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## VOCAL LYRICISM OF DEJAN DESPIĆ

**Abstract:** Vocal output by Dejan Despic, created during more than fifty years, comprises six voluminous cycles for voice and piano (harpsichord): *Adriatic Sonnets* (1951-1954) to the poems from the similar cycle by Jovan Ducic, *Dubrovnik Songbook* (1989) to the poetry by Dubrovnik's petrarcist, *Ozone of the Homeland* (1991) to the verses by Desanka Maksimovic, *The Circle* (1992) set to ancient Japanese poetry (translated by Miloš Crnjanski) and two cycles – *Djulići (Flowers Blossomed)* and *Uveoci (Flowers Withered)* (1995) to lyrical cycles by J.J. Zmaj. Emanating from the essential composer's interest for poetry and poetic text, this output represents encircled and yet, diversified world in which composer came to the specific vocal-lyrical poetics. That poetics is marked by linking of poems into complex cyclical wholes that, based upon selected poetry, build unified sensible threads. They are driven by moods and emotions from the realm of "pure lyric": melancholy, longing, nostalgia. Dejan Despic's cycles are nuances of filled and coherent lyric panorama in which different poetry luminance is accompanied by the nuances of music language and style within the distinctly individual stylistic frame.

The vocal-lyrical production of Dejan Despić was created in a span of over half a century, comprising six extensive cycles for voice and piano (harpsichord)<sup>1</sup>: *Jadranski soneti (Adriatic Sonnets)* (1951-1954), composed to three poems from the eponymous cycle by Jovan Dučić, *Dubrovački kanconijer (Dubrovnik Songbook)* (1989), set to the poetry of Dubrovnik Petrarchists, *Ozon zavičaja (Ozone of the Homeland)* (1991) to verses from an eponymous collection of poems by Desanka Maksimović, *Krug (The Circle)* (1992), set to ancient Japanese poetry (translated by Miloš Crnjanski) and two cycles – *Djulići (Flowers Blossomed)* and *Uveoci (Flowers Withered)* (1995) to lyrical cycles by J.J. Zmaj.<sup>2</sup> Irrespective of the long time span of its creation, Despić's corpus of songs shows no sign of development and progress, either in the approach to the vocal-lyrical field or in terms of language and style or the semantic field, mood or emotional register featured in the selected poetry. On the contrary, it can be said to represent an integral yet diverse world as, in the nature of things, is the world of lyrical poetry and the world of every authentic lyricist (and vocal lyricist). The roundedness of this world owes to that characteristic closeness, distinctive isolation, personal and individual form of interpretation of the living world in a lyrical landscape whose basic contours, intonations and moods are defined by its very creation. From his early song cycle, Dejan Despić has developed quite an individual vocal-lyrical poetics whose constants have been defining his song up to his latest works.

The mainstay of this poetics is a sensibility of poetry and poetic text the likes of which are few in Serbian music, which arises from the composer's own poetic impulse, his essentially poetic interest, and owing to which the thought that "poetry imbues each art, each revealing of the essence as the beautiful" (Heidegger) is confirmed time and again. In his vocal lyricism and possibly in his overall production,

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<sup>1</sup> All cycles, except the early *Jadranski soneti*, are dedicated to Aleksandra Ivanović and Olivera Djurdjević.

Despić is equally focused on beauty and essence. However, this poetic, that is to say, lyrical impulse was, poetically speaking, counterbalanced from the very outset of the composer's vocal-lyrical production by a strong narrative and dramaturgic impulse. Namely, in his cycles the composer makes such a selection of songs from poetic cycles or collections that in this new sequence and arrangement they form an entirely new, composer's train of thought that follows its own poetic and musical, as well as poetical-musical, logic. Owing to these narrative and dramaturgic gestures, by which poetic structures are subsequently interpolated into "prose" or dramatic structures, all of Despić's song cycles become unique poems, or even dramatic scenes. Thus, they testify to a tendency achieved differently in poetic terms, albeit a tendency complementary to the monodramatic staging of *Lied* in the modern epoch of the genre's development, within the cycle *Krug (Cycle)*, so practically the conception itself is at work. This poetic constant is supported by a pronounced structure of time and narrative in the cycles, but is again counterbalanced by gestures of closure that provide a homogeneity of meaning. In this context, a significant connection is established between the cycles on the newly-formed contentual level: each in a different way, either literally or metaphorically, they describe "the circle of time" – from evening to morning service, from the morning sky to the sorrow of nightfall, from youth to times past, from Flowers Blossomed to Flowers Withered – or the philosophical circle of Far Eastern thought. The dramaturgy that follows the trajectory of the circle – in which all central unrests on the literal level flow into ultimate resignation, remembrance, oblivion, reconciliation – pushes, however, into the foreground the very poetic substance and the blending of the horizons of time which is feasible only in this substance.

