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## **A FAREWELL TO AJA: FRAGMENTS OF MEMORIES**

The news of the final departure of the highly esteemed and much loved professor Roksanda Pejović, our Aja, cast a sorrowful tone at the beginning of January this year. It was difficult to accept that the extensive, thematically and substantially rich musicological oeuvre of Roksanda Pejović was finally and irreversibly complete, that Serbian music historiography had lost one of its most ardent and committed scholars and, at the same time, a pedagogue with a unique method, enthusiasm, and charm. Aja's quiet departure was especially painful for her many students, especially those who even after graduating maintained close professional contacts with the professor with whom they made their first forays into musicology, finding in her support and backing as well as an always willing and inspired interlocutor for all major issues in assessing and interpreting Serbian music as well as more recent methodological currents in contemporary musicology. Direct and spontaneous, witty and with a fiery temperament, Prof. Pejović easily impressed and charmed her younger interlocutors, simultaneously encouraging the individuality, freedom, and boldness of their critical deliberations of the past and present alike.

I was part of that privileged, though not exactly small, group of Aja's former students whose subsequent work was closely monitored by the Professor. Quite familiar with most of her countless publications due to the nature of my own research, over time I advanced to the rank of consultant in the making of some of her more recent publications, which meant that I later got to review some of them. When the Musicology Department of the Faculty of Music organised an international conference in 2005 to celebrate Prof. Pejović's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, the organisers – my colleagues from the Department – entrusted me with the great responsibility and honour to speak of Aja's 'musicological portrait'.

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It meant that I had to produce a complete overview of the sheer thematic multiplicity of her oeuvre published thus far, as well as to highlight the main traits of her methodological approach and narrative itself. In addition to the collection of essays published in 2006 as *Istorija i misterija muzike (Историја и мистерија музике, The History and Mystery of Music)*,<sup>1</sup> a considerably extended and revised version of my talk was also published in a separate volume: Roksanda Pejović, *Biografija i bibliografija (Биографија и библиографија, Biography and Bibliography)*.<sup>2</sup> Grateful for the invitation of the editorial board of the *New Sound* to offer a respectful review of Roksanda Pejović's immeasurable contribution to the study of music, I will quote here the lines with which I concluded that piece more than a decade ago:

A tireless researcher and enthusiast, a consistent representative of the historical approach to the study of the musical past, Serbian music historiography is indebted to Roksanda Pejović primarily for her synthetic overviews of Serbian medieval art and the developmental paths of Serbian music life in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the context of other arts. Her monographic studies were richly provided with appendices, chronological overviews and tables, name indices and bibliographies, which made her books a rarity in Serbian musicology. Convinced about the significance of publishing one's research results as quickly as possible, to break ground for younger generations of musicologists, she never absolutised her views. Aware that her conclusions were necessarily predicated on the current stage of research, she was never shy to review, complement, or reassess certain topics and areas from a different point of view. Her works about the history of musical performance and writing on music affirm her not only as an exquisite connoisseur of the circumstances that conditioned the musical life and development of Serbian Romanticist and Modernist music, but also as a committed historian who, in comparison to the preceding generation of musicologists, extended the limits of our knowledge of Serbian musical culture by several degrees.<sup>3</sup>

Already in her lifetime, Roksanda Pejović occupied a high and prominent place among the doyens and doyennes of Serbian musicology with her painstaking work and major contributions. I clearly remember how deeply moved she

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<sup>1</sup> Katarina Tomašević, "Muzikološki portret Roksande Pejović" (A Musicological Portrait of Roksanda Pejović), in: Ivana Perković Radak, Dragana Stojanović Novičić, and Danka Lajić (eds.), *Istorija i misterija muzike: u čast Roksande Pejović* (The History and Mystery of Music: In Honour of Roksanda Pejović), Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 2006, 33–42.

<sup>2</sup> Roksanda Pejović, *Biografija i bibliografija*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 2007, 4–14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

was by the attention lavished on her at the 2005 Conference. The long list of participants included few names that were not also her former students.

The next invitation to speak about our dear professor came, unfortunately, shortly after her funeral, when my colleague Ivana Perković Radak asked me to take part in her memorial, on 10 January. Out of a deep respect for Aja, I could not decline, but I could feel that my oration would not rise above the form of fragmentary memories of so many warm, friendly, and meaningful years together. Despite its strong personal note, I will use the text of that talk to complete this, my last farewell to my dear professor.

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Dear colleagues – all of you, who shared with our professor Roksanda Pejović all those years and times as her ‘children’, students, colleagues, and friends, and then also as equal participants in the growth and maturing of the modern and globally current contours of Serbian music studies, under the roof of this Faculty as part of the University of Arts, as well as under the auspices of many other institutions, to whose work Professor Roksanda gave an immeasurable contribution primarily as a pedagogue, to all of you I owe a big apology in advance, because this talk of mine, dedicated to Aja, will not be – because it could not be! – a duly reserved ‘in memoriam’ with a systematic and well-argued presentation of the Professor’s scholarly contributions to the study of the Serbian musical past, perhaps also offering an assessment of her work in the context of Serbian music historiography. [...]

