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***MUSIC AND THEATRE***  
**The 19<sup>th</sup> International Review of**  
**Composers**  
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With its specific programme content, the Nineteenth International Review of Composers, held from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2010, differed not only from the rest of the concert season but also from its previous iterations. Although the basic idea of this festival, from its very emergence, is to permanently follow and present contemporary compositional creation in Serbia, as well as current compositional tendencies and practices in the world, the selector Ivan Brkljačić, conceiving this year's programme, was governed not only by that most general 'signpost', but also by some other criteria. What proved to be the most liable to changes is the artistic context of the festival, i.e. the *framework* within which a survey of developments in contemporary music is made. The very title of the Review – *Music and Theatre* – pointed to the interdisciplinary permeability of the fes-

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tival's boundaries and its openness towards the works which in most diverse ways reassess/problematicize the relationship between music and stage, movement, acting, image... By this thematic direction of the festival, the selector aimed to present to the domestic audience some of the most important authors who represented and developed various concepts and models of the *theatralization of music* (such as John Cage, Luciano Berio, Mauricio Kagel and Georges Aperghis) and, above all, to encourage Serbian authors to research and 'think through' the relationships between music and theatre, as well as to map the fields firmly connected to music.

Stepping out of the field of pure music made it natural to leave the concert hall and get onto theatre stages, hence the events most closely related to theatre were held in the Bitef Theatre (*Muzički cirkus Džona Kejdža* [*John Cage's Musical Circus*]) and the Yugoslav Drama Theatre (instrumental theatre performed by the ensemble *Cantus*). At the remaining concerts, held in the vestibule of the National Bank, which ever since 2008 has asserted itself as the Review's 'parent' concert hall, and in the refurbished hall of the Union of Composers of Serbia, where the first concert was held, we could follow various levels of approach to the festival's subject, while the choice of certain pieces raised the issue of whether the selection criterion was justified.

Therefore, as a kind of *screen* which allowed us to follow various forms of music and theatre intersecting and permeating each other, the Nineteenth Review allowed us to gain an insight into the state of contemporary musical creation, particularly of its, we could say, *most sensitive* part – chamber music. Unlike the previous years,

when the appearances of a symphony orchestra and large chamber ensembles were an important part of the programme, the Nineteenth Review was focused 'on the author and on the new work itself, and then also on the soloist whose performance breathes life into the piece', as the selector pointed out in his keynote address. In five days, nine concerts were held, in which works by 48 composers were performed (mostly for small ensembles – duos, trios and quartets), two-thirds (30) of whom were Serbian composers. However, in spite of foreign authors being less represented, the Review lived up to its international character, and that was largely thanks to the participation of foreign performers – yet another appearance by the renowned ensemble *Alternance* from Paris,<sup>1</sup> the guest performance of the ensemble *Cantus* from Zagreb,<sup>2</sup> as well as the performance of the excellent percussionist Pepe García Rodríguez... Domestic soloists and chamber musicians, such as Nada Kolundžija, Borislav Čičovački, Aleksandar Latković, Neda Hofman, Ivan Marjanović, Stana Krstajić, Dragan Đorđević, Srđan Sretenović, Dejan Božić, Ana Radovanović, Milana Zarić, Vlada Dinić etc., also showed the entire scope of the interpretative possibilities and the ability to penetrate into diverse musical discourses. Apart from these artists, whose performances sometimes required a serious stage engagement, ensembles such as the *LP Piano Duo*, featuring

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<sup>1</sup> The ensemble took part in the Reviews in 1996 and 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The ensemble for contemporary music *Cantus* first appeared before the Belgrade audience in October 2009, participating in the 41<sup>st</sup> Bemus festival.

Sonja Lončar and Andrija Pavlović, the Belgrade Harp Quartet, and the Ljubica Marić String Orchestra, conducted by Rade Pejčić, confirmed that they are, in a manner of speaking, specialists for interpreting contemporary music.

Given the expansion of the festival's media and genre framework, the audience was confronted with an (in)visible change that occurred in the concert hall. In other words, it was confronted with a concert as a place where the act of listening *does not stand apart* from the entirety of perception, but the musical work is *offered* to all the senses. Therefore, at the opening ceremony itself in the BITEF Theatre, the audience had the opportunity actively, using all the senses, to follow the multimedia project *John Cage's Musical Circus - a House Full of Music*, conceived by the pianist Nada Kolundžija. Encouraging us to *watch with our ears* and to *listen with our eyes*, the artist, collaborating with the stage director Scott Fielding, excitingly realized Cage's crucial poetic concepts of *experiment* and *musical circus*, performing with other artists on the stage (Katarina Jovanović, soprano; Aleksandar Benčić, trombone; members of the ensemble *Prerađivačka industrija muzičkog materijala* [*The Processing Industry of Music Material*]) numerous works by this famous American artist – from the early ones for percussion and prepared piano, to the late ones, where one could hear, for example, the humming of water in shells – while the actor Svetozar Cvetković read excerpts from the composer's papers. During this experimental theatre piece, various events and actions (music, video, dance, speech) were unfolding on the stage simultaneously and independently of one another – among other

things, the electroacoustic pieces *Nothing, You Say* and *Gliding* by Katarina Miljković and *EuroCage* by Miša Savić, inspired by Cage's music, were performed – so it was not always easy to perceive all the segments of this complex non-narrative structure. In fact, by cancelling the central focus (perspective), the project authors *opened* the space for the audience's active participation and multiple experiences, thus reaching the essence of Cage's experimental act.

