

Article received on 29th July 2009

Article accepted on 30th July 2009

UDC 787:78.071.1 Hofman, S.

Vesna Mikić*

University of Arts in Belgrade

Faculty of Music – Department of Musicology

**A SAMPLE OF THE EQUALS' *DUEL* – SRĐAN HOFMAN: *MUSIC TOYS*
FOR VIOLONCELLO AND DOUBLE BASS****

Abstract: In this paper the recent piece by Srđan Hofman, *Music Toys* for violoncello and double bass (2008) has been surveyed. The results of the analysis and insight in the major part of the composer's output lead to a musicological interpretation of the piece and the contextualization in relation to the *Duel* for piano and live electronics (1996), as well as regarding the recent direction of the composer's work.

Key words: Srđan Hofman, *Music Toys*, new miniature, sample, violoncello, double bass, contemporary music, Serbian music, *Duel*.

A few years ago, when in this magazine I was reviewing a new piece by Srđan Hofman (1944), *Hadedas – Izlaganje i tri razvoja* [*Hadedas – Exposition and three developments*] for violoncello and piano,¹ I was convinced that the composer, primarily due to the different circumstances he had found himself in back then, had for some time 'abandoned' electronic sound and that he would eventually, if not in his next piece, 'return' to it. I must admit that not only was I partial, but that I had made a mistake. After listening to *Music Toys* I understood that when Hofman's poetics is in question, the choice of media simply doesn't matter any more. More precisely, it looks as if the possibilities that electronics once offered the composer were at that time the only 'right' solution to his creative needs and curiosity, while now it seems that the achievements of those very possibilities actually allowed him to successfully search and find satisfactory solutions in 'traditional' media, too. Namely, Hofman seemingly succeeded, in his own resourceful and creative way, to govern specific 'two-way' motion, the interaction that in interpretation could take place almost exclusively

* Author contact information: mikic@eunet.rs.

** The research for this article was carried out as a part of the project World Chronotopes of Serbian Music, No. 147045D (2006-2010), supported by the Serbian Ministry of Science and Technological Development.

¹ Vesna Mikić, 'Povratak u budućnost – Srđan Hofman: *Hadedas – Izlaganje i tri razvoja za violončelo i klavir*', *Internacionalni časopis za muziku Novi Zvuk*, 26, 2005, 100–104.

Vesna Mikić
A Sample of The Equals' Duel – Srđan Hofman: *Music Toys*
for Violoncello and Double Bass

on the metaphorical level while in compositional procedure it could be perceived also on a very realistic, technical one. Hence, in the title of this paper I add to the piece's title: '*Sample of the Equal's Duel*' by which I want to point to the fact that the experiences achieved in decade-long studio work (here symbolically underlined by the titles of his two pieces – *Samples* and *Duel*, but not only these) were actually sublimed in the piece that we've heard for the first time in late 2008.

Music Toys was composed for the 17th International Composers' Review in Belgrade that for its motto had the notion of a 'new miniature'. Hofman's unpretentious title in the case of the composer with such a reputation should have been a signal for the listeners that there was something more 'serious' there. Perhaps similar to the *Wondrous Milligram* by Ljubica Marić, or some other 'little' pieces by great composers, Hofman in an magnificently artistic manner in less than eight minutes and for only two (amplified) string parts, manages to open to us his whole world: a world full of (music) toys/objects, which he now, in the zenith of his creative maturity, handles like a real magician.

Confirming once again that the origin and the configuration of the material the toys are made of were never his prime interest in comparison to the ways in which they can be put together, disassembled, thrown but not broken, getting to know them from the inside, their mechanism and the ways they work, *Music Toys* positions as a piece of music that, as already mentioned, in an unpretentious way and covering little space, yet almost in a poster-like manner proclaims the main features of its creator's output. For it could be argued that in Hofman's case some kind of 'object to look at/listen to' has always been the question, be it a hexagon (the cycle *Hexagons*), the object in the 'shifting mirror' (*Shifting Mirrors*), the subject/object (*Who Am I?*, *Duel*), or object-sample (*Samples*, *Duel*), object-toy... Always somebody other or something else that was listened to or looked at, always in other/different ways and from another angle, always something 'other from the same'...

The special quality of expression or looking/listening that Hofman achieves in *Music Toys* actually lies in the fact that this time he directs his observatory/auditory curiosity to the medium burdened by a specific tradition – the violoncello/double bass duo. The tradition of chamber music may not be in question here, since this kind of duo is not so usual, so the specificity of the mentioned burden hides in the old 'coalescence' of the two deepest string instruments, their 'joint' history. Therefore, in almost a neoclassical (in its subversive) 'artistic-surgical' manner, Hofman

Vesna Mikić
A Sample of The Equals' *Duel* – Srđan Hofman: *Music Toys*
for Violoncello and Double Bass

separates the 'Siamese twins' of the classical orchestra, by using not only a diversified palette of articulation procedures (the kind of Bartokian diversity is audible: arco, different pizzicatti, quasi percussive effects-slamming the upper plates of the instruments, col legno; sul ponticello, sul tasto, impressive jété effects, glissandi, etc.), but also his experience in the studio in order to 'compensate' for the natural 'flaws' of the instruments as well as to achieve their most peculiar soundings. By these means, he reaches the 'equality' of the instruments answering at the same time the question he possibly had asked: is it possible for the double bass to sound like a violoncello, and if it is, how can it be done? Of course, the equality of sound is sustained by the 'exchange' of the motives among the instruments. There again we meet the composer's 'turning inside out' and observation of the object from different angles, but this time the object being the musical material, and from different perspectives. It could actually be said that the whole musical flow is realized through specific exchange, transpositions and taking over the motives of one instrument by another and that it is the very issue by whose resolution Hofman creates his piece's structure, or whose resolution dictates the compositional procedure. Hofman's motives act not unlike concentric circles formed by 'stones thrown on the water's surface'² weaving the dense net of motivic relations. And 'the other from the same' at the level of motivic procedure is almost 'naturally' based upon varied repetitions that form a firm structure (in the simplest analysis: three-part form with coda if the introductory material is regarded as the first subsection of the first section /abcba/) coming from the 'grain' exposed in the five-tone chord at the beginning and stepwise relations of the instruments in the first few bars of the piece. This kind of quasi unisono sections are rare in comparison to the sections built upon the roles' 'crossing-over' and mutual 'mirroring' of one instrument with another (for instance, 7 bars before score sign B until bar 10 of the B), quasi jam session solos (double bass in score sign E) or soloist bravuras above ostinato (violoncello above double bass in bar 9 of the C) or almost percussive accompaniment of the other instrument (violoncello above plucked F sharp in double bass – major part of score signature B until bar 9 of C). Exceptional in this respect is the section *Calmo* to which the composer refers as a 'choral' one (in the score), demanding from the double bass player the strictest possible rhythmical performance. This quasi choral two-part counterpoint is based on the uncompleted triple repetition of the same melodic phrase, nine bars long 'cantus firmus'

² For composer's comment of the piece see programme booklet of the 17th International Composers' Review, Belgrade, UKS, 2008.

Vesna Mikić
A Sample of The Equals' Duel – Srđan Hofman: Music Toys
for Violoncello and Double Bass

(changeable meter) whose steady, stepwise and mostly quarter note motion reminds one occasionally of the *Dies Irae* sequence or maybe to the traditional song from Pomoravlje used by Ljubica Marić in her *Passaccaglia* probably due to its dark, bass sound. Above it, the violoncello 'improvises' on the already exposed motives/sound objects (Example 1).

Besides the fact that this section in its character, its place in the structure and the manner in which the music materials are being exposed and treated, irresistibly recalls the *Molto rubato* piano section of the piece *Duel* (for piano and live electronics, 1996)³ by the same composer, the relations between the two pieces are even more striking in the case of the motives from the beginning of *Music Toys* (five-tone chord is similar to the one sampled at the beginning of the *Duel*), and especially in the described section marked by the fast exchanges of the motives (from the change of tempo to 144 in score signature A forward, especially in the first six bars; Example 2). There we see almost identical material in a successive quasi scalar imitative motion.

