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**ANOTHER CONTEMPORARY CONTRIBUTION TO  
THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PASSACAGLIA  
About Jugoslav Bošnjak's work *Sinfonia – passacaglia*<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The reason for this analysis of the work *Sinfonia – passacaglia*, one of Jugoslav Bošnjak's (1954) latest works, was its premiere in 2007. In terms of style, compositional technique and genre, this one-movement orchestral composition proves the author's loyalty to the creative poetics he began to build in the early 1990s. It confirms Bošnjak's devotion to orchestral sound, his skill in exploiting the expressive resources of this medium, virtuosity in using and correlating instrumental colours, and determination to create communicative music. The author of this text particularly focuses on the way in which compositional procedures paradigmatic of the passacaglia have been combined with procedures typical of symphonic thought and symphonic style.

**Key words:** Jugoslav Bošnjak, *Sinfonia – passacaglia*, orchestral music, variation principle, passacaglia

*Sinfonia – passacaglia*, the latest work of composer Jugoslav Bošnjak<sup>2</sup> to be presented to the Belgrade music audience, is not his most recent work.<sup>3</sup> It confirms to admirers of the composer, as well as the professional public, that despite his seven-year absence from the concert scene he has remained true to the creative poetics that produced a series of well-received and highly acclaimed works in the past.

*Sinfonia – passacaglia*'s inclusion in the genre of orchestral music confirms Bošnjak's decades-long devotion to orchestral sound. The continuity of that long-standing predilection, which began in the early 1970s, has been disrupted by only a few of the author's works from which the orchestra was omitted: compositions for piano (two suites, *Ispovesti* [Confessions] from 2002); and chamber ensembles of different settings (*Gudački kvartet* [String Quartet], which he wrote as a student; *Vilinska pesma* [Fairy Song] for flute, violin, cello and piano; *Sudba* [Destiny] for soprano and string quartet; and *Akvarel* [Watercolour] for

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<sup>1</sup> The work, written in 2005, was premiered on March 15, 2007 at a concert entitled "Berlin-Belgrade" at the hall of the Ilija Milosavljević Kolarac Foundation. The composition was performed by the Symphonic Orchestra of RTS – on whose initiative this premiere was organized – under the direction of the German conductor Christian Ewald.

<sup>2</sup> Jugoslav Bošnjak was born in 1954 in Rijeka. He completed both his graduate and postgraduate studies of composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, under Professor Rajko Maksimović. He works as a composer and music producer of the Symphonic Orchestra of RTS.

<sup>3</sup> Bošnjak's most recent work, composed in 2006, is the large oratorio *Knjiga o Jovu* (*The Book of Job*), for soprano and solo baritone, mixed choir and large orchestra.

two pianos and percussion); and the vocal-instrumental work *Otkrovenje sv. Jovana* [The Revelation of St. John] written in 1992 and conceived for a specific – previously untried– performing combination of mixed choir and solo trumpet. Bošnjak's clear preference for the rich timbre of a large orchestra is evident in the symphonic poem *Alef* [Aleph], the symphonic poem for violin and orchestra *Himera* [Chimera], fantasy for large orchestra *Tibetanska knjiga* [Tibetan Book] (premiered in 1987), and Uvertira *1453* [Overture 1453] (performed in 1989), as well as those works of differing genres that not only imply the participation of the orchestral medium, but also leave enough room for the composer to further explore instrumental colouring and to perfect his already unique and clearly defined orchestral writing. These include the ballets *Oziris i Izida* [Osiris and Isis] and *Kraljeva jesen* [The Autumn of the King] (performed in 1993), concertante works *Tri pesme* [Three Songs] for trombone and symphonic orchestra (1992), *Rapsodija za violinu i orkestrar* [Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra] (1997) and *Koncert za klavir i gudački orkestar* [Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra] (1992), as well as the oratorios *Jevanđelje po Marku* [The Gospel According to Mark] (for solo bass, mixed choir and symphonic orchestra, 1996) and the already mentioned *Knjiga o Jovu*.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed in the context of Bošnjak's compositional work - in particular its stylistic unity,<sup>5</sup> the level of compositional procedures and his perseverance (undisturbed by sporadic shifts in genre) in choosing large instrumental and vocal-instrumental forms inherited from the (distant) music past - *Sinfonia – passacaglia* is a work in which the composer, at least briefly, returns to creating orchestral music that is 'not supplemented by anything'. That is to say, it does not rely on any extra-orchestral (scenic, vocal or solo-instrumental) expressive layer, rendering it pure in genre. Unlike his previous orchestral works, which are usually inspired by literary or philosophical texts, *Sinfonia – passacaglia* is devoid of any extra-musical layer of meaning.

In this work, Bošnjak, by skillful application of the expressive devices provided by a large orchestra, joins those contemporary composers who have tested and proven the high adaptability of the seemingly

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<sup>4</sup> The decision to incorporate the most important data from Jugoslav Bošnjak's professional career into the text was not influenced solely by a methodological need to place *Sinfonia – passacaglia* into the adequate context. It was also motivated by an environment where musicologists are primarily oriented towards the study of contemporary national heritage: there is no source or database from which someone interested in the composer's oeuvre could obtain information. The genre cross-section provided makes use of information kindly provided by the composer himself.

<sup>5</sup> The romantic designation stood out as a common conclusion in the few critical reviews that attempted to stylistically categorize Bošnjak's works [Cf. Milena Pešić, 'Novo Bošnjakovo delo', in: *Politika*, March 2, 1987; M. Ognjanović, 'Aplauzi Bošnjakovoj Uvertiri', in: *Politika*, January 16, 1989; Katarina Tomašević, 'Kraljeva jesen Milutina Bojića kao inspiracija za muzičko-scenska dela /Rajičić, *Simonida*; Bošnjak, *Kraljeva jesen*', in: Nadežda Mosusova /ed./: *Srpska muzička scena*, Beograd, Muzikološki institut SANU, 1995, p. 345]. The characteristics of Bošnjak's music language that the aforementioned authors defined as neo-, late- and post-romantic prompted Vlastimir Trajković to talk about the composer's "conservatism and traditionalism" [Cf. Vlastimir Trajković, 'S onu stranu međe moderna-postmoderna: *Koncert za klavir i gudački orkestar* Jugoslava Bošnjaka ili pouzdanje u princip muzikalnosti', in: *Novi Zvuk*, no. 20, 2000, p. 96].

inflexible passacaglia to different stylistic contexts and poetic principles.<sup>6</sup> The title of the composition – a concise explanation of the composer's creative intention<sup>7</sup> – and, most importantly, his organization of the music flow demonstrate that Bošnjak's aim was not to 'reconcile the strict baroque *form* [of the passacaglia] with the romantic dualism of dramaticism and lyricism',<sup>8</sup> but to correlate the compositional *procedures* paradigmatic of the passacaglia with techniques characteristic of symphonic thought and symphonic style.<sup>9</sup>

There are three essential signifiers of the passacaglia form present in Bošnjak's composition: the theme, in which the intervallic makeup and rhythmic pace provide 'neobaroque' overtones (it is exposed in a quartet of horns, score nos. 4-5, example 1); the repetition of that basic, extensive, melodically and rhythmically fixed thematic material in different registers and instrumental colours; and its contrapuntal and often rhythmically complementary layering with other melodic content, sculpted with equal care. However, two very recognizable characteristics of the passacaglia are deliberately omitted from the work: the building of the musical flow on a theme that is constantly present (i.e., repeated in its entirety and simultaneously varied); and the texturally simplified exposition of the theme in a refined orchestral setting which is meant to serve as a specific point of reference. Instead of a permanent successive exposition of the passacaglia theme, the composer bridges the clearly demarcated variations – of which there are six in total<sup>10</sup> – with a connective tissue mostly independent of the theme in terms of its content. He introduces these sections mainly by way of a cut: either contrastingly in terms of the dynamics, sharply in terms of the articulation, or strikingly in terms of the orchestration. He bases them on contrasting material, with motifs that were originally revealed during the exposition of the theme, but also on elements of the theme itself, ensuring the minimum participation of the thematic substratum in essentially unthematic sections of the work. Rather than waiting until the exposition of the theme, Bošnjak employs diaphanous orchestration and achieves an ethereal texture at the beginning of the composition, in the extensive Adagio section. This allows him to intertwine the theme,

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<sup>6</sup> The work, which lasts 16 minutes and 38 seconds, is divided into 44 score marks. Its basic meter is triple (3/4); its basic tempo *andante*. It is written for an orchestra with triple woodwinds, a rich corps of percussion instruments (kettledrums, bass drum, tam-tam, cymbals, triangle, and bells), harp, and celesta.

<sup>7</sup> Bošnjak summarized the idea in one sentence: "The thematic basis consists of the broad neobaroque theme of the passacaglia, while the arrangement in the dualism of lyric and dramatic sections is markedly symphonic".

<sup>8</sup> (Emphasis author's own.) As concluded by Branka Radović, for example [Cf. Branka Radović, "Berlin-Beograd". *Posveta i žrtvovanja*, in: *Politika*, March 21, 2007.]

<sup>9</sup> The author's intention was not to compose a symphony Passacaglia [*sic*], as the readers of the newspaper *Danas* had been informed in the announcement of the work's performance [Cf. B. D. Belčević, 'Berlin-Beograd sutra na Kolarcu', in: *Danas*, March 14, 2007]. By this unacceptable mistake, which would seem insignificant only to a layperson, the author of the text changed the genre designation of Bošnjak's composition.

<sup>10</sup> The first variation, in which the theme is entrusted to the cellos, is a direct extension of the exposition of the theme (*Andante*, no. 6); in the second (*Allegro*, nos. 9–11), the theme is carried by trombones, tuba and deep strings, intermittently supported by kettledrums; in the third (*Andante*, nos. 12 and 13), the theme is transposed into the high register of piccolo flute, flute, first violin and celesta; in the fourth, the theme sounds only in the bassoon part (*Andante*, nos. 21 and 22); in the fifth in the trumpets (*Allegro*, nos. 29–31); and in the last variation, in two horns and two trombones (*Andante*, from no. 41).

represented by a quartet of horns during the first exposition, with a dense web of accompanying layers that are not so much melodically profiled as they are motivically differentiated and rhythmically clearly defined.

In addition to merging the introduction – the function of which is completely traditional: the rhythmic and motivic announcement of the thematic substratum of the work – with the development of a series of variations, there are two more procedures characteristic of symphonic style which structurally move the composition even further from the traditional form of the passacaglia. The procedures referred to are the organization of not only the discontinuous variation sequence but also the entire order of entities within the music based on the (consistently applied) principle of contrast, as well as the transformation of the final variation (from no. 41) into a specific recapitulation. Bošnjak primarily achieves the dualism of the lyric and the dramatic (which almost completely corresponds with the dynamics of the alternation of *Andante* and *Allegro* sections) by interchanging different orchestrations: (a) those in which the performing body is reduced either to the strings with polyphonically coordinated parts (like in the first variation, example 2) or to an ensemble with a lighter setting (like in the third and fourth variations); and (b) the prevalent ones, in which the tutti orchestra performs and a prominent role is assigned to brass wind instruments. By entrusting both the theme of the passacaglia and the most defined contrapuntal line that is added to it – which he had used in the previous course of the work (see part of the first violin in example 2) – to the piercing brass wind instruments in the last variation, the composer elevates this final segment of the music dramaturgically, and by choosing an orchestral setting similar to that in the exposition of the theme, he functionally approximates it to the recapitulation.