Unlike the performative structure of activity in Cage's *musical circus*, which promoted chance and anarchy as the principles of artistic activity, and offered to the listeners an opportunity to shape their own acoustic experience, the Croatian ensemble *Cantus*, conducted by Berislav Šipuš and in cooperation with the choreographer Dinko Bogdanović, performed a very meticulously directed instrumental music *play* on the stage of the Yugoslav Drama Theatre. Expanding the scope of their profession, the members of the ensemble, with an outstanding musical interpretation, used their own acting, gestures and stage movement to contribute to an arresting performance of 'classics' of musical modernism – Luciano Berio (*Opus Number Zoo*, a children play for a wind quintet) and Maurizio Kagel (*Kontra-Danse*, ballet for non-dancers, and *Match* for three players) – then the works of Croatian authors – Berislav Šipuš (*Ten Hotti* for voice and chamber ensemble) and Silvio Foretić (*Valse macabre* for voice and salon orchestra) – as well as the work *Pesnik u staklenoj kutiji – bajka* [*Poet in a Glass Box – a Fairytale*] by Ivana Stefanović, written at the suggestion of the ensemble. The individualization of this music collective to the

soloist level, apparently necessary exactly because *Cantus* nurtures a specific repertoire profile, contributed to the excitement and dynamic of the journey through the works of different poetical orientations.

Within the Review there was a line of *performance art*, thanks to the participation of the duo featuring Sorin Romanescu, electric guitar, and Irinel Anghel, voice and keyboards – representatives of the Romanian experimental music scene – who performed the stage music performance *Vortando – Musical Concert of the Inner World*. By playing with blindfolds inside the interactive visual concept and installation *EGOctopus* (a work by Romanian artist Raluca Ghideanu), these artists realized a richly nuanced ‘counterpoint’ of stage and musical events, while the dramaturgical dimension of the performance remained the least developed and articulate.

Apart from these three events, which most directly responded to the festival subject, we should particularly highlight the concert *Harfa do harfe [A Whole Lot of Harps]*, held in the vestibule of the National Bank, since it brought some of the most exciting moments of the Review. Thanks to the exceptional interpretative abilities of the members of the Belgrade Harp Quartet, led by Ljiljana Nestorovska, and then Milana Zarić, a harpist, and Pepe García Rodríguez, a percussionist, the audience had an opportunity to feel the charm of *live* performance, related to the *here* and *now*, and also to perceive the *theatrical* potential immanent to the harp. The specific sound of this instrument, combined with electronics, became prominent in Srđan Hofman’s ‘acoustic study’ *Gledajući u ogledala Aniša Kapoor [Looking Into the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor]* for two amplified

harps and sound processing software *Logic Pro*, where the author, by the electronic modification of the harp sound, multiple microdelays and sound modulations, realizes the illusion of unbounded, expanding acoustic space, which also happens in the work *shadow study #6* for amplified harp, percussion and electronics by Jasna Veličković, based upon an elaboration of the phenomenon of the instrument vibrating/resonating. Apart from these works, which greatly captivated the audience’s attention, we also heard the works *The Crown of Ariadne* for solo harp and percussion by Raymond Murray Schafer and *Compagnie* for cimbalon, harp and percussion by Georges Aperghis, based on the exploration of ‘the other’, percussive nature of the harp, while the work *Zeleni talasi [Green Waves]* for four harps by Milan Mihajlović uses glissando as the primary means of expression.

It should be particularly noted that the young authors, exploring the links between *a concert podium* and *a theatre stage*, opened up interesting perspectives and showed creativity in their compositions. Thus, e.g. the permeation of stage media into music media led to the fusion of the composer and the performer into one person in the works by Ana Gnjatović (*Dialogue, quasi una serenata* for two voices) and Teodora Stepančić (*Aluminium obsession* for voice). While Gnjatović, together with composer Draško Adžić, executed a sort of vocal performance focused on the very act of performing, Teodora Stepančić in her work ‘extends’ her own body, and the ‘extension’ takes the shape of a voice prepared by aluminium foil, a glass jar... The possibilities of blending music and stage or choreographic elements are out-

lined, but not significantly developed in the work *Varying Moods* for alto saxophone and percussion by Jelena Dabić, where the choreography 'supports' the musical presentation of various psychological states and moods, as well as in the work *Četiri skitnice* [*Four Vagabonds*] for trumpet, horn, trombone and bassoon by Marko Matović, which is based on jazz elements and represents a kind of *genre scene* of music-making by street musicians.

