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**‘HARMONY OF THE SPHERES’ IN THE MUSICAL ‘VITRAGE’
OF THE THIRTEEN-STAR FLOWER OF CASSIOPEIA: MICRO-
AND MACRO-MANIPULATION WITH TIME AND SPACE¹**

‘...And the Thirteen-star flower of Cassiopeia has wilted /
Fanned with the Milky Road, the never-ending rainbow...’

Marko Ristić, song *The startle*²

Abstract: This paper deals with an analysis of the phantasy for orchestra *Trinaestozvezdani cvet Kasiopeje* [*The Thirteen-star Flower of Cassiopeia*] by Vladimir Trmčić (1983). Special attention is paid to the motivic analysis of the work and general aesthetical premises of the program, which influenced the formation of the musical flow. The static nature, sustained tones and micropolyphony enable the composer to experiment with time, space, intervals, timbres, resulting in music with an immanent logic guided by the movement of energy masses.

Key words: Vladimir Trmčić, symphonic phantasy, music time, music space, cluster

The Thirteen-star Flower of Cassiopeia by Vladimir Trmčić** (1983), written in 2010, was commissioned by the ‘Lux aeterna’ trio of accordions from Kragujevac, and the following year it was revised as a version for symphonic orches-

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¹ Sound example is available online at the official New Sound YouTube channel. Please find the playlist here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKBa4wqrI-s&feature=youtu.be>

² Verses that inspired Vladimir Trmčić to write his *The Thirteen-star Flower of Cassiopeia*.

tra, this time with the subtitle 'phantasy for orchestra'. Since then, the composition for three accordions has been performed at thirteen concert performances in several towns in Serbia and also in Slovenia and Poland. The orchestral version had its premiere performance on the 25 January 2018 at the Ilija M. Kolarac Endowment Concert Hall by The Symphony Orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation (RTS), conducted by Jacopo Sipari di Pescasseroli, as part of the cycle 'Premieres'.³

In this work, Trmčić gave his own musical vision of the perception of time and space in cosmic proportions. It should be noted that the sound of the accordion proved to be a suitable media for this kind of manipulation; in this work, accordions sound almost like the organ, with long, sustained tones *à la continuo*, and sometimes tonal results resembling those of electronically produced music because of the treatment of the dynamics and registers of the instrumental parts which, in addition, broaden the musical space. On the other hand, in the orchestral version different groups of instruments are used as blocks, as a tonal and timbre potential. From the aspect of the orchestral version, it seems that Trmčić had thought in a symphonic way, even when composing the initial accordion version. In both versions the composer experiments with duration, time, dynamics, proportions, intervals, densities, registers, but also deals with problems related to the specifics of the media.

** Vladimir Trmčić (1983) graduated composition at the Faculty of Music Arts in Belgrade, in the class of Isidora Žebeljan, and continued with PhD studies at the same Faculty in 2010, receiving his PhD in 2017. He earned a scholarship for the 18th International Summer Academy Vienna-Prague-Budapest in 2008 (Sommer-akademie 08 Prag-Wien-Budapest, 10.08 – 24.08.2008). His works were performed at the international festival KOMA' (2005–2008, 2012), during the mentioned International Summer Academy (2008), at the concert Slovenska komorna glazba i njene evropske vzporednice in Ljubljana (2012), at the 12th and 13th International Harp Festival in Belgrade (2013–2014), and several other concerts in Serbia. His works were performed by many prominent performers. His work *Longing*, for viola and accordion was among the selected works with which Radio Belgrade presented itself at the 62nd International Rostrum of Composers in Tallinn (May 2015). Also, his works were broadcasted (both as live and recorded material) at Radio Belgrade 3, RTS Digital and Ireland's National Radio (RTÉ).

Trmčić has been awarded by the Soziale&Kulturelle Einrichtungen der Austromechana GmbH fund in 2008, for his *Tužbalica* (Klagelied), for violin, viola, cello and piano, and the April Award of the City of Belgrade for 2010 for his composition *Zeleno sunce Janusa*, as well as with the prize of the *Muzika klasika* magazine for the year 2015 in the category 'Composer of the Year'. Currently, Trmčić works as an assistant professor at the Music Department of the Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac.

³ We find this work among the selected ones at the 'Contest for Composers' held by RTS Musical Production in January 2017, to be performed and/or recorded by their orchestra.

In this paper, I shall focus on a review of the orchestral version of *The Thirteen-star Flower of Cassiopeia*, with occasional considerations of the accordion version.

It seems that *Cassiopeia* shows some resemblance to *The Planets* by Gustav Holst, because of its program's theme and main idea. But this is only a superficial similarity. Namely, while Holst turns to the planets as more of an astrological than an astronomical phenomenon, which results in every movement of the suite bearing the character and atmosphere of the astrological meaning of a certain planet, Trmčić in his work tries to move out of the sphere of human knowledge about the influence of the planets, and into the astrophysical space, the timeless space of the universe, giving his relativisation of the notions of proportion and the flow of time. This is not the first time that Trmčić has sought a program basis within the cosmic sphere; in 2010 he wrote an 'image for orchestra' *The Green Sun of Janus*, which the orchestra of the Faculty of Music Arts in Belgrade performed in 2013. In both cases the inspiration was derived from celestial bodies and Greek/Roman mythology, while the character of the music bears a close similarity to the spirit of sci-fi film music, especially as it is treated in *A Space odyssey* (1968) by Stanley Kubrick and *Melancholia* (2011) by Lars von Trier. The slowness and static nature of Trmčić's music in the case of *Cassiopeia* in the aesthetical sense resembles Andrei Tarkovsky's film poetics, but this would be a good subject for further research.

We have to point out that Trmčić gained earlier experience in composing for the organ. *Liturgical Images* (2005) for this instrument originated while he was a student, and largely influenced the formation of Trmčić's style as shown in his later composition *Cassiopeia*. Long, sustained tones (underlined with the 'monotonous', potentially endless tone of the organ), the frequent use of returning notes, meandering around one tone/chord, leaves the impression that almost nothing is going on in the dramaturgical sense. Occasional breakthroughs from this pattern suggest a change which does not occur every time: the climax, though, comes gradually, with the increased usage of clusters and a faster pace, or the shredding durations of musical tones. The chord, i.e. harmony, overwhelms the melodic line. Thus, the changes that we perceive do not occur so much in the vertical shifts as within the verticals themselves, as small alterations in the chord which often stands of itself because, given that this is a question of atonality, also bearing in mind the long rhythmical values of tones, we do not perceive the strong logical causality between the successive harmonic elements. Music itself has an immanent logic and is guided by sound, timbre, by the forces of energy and potential, and its static and restrained character is the result of the programmatic relations with the liturgy and ascetism.

It is exactly these experiences that have reached their peak in *Cassiopeia*, with the motion of the potentials of the energy masses that arise from stringing 'dissonances' and their 'vibration'/alterations. However, the accordion has a tone that can be dynamically nuanced, which leads to the increased sense of mobility in comparison to *Liturgical Images*. The symphonic orchestra, by its nature, has an even wider range of techniques and effects which intensifies the musical flow, so the music, although static in general, has its potential, which is revealed through the musical work and relates mainly to a single tone/vertical, or the relation between two successive verticals and their dynamic nuancing. The harmonic and dynamic treatment intimated in *Liturgical Images* is very appropriate for the program that Trmčić contemplated for *Cassiopeia*, of which he writes when reviewing the program of his composition:

The concept of my composition includes in itself something that until now, has not been noted; a multitude of simultaneous supernovas within one constellation, observed from a slow motion perspective, comprehending all microprocesses leading from the collapsed iron core of the star, to a magnificent supernova... Imagine that you are attending this cosmic event: thirteen simultaneous supernovas in the constellation of Cassiopeia, their grandiosity, beauty, but also the terrifying destructive power of released energy, a 'cosmic' flower with thirteen petals of the most incredible colors, which destroy everything in their path and disappear, leaving behind awakened sparks of life.⁴

As Trmčić writes further, because the burst of a supernova lasts very briefly – only three seconds – time is “of essential importance for this type of setting of the composition: it is *slowed down*”. And that deceleration is practically hypertrophied. This matches the relativity of time and space in the cosmos; bearing in mind that the distance is measured in light years, and that time since the creation of the cosmos cannot be comprehended from our perspective, it seems like a paradox that such a big event – the explosion of a supernova – lasts so briefly. Trmčić's *Cassiopeia* though extends that time interval, which is only an instant compared to eternity.

In Trmčić's music we find an adequate echo of that immobility, 'monotony', stability and, to some extent, the apathy of the cosmos as a whole, whose parts continue to exist even after cosmic catastrophies.

Namely, the broadness of the form is predicated on the program idea. The music form is monolithic, consisting of one single particle, one core, and it is thoroughly composed. As we stated above, the music form is the result of the

⁴ Vladimir Trmčić, *Usporeno vreme i kosmički vitraž Trinaestozvezdanog cveta Kasiopeje*, manuscript, Belgrade, 2011.

movement of the energetic potentials of the thematic/motivic material, and their stratification. The very beginning of *Cassiopeia* is not striking, it is condensed and we perceive it as part of some ancient sound that existed long before this composition.

The thematic plan is reduced practically to the interval of a second – a second as a harmony, as an interval, part of a cluster, a motion, a returning tone, a suspension, both horizontally and vertically. Some parts of the musical flow, mainly in the parts played by the ‘cello and the contrabass, are perceived as an ‘ison’, a Pythagorean ‘harmony of the spheres’, in which negligible alterations, *glissandos*, *arpeggios* are only minor deviations, which convey a feeling of a kind of micropolyphony. The whole range of orchestra is used, from the lowest to the highest register, often at the same time. Divisi, flageolet-tones and tremolos of the string section are present in almost every section of the composition. The interval of the second is the foundation of all the motivic material; apparently all of it emerges precisely as the consequence of developing the second, i.e. by the ‘variation’ of this interval. The variation of the interval is even performed through a reduction, as result of which it becomes a quarter tone – ‘microsecond’.

The form itself can be divided into sections according to the thematic material and the appearance of new instruments:

- 1st section: bars 1–20
- 2nd section: bars 21–52
- 3rd section: bars 53–73
- transition: bars 74–79
- 4th section: bars 80–96
- transition: bars 97–104
- 5th section: bars 105–150
- codetta: bars 151–157

The first section begins with the major triad E-G-sharp-B (in the flutes and the oboes) which becomes an augmented triad (i.e. an augmented seventh chord: C-E-G-sharp-B) in the moment of the returning tone in the part of the oboes, with a return to the major triad in bar 8; in the part of the clarinet we have F-G-sharp-C, an enharmonic minor triad. The ‘clash’ between the tones E-F and B-C in a chord, i.e. the interval of the minor second, as well as the motion of the minor second, in this way becomes the core of the motivic material. This chordal juxtaposition we find repeated in the part of the harp, while the tremolos of the violins use all the abovementioned notes, emphasising that clash of minor seconds. The almost chamber sound of the flutes, clarinets, oboes, harp and violins

is underlined with dynamics which rest between *ppp* and *p*, with a wavy *mf* in the tremolos of the first violin.

The second section (bar 21) begins with the gradual entrance of new instruments; it is a 'second exposition', in which only the instruments that were omitted in the first section (the trombones, tuba with bassoons and tam-tam, cellos and double basses) participate, with the addition of the harp. The dissonance is sharpened here: in the *divisi* of the strings there is a cluster consisting of two minor successive seconds. This motive is transferred to the other instruments. The French horns in bar 28 take over the role of carrying the main motive (minor second F-G-flat) in the lowest register. The combination of the contrabassoon and double bass also carries this principal motive, but it is inverted (a minor second downwards).

The third section (bar 53) is dominated by the instruments from the first one, which bring the 'decomposed' motive of the returning note from the beginning; the descending second becomes the motive which is metro-rhythmically varied now, and which forms clusters in the encounter with tones of other instruments. A short transition (bar 74) gives a hint of the main material of the fourth section (bar 80). It is a glissando of the harp, consisting of the tones A-flat-B-flat-C-D-E-flat-F that alternate with the sequence A-B-C-D-E-flat-F. This material recurs in the part of flute, the clarinet and, in a decomposed form, in part of the oboe. The transition which follows repeats the motive of the downward minor second from the third section.