This content orientation, as well as musical-dramatic logic, is underlined by two procedures that are equally important for Despić: on the one hand, the concentration of the cycle's semantic field is realized through a dense network of leitmotifs and leitharmonies. By incessantly returning, repeating, varying, unexpectedly emerging, they affirm the fundamental meaning the composer holds dear, and with their discreet, sometimes almost invisible appearance, they establish "underground" connections between the songs and ensure a solid yet subtle, autonomous, mesh reinforcement of the work. On the other hand, the composer's poetics is characterized by the widest range of musical forms, confirming one of the open possibilities of *Lied* as a genre pattern, namely that there are countless ways for incorporating it into a defined (classical) form and adjusting it, on the other hand, to the most diverse genres.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the musical form of Despić's songs scrupulously follows the composition of the poetic text and its own autonomous logic, so that even when poetic form is constant, it changes from song to song. As far as both cycles and individual songs are concerned, the poetic of Despić's vocal lyricism in general is marked usually by a hardly attainable balance of opposite principles of form: it both features and stresses the through-composed principle of time progression and a rounding to more specific or broader, more

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<sup>2</sup> The composer wrote another two cycles for soprano, flute and piano: *Jesenje pesme (Autumnal Songs)* (2001) to verses of Japanese poets and *Prolećne pesme (Vernal Songs)* to Desanka Maksimović's early lyrical poetry.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Christophe Combarieu, *Le lied*, Paris, PUF, 1998, 15.

comprehensive wholes of meaning and mood. Likewise, as regards metric and syntactic aspects of poetry, the composer observes the metric canon and syntactic-intonational series with equal attention.

The discursive dimension in the voice-part is consistently based on the prosodic plane of the text – its intonational and rhythmic graph – which is not only a poetic constant, but also an aesthetic standard which was set parallel to the foundation of the genre at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which is the basis for a successful song. Dejan Despić observes the prosody of the text with a precision that can be deemed exemplary – “ohne prosodische Fehler”, as the composers of German Romantic *Lied* would say – thus making a valuable contribution to the music physiognomy of the Serbian language. Bearing in mind the predominant syllabicity in text treatment – unless otherwise required by the stylistic aspects – and remaining true to the melodic logic in basing the voice-part, in his vocal lyricism the composer arrived at a thoroughly individual type of melodic recitative that provides the widest range of expressive effects. However, what essentially determines the poetic milieu is the semantic plane of the poetic text, the line of meaning and the affective layer it incorporates.

According to the law of creation in the vocal-lyrical domain which has the status of principle in Despić's work, musical language follows the stylistic and poetic as well as semantic orientation of the poetic text. Hence, the authority of reference, text and its basic meaning in Despić's vocal lyricism is untouched; moreover, it is confirmed and strengthened in musical transposition. Inner semantic accents and the musical actualization of the semantically central words and wholes are realized directly, through metric and syntactic disposition of the songs, as well as through an indirect relationship of music to the semantic layer of poetry. This relationship rests principally on the language orientation, harmonic relief and the basing of the voice line. It should be said that, generally speaking, the way in which the semantic layer is realized in music mostly confirms the classical aesthetic and poetic position, that it spreads across the horizontal, which means that the analogous resonance in Despić's songs moves mostly metonymically, by association, and not metaphorically. The reason for this is also the combination of descriptive and confessional expression in the selected poetry, so it is precisely this transparency of the symbolic layer that is the basis of the greatest variety of solutions and effects realized in the piano part and its dynamic combination with the voice part. It ultimately provides clarity of the figurative meaning (intonation, colour, emotion) in the new, poetical-musical plane and purity of the lyrical landscape.

Predominant moods in Despić's vocal lyricism are precisely those that build the landscape of “pure lyricism”: sorrow, longing, nostalgia. Leaning onto them, however, is an entire range of emotions, and developing from them is a complex dynamics of ambiguous emotions owing to which the fundamental, lyrical genre field is enriched, without being abandoned: from discreet sadness to masked sorrow, from melancholic liveliness to unemphatic joy and passion. The composer's lyrical landscape thus acquires contours of a specific emotional total, whereas his *Lied* takes on the aspect assigned to the genre on its native ground by the Romantics – the aspect of “cosmic landscape”. Despić's cycles are nuances of this fulfilled and coherent world in which different elucidations of poetry are accompanied by nuances of musical language and style.

## Dubrovnik Inspiration – *Jadranski soneti* and *Dubrovački kanconijer*<sup>4</sup>

The composer's early cycle *Jadranski soneti*<sup>5</sup>, op. 15, is composed to three songs from an eponymous cycle of Jovan Dučić: *Večernje* (*Evening Service*), *Noćni stihovi* (*Nocturnal Verses*) and *Jutarnji sonet* (*Morning Sonnet*). This poetic inspiration identifies the melancholic mood and descriptive poetic narrative as a framework for all subsequent vocal-lyrical works of the composer, while this song cycle also establishes his important poetic mainstay. Namely, the songs were selected in such a manner as to form a new, firm structure of meaning in the composer's sequence and arrangement that follows the narrative thread. The narrative dimension of *Jadranski soneti* is supported by the cycle's through-composed logic of form, but this structure is counterbalanced by a gesture of closure that provides the homogeneity of meaning: by the tonal disposition of the cycle (f-A-f-F/f) and by ultimately returning to the original motive of the first song. Despite the invariability of the poetic form of the sonnet, the form of certain songs changes with each song, albeit in such a manner as to incorporate both the principle of time progression and the rounding to more comprehensive wholes of meaning and mood. Similarly, the composition follows, or rather, underscores the strong metric stops of Dučić's typical verse with proportional structures, but at the same time allows syntactic wholes to "encroach" them, to stress the discursive dimension of music.

