

Sonja Marinković

**Dragana Jeremić-Molnar, *Srpska klavirska muzika u doba romantizma (1841-1914)*  
(Serbian Piano Music in the Epoch of Romanticism /1841-1914/),  
Novi Sad, Matica srpska, 2006, 299**

Dragana Jeremić-Molnar's book deals with the problems of development and the characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup>-century (up to 1914) Serbian piano music. For the first time in Serbian musicology this book sheds full historical and analytical light on the development of an important genre in Serbian music, making an important contribution to the study of its historical development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author dedicated a number of years, from 1995 to 2001, to the study of this topic, making it the focus of her graduation paper and master's thesis, as well a series of other individual works.

In the study before us, which is the edited text of the master's thesis, she undertakes the difficult task of systematising the historical development of the piano genre over more than seven decades and analysing the works of over fifty authors, placing them in the context of broader examinations of social developments and the development of Serbian music of the epoch. Combining extensive archival, historiographic and analytical research, she constructs a very clear and systematically structured book. Dragana Jeremić-Molnar's work is characterised by a meticulous and systematic approach to research, a precise scholarly apparatus, a careful consideration of problems and an original approach. I would particularly like to underline her unique writing style, which is reminiscent of Konjović's lavishness of sentence structure, as well as the richness and sonority of her language, features rarely found nowadays.

The text is organized into three main chapters – *Sociological Review: Functions of the Piano and Music-Making at the Piano in Everyday Life of the Serbian Population*; *Historical Review: Origins and Development of Serbian Piano Music*; and *Analytical Review: Characteristics of Serbian Piano Production* – which are framed by a preface, an introductory note containing a survey of the literature, and a final concise evaluation of the relevance of the achieved results in the context of European music.

In the first chapter, by reconstructing certain elements of the social milieu, the author aims to provide better insight into the long and gradual process of private and public recognition of piano music and the piano as an instrument that took place in urban environments. The author

states the reasons for the relatively late appearance of piano music in the Serbian environment: lack of instruments, lack of expert personnel, absence of the need for and interest in creativity, and life under Turkish rule. Urbanisation, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the concomitant formation of an elite class of the population created the necessary conditions for the beginning of development. Special emphasis is placed on the importance of the definition and the structural and functional differentiation of social formations and the rise of the bourgeoisie of the Serbian society as the primary consumers of piano music-making. The author observes and emphasizes the importance of the home environment as the usual setting for fostering piano music-making and points to the association of the instrument with members of the female sex. Stress is also laid on the crucial role of the instrument in the music education of the bourgeoisie.

The author represents the public function of the piano by examining the participants in the performing scene and analyzing the contents of the concert repertoire. She also underlines the fact that the primary concert concept of most public performances was based on a synthesis of two dominant programme orientations – the performing of compositions of drawing-room and virtuosic character and works originating from domestic music heritage. The strengthening of professional performing contributed to the overcoming of repertoire conventions and enabled the important process of formulating the content of programmes more carefully.

The deviation from a monotonous programme was, very boldly and resolutely, first promoted by Jovanka Stojković. It was most clearly manifested through the broadening of the stylistic range, by the incorporation of works entailing a more complex realisation in terms of compositional technique and content, more complex piano genres, cyclic soloistic works (sonatas), and concert pieces into the repertoire. The author concludes that the new performing orientation, initially perceived as a deviation from the *status quo*, over time acquired the status of a norm.

In the historically conceived second part of the study, the author presents a heterogeneous, contrasting image of composers, systematising the presentation according to the criteria of education and gender. She concludes that women, who were the most numerous in soloistic piano performing, did not predominate in the compositional sphere and that amateurs were not noticeably dominant in numbers. The relatively balanced ratio between educated composers and amateurs is interpreted as a positive consequence of the valuable presence of foreign composers in Serbia and Vojvodina, (besides Morfidis-Nisis, who was of Greek descent, and the Italian Dionisio de Sarno-San Giorgio, a large number of Czech composers also tried their hand at composing piano music). Although she correctly observes that national differentiation was the primary criterion for systematising composers in the piano genre, she also

explains, using more relevant, music criteria, that it is not possible to establish a realistic differentiation between the works of representatives of different national groups. Aware of the dilemma between the individual and the parallel examination of the piano production of representatives of different nationalities, the author opts for the only right and meaningful, precise and chronologically valid method of examining Serbian piano production that is based on the synthesis of their contributions.

In the historical examination of the development of Serbian piano music, Dragana Jeremić-Molnar proposes a possible periodisation, dividing this epoch into four stages. The first two periods – examined in the units (1) *The Age of Kornelije Stanković* and (2) *The Period of Jovan Paču's Domination* – are delimited by the output of the two composers who became specific focal points around which other authors gathered and on which they based their own work. The author identified the year 1886 as a boundary, bearing in mind the noticeable branching out of compositional practice, as well as the short-term, but fruitful activity of Robert Tolinger ((3) *Robert Tolinger and His Contemporaries*). Tolinger recognised the reality of Serbian music's situation, clearly joining those who advocated its professionalisation. Elements of the stylistic change which discreetly manifested itself at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, without departing from the constant romantic context, were an indicator that this period should be viewed as the final stage of the development of the piano genre ((4) *Piano Music from the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*). The author strives to integrate almost all the composers and piano compositions created during the period into the survey of the development of Serbian piano production.

The final, analytical chapter has the primary function of defining the essential characteristics of piano production. With the aim of depicting the form, character and pace of the development of 19th-century Serbian piano music and establishing an evaluative hierarchy among the composers, Dragana Jeremić-Molnar first meticulously examines the output of composers who showed a strong affinity and ambitious dedication for writing piano music, and who created compositions that represent an important part of the national music heritage – Kornelije Stanković, Jovan Paču, Robert Tolinger and Isidor Bajić, adding the early works of Petar Konjović and Miloje Milojević to this group of authors. Stanković and Paču were the leading representatives of the first important line of piano music which ensured its continuity and which characteristically incorporated elements of the European, mainly drawing-room tradition into nationally oriented works. The compositions of Tolinger, Bajić, Konjović and Milojević also played an important role in the preservation of the necessary continuity. At the same time, they represented a new dimension of the development process that was based on correcting, refining

and carefully redefining the adopted orientation. These composers, and above all the representatives of the youngest generation, are responsible for the stylistic modernisation of Serbian piano music through the reception and assimilation of certain elements of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century European romantic tradition.

The analytical interpretation of the modest, mostly unsuccessful albeit numerous compositions – whose authors were mainly amateur musicians, but also certain educated composers who were not overly interested in piano music – completes the genre and formal profile of piano literature, as well as the range of its characteristics. What follows is an overview of compositional contributions according to the forms used (variational forms, the genre of stylised dances, character and programme pieces, polyphonic forms, marches and pieces based on folklore arrangement).

What the study greatly benefits from are the appendices – a very extensive bibliography (226 units) and appendices with lists of composers and their piano works, a chronological survey, an overview of works according to their genres, and a depiction of the development of concert life. *Srpska klavirska muzika u doba romantizna (1841-1914)* provides a valuable contribution to Serbian musicology and appeals not only to those who belong to the narrow circle of scholars-musicologists, but also to numerous pianists and piano students, as well as amateurs of piano music.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić