

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES: MONOGRAPHS

MUSIC: TRANSITIONS/CONTINUITIES

Department of Musicology
Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade



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TRANSITIONS IN THE PGP-RTB/PGP-RTS REFLECTED IN THE CLASSICAL MUSIC EDITIONS*

ABSTRACT: This paper deals with the production of classical music records in the Yugoslav label PGP-RTB/PGP-RTS since its foundation in 1968 up to the present. The paper focuses on differentiation of editions released before and during the political, economic and cultural transitions in the '90s. Last decades of the twentieth century also marked the technological transition from analog to digital recordings. Changes and continuities reflected in the editorial policy (as read from the released recordings) served as a marker of different transitions happening at that time.

KEYWORDS: transition; Yugoslavia; cultural policy; music industry; PGP-RTB / PGP-RTS; recordings; classical music

During the twentieth century, the development of music industry inevitably influenced modes of the reception of music. Its development and everyday life practice of listening to records raised the question of the possible effects that political and technological transitions made on different types of recordings. As for the classical music on vinyl, in the context of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, it is obvious that, on the one hand, the selection of repertoire is based on the idea of popularization of classical music, and on the other hand, on the support of the contemporary production. But, during the '90s, the transition in the politics, economy and, hence, cultural policy, meant different attitudes towards classical music. The same period is the time of the postmodern, for itself characterized by the changed idea of culture, not divided in high and low culture. Finally, the technological transition from vinyl and cassette to the CD, or from analog to digital, marked the end of the century. In the '90s, all these transitions could possibly be traced in the example of classical music releases in PGP-RTB/PGP-RTS (hereinafter: PGP),¹ understood as discursive

* This research was carried out as part of the scientific project of the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade *Identiteti srpske muzike u svetskom kulturnom kontekstu* [Identities of Serbian Music in the World Cultural Context], supported by Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

¹ The acronym PGP-RTB stands for *Produkcija gramofonskih ploča Radio televizije Beograd* (Belgrade Radio Television Gramophone Records Production). It was founded in 1951. After the dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, the

formation. All information about the releases given in this paper is based on the archive research.²

As an introduction, I will give a short survey of the development of this label.³ PGP was founded in 1951. During the first decade, its label was still experimental. In mid '50s, new standards, such as EP (extended play) and LP (long play) appeared and a broader production for the market was established. Thanks to this expansion, industrial production of series of records started. In the late '60s, it became usual for PGP to repurchase license of foreign labels such as Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, Polydor, etc. In the decades that followed, there were few technological innovations, such as the introduction of audio cassettes (1977), VHS production (1983), CDs (1988) and DVDs (2003). We could say that every step in this technological transition had its impact on the reception of the classical music. That's obviously not just in the different qualities of the sound, but also in the fact that other types of recordings had different possibilities for the quantity of the material that could be put on them. This is obvious in the example of the same editions that were published both on cassette and on CD. In the year of 1994, the last classical music gramophone record was produced.⁴ It is indicative, however, that the name of the label, production of gramophone records, was preserved which is in a way paradox. We could say that it suggests confused state in which this label was during the nineties, and which still stands today. That's because there was no specific orientation established, when the previous model of cultural policy was abandoned. In the further text, focus will be on the transition process in the cultural policy, leaving debate on technological transitions for another occasion.⁵

name of the institution was changed to Produkcija gramofonskih ploča Radio televizije Srbije (Serbian Radio Television Gramophone Records Production), for which the acronym PGP-RTS is used.

² The research considered thorough examination of the documentation kept at the PGP, including the information on the release title, programme (names of composers, titles of compositions), release year (not in all cases), release serial number and members of the PGP editorial and, occasionally, technical staff.

³ Cf. <http://www.rts.rs/page/rts/ci/pgp/story/1261/%D0%9E+%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0/538681/%D0%98%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0%D1%82++%D0%9F%D0%93%D0%9F+%D0%A0%D0%A2%D0%A1.html>, acc. 22.08.2013. Cf. Jelena Arnautović, *Između politike i tržišta. Popularna muzika na Radio Beogradu u SFRJ* [Between Politics and Market. Popular Music on Radio Belgrade in SFRY], (Beograd: Radio-televizija Srbije, 2012), 60–63.

