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### COMPOSER DUŠAN KOSTIĆ (23/1/1925 – 6/10/2005)

Memories of composer Dušan Kostić's work are connected with Belgrade's recent music past and the erstwhile desires of once young graduates from the Music Academy to embark on contemporary music.

He approached music as an educated man – he displayed his knowledge of music and philosophy, and particularly literature, already during his studies, as well as in endless discussions he used to have with Raško Dimitrijević before different audiences, on various areas of world and Serbian culture, ultimately becoming a frequent visitor to his home, one of Belgrade's cultural spots.

Besides their joint efforts to musically grasp composing skills, Kostić and his professor of composition and conducting Predrag Milošević apparently had many other things in common, namely breadth of artistic and cultural vision and a specific ironic attitude to the surrounding world. It was precisely the irony, even sarcasm, that was inherent in Kostić's fierce and extravagant nature. Energetically and resolutely, albeit often without good reason, he held firm to his convictions, forcefully repudiating contrary positions.

He graduated in composition in 1955 and completed his postgraduate studies in 1962, each time under Predrag Milošević. He finished his conducting studies in 1955 and followed an advanced course in Bayreuth under Hermann Scherchen. After teaching theoretical subjects at the Music school *Mokranjac* (1951-1956), he became a music contributor to Radio-television Belgrade (1957-1959) and subsequently, professor-theoretician at the Department of Theory of the Faculty of Music. He was the first to teach style analysis – by changing the concept of this subject, he attempted to expand it beyond the confines of the school curriculum and connect it with styles of literature and art.

We follow his career in the music milieu in which he lived, whose characteristics reflected on some of his colleagues-contemporaries. Like Kostić, most of them departed from late Romanticism in their creative work. What was, after all, to be expected from the students whose early works included *rukoveti* modelled on those by Mokranjac? The important fact, however, is that young composers were establishing, each according to their own affinities, contact with the modern times.

Kostić's *Sonatina za fagot i klavir (Sonatina for bassoon and piano)* (1952) was well received at a concert of composition students, held on May 7, 1952,<sup>1</sup> while the first public comments about Dušan Kostić's work were made with respect to his symphonic poem *Kontrasti (Contrasts)*, set to the poetry of Raško Dimitrijević, which was performed at a concert of a group of senior students to which he belonged. Its qualities were recognized, but like other student compositions performed at the time, Kostić's symphonic poem failed to demonstrate a mastering of compositional problems or the relief, lyrical and contentually rich thematics and instrumentation freed from the youthful Sturm und Drang period.<sup>2</sup>

Already at the outset of Kostić's career, we encounter certain characteristics that will be typical of both his subsequent work and the compositions of his contemporaries, namely an untraditional treatment of the sonata form, the use of dodecaphony, the use of folk melodies, a distinct tendency to the polyphonic way of thinking and a need to express humorous mood by music means.

These characteristics first appear in *Sonatina for bassoon and piano*, in deceptive recapitulation and true recapitulation in I movement and in the quotations of music thoughts from the first two movements in the finale, and later in the Second Symphony (1964), in the likeness of material of the two movements. Vasilije Mokranjac also arrived at a specific concept of the sonata form already in his early works; attempting to achieve uniformity of the symphonic movement, he came to quote thoughts from previous movements in the last, and he arrived at a specific archimotive.<sup>3</sup>

Dušan Kostić explored his interest in dodecaphonist technique in the First String Quartet (1954) and Symphony in sol (1957), whereas composer Aleksandar Obradović tried his hand at it later, in his Second Symphony (1964), and not only in this composition.

Kostić demonstrated his distinct inclination towards the polyphonic way of thinking, to which he would remain loyal, in Symphony in sol (passacaglia in III movement) and particularly in the Second Symphony (1966), in chorale, five-part fugue, double fugue and passacaglia. "The sound atmosphere of this symphony's modernized Baroque motoricness carries an emotional tone which imparts not only a specific quality, but also unique value."<sup>4</sup>

Kostić presented himself with formidable challenges, which is why he failed to reconcile, in *Crnogorska svita (Montenegrin Suite)* (1957), the "monolithic, motivically

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to reviews, in the examination of Kostić's compositions we have used analyses of Dušan Skovran from a study jointly published by Vlastimir Peričić, Dušan Skovran and Dušan Kostić, entitled *Muzički stvaraoči u Srbiji*, Beograd, Prosveta, 1969, 197-204.

<sup>2</sup> Branko Dragutinović, Koncert apsolutenata Muzičke akademije, *Politika*, Oct. 3, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> *Dramatična uvertira (A Dramatic Overture)* (1950) and the first two symphonies (1961, 1965).

indivisible diatonicism of the Montenegrin folk melody” with the application of chromatics and dazzling orchestra,<sup>5</sup> despite his “skill in compositional developing of the symphonic movement and his flair for impressive instrumentation”.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1970’s, he tried his hand at vocal-instrumental compositions, comical stage dance and cantatas – after all, compositions with text perhaps best suited his temperament. The humour radiating from the youthful and cheerful *Sonata for bassoon and piano*, enhanced by the very character of the solo instrument, was also used in the comical dance *Majstori su prvi ljudi (Craftsmen are the First People)* (1961), but it grew into irony, caricaturing and parody, and ultimately, in his later works, into sarcasm. Contemporary Belgrade composers, including Kostić in his *Dve bečke pošalice (Two Viennese Quips)* from 1974, retained the humorous, ironic and grotesque treatment of music only in choruses (Kosta Babić and Dragutin Gostuški in particular), while Nikola Hercigonja refused to renounce irony (*Šest Zmajevih satiričnih pesama /Six Zmaj’s Satirical Poems/* for choir and orchestra, 1953) and Dušan Kostić employed sarcasm and banter.

However, Jovan Putnik’s text, based on Kosta Trifković’s comedies (*Čestitam /Congratulations/* and *Ljubavno Pismo /A Love Letter/*) inspired Kostić’s cheerful disposition: *Majstori su prvi ljudi* is farce, song-play, vaudeville and operetta all rolled into one, so it is hardly surprising that it does not belong to any specific stage genre. The important fact is that it conveys the atmosphere of 19<sup>th</sup> century Vojvodina, the openheartedness and naivete of its citizens who are scoffed by their descendants in both arias and old sentimental urban songs; still: “Good taste was in no way spoiled, the dramatic flow had its necessary life, words and music fulfilled their function and complemented each other”.<sup>7</sup> Kostić displayed “a sense of and flair for dramatic realizations” and an interesting, explosive orchestra, but he exaggerated in caricaturing and in the elaborate arrangement of the poems.<sup>8</sup>

Two cantatas, *Otadžbina (Homeland)* (1961) and *Kragujevac* (1962) are characteristic of Kostić’s production: the former is set to texts by Branko Miljković, Milorad Panić-Surep and Đura Jakšić, the latter to a poem by Desanka Maksimović. Remaining loyal to his beliefs, he employed polyphony in these compositions, too, namely fugue in the finale of *Otadžbina*. The same ideas are entwined in the movements of the cantata *Kragujevac*, where three

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<sup>4</sup> Branko Dragutinović, Druga simfonija Dušana Kostića, *Politika*, Feb. 11, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Dragutin Čolić, *Crnogorska svita* Dušana Kostića, *Borba*, Mar. 13, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> Branko Dragutinović, *Crnogorska svita* kompozitora Dušana Kostića, *Politika*, Mar. 13, 1958.

<sup>7</sup> Dušan Plavša, *Majstori su prvi ljudi*, *Nin*, 9/5, 1962//11.

<sup>8</sup> Dušan Skovran, Hronika muzičkog života, *Zvuk*, 1962, 55, 573-574.

movements correlate as exposition, development and recapitulation. The themes are almost dodecaphonic in the Allegro movement, while the use of military marches, intended to mock the enemy, was overstating triviality. The composition was also “overplayed in terms of sound and dynamics”.<sup>9</sup>

Kostić wrote a few articles and chronicled Belgrade’s music life for a short while. He is also the author of textbooks and a number of theoretical studies.

Among Kostić’s earliest writings, which proved essential for the Belgrade climate at the time when they appeared, there were two articles *Muzika iz retorte (Music from the Retort)*.<sup>10</sup> In addition to an article on professor Petar Bingulac, who left an indelible mark on generations of students of Belgrade’s Music Academy,<sup>11</sup> Kostić wrote, with obvious enthusiasm, about George Bernard Shaw and his poisonous arrows directed at participants in London’s music life, as well as about Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Camille Saint-Saëns and others.<sup>12</sup>

His attempt at solving the problem of Mokranjac’s realistic interpretation of the *rukoveti* text was quite an original one. Proceeding from a psychological interpretation of the content and from dramaturgy, he drew bold parallels between the characters of boy and girl from the Eleventh *rukovet* and Adam and Eve, that is, between the accounts of Hajduk Veljko and those of Odysseus.<sup>13</sup>

Kostić was in charge of chronicling Belgrade’s music life in seven issues of the magazine *Zvuk*, between 1957 and 1959. With introductions on the problems of music events or without them, he would record music events, usually in the style of music chronicles, and add his comments and sporadic evaluations. He deeply felt music and openly expressed his opinions on the listened works, which generally corresponded with the views of other Belgrade critics. However, on certain occasions some of his statements raised eyebrows. His observations about Belgrade music artists, composers and institutions were particularly absorbing.

It seems that he did not fully understand Ludwig van Beethoven. Why is it that Ludwig van Beethoven’s Sonata op. 90 “has no grounds for remaining on the concert podium because of its last movement and what makes the Sixth Symphony of the same author

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<sup>9</sup> Branko Dragutinović, Muzičke večeri Radio-televizije Beograd pred praznom dvoranom, *Politika*, Feb. 10, 1962.

<sup>10</sup> *Savremeni akordi*, 1954, 3, 20-22 and 4, 33-34.

<sup>11</sup> Taj radoznali čovek (That Curious Man), *Pro musica*, 1972, 64, 8-9.

<sup>12</sup> G. B. Shaw – “uomo virtuoso”, *Zvuk*, 1963, 56, 12-17.

<sup>13</sup> Realističko tumačenje teksta u Mokranjčevim rukovetima, *Zvuk*, 1981, 4, 48-54.

unrewarding”?<sup>14</sup> However, when an outstanding interpretation took place, he would experience it wholly:

*Conducting a concert dedicated to French music, Zubin Mehta was reaching one pinnacle after another, making it indeed difficult to decide which one was better: his Debussy (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun), where the exuberant and excessive palette of a true impressionist blazed with a bright redness of its colours, his César Franck, replete with such unimaginable details in orchestral accompaniment that Symphonic Variations grew into a symphony with obliged piano, or his Berlioz, whose “Symphonie Fantastique” acquired humanistically heightened accents... The Belgrade Philharmonic, fascinated by the conductor, truly gave their best that evening...”<sup>15</sup>*

Not only does Kostić’s evaluation of the performances of Belgrade music artists correspond with judgments of other critics, it is even more benevolent! He regarded the interpretations of pinaist Zdenko Marinković as exemplary, he described his first encounter with pianist Nada Vujčić in 1959 as a revelation, he considered the concerts of pianist Mirjana Vukdragović outstanding and he similarly described his impressions of the concert of clarinetist Bruno Bruno. He rated Krešimir Baranović’s interpretation of Dvořák’s *Carneval* as virtuosic, and Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony under the direction of Živojin Zdravković as “a masterpiece of understanding and carefully dosed psychological suspense”.<sup>16</sup>

