

**Miško Šuvaković**

### **ON PERFORMING**

#### **From ONTOLOGY to PERFORMATIVITY in and on MUSIC**

Bojana Cvejić was born in Belgrade, graduating from the Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology at the University of Belgrade, and obtaining her Master's Degree in 2005. She is the author of two books: *Otvoreno delo u muzici (Boulez/Stockhausen/Cage)* [*Open Work in Music (Boulez/ Stockhausen/Cage)*], SKC, Beograd, 2004, and *Izvan muzičkog dela: Performativna praksa Erika Satija, Džona Kejdža, Fluksusa, La Monte Janga, Džona Zorna* [*Outside a Music Work: The Performative Practice of Erik Satie, John Cage, the Fluxus, La Monte Young, John Zorn*], IK Zorana Stojanovića, Sremski Karlovci–Novi Sad, 2007. A regular contributor to such magazines as *Novi Zvuk*, *Frakcija* and *Maska*, she also collaborates with the TkH Centre and with the non-governmental organization *Činč*, and teaches theoretical subjects at the dance school *P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research Training Studios)* in Brussels. Among her research and practical interests are musicology, performing arts studies, conceptual dance, dance dramaturgy, opera direction and performance. Her involvement in the performing arts scene sees her performing beyond Belgrade, in international centers such as Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, and Lisbon. She currently lives in Brussels, but pursues her PhD studies through the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Middlesex University in London, England.

The elaboration and revision of the author's MA thesis, defended at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade in 2005, resulted in the book *Izvan muzičkog dela: Performativna praksa Erika Satija, Džona Kejdža, Fluksusa, La Monte Janga, Džona Zorna*. Through it, Cvejić aimed to lay the foundations for contemporary *hard* theoretical research into, and interpretation and discussion of, music as performative art, and as a part of performing studies. Bojana Cvejić bases the research on the musicological problem of "performing" in avant-garde, neoavant-garde and post-avant-garde 20<sup>th</sup>-century music material practices, and then elaborates on the interdisciplinary interpretation of said problem. Based on the contemporary theoretical postulates grounded in the theory of performativity and the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, she carries out a critical and analytical musicological discussion of performing in the works of composers Erik Satie and John Cage; neoavant-garde literary, artistic and music movement Fluxus; composer

and performer La Monte Young; and composer and performer John Zorn. Bojana Cvejić maps out the entire field of radical, experimental and normatively excessive music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the departure from the canonical dogmas of modernism.

The book *Izvan muzičkog dela: Performativna praksa Erika Satija, Džona Kejdža, Fluksusa, La Monte Janga, Džona Zorna* runs to 323 pages including numerous music examples, analytical diagrams, documentary black-and-white photographs, and 162 bibliographic items. The literature provided is contemporary and interdisciplinary, and the author includes a summary in English and a systematic index of terms and names to facilitate easy reading of the study. Publisher Zoran Stojanović, from Sremski Karlovci, printed *Izvan muzičkog dela* in the same edition as the books *Doksid s-TIU/4 – Fundamentalističko mapiranje savremenih teorija izvođačkih umetnosti (Doxicid s-TIU/4 – A Fundamentalist Mapping of Contemporary Theories of Performing Arts)* by Ana Vujanović, PhD, and *Opera u doba medija (Opera in the Epoch of Media)* by Jelena Novak, MA, further indicating the generational inclination of these authors toward developing and conducting contemporary critical-analytical work in comparative fields of contemporary theory, philosophy, and art. In a culture dominated by books on literary theory and fine arts theory, the elaboration of comparative discursive fields of the “performing arts” is invaluable.

The first part of *Izvan muzičkog dela* brings a critical-analytical discussion of the possibilities of defining music; the problemizing of the open and closed status of a music concept, work and paradigm. In a strict philosophical-aesthetical sense, Cvejić raises the question of essentialist and anti-essentialist approaches to music. What she offers to the metaphysical “pitfall” of binary thinking - based on the confrontation between essentialism and anti-essentialism, that is, relativism and anti-relativism - is the *idea* of interpreting the ‘performative doing of music’. The author introduces the term *performative* into theoretical discourses on music from the philosophy of language of J. L. Austin, the studies of the French linguist Émile Benvenist, and the American language philosopher John Searle. Special attention is given to theorizations of the performative in schools originating from the critique of French structuralism; for example, theorizations of the performative from the viewpoint of Shoshana Felman’s psychoanalysis. The key premise of the book is contained in the subtitle “Polje izvođenja” (The Field of Performing) [pp. 65-71]. The author departs from a relevant, and to her work crucial, distinction between two types of performing in music: ‘The distinction can be best perceived if we consider the similarities: both a music work and a performative work are performed. I will distinguish between the two types of performing as interpretative performing (interpretation of a music work) and performative performing (musical happening, performance