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It took two years for Jugoslav Bošnjak's *Sinfonia – passacaglia* to be performed in public and thus be promoted from a composed work to a “new” work. It deserves to escape the fate of the composer's (and others') earlier works, and should receive ongoing public performances. For this work to disappear from concert repertoire would be undeserved from the viewpoint of the music content it offers, the solid technical skill Bošnjak demonstrates, and the virtuosity with which he selects parts of the orchestral body, nuances them in terms of articulation, and correlates and coordinates them. But it would be all the more unjust bearing in mind the composer's generosity to the listener. Because even though it requires the listener to perceive broad, horizontally scattered motifs and passages, juxtaposed layers of different degrees of rhythmic fervor, and briskly encountered instruments, *Sinfonia – passacaglia* is a work that preserves and underlines the melody, sets no traps on the path of following the clearly organized music flow, captivates by its colouring,

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and is essentially tonal; therefore, it has all the necessary prerequisites not to *remain* a work comprehensible only to the elite, but instead *become* a work acceptable to a wider audience. This would be more likely if *Sinfonia – passacaglia*, together with the composer's previous works, was offered to the audience as a recording.

### Summary

Serbian composer Jugoslav Bošnjak (1954) wrote his last orchestral work *Sinfonia – passacaglia* in 2005. Two years later, in March 2007, *Sinfonia – passacaglia* was publicly performed in a concert of RTS Symphony Orchestra. That occasion motivated the writing of this paper.

*Sinfonia – passacaglia* is a one-movement work (*Andante*,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , duration 16'38'') for large orchestra. In a programme note written for the purpose of work's premiere, the composer summarised his basic idea in a short sentence. He informed listeners that the 'work rests on a broad, neobaroque *passacaglia* theme', and that his intention was to deal with the thematic material in a symphonic way, which manifests itself through duality of lyric and dramatic parts. In *Sinfonia – passacaglia* we can find three important definers of *passacaglia* form: theme, repetitions of a melodically and rhythmically fixed theme, and juxtaposition of a theme (as a background) and other contrapuntal layer(s) (as simultaneous musical events). The work opens with a long, orchestrally translucent slow introduction (*Adagio*), and culminates with a *Maestoso*. After the exposition, orchestrated for 4 horns in F (rehearsal no. 4–5), the theme is repeated and varied six more times (rehearsal no. 6, 9–11, 12–13, 21–22, 29–31 and 41–44). Those *passacaglia* sections are separated with developmental symphonic sections. They are partly based on elements of the theme, motives from the theme's orchestral setting, and different, contrasted material. The composer achieves a duality of lyric and dramatic less by change of tempi (*Andante* and *Allegro*), than by orchestral means. In the lyrical parts he drastically reduces the orchestra to the strings, or combines strings with woodwind instruments, and in dramatic parts he uses the full orchestra and gives a prominent role to the brass instruments supported by the percussion.

Considering its orientation towards melody, rich and colourful orchestration, and clear formal organization, *Sinfonia – passacaglia* is a communicative work which could be (if it becomes accessible on CD) acceptable for a broad music audience.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić

Example 1

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Example 1". It consists of four staves of music, all in treble clef and 2/4 time. The tempo is marked "Andante". The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor). The first staff begins with the instruction "2 Cori in F" and a dynamic marking of "f". The music is written in a single melodic line. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, with a circled "4" above the first measure. The second staff contains measures 5 through 8, with a circled "5" above the fifth measure. The third staff contains measures 9 through 12, with a circled "8" above the eighth measure. The fourth staff contains measures 13 through 14, ending with a double bar line. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes), rests, and dynamic markings such as accents (>) and breath marks (v).

Example 2

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Another Contemporary Contribution to the Contextualization of the Passaglia.  
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The image displays a musical score for a string ensemble. The top system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the time signature is 3/4. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The Violin I part begins with a first ending bracket containing a '6' and a 'div.' marking. The dynamic marking 'f' (forte) is present for all instruments in this system. The bottom system shows the string section staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Cello part has an accent (>) and the Contrabass part has the marking 'unis.' (unison).