⁴ According to the PGP documentation, it was the release of the Trio Toškov playing Beethoven and Haydn.

⁵ The question of technological transitions, and, in general, audio technology in Serbia/Yugoslavia, demands a more complex research. As Simon Zagorski-Thomas notes, although we could have some general remarks on the chronology of audio technology development, we should have in mind all the geographical specifics, which are harder to follow. Cf. Simon Zagorski-Thomas, *The Musicology of Record Production*

The model of cultural policy valid in Yugoslavia was based on the idea of the democratization of culture. This concept was introduced in France by André Malraux, novelist, art theorist and Minister of Cultural Affairs of the French Republic (1959–69), and then adopted in most world countries.⁶ The idea was for all products of high culture to be equally available to all members of the society, no matter what their position in that society was.⁷ Emphasize is, of course, on high culture. In Yugoslavia, a specific rhetoric of musicians and cultural workers was established, so the role of classical music was interpreted as one of the most important in the socialist regime.⁸ It was pointed out that it was necessary to educate wide audience and make classical music available to all members of the socialist state. The popular music was, in this context, labeled as the bourgeois product.⁹ Writers about music, such as conductor Đura Jakšić and theoretician Dušan Plavša, considered PGP's important role in the mission of making classical music, especially that by Serbian and Yugoslav composers, available to everyone.¹⁰

It seems as if during the seventies and eighties, there was serious support for classical music releases in PGP, but there was no further continuation in that direction, given the political transition that arose in the '90s. The transition

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 97–98. He states that the researchers' agenda should be "to examine how the politics in countries and communities outside the commercial US music mainstream affected their access to and subsequent use of the recording technology". Ibid, 113.

⁶ Dr Vesna Đukić, *Država i kultura. Studije savremene kulturne politike* [State and Culture. Studies of Contemporary Cultural Policy], (Beograd: Institut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti, 2010), 67.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cf. Nikola Žanetić, "Pogubni znak jednakosti između kulture i zabave" [A Deadly Equation Sign between Culture and Entertainment] in: *Muzičko stvaralaštvo i kritika* [Musical Opus and Criticism] (Beograd: Marskistički centar Organizacije CK u Beogradu, 1982), 61–67.

⁹ Cf. Slavko Zlatić, "Aktualna pitanja tzv. masovne muzičke kulture (Širenje muzičke kulture kao zadatak omasovljavanja)" [Current Issues of So Called Mass Musical Culture (Broadening of Musical Culture as a Popularization Task)] in: *Kongres Saveza organizacija kompozitora Jugoslavije* [Congress of Yugoslav Music Authors' Organization], by Nenad Turkalj *et al.* (eds), (Zagreb: SOKOJ, 1977), 35–45; Đura Jakšić, "Kultura se mora borbenije postaviti protiv svih oblika lažne kulture i neukusa... – ali kako?" [Culture has to take a more offensive attitude against all forms of fake culture and distaste... – but how?], *Pro musica*, 120, (1983), 2–3.

¹⁰ Cf. Đura Jakšić, "Gramofonske ploče u Srbiji" [Gramophone Records in Serbia], *Pro musica*, 100, (1979), 44–46; Dušan Plavša "Dela jugoslovenskih kompozitora u medijima reprodukcije (radio, televizija, gramofonske ploče i kasete)" [Works by Yugoslav Composers in Reproduction Media (Radio, Television, Gramophone Records and Cassettes)] in: *Kongres Saveza organizacija kompozitora Jugoslavije*, by Nenad Turkalj *et al.* (eds), (Zagreb: SOKOJ, 1977), 199–212.