The softness of colour, reserve and the melancholy tone of expression are underpinned by a combination of the functional key dynamics and distinct modality – a diatonic concept that determines the linguistic orientation of *Jadranski soneti*. On this basis, the cycle is harmonically oriented in the romantic-impressionistic manner, which confirms the analogy between the musical language and the stylistic and poetic orientation of the poetic text. The central, melancholy mood of the cycle is underlined by the dominant colour of Aeolian and Dorian modes, with a momentary Mixolydian elucidation in the second song, while the oscillation of genera, often based on the common tonic, contributes to the almost incessant change of light and greatly accentuates the dynamic unity of opposites in Dučić's verses. What becomes fully expressed in a closer relationship to some of their wholes or words is a corpus of expressionistic means such as seventh-chords at all degrees, the frequent mixture parallelism as well as the isolation of intervals of the second and the fourth, or, on the other hand, the sound of pure fifths in the texture disposition of the piano part. This predominant tone is balanced by the dramatic potential of dissonance (when it is not independent in the impressionist sense), in the sense of non-harmonic, primarily suspension tones and structures, as well as chromatic tensions. They impart Romantic intensity and sensibility to the reticent Parnassian milieu, while the original motive of the cycle, developed in the Romantic fashion principally through its harmonic perspective in accordance with the dramatic concept of the genre, to some extent begins to function as leitharmony (example 1). The diatonically oriented and

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<sup>4</sup> These cycles are discussed in more detail in the article "Dubrovačke poeme Dejana Despića", *Muzikologija*, 5, 2005, 313-345.

classically structured voice part, albeit dominantly melodically based, follows the intonational and rhythmic graph of the text.

In the song cycle *Dubrovački kanconijer*, op. 96, after more than thirty years, the composer returns to Dubrovnik for inspiration, in this case the poetry of Dubrovnik's Petrarchists Šiško Menčetić, Marin Držić and Savko Bobaljević. He unifies his own selection of verses from their "love songs" into a firm meaningful whole. The songs *Vernost (Faithfulness)*, *Blaženstva (Blisses)*, *Jadi (Sorrows)*, *Čežnja (Yearning)* and *Cvet mladosti (The Flower of Youth)* form a new, composer's line of meaning that narrates the joy of love, the sincerity and tenderness of emotions and ends with distress over rejected love and a longing for times past, by which this cycle reveals a related semantic thread to the cycle *Jadranski soneti*. For the first time in this cycle the composer sets the direction for the vocal-lyrical landscape by stylization. The neo-Renaissance musical stylistic framework evokes a Renaissance Dubrovnik milieu through the genre pattern of *frottola* and its characteristics. Hence the simplicity, balance and terseness of account and the character of dance blend into a mood of "melancholy liveliness" that qualifies the overall expression. The integrity of the cycle is achieved by "tonal" (in F sharp) and thematic completeness and by the basic, Aeolian colour of the first and the last song. In addition, the composer points out the *attaca* performance of the movements, while the songs are linked with thematically identical instrumental Intermezzos, their characteristic, dance, rhythmically impregnated motive being the main motive of the last song (examples 2a and b). The absence of dramatics is manifested in the consistent strophic form, except in the last song which serves to round off the cycle. The effect, which on the affective plane is expressed as an effect of "condition" and mood and on the semantic plane as an effect of de-concretization and generalization, follows the concept of the Renaissance landscape. Melody in this cycle is reduced and discreet in expression, condensed in structure, its range and spectrum of development smaller, but, accordingly, it is enunciated more as a recitative than a melody. A specific reconciliation between the autonomy of instruments underscoring the modern aspect of the song and its Renaissance subordination to the voice is practically carried out by consistently doubling the vocal line in the descant of the instrumental part. Conforming to this is the modal base of *Dubrovački kanconijer*, from which its harmonic perspective originates. The clarity of the milieu is confirmed by a prevalence of tertian chordal textures (usually seventh-chords) coupled by an Impressionistic procedure. Contrast and dynamic moment are first of all effected diachronically, through frequent changes of modes, i.e. their initials.

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<sup>5</sup> The edition of cycles *Jadranski soneti*, *Dubrovački kanconijer*, *Ozon zavičaja*, *Krug*, in: Dejan Despić, *solo pesme*,

## Japanese poetic inspiration

### *Ozon zavičaja*

With the cycle *Ozon zavičaja*, op. 105, composed to five cycles of an eponymous collection of haiku poetry<sup>6</sup> by Desanka Maksimović, the vocal lyricism of Dejan Despić joined the “enthusiasm for ancient Japanese poetry”<sup>7</sup> shared by many Serbian poets and composers of vocal lyric poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the closeness that was established by various means and circumstances between modern art and the images and structures of archaic Japanese poetry. In basing his vocal-lyrical cycle as a homogenous meaningful structure, akin to that in his earlier works – but here notwithstanding the fragmentariness of the poetic expression – the composer found incentive in the very cyclical concept of the poetess’s collection: namely, many haiku tercets recur in it at a considerable distance and in different cycles, confirming the privileged, to paraphrase Genette, “poetic space” and bringing about a change in the semantic context and, by extension, nuances of meaning conveyed by haiku strophes. Dejan Despić employs these features of the *Ozon zavičaja* collection to fuse terse haiku strophes into new poetic-musical wholes (songs of the cycle), thus enriching earlier procedures of building up a new meaningful context based on poetical inspiration. Ten “new songs” of modern composition and expression which, however, also retain a specific musicality and semantic range as well as the peculiarity of the poetess’s Far Eastern inspiration, produce a unique musical-poetical semantic field. It rests precisely on the subtle and manifold re-contextualizations of poetic, music and poetic-music meanings. The aspiration of poetry, in the composer’s interpretation, to make its own “space” independent of and disconnect from reference thus metamorphoses into a (inherently “independent”) musical landscape saturated with meaning.

