimited those music-theoretical domains that were left outside of his purview. A comparative meta-theoretical discussion of theoretical treatises and artistic practice, self-reflexive historical-epistemological questions about the discipline itself and the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ *Cf. Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

analytical methods and criteria applied, as well as complex semantic issues related to the mutual interaction of poetic and music analysis are some of those domains that could also be discussed in the study of vocal counterpoint. The question of the interrelation between those different domains – whether and how much they overlap, side-step, or condition each other – is an epistemological and not an axiological issue. Therefore, this textbook, on account of both what is and what is not in it, points to two important elements. The first is the author's personal relationship with his topic. The author himself gestures toward this, when he writes in the foreword that he modelled the book's structure according to the way he has taught his own students for years and that the book is the sum of all that he had learnt from his own teachers, the literature, compositional practice, and students themselves. Second, *Renaissance Vocal Counterpoint* is also a testimony of not only an entire tradition of approaching the discipline of counterpoint in Serbia, but also a wider horizon of thinking *about* and *in* music theory. It is a horizon to which, within its own stated borders, there is practically nothing one could essentially add. Precisely for that reason this publication is unique and precious in the context of Serbia today, and its significance is invaluable.

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Snimci svetovne horske muzike.
Imaginarni muzej Mokranjčevih dela
[Recordings of Secular Choral Music.
Imaginary Museum of Moranjac's Works]; *Enriko Josif, kamerna muzika*
[*Enriko Josif, Chamber Music*];
Srpska muzika za klavir. *Ženske priče*
[Serbian Music for Piano. *Women's Stories*]; *Balkan Bolero*. Chamber Music of Isidora Žebeljan.¹

In 2014, four CDs with music by Serbian composers were released, which continued the affirmative practice of Serbian artists and musical institutions of preserving and promoting Serbian musical heritage. Two of those releases are dedicated to male composers: “Snimci svetovne horske muzike: *Imaginarni muzej Mokranjčevih dela*” (Muzikološki institut SANU, Bel-

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