
CD REVIEWS

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Biljana Srećković*

University of Arts in Belgrade

Faculty of Music

Department of Musicology

Vladan Radovanović

***Fonoverzum – elektroakustička
muzika***

**[*Phonoverse – Electroacoustic
Music*], Sokoj, 2010**

The double CD titled *Fonoverzum* is the first audio-release which gathers together the entire opus of electroacoustic works by Vladan Radovanović, the doyen of our musical and artistic scene. The two discs contain thirteen compositions created in almost four decades, from 1960 to 1998 – more precisely, from the moment when the author was taking his first strides as a composer and only just becoming ac-

* Author contact information:
biljana_sreckovic@yahoo.com

quainted with the electronic medium, to the moment of his full maturity and absolute mastery of the electronic technology as a compositional means. This release is, therefore, the result of Radovanović's intense interest in new media and, as the title itself suggests, his propensity for exploring the very phenomenon of sound.

The evolutionary path and the characteristics of Radovanović's electroacoustic discourse, and hence his poetics, can be perceived through thirteen works which, although not arranged chronologically, allow us to gain a complete and comprehensive diachronic perspective of the artist's activities in this field. These are the following compositions: *Invencije* [*Inventions*] (1960), *Elektronska studija* [*Electronic Study*] (1966), *Elektra* [*Electra*] (1974),¹ *Lažno ogledalo* [*False Mirror*] (1986–1987), *Undina* [*Undine*] (1985),² *Miks* [*Mix*] (1993) (contained on the first disc); *Nova98* (1998), *Timbral* (1987),³

¹ This composition was awarded the first prize for electroacoustic music at the Yugoslav Radio Music Competition, in 1975.

² The work was commissioned by the organizers of a multimedia festival *Talkin Back to the Media* in Amsterdam.

³ The work was chosen in 1998 to represent Yugoslavia at the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).

Fluks [*Flux*] (1989),⁴ *Kompjutorija* [*Comptoria*] (1976), *YUdogadžaji* [*YUevents*] (1990),⁵ *Ansambl* [*Ensemble*] (1993) and *Audiospacijal* [*Audiospatial*] (1975–1978)⁶ (contained on the second disc). The acoustic manifestations of Radovanović's electroacoustic work are complemented by the author's biographical data and comments in the Serbian and English languages (translated by Aleksandra Gajić and Paul Pignon), printed in the accompanying booklet, the covers and layout of which were designed by the author himself, which makes this release attractive and accessible to both the domestic and foreign audience.

The broad pool of Radovanović's procedures, applied over an extensive time span, presents an array of inspirational subjects, relevant not only for understanding his work in the electroacoustic medium, but also phenomena whose significance transcends the poetics. Namely, the *Fonoverzum* release raises the question of Radovanović's mastering of the technology, but also the issue of the problematization of electroacoustic music in the area of ex-Yugoslavia and Serbia, since the release contains works of crucial importance for the initial development of this genre in Yugoslav/Serbian music – *Invencije*,⁷ one of the first electroacoustic works in this re-

gion, and *Kompjutorija*, the first Yugoslav computer composition. These two works actually represent the opposite extremes (in the conceptual and diachronic senses) of Radovanović's encounter with technology. *Invencije* (1960) are the artist's first product made by using technology, albeit quite rudimentary, in the form of a home tape recorder, and also the earliest attempt at editing recorded sound material in Serbian music, hence a pioneering example of prominence of the notion of *musique concrète*, since the work is based upon the use of concrete sounds (male and female voices, the sound of the piano, the plucking of its strings, hitting the soundboard). Sixteen years later, after further research (at the Experimental Studio of Polish Radio in Warsaw) and the complete mastering of analogue electronic technology (*Elektra*), Radovanović discovered the computer as a means of work and became acquainted with the first derivatives of digital technology. The result was *Kompjutorija* (1976), made with a primitive computer programme (POD 6) and based upon a stochastic principle (at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht). A specific example of establishing relations between analogue and digital technologies is documented by the work *Timbral* (1987), realized in the Electronic Music Studio of Hungarian Radio, of a digital type, and the Electronic Studio of Radio Belgrade, based upon analogue devices. Exactly this latter studio, whose initiator and *spiritus movens* was the author himself, witnessed the creation of most of Radovanović's works (*Elektra*, *Lažno ogledalo*, *Undina*, *Miks*, *Nova98*, *Fluks*, *YUdogadžaji*, *Ansambl*, *Audiospacijal*). By listening to these compositions, the listener therefore has an opportunity to follow the

⁴ The work was commissioned by Radio Belgrade on the occasion of the anniversary of the Choir of Radio-Television Belgrade.