Stage modifications of the concert performance were also realized in Nataša Bogojević's work *Le beau est toujours bizarre* for soprano, baritone, violoncello and piano, thanks most of all to the suggestive execution and acting capabilities of the vocal soloists (Ana Radovanović, soprano, and Vlada Dinić, baritone); then by introducing the spoken text and the narrator in the works by Anica Sabo (*Sanjališće* for narrator, flute, violin and viola) and Jasna Veljanović Ranković (*Varijacije bez teme* [*Variations Without a Theme*]; by making performers act in the 'mini choreo-dramatic suite' *Let's Play* for a five-year old violinist and a flutist by Dragana Jovanović; while the music and dance structure in the work *Kružna melodija* [*Circular Melody*] by Mirjana Živković were articulated as complementary acts; and Branka Popović in her work *In nuce* for viola realized the procedure of music material visualisation by projecting the image of a walnut on an orange coloured stage. Some authors also strived to meet the festival's programme requirements without disrupting the autonomy of the musical work. Thus, for example, in *Veelika Jelenče* by Ivan Brkljačić, the marimba impersonates a character from instrumental theatre which the composer uses to paint human behaviour (it is a part of the

composer's doctoral project), while Miloš Zatkalik in the work *Naizgled bezazlena igra* [*A Seemingly Innocent Game*] for violoncello, vibraphone and piano, 'reflects' possible interpersonal relations in his treatment of the instrumental parts. Interestingly enough, the Review's commission, *Mala opera* [*Small Opera*] by Milorad Marinković, excellently performed by the ensemble *Alternance*, did not resonate convincingly with the festival subject. Drawn to the virtuosity of French Baroque opera, Marinković re-shaped that genre into an instrumental suite, striving on one hand to preserve the formal characteristics of opera numbers using appropriate compositional procedures, and on the other, to 'inscribe' new meanings into these numbers by using Oriental music.

However, although the Nineteenth International Review of Composers was marked by the aspiration to re-examine various paradigms of the relationship between music and theatre, the selector's and organizers' intention to present the directions of Serbian music development as comprehensively as possible led to certain 'derailments' and departures from the festival's program determinant. Thus, the programme contained works by authors of various generations which did not respond directly to the thematic requirement. Apart from the composition *Niška banja* for four trombones by Aleksandar Vujić, based upon the eponymous folk song, we should certainly mention frisking with an array of quotations in the works by Dejan Despić (*Serenada za gudače, op. 204* [*Serenade for Strings, Op. 204*]) and Predrag Repanić (*Ko laže na Ostrvu mrtvih? /po zapisima s jedne imaginarne konferencije/*, monodrama za klarinet in B [*Who is Lying on the Island of*

*the Dead?* [after the transcript from an imaginary conference], monodrama for clarinet in B flat]); then the application of pseudo-Baroque music language in the work by Svetlana Maksimović (*Glasovi*, monodrama za violinu [*Voices*, monodrama for violin]) or the minimalist procedures in the works by Ivan Božičević (*Tracing – u traganju za jednostavnošću* [*Tracing – In Search of Simplicity*]) and Vladimir Tošić (*Silabial*); as well as *Četiri kraljevstva* [*Four Kingdoms*] for flute and guitar by Božo Banović, a work of neoclassical expression and measured sound; and acoustic explorations in the work *SIVO* [*GRAY*] by Milica Đorđević, which attests to the already completely mature and recognizable compositional handwriting of this young author.

Considering the programme conception and artistic results of the Nineteenth Review, it is clear that this manifestation once again has proven its normative function, as an exceptional event in the area of

contemporary music, which presents and allows for achieving the most significant artistic and performance accomplishments. During the closing ceremony, Aleksandra Vrebalov was presented with the Mokranjac Prize for the vocal-instrumental composition *Stanice* [*Stations*] (2007).<sup>3</sup> Also, the total result of the festival was a warning that the leading subject, given in the title itself, was not developed to a sufficient extent. To be exact, most of the presented works by Serbian authors only outlined the *inflexion points* which allow for establishing connections between music and theatre, while their full potential was explored in just a handful of compositions. Therefore, we hope that the organizers in the future will show an even more meticulous approach to profiling the programme and conceptual changes, certainly expected from the most significant festival of contemporary music in Serbia.

*Translated by Goran Kapetanović*

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<sup>3</sup> According to the official explanation by the Jury, the winning composer Marko Nikodijević (1980), who since 2003 has lived and worked in Germany, could not receive the prize (for the work *Cvetić, kućica... la lugubre gondola – žalobna muzika za orkestar prema Francu Listu* [*A Small Flower; A Small House... la lugubre gondola – Sorrowful Music for Orchestra After Franz Liszt*]) because since recently he no longer has Serbian citizenship.