and other forms of performative practice). In principle, this division corresponds to the two forms of expression – interpretative performing stresses the locutionary character of expression, while performative performing emphasizes the illocutionary character’ [pp. 65-66]. The implications of this assumption are that it is the music *itself* that reveals essential distinctions between canonical ideals of performing and non-canonical innovations or explorations leading to the unknown, open or hybrid. By establishing the model of performative music practice, the author at the same time posits the concept of the ‘weak history of performative music practice’: ‘By weak history of performative music practice I mean history that does not have a project, an idea of development toward a specific goal and destination, precisely because it is transposed from a music work’ [p.82]. The objective of such musicological and philosophical-aesthetical thinking is to establish the shift from a “music work” as a necessary and ontologically centered *source* of music to “music” as a material performative practice that is only indexed by certain works. The shift from a music work-as-*source* to a music work-as-*index* aims to have far-reaching implications for the musicological-aesthetical thinking, which is that music is a “practice”. The key word here is *practice*, which, in the Althusserian and post-Althusserian sense, does not mean simple and direct opposition to theory but a productive and critical relationship between intervening material events and theories that are fundamentally related. The idea in question is “theoretical practice”, which manifests itself as a presupposed horizon of contemplating and understanding music in its historical constitutions. However, “theoretical practice” is not only a matter of thinking in music, but also includes music in its sensory-corporeal manifestations.

The second part of *Paradigme performativne muzičke prakse* deals with interpretations of historical paradigms of the performative music practices of composers Erik Satie, John Cage, the art movement Fluxus, La Monte Young and John Zorn. It points to the author’s brilliant ability to critically and analytically apply philosophical and esthetical apparatus to specific music practices and music works that manifest themselves as identificatory sources or traces, and often as documents of these practices. One should not lose sight of the fact that composers Erik Satie and John Cage belonged to the art movement Fluxus, or that La Monte Young and John Zorn are authors who are identifiable as “performers” of their own works and also as radical multimedia artists. Erik Satie was one of the leading figures of the French art scene from postimpressionism to cubism and dada to surrealism and neoclassicism. Cage’s legacy is a vast, hybrid output of music, fine-art, poetic, performing, philosophical and theoretical-political works. His famous dictum – ‘Everything is music!’– should not be forgotten. Composers, that is, artists of the Fluxus movement introduced new terms such as *mixed media*, *intermedia*, *multimedia* etc. La

Monte Young is a composer, jazzman, performer, ambient artist, and performer of Indian and Tibetan music. The work of John Zorn, the first major American composer of “classical music” who majored in saxophone, touches on a wide range of music genres from popular to high art, through his experiences as a composer of concert film music, club performer etc. In addition, these composers are not related in terms of historical evolution; rather, one can speak of contradictory, provocative and critical relationships between them. For example, one of the most outspoken critics of the role of chance in the work of John Cage was John Zorn. Bojana Cvejić had the difficult task of establishing analytical-critical procedures with which to identify, analyze and interpret these very different music practices and their institutional and administrative modes of presentation and promotion. The composers-performers discussed in the study radically elaborated and modified all the relevant aspects of “music”, from the status and character of the score to the role of sound and the manifestation of music performance as an event of music or art, that is, music and art. Her study analyzes and interprets precisely these characteristic shifts in the “nature” of music in order for it to be a permanently changing practice and change *itself* as an art.

What Bojana Cvejić was facing as a leftist, and critical musicologist and art theoretician was the fact that “performative music practices” in late capitalism became dominant characteristics of a “successful” music work at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Applying the theory of performativity to “music”, she came to the essential conclusion that music was a hybrid performing and media art in late capitalism. The author pointed out the significant contradiction of contemporaneity, which is that “performativity” is a simultaneous prerequisite for the specificity of a music practice as a singular event of affectation (in the Deleuzian sense) and a precondition for the appearance of music within artistic, cultural and media hybridities, i.e. music beyond the boundaries of music *itself* (in the Cageian sense).

This weighty, fastidiously and critically written book points to the paradoxes and contradictions of both contemporary music and contemporary musicology in the field of philosophical and political theorizations. Bojana Cvejić’s critical-analytical approaches are an excellent basis for future research into the crucial relationships between the practices of music, art, musicology and philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cvejić’s acuity and her uncompromising stance in dealing with the selected problems are an indication of a resolute author who is expected to rise to new challenges.

Translated by Dušan Zabrdac