The fifth section (bar 105) has the role of the development section and the climax of the work. We find the gradual stratification of all the motives which were exposed earlier; they are freely distributed across the instrumental parts. We find the motive of the descending second combined with the motive of the returning tone from the first section; there is also a *quasi glissando* (from the fourth section, in the flute) between these seconds, and we can locate a line that starts to lead to the climax, from bar 116 in the violas (doubled in the part of clarinet), and it is transferred to the higher instruments in the next bars, with the second-pace growing. The potential of the interval of the second is released completely, and with the returning notes and the dynamic, the melody conquers ever increasing heights. This moment is crucial – in the parts of the other instruments some other motives are introduced, derived from the previous ones, with new potential and energy: the wide *quasi arpeggios* in the string parts, the free, broken lines derived from the *arpeggios* in the parts of the woodwinds (especially the flutes and clarinets). This stratification results in total 'chaos' in the *fff* dynamics: clusters of the tremolos of quarter-tones in the *divisi* of the strings create a cacophonous base for the *glissando* of the harp through all the registers,

while the motive of the descending second F-E shows itself on the foundation made of clusters of horns and the chromatics of the bassoon. After bar 147 there is a slow fade-out through the clusters of the lower strings; from this moment, the instruments are gradually switched off after the reduction to one tone or interval, along with a general decrease in dynamics – from the *fff* in bar 147, to *p* in bar 148. In the part of the trombones we find quarter-tones (the motive of the descending second) which sound out of tune and fade out. In bar 151 the harp brings a reminiscence of the clash of the major and minor chord in the interval of the second, like the one that was heard at the beginning, but this time upwards ‘E-G-sharp-B against F-A-flat-C.’ Only the strings, the harp, and the tam-tam appear in codetta, which is concluded with the fading sparkle of the tremolos.

Susan Langer writes that ‘All music creates an order of virtual time, in which its sonorous forms move in relation to each other – always and only to each other, for nothing else exists there...’⁵ Vladimir Trmčić also created some kind of ‘virtual time’, by referring to extending infinite time in the cosmos. It seems as though the music from the beginning of *Casiopeia* started much earlier, but we failed to hear it. The composition ends in a similar way – it fades out, with one bar of a sustained pause at the very end; just as if we drifted apart from the sound source, which continues to exist. Bearing in mind the program idea, Trmčić’s *Cassiopeia* does not sound entirely like a completed work, but more like a small excerpt from an eternal sound and from the eternal harmony of the spheres.

Works cited

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Summary

The Thirteen-star Flower of Cassiopeia by Vladimir Trmčić (1983) was commissioned for a trio of accordions. In this first version, Trmčić showed symphonic thinking, and the year after that (2011), he successfully arranged this work for the symphonic orchestra. In the aesthetic sense, Trmčić’s starting point is contained in the verses written by surre-

⁵ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*, New York, Charles Scribner’s sons, 1953, 109–110.

alist poet Marko Ristić, as well as in the domain of astrophysics: a hypothetical situation in space when thirteen supernovae occur simultaneously. The deceleration of time, which derives from the program idea (in the words of the composer), is hypertrophied. This corresponds with Trmčić's general musical expression. We find his *Liturgical Images* (2005), a student work for the organ, as the predecessor of *Cassiopeia*; the long, sustained tones, meandering around one tone/chord, create the impression that almost nothing is going on in the sphere of dramaturgy. The chord, i.e. the harmony, overwhelms the melodic line, as the climax comes gradually, with the increased usage of clusters. Thus, the changes that we perceive happen not so much as vertical shifts, but occur within the verticals themselves, as small alterations in the chord which often stand *per se*. The music itself has an immanent logic and is guided by the sound, timbre, by moving the forces of energy and potential.

Nevertheless, the very similar music 'result' of these two compositions derives from different program ideas: *Liturgical Images* was inspired by the liturgy and asceticism, while in *Cassiopeia* we find the program relations with endless dimensions of the cosmos, both the time and spatial ones, which result with the relativisation of time and space in this composition. The whole range of the orchestra is used, from the lowest to the highest register, often at the same time. Some parts of the musical flow, mainly in the parts played by the 'cello and contrabass, are perceived as an 'ison', in which alterations, *glissandos*, *tremolos* are only minor deviations, which gives the feeling of a kind of micropolyphony. *Cassiopeia* has a thoroughly composed form, with five sections, transitions and codetta. These sections are clearly marked by different orchestral situations. The interval of a minor second represents the foundation of all the motivic material in this composition. It is varied and emerges as an interval (a returning, sustained tone, or a part of some broader motive), or as the part of a chord (for example, in a juxtaposed chord in part 1, or in clusters). In the last bars of *Cassiopeia*, the variation of the minor second is even performed through a reduction, as a result of which it becomes a quarter tone – 'microsecond'.