period begins in Serbia/Yugoslavia in 1989, its main characteristic being discontinuity, both in terms of cultural policies of the previous regimes and in relation to the dominant trends of the cultural policies in Europe and other former socialist republics. Theoretician Vesna Đukić calls this period in Yugoslavia (reduced to Serbia and Montenegro) the “blocked transition”, but does not deny the fact that major political changes emerge in the country and reflect the culture.¹¹ We could debate over the validity of the term “blocked transition”, but it is obvious that some kind of transitional period in Serbian society started at that time. The most significant change in culture is stated to be the elimination of self-management planning and social negotiation, as well as the adoption of the Law on culture financing funds in 1990, by which the powerful centralization of the state was virtually introduced. In such a way, funds just implement but do not establish the cultural policy.¹² Therefore, behind all the established bodies, such as funds and councils, stood the ruling political party and the political oligarchy, which brought key decisions related to culture.¹³ The second discontinuity is reflected in the cancellation of multi-annual planning of strategic development, without new planning procedures being put in place, because their institutional holders were not known.¹⁴ Vesna Đukić explains the motivation and desire of political elites to centralize the power with the fact that this social group supported the new cultural model, “which is why the (high) culture and contemporary creation received much less support from the state than ever over the past decades.”¹⁵ Because of that, the alternative art forms were created mainly in a non-institutional sector and funded by non-governmental organizations.¹⁶ The aim of the '90s cultural policy was primarily to represent the national identity and “defend” it from the world.¹⁷ PGP–RTS, as a part of the state media service, supported the state policy values. What was, then, the PGP activity like before and during the transition?

Since 1968, from when the oldest document found in the PGP documentation originates, both licensed and domestic releases were equally presented. As far as licensed releases are concerned, it can be noted, first of all, that a considerable number of records were aimed at general public; also, when it comes to performers, there were great classical music “stars” whose names attracted consumers. The aiming at wide audience can be seen especially in the titles of releases and series, such as *Muzika miliona* [*Music of Millions*, 1968, 1971], *Konzerte für Millionen* [*Concerts for Millions*, 1989],¹⁸ *Volim muziku* [*I Love*

¹¹ Cf. Dr Vesna Đukić, *Država i kultura...*, op. cit., 228–229.

¹² *Ibid.*, 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 231–232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁸ In the documentation, title is provided in German.

Music].¹⁹ For example, the note on the latest release is indicative: “This is a release for the young and old, through which the fans of classical music will meet composers and some of their works, from Johann Sebastian Bach to Igor Stravinsky. The particular choice of compositions allows various performing ensembles (piano, organ, chamber and symphony orchestra) to be introduced to listeners.”²⁰ These records characteristically represent excerpts of compositions of a larger scope or short tracks. A significant segment of the licensed releases also included the latest records of famous artists and ensembles, such as Ivo Pogorelić or the Berlin Philharmonic led by Herbert von Karajan. There was also a striking practice of the introduction of specific formulations characteristic for popular music, such as *The Best of Placido Domingo* (1987). Additionally, among the typical releases were those which under one title included several tracks with similar characteristics – for example, *Poziv na igru/Aufforderung zum Tanz [An Invitation to a Dance]*,²¹ with compositions of a dancing character, *Adagio, čarolija baroka [Adagio, Magic of the Baroque]* or *The Magic of the Waltz*²² (1982). However, in addition to these types of releases, there were also series of records dedicated to the opus of a single composer. For example, there are series dedicated to Ludwig van Beethoven, featuring symphonies, piano sonatas and the entire opera *Fidelio* (), and one featuring his symphonic opus (1981). These are followed by a few releases dedicated to Frédéric Chopin and Giuseppe Verdi (*Verdi – Italija, kolevka opere [Verdi – Italia, the Cradle of the Opera]*, 1973), with excerpts from various operas.

When it comes to the national production of records, it was of great importance for PGP to publish the recordings of canonical works and performances by Serbian and Yugoslav artists, with the aim of preserving cultural heritage, which was one of the implied duties of a state institution such as PGP. There were many recordings of distinguished soloists, ensembles, choirs and orchestras. One of their most important projects was the series *Umetnost flaute [Art of the Flute]*, recorded by flutist Miodrag Azanjac, featuring the compositions for this instrument throughout history (from baroque to the music of contemporary composers). In the local version, as a sort of an equivalent to the series such as *Muzika miliona*, there were the records created in the collaboration with the editor of *Dragstor ozbiljne muzike [Classical Music Shop]*, Dejan Đurović, which included well-known tracks and excerpts from classical music works. However, publishing releases of series of works by local composers can be considered PGP’s most important activity. They included, among others

¹⁹ If a release year is omitted in the main text, it means that it was not recorded in the PGP documentation.