The importance of the semantic plane for the composing technique and the logic of constructing a vocal-lyrical cycle, which is confirmed in Despić’s overall lied production, becomes more distinct in this cycle than in the previous two, to the extent that a metric pattern (5:7:5) in haiku poetic form does not disturb the functioning of the language system, does not “violate” (Jacobson) the syntactic structure and semantic whole – does not disrupt the logic of the speech sequence by the clarity of its message. Crnjanski would describe haiku as “an uninterrupted sentence, in fact short as a sigh”<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, whereas in his previous two works the composer focused on establishing a balance between music metrics and syntax that corresponds to the considerable effect of both energies in the poetry itself, in *Ozon zavičaja* he focuses on accentuating the speech flow. This becomes even more convincing if the poetic form is condensed, which is why the composer achieved another balance here, between no less opposing

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Belgrade, Udruženje kompozitora Srbije, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Desanka Maksimović, *Ozon zavičaja* (cycles *Ozon zavičaja*, *Kula čeone kosti*, *Večernjača*, *Seosko groblje* and *Mesečevo brvno*), Belgrade, Književne novine, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., “Razgovor sa čitaocima”, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Miloš Crnjanski, *Pesme starog Japana*, in: *Sabrane pesme* (ed. S. Velmar-Janković), Belgrade, Srpska književna zadruga, 1978, p. 338.

impulses: the pithiness of expression, which almost cancels the perspective of time, and the open, discontinued discursive thread, grooved in time.

This thread is underscored by the through-composed logic of the cycle, and is confirmed by evolutive tonality: in B/G – in A, which is mostly present in some of the songs as well: out of ten songs, only three are rounded off in terms of tonal centre (the third – in A, the fourth – in C, the sixth – in F sharp, and to some extent the second: in A – in D:B). However, another kind of balance, complementary to the first, regarded by the composer as the foremost because it is directly expressed on the semantic plane, is achieved in each song. This is a balance that arises from the very poetic inspiration between two “non-musical” aspects characteristic of haiku expression: pictorial and reflexive-narrative. It should be noted that for poetic structures consisting of three or four haiku tercets, which form the basis for songs of the vocal-lyrical cycle, the composer mainly chose strophes of descriptive, rather than reflective character. However, this pictorial moment is considerably counterbalanced by the narrative/reflexive line which originates from the very structure of the wholes: they are structured in such a way as always to lead toward the final point of meaning. A singular combination of the narrative and the pictorial is thus achieved in each song, in which case neither the formal dispositions of individual songs nor their effect on the semantic plane are univocal. The form of the songs ranges from that of closure in the ternary form to discontinuity in the through-composed flow, but it also has variations within these specific solutions. Apart from following the opposite energies of image and narrative, the variability and oscillation of form – similar to that in *Jadranski soneti* – is always owing to the composer’s relationship to different planes of the text, which provide a key impulse to the principal form of structuring in certain songs.

Because of the predominance of the descriptive principle, the cycle is realized as a series of concise and striking images-moods that vary the basic colour of sorrow, concentrated in the basic motives/figures (*rain, western skies, evening breeze, purple marquee*) of the selected strophes. However, through that faint wavering, or rather flickering of melancholy landscape, almost beneath its levelled surface, the composer weaves the storyline and circumscribes a “circle”: from melancholy (the first four songs) to short-lived happiness (the fifth), to sadness – *nightfall melancholy* as designated by the poetess (the sixth, seventh and eighth), to reconciliation (the last two songs). Hence the strong narrative moment is “subsequently” realized in the cycle. It primarily rests upon the identified, significant motivic elements by which a network of meanings spreads through a series of moods: they carry the discursive thread while using leitmotif procedure to establish implicit relations between the stringed moods and determine them functionally. The focusing of the semantic field on the original motive and hence the affirmation of the basic meaning, owing to which the previous two cycles are close to a relatively classical frame, “disperses” here into several important motivic wholes. This gesture, by which *Ozon zavičaja* to a great extent establishes a connection with the Romantic semantic field, is additionally reinforced by a distinct harmonic profiling of these motivic elements which can be said also to define the harmonic context of the cycle and the special ways in which it is realized.

The original motive of the first song, which is frequently the case in the composer's poetics, is figuratively profiled and above all essentially determined by ambiguity concerning the tonal centre (B – G), specified (in G) by specifying the meaning: *Jutros prozori rone suze* (*This morning windows shed tears*) and in the eighth song to the text *Spušta se seta/sumraka...* (*A twilight gloom descends...*) appears not only within the altered centre – in A, but also in a new, pentatonic harmonic perspective (examples 3 a and b). This pentatonic moment is, again, “borrowed” from the motive of the second song *Prestala kiša* (*The rain has stopped*) (example 4). The meanings of the songs are thus in multiple correlation through contingency, touching of meanings, but at the same time a change of context is suggested and the semantic field of the cycle is increased.

The main poetic standpoint and one of the mainstays of the composer's technique, the interpretative potential of variation resting primarily on the harmonic dimension, is thus fully expressed. With a varied repetition of important motivic wholes, the principal mood, the character, is reinforced, and the motive becomes fixed in the status of a model, so that his constant harmonic re-contextualization, changing of colour and perspective, alters the milieu in which it is expressed, but also the “angle” from which it can be considered – interpreted. This is noticeable both in the exposition of the same motives within the unexpectedly altered centre and at a considerable distance, which makes the change in the musical (even the semantic) context more significant.

The composer's second technique in establishing distinct elements of meaning also arises from the same basic, metonymic principle of the relationship of music to poetic text. This is a figurative exposition in the true sense, to which isolating certain words is vital.

Such figure is important for the semantic unity of the cycle, formed in the sixth song, and then repeated unaltered in all subsequent songs, right to the end of the cycle. The auxiliary piano note (in F sharp), almost in the form of an ostinato figure, transposes a full epithetic range of figurative meaning ...*slavuj cele noći peva o ljubavi* (*the nightingale sings of love all night long*) in a madrigal/tropological way, and also reawakens the bel canto *locus communis*, both in terms of meaning-image and its musical transposition (example 5).