These two 'fragments' in the relatively small space of *Music Toys* provide us with a background strong enough to try to understand what kind of duel is in question this time. Since in the previous one at stake was the 'clash' of the 'human' and 'machine' sounds that in their acceptance of the differences resulted in a kind of cyborgian sound, here it rather looks as if we have the 'duel' as a mutual 'looking at', not measuring up the forces, but rather recognizing and understanding similarities. The fact that there are obvious relations between the two pieces provokes further discussion of the possible meanings these convey in the context of Hofman's output. It does not seem that the auto-quotations are at stake here, although they do exist for instance in Hofman's *Déjà vu* (1985). Apart from the fact that the characteristic procedures in the whole of Hofman's output could be observed, here we can say that maybe in a different, new and thanks to the relationship with the *Duel*, a kind of observation/audition of the (sound) object had taken place. For it looks here as if the *Duel* becomes that object, a sample to work with. Now then, there are no more samples/fragments of different origin, but the composer's piece becomes the sample. As if there was an 'autosample'? There is no more electronics, no more samples, no more quotations. There the very poetics have become a sample (which, it can be argued, could be the case with other poetics too),

³ On *Duel* more in: Vesna Mikić, 'Duel kao odgovor', *Internacionalni časopis za muziku Novi Zvuk*, 8, 1996, 39; Vesna Mikić, 'Da li duel postoji?', in: *Izuzetnost i sapostojanje*, Zbornik radova sa V Međunarodnog skupa *Folklor – Muzika - Delo*, FMU, Beograd, 1997, 154; Vesna Mikić, *Muzika u tehnokulturi*, Beograd, Univerzitet umetnosti, 2004, 239.

but the creative act is symbolically as well as realistically leaned on one already existing piece of similar structure, the *Duel*.

However, the decision to simulate one's own already existing piece in one almost completely traditional milieu possibly points to the specific way of maturing of Hofman's poetics in the realm of postmodern neoclassicism, of the neoclassical requestioning, (re)constructing and highly professional (re)constitution of the postmodern experiences.

Translated by the author

Весна Микић

**СЕМПЛ ДУЕЛА ЈЕДНАКИХ – СРЂАН ХОФМАН: МУЗИЧКЕ ИГРАЧКЕ
ЗА ВИОЛОНЧЕЛО И КОНТРАБАС**

САЖЕТАК

У раду је представљена и интерпретирана најновија композиција Срђана Хофмана (1944) – *Музичке играчке* за виолончело и контрабас (2008). Заступајући тезу да управо ова минијатура доноси сублимирани и кондензовани одговор на сва питања која би могла бити постављена у вези са композиторским стваралаштвом, ова интерпретација у исти мах почива и на детаљној анализи дела и открива везе овог остварења са неким ранијим делима Срђана Хофмана. На тај начин указано је на могуће начине тумачења и контекстуализације ове донекле „чудне“ минијатуре у контексту композиторове постмодернистичке поетике и скоријег усмерења које је она попримила.

Кључне речи: Срђан Хофман, *Музичке играчке*, нове минијатуре, семпл, виолончело, контрабас, савремена музика, српска музика, *Дуел*.

Vesna Mikić
A Sample of The Equals' *Duel* – Srđan Hofman: *Music Toys*
for Violoncello and Double Bass

Example 1

Calmo ♩ = 56

Vlc. *p*

Cb. *p*

Vlc. *ppp* 1 Vlc. poco rit.

Vlc. *ff* ♩ = 144

Cb.

Vlc. *ff* ♩ = 72 accel. ♩ = 144 ♩ = 72 accel. ♩ = 144

Cb.

Vlc. *ff* ♩ = 72 accel. ♩ = 144

Cb.

Vesna Mikić
A Sample of The Equals' *Duel* – Srđan Hofman: *Music Toys*
for Violoncello and Double Bass

Example 2

The musical score for Example 2 is written for Violoncello (Vlc.) and Double Bass (Cb.). It consists of two systems of music.

System 1: The piece begins with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 144$. The Vlc. part starts with a *mf* dynamic. The Cb. part also starts with a *mf* dynamic. The music is in 3/4 time and features a series of eighth-note patterns with some rests.

System 2: This system includes performance instructions. A box labeled 'B' is placed above the Vlc. staff. The tempo changes to *rit.* (ritardando), then *a tempo*. The Vlc. part is marked *ff* and includes the instruction *sul ponticello*. The Cb. part is marked *pp* and includes the instruction *pizz. sf* (pizzicato sforzando). The tempo then changes to *ordinario* (normal). The Vlc. part continues with *ff* dynamics, and the Cb. part continues with *ff* dynamics.