This moment, which somehow arrived so suddenly, in stark contrast with the Christmas and New Year’s holidays [...], caught me utterly unprepared and emotionally fragile to say goodbye here to our Aja with words that might entail an academic tone, an emotionally reserved tone, focused on saying goodbye to a professor who made such a deep impact on the professional lives of many of us here, whom, with varying degrees of success (compared to her often maximalist expectations!), we sought to follow. Therefore [...] I ask for your forgiveness in advance, because [this talk] will comprise only fragments of my memories of the 40 years that have passed since I first met her.

The beginning itself was, like for many of her students, almost shocking and quite dramatic. Those were the years – the late 1970s – when, as Aja liked to say, with resignation, ‘we had nothing with which to begin a course in general music history’, so she would throw us all, barely out of secondary school, right into the battle of translating chapters from the latest edition of the *Oxford History of Mu-*

*sic*. In her lectures, which were a species of their own, she tried, with much energy and ardour, to transmit all her knowledge to us in one breath, to highlight for us the links, correspondences, and differences among things that to us seemed totally incommensurable: ancient Greek, Arabic, and Renaissance music theory, Palestrina and Bach, ancient theatre and the first operas. Those were unique experiences. Still, we had a lot to learn and master before we could accept the necessity of Aja's favourite maxims and methodological suggestions and questions: 'No analysing without an idea first!'; 'What's the parallel to that?'

However, her work in the classroom formed only a fragment of her constant commitment to pedagogy. Sometimes, she conducted one-on-one tutorials on a bench in the park outside the Academy, sometimes at the department store next door, the 'old' *Beograđanka*, whilst doing some essential shopping. Some of us – although no one was privileged in that regard! – received 'lessons' in musicology, the profession, as well as life in general in the broadest, most flexible sense of that word in her car, getting a lift, usually to her house, where our lectures would continue after class. And it is documented, at least in the memory of my generation, that she was an excellent driver, very determined and quick, and invariably focused – therefore, in perfect harmony with her temperament: with her eyes always on her goal, she never hesitated in reaching it, obeying the rules, but also leaving behind anyone who hesitated, that is, all those who 'didn't know exactly what they want'.

The Pejović family home – a small, modest flat in Belgrade's Braća Jerković neighbourhood – was a sort of 'outpost' of the Musicology Department. At first, we went there with trepidation and uncertainty, but over time, thanks to the warmth with which Roksanda's husband Pejka – Milica's father – always greeted us, as did his daughter Milica herself, who grew up with many of Aja's students younger than me, we started feeling welcome, 'like home', even when Roksanda, always direct, sharp, and crystal-clear in her assessments, sent us away with words such as 'Go on, Sweetie [or Princess], get it right! You can do better than that!' Hardly less intense was her 'summer camp' in Sutomore, where many seminar papers were written or polished for the September or, ultimately, October exam period.

There is nothing peculiar about the fact that most of us really grew close with our dear Professor only upon leaving her class in general music history: entering the world of the Serbian musical past was the time when we practically made our first forays into the field she dominated unchallenged for decades. Our classes thus went on into infinity, to this day, because every step in interpreting the historical currents of Serbian music is necessarily preceded by consulting the foundations that Roksanda Pejović laid down in her writings.

I will repeat here something I said to her more than once, whenever she called to give me her latest manuscript to read so we could ‘chat’ afterwards, as she used to say: ‘But Aja, what you’ve written (and she wrote 35 published books, hundreds of articles, and lexicographic units for leading international encyclopaedias!), well, no institute or department in Serbia has managed that much!’ Hearing these words, her face would slowly flood with that peculiar smile of hers, reserved but almost a bit mischievous, while her gaze, somehow indeterminately looking sideways, would reflect a feeling of satisfaction and pride. She knew, our Aja, just how big the leaps she made in extending the knowledge of Serbian music history were, but at the same time she knew, and expected, that her conclusions and writings would not be the final word, but only a half or one third of the way, perhaps even just the beginning of a road that should always be explored anew.

It was precisely Professor Roksanda who first revealed to me, a very, very long time ago [...] that the international scholarly scene attached much more value to articles published in leading journals than to monographs. But it was as though that did not concern her at all: ‘I don’t care what they value abroad. I’ll write what I know and what we need’. It was like a personal patriotic project of Aja’s, just giving with no reservations or expectations of any kind of reward.

Long enough have I walked this earth and learnt many things, including the bottomless void and silence when your parents finally leave, the closest living beings one has... Also, I have been here long enough to remember the words of our noble professor Vlastimir Peričić, of which Professor Mirjana Veselinović Hofman reminded us on the occasion of his final departure from this plane of existence (paraphrasing): ‘In each one of us, there lies a little graveyard, the heritage of ancestors who left a mark’. And yet, and despite all, it is as if the world of ratio were always in a quiet competition with the world of the irrational, of the utopian projection, and it suddenly happens – to which I testify here today – that we develop an illusion, that we cultivate the delusion that someone important, someone like Roksanda, will always be there, as a teacher, model, warning, a unique figure in our lives, with whom we will always, whenever we feel like it, rekindle our discussions, which would, just like we are used to, start vibrating again like beacons/signposts on the road toward new self-realizations.

For now, it is still hard to accept that Aja won’t be there at the next gathering to regale us in her unique, charming way. We miss her already. May she rest in peace and accept our warm and endless gratitude.