This confirms the desire for the unity of the semantic field, as well as the consistency of connecting (figures in the cycle), congruent with the consistency of transposing (text in music), as opposed to intervention and difference effected by changing perspectives in the treatment of the previous two motivic wholes. While the procedure involving them confirmed the aspect of the story, the figures so profiled and led intensify the effect of the image and, by extension, the discreet decorative moment which is not missing in *Ozon zavičaja*. The composer relies on the best tradition of 20<sup>th</sup>-century *bel canto* poetics (itself relying on the poetics of Renaissance madrigalists) and accordingly there is that characteristic “echo effect” – the imitation of the figure within a short interval in the second voice (voice-piano).

The basic, melancholy tone of *Ozon zavičaja*, as suggested by its semantic bases, is linguistically supported by distinct diatonicism leaning on modality, coupled with the major and the minor and their

specific manifestations (such as melodic major) in basing the important elements of meaning and with the pentatonic scale performing the same function, which subtly evokes the original, archaic poetic ambience. However, what principally determines the harmonic context of the cycle is not only the adaptation of these different bases to the text of specific songs (such as the striking and consistent Phrygian orientation of the fourth song: *Razapeto nebo/tanak, modar šator/iznad moga vrta / The sky is unfolded/ a gossamer, purple/marquee o'er my garden/*), but also adaptation in the course of the text within each song. Therefore, the composer, again akin to a 17<sup>th</sup>-century master, chooses to register every critical change of mood, but in such a manner so as not to disturb the main intonation of either song or cycle. Hence, as in a harmonic kaleidoscope of sorts, the constant and numerous changes, or rather the blending and friction of the major and the minor, of the pentatonic scale and tonality – based on the common or changed tonic, i.e. initial. This is achieved, as at its point in history, with a technique of frequent alterations and re-alterations, and is joined by a range of impressionistic means and effects underscoring the pastel colour of the whole: mainly plagal, occasionally mediant connections, the ones originating from the modal orientation of the flow, in accordance with tertian textures with added tones, mixture parallelism, texturally separated fifth and/or fifth-fourth chords. The voice-part underlines the conciseness of the text, by mainly diatonic and conjunct movement in small ranges, in a rhythmically strikingly profiled flow (often alternating with the piano part). Chromatic movements or sudden changes of the tonal centre serve to accompany the occasional contrasting dramatizations of otherwise non-dramatic, descriptive wholes.

### *Krug*

The composer's main interest in his earlier vocal-lyrical cycles, namely to achieve a semantically homogenous whole and use it to circumscribe a "circle", is fully expressed in the cycle bearing this name, op. 107, which, like the previous cycle, is also inspired by Japanese poetry. As explained in a commentary of his work, the composer took a selection of twelve ancient Japanese tankas (by poets from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century) translated, annotated and published by Miloš Crnjanski in the collection *Pesme starog Japana*<sup>9</sup> (*Songs of Ancient Japan*) and "bound [them] into a unique meaningful and experiential circle departing from loneliness and returning to it, having traversed longing, hope, happiness and rapture, then anxiety, pain, parting and disillusionment..."<sup>10</sup> The main poetic props of *Ozon zavičaja*, deriving from the uniqueness of poetic inspiration, were retained in this work, albeit sharpened. Each song is more concisely expressed, but the discursive plane and, by extension, the importance of the speech sequence are stressed even more. The fluidity of song sequencing is also greater and so is the continuity thereby achieved, which is why the cycle has the form of an uninterrupted flow. Owing to this high degree of connection between the twelve concise songs (movements), achieved by the structural logic of the work alone, *Krug* is defined dually in terms of genre, both as a cycle of songs and a musical monodrama.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 311-352. (First edition: *Pesme starog Japana. Antologija*, Belgrade-Sarajevo, Izdavačka knjižarnica Napredak, 1928).

<sup>10</sup> Dejan Despić, op. cit. p. 74.

Moreover, the inherent, intrinsic monodramatic logic of the vocal-lyrical cycle, and even its historical origin in the musical-dramatic monologue of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, is confirmed through this work in the most convincing manner. If, by Impressionism's mediation, the descriptive poetics of this period's *bel canto* (and gallant style, too) were imprinted in *Ozon zavičaja*, the Baroque musical-dramatic style, which after Expressionism became close to 20<sup>th</sup>-century vocal creativity, in a modern linguistic context forms the basis of *Krug*.

The monodramatic foundation of the genre relies primarily on a type of poetic expression that here is not descriptive, but confessional – the expression of “*solitarius*”, and the psychological trajectory whose emotional register indeed forms the dramatic basis of the work. In the same degree in which the author focuses on the *affetto* (and, understandably, its presentation) in this cycle, and in which a series of emotions experienced by the solitary character ultimately converge in a dominant feeling of pain and a tragic sense of the world, a much greater amplitude of tension, as well as degree of change and dramatization of expression, is realized than in the melancholy landscape of the homeland. Since the central emotion is the basis of a dramatic premise, the cycle moves from an initial *mélange* of the descriptive and the confessional, and a feeling of melancholy and longing (*Cveće mi svenu/u dugoj noćnoj kiši // My flowers wilted/in the long and rainy night//* – song 1) towards a purely confessional expression that changes into an appeal, a *calling out* – a convention in the music-dramatic technique – and towards feelings of anxiety, grief and despair (*Onoga koji,/znajući za moju ljubav, odlazi,/zaustavi, o drvo trešnjino! // The one who,/knowing of my love, is leaving/ stop, o, cherry tree!//* – song 7), eventually retreating into reflection and tragic emotion (*Uvek sam mislila/da cveće zaborava cveta/samo u vrtu, među ružama... // I always believed/ flowers of oblivion blossom/ only in the garden, among roses...//* – song 12). The music flow's dramatic curve follows this trajectory, so that its rise is effected in the central part of the cycle (songs 7, 8 and 9). The basis of the composer's monodramatic poetics is a succession of moods-emotions and an internal unity of each of them, moments formulating the Baroque dramaturgy. The succinctness of songs coupled with the through-composed form not only emphasizes the discursive plane, the sole point at which they are realized, but also makes each of them, as Crnjanski says, “a sentence, brief as a sigh”.