²⁰ Quotation originates from the document related to the release, found at PGP.

²¹ In the documentation, title is provided both in Serbian and German, with the title in English crossed.

²² In the documentation, title is provided only in English.

Antologija srpske muzike [*Anthology of Serbian Music*] (1977) and *Savremeni domaći kompozitori* [*Contemporary National Composers*] (1974–79). The edition *Antologija srpske muzike* consists of five records featuring genres of symphonic, chamber, and piano music, solo songs and choral music. Most compositions were created in the early twentieth century and in the interwar period, with the most represented composers being Josif Marinković, Petar Konjović, and Miloje Milojević. From today's perspective, what strikes us is the lack of church music in the anthology, which will, a few years later, during the '80s and especially the '90s, have a prominent place in the classical music record production. The series *Savremeni domaći kompozitori*, published in the '70s, included a total of 25 records featuring selected works of different generations of composers. From the interwar generation of composers, the works by Stevan Hristić and Josip Slavenski were included. The "Prague generation" of composers was represented by Ljubica Marić, Stanojlo Rajičić, Milan Ristić, Mihovil Logar, and Dragutin Čolić, and there were many composers emerging on the music scene after World War II, as well. A significant release was also the triple album featuring Stevan Mokranjac's music.

The '90s saw a striking change from the previous decade – the publishing of licensed releases was discontinued. In 1991, several licensed compact discs were published, some of which being a remastered material previously published in PGP, such as the record featuring Debussy's and Ravel's compositions from 1965. This was also the last year in which the licenses were published. The abandonment of this practice – which resulted, presumably, from fewer material resources of PGP, and because of the sanctions – meant considerable decline in the record production in this company, which has since been focused exclusively on domestic artists. Until 1994, certain releases were published exclusively on vinyl and cassettes, and some on compact discs. Distribution of one release on all three sound recording media probably indicated that it was expected to sell well. An example is the footage of Stefan Milenković's concert held in 1991. The content of some releases distributed both on a cassette and CD differed insofar as the cassettes usually contained fewer tracks, resulting in omission of a part of the programme. Also, several charts of *Dragstor ozbiljne muzike* were released on cassettes and CDs, which remained a continuous practice from the previous period. This type of content, as well as the video footages of the show *Subotom uveče* [*On Saturday Evenings*] (1991, 1997), was released frequently.

As for the works by domestic composers, the production was on a significantly smaller scale. The compositions by Mihovil Logar (1990), Milan Mihajlović (1991) and Stevan Mokranjac (1991) were released. In 1992, pianist Ameli Mišić's *Srpska klavirska muzika XX veka* [*Serbian Piano Music of the 20th Century*] (1992) was released on vinyl, while in the next four years, through to 1996, no works by domestic composers were published. In that year, Vojislav Voki Kostić's music was released on a CD *Retrospekcija* [*Retrospection*] (1996).

In the following years, a series of CDs titled *Jugoslovenski savremeni kompozitori* [*Yugoslav Contemporary Composers*] were released, featuring the works by Rastislav Kambasković (1997), Konstatin Babić, Stanojlo Rajičić (1998), Dušan Radić (1999), and Enriko Josif (1999). Apart from this series, Aleksandar Obradović and Ivan Jevtić were present among others. Strikingly the most common was the sacred music. Several releases commemorating the 800th anniversary of Hilandar were released. On one of them, Zoran Hristić provided music and arrangement of church melodies, along with works by other composers. However, the release was titled after Hristić's composition – *Posveta, osam vekova Hilandara, Sila krsta* [*Dedication, Eight Centuries of Hilandar, The Power of the Cross*] (1998). Several liturgies were also released. (Svetislav Božić – dedicated to the Hilandar anniversary /1998/, Kornelije Stanković /1999/, Josif Marinković /1999/). Also, a CD release titled *Srpska duhovna muzika – Dela najvećih srpskih kompozitora horovođa Društva* [*Serbian Sacred Music – Works of the Greatest Composers Cantors of the Society*] (1998) came out.²³ A smaller scale production in this period was typically compensated by the rerelease of materials that had previously come out on one or more vinyl records – such as the CD rerelease featuring the 1969 Belgrade Opera performance of “Mazeppa” by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1998) in Berlin, and the CD *Lady Plays Keyboards*,²⁴ featuring different compositions performed by Smiljka Isaković, previously released on a vinyl LP record.²⁵

It seems that in the context of political and technological changes, it was impossible for PGP to establish a clear direction of their programme policy. Although by the end of the decade PGP resumed publishing of works by domestic composers, such practice was not frequent, and the releases of classical music composers primarily contained sacred music. They came out in the year when the eight centuries anniversary of the establishment of Hilandar was celebrated nationally. With the exception of the releases containing prominent soloists, the classical music production in this house was reduced to the releases related to the programme featured on the classical music charts and the CD rereleases of old materials. A few years later, the technological innovations leading to the “disappearance” of the sound recording medium as a physical object, provided the access to music without direct mediation of a recording label.

The research of the effects of different transitions on the PGP discography, as well as the continuity of practice, is significant because sound recording media are one of the many texts and discursive formations of a culture and, as

²³ “Society” refers to the performers on the release: First Belgrade Singing Society.

²⁴ In the documentation, title is provided in English.

²⁵ Releases: *Muzika XVII veka* [*Music of the 17th century*] (1984), *Scarlattini – Soler* (1987).

such, one of the social formations intertwined with the dominant power. As Michel Foucault would say, 'Every society has a regime of truth modulated by the power, which shapes the discourses and pervades the social body, and is inevitably manifested as such.' As one of their products, sound recording media as the texts of culture, are a segment of culture that may point to the ways of representation of the power, the place of classical music, both traditional and contemporary creativity in society, as well as to the conditions in which the audience could receive this music.

SUMMARY

Belgrade Radio Television Gramophone Records Production (PGP-RTB), later Serbian Radio Television Gramophone Records Production (PGP-RTS), hereinafter referred as PGP, was founded in 1951. Since its establishment one of its roles was the classical music production. For the purpose of this paper, releases dating from 1968 up to the present day were considered. Goal of the paper is to see if there were any significant changes in editorial policy of this institution before and during the periods of political, economic, cultural and technological transitions, which all took place in late 20th century. The focus is on the political and cultural transitions, while the technological one has only been marked for future examination. According to theoretician Vesna Đukić, the thesis about "blocked transition" happening in Yugoslavia during the '90s was used to describe the cultural policy of the period. Work by the same author was used for studying the cultural policy in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. According to the information contained therein, as well as the articles written by prominent cultural workers of the time, such as Đura Jakšić or Dušan Plavša, classical music was highly valued. As for the classical music releases, licensed and domestic, a certain mainstream could be observed. Licensed releases could be divided into two groups. One contained the excerpts of "popular" classical music works (that is, the *Music of the Millions* series), while the other included the series dedicated to the important works by selected canonical composers. As for the domestic production, there were series dedicated to great historical figures, such as Stevan Mokranjac, as well as those containing pieces by contemporary composers. Additionally, different thematic releases and those featuring distinguished soloist or ensembles came out. During the '90s, the practice of publishing licensed releases was understandably abandoned, and domestic production was seemingly managed without a distinct plan. Sacred music releases prevailed, coinciding with the national celebration of the anniversary of the Hilandar monastery. It could be noted that the releases reflected a change in values occurring in the transitional period, as they reflected other circumstances before the transition. But, given the transitional period which brought about the change of many elements, it seems that the institution fell into a blurry state, without clear orientation, at least as far as classical music is concerned.