He rationally approached judging the results of most of his contemporary colleagues-composers and pointed out that he had expected greater audacity, a clearer conception and sharper language from the late Romantic Milutin Radenković in Concertino for piano and orchestra. He reproached Radomir Petrović for the relationship between form and instrumentation, he believed Peričić’s Sonata for piano was a serious study,<sup>17</sup> and discerned the “clarity of forms, transparency of instrumentation with sporadic bizarre effects, a certain breeziness and quasi-wittiness of the themes which do not require any specific dramatic arrangement, as well as a distant overtone of something impressionistic in harmony” in the suite *Rema* and other works of Dragutin Gostuški.<sup>18</sup> However, he was the most critical of precisely the composers who were receiving the most attention at that time, Dušan Radić and Enriko Josif. According to Kostić, in *Divertimento*, composed on the basis of works by

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<sup>14</sup> Dušan Kostić, Hronika muzičkog života, Beograd, *Zvuk*, 1957, 13-14, 161-162.

<sup>15</sup> Dušan Kostić, Hronika muzičkog života, Beograd, *Zvuk*, 1959, 24-25, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Dušan Kostić, Hronika muzičkog života, Beograd, *Zvuk*, 1959, 30, 501-506.

<sup>17</sup> Dušan Kostić, Hronika muzičkog života, Beograd, *Zvuk*, 1959, 30, 501-506.

<sup>18</sup> Dušan Kostić, Hronika muzičkog života, Beograd, *Zvuk*, 1959, 24-25, 172-176.

Stravinsky and Bartók, Radić displayed inadequate knowledge of the resonator,<sup>19</sup> while Josif received an ironic remark:

...*"Lirska simfonija"* (*Lyrical Symphony*) of the young Serbian composer Enriko Josif, in which "good old" impressionism rears its ugly head and transforms into a now cheerful, now sad young man who has not got a lot to say (much less through four flutes, harp and the strings), but one has the feeling that that something is nonetheless imminent".<sup>20</sup>

Among the older composers, Mihovil Logar was the only one who was not understood: Kostić regarded his Concerto for clarinet and orchestra as being "poised between a desire for popularity and modernism" and inadequate in terms of harmonic language, instrumentation and length.<sup>21</sup> Kostić was not the only critic to misjudge the character of Logar's compositions.

Kostić's two high-school music textbooks and a number of studies are in manuscript.<sup>22</sup>

Kostić's most intense creative period lasted some twenty years, from 1954 to 1979, but during that time his works were seldom performed, which is, after all, the case with most Serbian composers. He was gradually becoming less involved in music events and lonely, he composed less, but the performances of his compositions received positive criticism from the music public. For a short while he was close to Nikola Hercigonja, with whom he shared an affinity for satire and Musorgski's work.

However, he has not been forgotten. Dušan Kostić as a composer has been elucidated in histories of music, textbooks, encyclopedias and lexicons.

Translated by Dušan Zabrdac

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dušan Kostić, Hronika muzičkog života, Beograd, *Zvuk*, 1959, 30, 501-506.

<sup>22</sup> *Umetnička čitanka* (for high school, with a group of authors), I-III, Interpres, 1958; *Muzički instrumenti. Istorija*. Mimeographed notes, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school, Niš-Pirot, author's edition, 1966.

Harmonski jezik i izražajna sredstva Musorgskog; Dezintegracija i integracija harmonije; Gregorijanska umetnost; Umetnost horskog pevanja (mimeographed notes) etc.

Stana Đurić-Klajn, Razvoj muzičke umetnosti u Srbiji, *Istorijskei razvoj muzičke kulture u Jugoslaviji*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1962, 707; Dušan Skovran, Dušan Kostić, in: Vlastimir Peričić u saradnji sa Dušanom Skovranom i Dušanom Kostićem, *Muzički stvaraoci u Srbiji*, Beograd, Prosveta, 1969, 197-2004;

Stana Đurić-Klajn, Kostić Dušan, *Muzička enciklopedija*, Zagreb, Enciklopedija Jugoslavije, 1974, 372; *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1980; Vlastimir Peričić, Kostić Dušan, *Leksikon Jugoslavenske muzike*, I, Zagreb, 1984, 459.