The homogeneity of the semantic (understood as affective) plane is ensured by the composer's effort to underline, in each song in the piano part, specific central motives-meanings. These motives, as well as the affective plane of the text they convey, are crucially supported by the linguistic orientation of the cycle. Like in every *rappresentativo*, so in *Krug*, dissonance is the main basis for the *night* as a scene and a metaphor, and for the tragic mode as a framework of feelings and events, which basically distinguishes the linguistic orientation of this cycle from previous works. The importance in *Krug* is shifted onto fourth chords, a whole-tone basis of the vertical, chromatic tertian textures, bichordal combinations or chordal cumuli in a chromatic tertian connection. However, this dissonant impulse is not absolute or univocal. This makes *Krug* closer to the logic of alternating between (independent) expressive dissonance and consonance in the music-dramatic style of Baroque – in which the effect of the dissonance

in time progression, and also in the progression of the emotion, intensifies and reflects on its surrounding consonant segments – than to Expressionism. This is achieved here by slightly touched tonal bases, modal elements, characteristic impressionistic fifth or fourth chords, “open chords” or parallel-led tertian textures... Particularly striking are static harmonic planes – accordingly close to the pretonal phase of music language – in which tonality is present associatively, although tonal dynamic is “suspended”.

Within this language of *Krug*, which is convincing in presentation but not sharp or overworked, there emerge motivic elements in which one can discern semantic elements of the songs upon which, again, rests the leitmotivic weaving of the cycle. In individual songs, they are guided by the logic of consecution and repetition, by which they acquire the status of a model and, like long “ostinatos”, ensure the unity of the tone.

In the first song, such is the original, figuratively conceived motive (the fifth of the “g” initial tonic, broken into two octaves with a chromatic paraphrasing of fundamentals). The slightly touched intonational indicator and dissonant potential of the broken chord draws into the foreground the independent, expressive value of dissonance in describing the central mood: *Cveće mi svenu/u dugoj noćnoj kiši*, which is confirmed when texture contracts into a ninth chord of a whole-tone dominant (on an augmented), by which the composer underlines the word *noć*, the meaning around which the semantic field revolves both literally and metaphorically (example 6).

The monodramatic foundation of *Krug*, barring the unity of the character/mood of the songs and their succession along a dramatic line – which, understandably, include changes of tempo and metrical dispositions of the songs – rests considerably upon their type of connection, that is, on the specific manner of realizing leit-poetics. Unlike the previous cycle, whose romantic gesture includes a re-contextualization of significant motivic elements and a transformation of their semantic ranges for the “story’s” stake, the identified units of meaning in *Krug* are Baroquely unchanged or only slightly varied.

The point of such an unchanging appearance of signifiers in the music flow is that their initial, motivated character and, therefore, their symbolic foundation, transforms into an arbitrary, conventional appearance of the sign. Hence the field of the cycle (and some of the songs) is concentrated, irrespective of the ostensible ramification of the affective scale, in a coherent (Baroque) *affetto* that incorporates all individual manifestations-differences of meaning.

This homogeneity, realized in the piano part by a static effect of “ostinatos” and by an equal distance between the distributed motives, is a basis on which the composer draws into the foreground the voice part. Its distinctly recitative foundation results from the text’s prosody, but is subsequently realized in a number of different ways. They again and above all are beholden to the internal configuration of the emotion, both in songs and in the cycle, which the composer observes with utmost consistency. However, this configuration, generally speaking, is guided by a line of “lament and scream” (M. Guiomar), a “two-member” affective structure that universally supports the monodrama’s concept. Consequently, there are two basic forms of recitative orientation in Despić’s cycle. The first, on the melodic plane, relies on

gradual motion within a small range, on the descending direction of motion and, above all, on the “lament” sign: a descending chromatic semitone.

Also in formulating the recitative, the composer selects characteristic wholes that are incorporated into a texture of leitmotives in the work. Such is the whole formed in the first song to words from the first couplet: *Cveće mi svenu/u **dugoj, dugoj** noćnoj kiši*. The characteristic intervallic disposition and the descending direction of motion point to the central motive of *Ozon zavičaja*, and with good reason, given the contingency of meaning (*Jutros prozor/roni suze...*) and the identical, figurative technique in forming motives according to select words of the text. It is important, however, to notice the significantly altered harmonic perspective of the motive. Namely, in its first appearance it is harmonically determined by the chord of the diminished seventh – a common spot, a “designated element” of music-dramatic style in tonal tradition (from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century to date) – whereupon a change of texture leads directly to the evolving of a chromatic chord and its whole-note frame already discussed in the foregoing (examples 6 and 3a). This motive permeates, sometimes manifestly, sometimes implicitly, the entire cycle, principally in voice, but also in piano, or doubled, in both parts.

Singling out characteristic wholes in the voice recitative supports the mainstays of its dramatic foundation: in the first place, the fragmentation of the vocal line – the isolation of short segments that become autonomous in semantic, as well as iconic, value – which, thus, enables the effects of a discursive hiatus, the interruption of a normal prosodic series. The composer achieves this by striking use of intervals, suspension effects, repetition (of parts of the text and music segments) and especially by alternating rhetoric gradation and fall (by transposing, changing the intonational orientation, i.e. “scale groove” within which voice segments move). There is one other significant moment in conceiving the recitative in *Krug*: a change of the recitative type in a short interval, depending not only on prosodic aspects, but also and above all, on the affective content of the text. In line with the poetics of the composers of monodic music drama and their successors, in the seventh song the composer transforms pure declamation, *quasi narrativo* at the beginning of the statement (*Onoga koji,/znajući za moju ljubav, odlazi...*), into an authentic *rappresentativo*, a dissonant skip (of the diminished fifth), to the word bearing the central emotion: *zaustavi*. (score, p. 67)

### **Inspiration from Serbian Romanticism: *Djulići* and *Uveoci***

In two vocal-lyrical cycles, op. 118, composed to poetic cycles by J. J. Zmaj, *Djulići* and *Djulići uveoci*, Dejan Despić oriented his lied, as previously in *Dubrovački kanconijer*, albeit in a quite different expressive sphere, by stylizing this time Serbian poetic Romanticism and Serbian Romantic Lied, which was inspired by it. By doing this, even in his own vocal-lyrical “circle” he returned to the homeland whence his production, historically interceded, originated. The composer set these two cycles, as he says

in the explanation of the work, as “a specific, contrastive diptych”<sup>11</sup> to his own selection of songs, i.e. strophes from Zmaj’s cycles. The first cycle contains seven songs: *Pesmo moja* (*My Song*), *Ljubim te* (*I Love You*), *Andjeli* (*Angels*), *Milovanje* (*Caresses*), *Snovi* (*Dreams*) and *Daj mi ruku* (*Give Me Your Hand*), while the second includes six songs: *Vile* (*Fairies*), *Mrtvo nebo* (*Dead Sky*), *Ćutnja* (*Silence*), *Orkan* (*Hurricane*), *Mesečina* (*Moonlight*) and *Pepeo* (*Ashes*). The contrast between them is, understandably, beholden to the difference in the poetic expression itself: in the first cycle, to confessional lyricism, which relies, in Zmaj’s unique way, on the bourgeois and folk spirit – restrained enthusiasm and a specific combination of cheerfulness and melancholy – whereas in the second it relies on a complex, reflective, highly motivated expression borne by sombre and dark moods. However, this contrast is realized subsequently in the composer’s music transposition.

The cycles are unified by a common field of genre and style, by a series of elements that forms the basis of an evoked Romantic milieu. In relation to the previous two cycles, this basically means a return to conceiving the voice part in the manner of melodic *espressivo – cantabile*, which is analogous to both the kind of sensibility borne by Zmaj’s lyricism and its tied, “music” verse. Hence the composer’s turning to classical structuring, proportional relations, repetition and periodicity, which originates from a steady metric pattern and accent on metric borders in poetic expression, and supports the prominent “fine melody” of the voice. Formal dispositions of the songs, both in these and in previous cycles, display a variability characteristic of the composer’s poetics of the *Lied* and different forms of adapting music form to the composition and the meaning of poetic text, relying on models of classical-romantic *Lied*: tripartite and strophic form.

The oscillation of tonal and modal diatonicism, which forms the linguistic orientation of the cycle, is a general basis of the lyric sensibility of verses and the referential music landscape. Tertian textures, including seventh chords and ninth chords in all degrees, are discreetly, impressionistically shaded by added non-harmonic tones. The stress on plagal and mediant connections in harmonic progression, as well as swift and subtle changes of the key/mode and the oscillation of relative and parallel keys, confirms their connection with a Slavonic late-Romantic milieu. The two cycles are unified not only by their common features, but also by the variation of the initial song of the first cycle in the final song of the second cycle, albeit with a low degree of remoteness, seeing as the initial (and final) part of the song is repeated consistently. This rounding of the diptych is particularly convincing given the Lydian orientation of the voice melody, from which the diptych emanates and to which it is reduced, and the harmonic relation proceeding from it (D: I<sup>+2+6</sup> II<sup>9</sup>, score, pp. 1 and 25). The basic features of the evoked Romantic landscape and its lyrical mode also include textural realizations in the piano part, formulated as accompaniment: chordal, figured, or by spreading a harmonic base.

The instance where, in this context, one may recognize the Romantic background of the Serbian lied, principally that of Josif Marinković (1851-1931), its specific mark, belongs to a genre variant that

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<sup>11</sup> Dejan Despić, *Djulići i Uveoci* (manuscript), p. 27.

characterizes the historical origin of the Serbian lied – the music *sevdalinka* (love song). The composer weaves into these cycles a *sevdalinka* expression, which reflects on the voice melody and its harmonic base, owing it to the raised fourth degree in the minor (the scale structure of the “Balkan minor”, which, incidentally, itself is not univocally present here either), in a discreet, albeit sufficiently convincing manner in relation to the stylistic reference. In the first cycle, this is manifest in a specific solution, and then in the sonic, as well as stylistic, emotion of the fourth song *Andjeli* (according to *Djuliću LI* and to the characteristic poetic expression of love rapture: *Oj, vi, dani, niste dani... /Oh, days, you are not days.../*). In this song the strophic form (*a a1*), varied to Zmaj’s two quatrains, is realized in such a manner that the voice melody – *espressivo* underscored by syncopes and dotted rhythm – is realized in such a way as to move in the first strophe within the Lydian “F” mode and the harmonic context arising from it, whereas in the second strophe, the melody, merely transposed, underlines the lower tetrachord of the “Balkan” A minor, with an appropriate (Romanticist) harmonization. What is also characteristic in this respect is that the song ends on a dominant in harmony and on the fifth of the dominant in the voice part. The stylistic tension that the composer achieves in these two parts of the song, but also in the second part, by swiftly redefining the characteristic scale pattern with a modal perspective that juxtaposes it, makes this segment seem like a quotation or, better yet, a stylistic variant of the previous, modern expression (score, pp. 7 and 8). An equally clear example appears in the sixth song *Snovi*, to a characteristic intonation of verses: *Čini mi se, grehota bi/Bila da te sad poljubim //It seems to me, a shame it would/Be to steal a kiss from you now//*), in which the voice part develops within the “Balkan” (G minor) scale framework with the music flow in the piano, however, pouring (via the final dominant) into the opposite, modal harmonic perspective and textural situation from the cycle’s beginning (another way of linking songs, typical of the composer’s poetics /example 7/).

In this general context, the composer draws a distinction between *moods* in the cycles. The predominantly major colour of the first and the minor colour of the second correspond to the principal moods, but the essential, subtle distinction is drawn within the genre itself. Whereas in the first cycle the Romantic lied is expressed as *romance*, in the second it acquires the form of a dramatized *Lied* – genre variants which were established, in terms of the Serbian lied, in the vocal-lyrical work of Josif Marinković. In *Uveoci*, this reflects on the voice line which, in as much as it loses structural support in periodicity, so the *cantabile* of the first cycle transforms within it into a recitative of “uneven” melodic configuration, interrupted by intervals, with changeable rhythm and distinct fragments. On the other hand, the vocal *espressivo* of *Djulići* transforms in expression into elements of pathos, expressed particularly in frequent skipping upwards into suspension, which at the same time help achieve a specific motivic connection between the cycles. The dramatized form of the *Lied* is ensured also by the through-composed form (in songs 4 and 5). In the fourth song, *Orkan* (*Djulići uveoci*, XXI: *Probudio s’ orkan ljuti... //A fierce hurricane awoke//*), owing to the narrative type of poetic expression, a vivid description and the elements of a dramatic scene realized by occasional direct speech, it also comes close to the genre variant of the *ballad*. The dramatization of expression in text transmission rests on another characteristic

procedure, namely strong descriptive figures, as literally as possible in supporting the textual meaning. Thus, like Marinković's dramatized songs, particularly his song *Grm (Bush)*, the composer leaves neither of Zmaj's metaphorical images without an appropriate music figure. In the second song, the image: *Mrtvo nebo, mrtva zemlja (Dead sky, dead land)* is transposed by a pregnant, disquieted rhythmicization of the F-minor tonic triad in the piano part; in the fourth, *Probudio s' orkan ljuti...*, the auxiliary figure in a low register and once again a minor context, provides a background for the entire scene, while in the fifth, *Mesečina kao negda...* (*Moonlight as in times gone by ...*), it vibrates in high-register major chords.

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Vocal-lyrical production is one of the most significant lines in Dejan Despić's oeuvre. However, the beginning of Despić's work in this area also marked a new phase in the genre's development in Serbian music. In terms of the importance and scope of his vocal-lyrical opus, continuity in its creation, and its poetic and aesthetic achievements, it can be said that what Marinković's *Lied* meant for the birth of the Serbian lied, what Milojević's meant for its life in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Despić's *Lied* means for the genre's development in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Serbian music history.

Translated by Dušan Zabrdac

Example 1

The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 80. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The vocal line is in a soprano range and includes the lyrics: "да-ра-сно о-сѣр-ба у ш-ми о-". The piano accompaniment features a prominent F-minor tonic triad in the left hand, with dynamics like "p" and "più p". The score is written in a standard musical notation with a treble clef for the vocal line and a bass clef for the piano part.

Example 2a

Musical score for Example 2a. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 116$ . The score consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including triplets and slurs. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *π* (piano).

Example 2b

Musical score for Example 2b. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 48$ . The score includes a vocal line with lyrics in Cyrillic: "Цвѣтъ лилѣ ѣе мла-до-сти сѣ-ди-ши од-хо-ди и шны-та ра-до-сти све на-ше од-". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *тр* (trio).

Example 3a

Musical score for Example 3a. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 54$ . The score includes a vocal line with lyrics: "Лѣ-рос ѣро-зо-ри ро-не су-зе". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte), *п* (piano), and *тр* (trio).

Example 3b

Musical score for Example 3b. The tempo is marked as  $\text{♩} = 52$ . The score includes a vocal line with lyrics: "Сѣу-ша се! се-ша су-мра-ка на рав-ныце и на ду-шу.". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and slurs. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *тр* (trio).



Example 7

чи — ми ли се, іре-хо — ша ди ди — ла, іре-хо-ша ди ди — ла га ше... га

*mp* *p* *p crescendo...*

ше сар... га ше сар іо — му — ди.

*f* *mf* *mp* *p*

4 5

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics in Cyrillic: "чи — ми ли се, іре-хо — ша ди ди — ла, іре-хо-ша ди ди — ла га ше... га". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with a 5-finger pattern and a treble line with chords. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, and *p crescendo...*. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "ше сар... га ше сар іо — му — ди." and the piano accompaniment with a 4-finger pattern in the bass and a 5-finger pattern in the treble. Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. The piece concludes with a 4-measure rest in the bass and a 5-measure rest in the treble.