⁵ The festival Synthèse FIMEB in Bourges (France) commissioned this work.

⁶ This work received the second prize (the first prize was not awarded) at the Concours International de Musique Electroacoustique in Bourges (France).

⁷ Out of the total of seventeen *Inventions*, the disc contains nine.

audio history of Radovanović's work in the electroacoustic field, i.e. to perceive the gradual progress of the technology for recording, the processing and reproduction of sound in our area and beyond.

Next, Radovanović's electroacoustic works raise the issue of categorization, i.e. various phenomenological types of electroacoustic music: from *musique concrète* (*Invencije*), to 'purely' electronic music, based only on electronically generated sounds (*Elektronska studija, Elektra, Undina, Timbral, Ansambl*) or sounds originating from other sources treated in an electronic medium (*Nova98, Miks, Fluks, YUdogadžaji*), to 'mixed' electroacoustic medium (*Lažno ogledalo, Audiospacijal*), to computer music (*Kompjutorija*). This reveals another important line in Radovanović's poetics which runs through the entire release of *Fonoverzum* – the propensity for creating relations between various media, mostly electronic and non-electronic ones, i.e. electroacoustic and, as the author puts it, non-electroacoustic music. Namely, the focal point of Radovanović's work is the sound itself and the notion that electroacoustic music is not a category stemming from autonomous parameters and separate logic, but just one form of musical art. Therefore, Radovanović establishes and maintains a correlative relationship between these two phenomenological forms of music, mostly by using or evoking acoustic media for creating sounds; the author's intensive interest in the voice as 'live' sound is particularly notable, and it turns out to be the cohesive element in almost all of his electroacoustic compositions. Thus, in Radovanović's *f(F)onoverse* we recognize many procedures which negotiate between the two worlds: the use of voice as a con-

crete sound (*Invencije*); the use of voice in combination with acoustic sources (flute, violin, bassoon) and tape containing electronically generated sounds and sampled vocal/instrumental material (*Lažno ogledalo*); the mixing of sound sources obtained by synthesis and sampling (male voice, female voice, more than forty other sampled sounds), whereas the synthesized sounds are similar to the sampled ones (*Miks*; this principle was also applied in the composition *Nova98*); the evoking, simulation, imitation of non-electronic sounds by electronic sounds, with the frequent use, as the author puts it, of 'voice-like sounds' (*Elektra, Undina, Fluks, YUdogadžaji, Ansambl*). It seems that the idea of networking these media is very strikingly realized in *Audiospacijal* for female choir and electronic sounds (which in this CD release are mixed together on a tape). Radovanović in this composition demonstrates a wide range of approaches to the human voice, often manipulated into sounding like an electronically produced sound, and becoming at the same time the 'reflection' of a voice in an electronic medium. It is exactly here, in the final and climactic number of the entire discographic release, where Radovanović externalizes the motto of his electroacoustic poetics (which he also talks about in the comment on the work): 'Ovako postavljeni odnosi vokalnog i elektronskog ukazuju na osnovnu ideju dela o uzajamnom približavanju dva zvučna sveta, i na težnju oplemenjivanja i očovečenja elektronskog, tehnološkog, pomoću vokalnog, ljudskog' ['The relationships between the vocal and the electronic conceived in this way show the basic idea of the work about bringing the two acoustic worlds together, and the endeavour to cultivate and humanize the

electronic, the technological, by using the vocal, the human’]. In other words, the electronic sound ‘svojom privlačnošću mami stvaraoca da mu udahne “dušu” [‘by its appeal induces the creator to imbue it with “soul”]’ (the comment to *Undina*); hence the humanization and naturalization of the electronic medium are obviously Radovanović’s undisputable ideals.

In that regard, the release also attests to the multimedia, synaesthetic nature of Radovanović’s creative self and his experimental spirit directed to research the boundary areas of art. This can be perceived at various levels, from the visual-conceptual form of the release, to particular examples based upon the notion of multimedia. Notably, one of Radovanović’s first electroacoustic works, *Elektronska studija*, was realized by the principle of creating visual forms which become models for pro-

ducing acoustic images. Besides, the composition *Lažno ogledalo* relies on the idea of visual reflections of beings and things, and apart from the musical version recorded on the disc, there is also a multimedia version which, aside from the musical part, contains the visual-kinaesthetic component.

The discographic release *Fonoverzum* by Vladan Radovanović is a capital document which in contracted form attests to the genesis of the artist’s activity in the field of electronic music, i.e. the shaping of his entire poetics. Finally, this release exists as an unavoidable and valuable material for research of the complete history of Serbian electroacoustic music, thus deserving the unreserved attention of the scientific public and a select audience.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović