

JOSIP SLAVENSKI (1896–1955)
POVODOM 120. GODIŠNJICE ROĐENJA KOMPOZITORA
[ON THE OCCASION OF THE 120TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
COMPOSER'S BIRTH]
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Some composers are present in our daily lives like a continuum, their names and music serving as a reference for certain musical styles or periods of music. Some burst onto the stage of music history seemingly out of nowhere and then disappear from that stage even faster. There are some whom we remember mostly on special occasions or anniversaries. Josip Slavenski, it seems, belongs to all of these groups: notably well known and widely performed in the first half of the twentieth century, celebrated before and after his international success and then almost forgotten on the European music scene, but always remaining a composer whose works provoke the attention of scholars and performers alike.

However, thirteen years have passed since a scientific symposium about his time and works was held for the first time in Belgrade, the city where Slavenski chose to spend the rest of his rich creative life and where he fully developed his musical potential. Proceedings from that symposium, commemorating fifty years since his death, resulted in eighteen musicological studies and four essays, memories and reflections, published in Belgrade in 2006 (Живковић 2006: 9). That same year, another important book regarding Slavenski's life appeared in print, prepared by the composer's widow (M. Slavenski 2006).

It took another anniversary to remind us of his creative input in Serbian music, and in the music history and culture of the surrounding nations, as well as the rest of Europe. That event happened on May 11, 2016, one hundred and twenty years since Slavenski's birth. The Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), in collaboration with the Serbian Musicological Society, organized a round table dedicated to the composer's life and work. This valiant effort also included a presentation of the newest music publication – the first part of a collection of Slavenski's choral compositions for mixed choirs, *Horske kompozicije Josipa Slavenskog I* [Choral works by Josip Slavenski, Book I] (Slavenski 2016)¹ and a concert dedicated to Slavenski's music – a performance of his piano, chamber and vocal works.²

1 In the meantime, in 2017 the second volume of this capital work was published (Slavenski 2017).

2 The concert was organized in Belgrade by pianists from the ensemble "Radionica za klavirsku muziku prof. Milanke Mišević" [The Workshop for Piano Music of prof. Milanka Mišević] with guests musicians.

Keeping the memory of a composer and his music alive by presenting a concert of his compositions is already a worthwhile effort at which every musicologist should aim.³ Continuing to present his work through musicological studies and preserving the continuation of musicological research regarding his work in subsequent publications is a task that should be gratefully acclaimed. Hence the publication *Josip Slavenski (1896–1955) – Povodom 120. godišnjice kompozitorovog rođenja*, edited by Ivana Medić and published by the Institute of Musicology SASA (Medić 2017) represents an important contribution not only for Slavenski scholars, but for Serbian and European musicology overall.⁴

The aim of this collection of essays by ten authors, according to the editorial foreword, is to present the newest research results concerning Josip Slavenski's life and work and his overall contribution to the Yugoslav music scene in the first half of the twentieth century.

The general scope of the publication gravitates around three main themes: the life and work of the composer, analytical studies of Slavenski's compositions and discourses regarding Slavenski's music style and reception throughout the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

Some interesting aspects of Slavenski's life and work, his contribution to Croatian and Serbian culture and the historical perspective in the presentation of his music are discussed in the articles written by Mirjana Živković, Maša Hrustek-Sobočan, Ana Kotevska and Nebojša Todorović.

The composer Mirjana Živković, one of Serbia's best known and most widely respected Slavenski scholars, reflects in her essay on important dates in the composer's life and the social circumstances regarding the reception of the composer's music before and after World War II, abroad and in the former Yugoslavia, along with some personal reminiscences about Slavenski ("Društveni aspekti izvođenja muzike Josipa Slavenskog" [Social aspects of the performances of Josip Slavenski's music]). Despite a mixed reception throughout his life – acceptance and rejection, accolades and critiques before as well as after World War II – Živković noted a revitalization of Slavenski's music towards the end of the twentieth century and a marginalization of his opus in his native Croatia. Her conclusion questioning the position of Slavenski's opus nowadays sounds like a valid invitation for further research of Slavenski's music within the boundaries of global music history.

Ana Kotevska provides an intriguing polemic about Slavenski's performances in the late twentieth century ("Dis/continuum – Slavenski na kraju XX i početkom XXI veka" [Dis/continuum – Slavenski at the end of the twentieth and the beginning

3 In November 2015, a concert of Slavenski's chamber works at the Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade commemorated sixty years since the composer's death.

4 The attention-grabbing cover (designed by Dejan Medić) and dedication page (to prof. Milanka Mišević) precede the content, as does the list of contributors (listed chronologically by birth rather than alphabetically – with Jim Samson's birth year erroneously listed as 1947 rather than 1946), which we usually find at the end.

of the twenty-first century]) with an invaluable chronology of the most important activities regarding Josip Slavenski and the reception of his music in Belgrade and Serbia from 1994 through 2017. Despite some discontinuity (between 2009 and 2013), performers and musicologists in Belgrade were active in preserving the composer's legacy, concludes Kotevska, underlining that Slavenski's music is still not present in the regular concert repertoire as it should be.

In her richly illustrated study about Slavenski's life, education and works, and especially his connection with his native Čakovec and Međimurje ("Josip Štolcer Slavenski – čakovečki skladateljski genij s beogradskom adresom i svjetskim glasom" [Josip Štolcer Slavenski – A musical genius from Čakovec with a Belgrade address and a worldwide reputation]), Maša Hrustek-Sobočan, director of the Slavenski Memorial Collection at Međimurje Museum (Croatia),⁵ paints a picture of a composer who outgrew local surroundings to become internationally recognized, but stayed deeply connected with his roots. Nebojša Todorović compares Serbian and Croatian music between World Wars I and II and Slavenski's place in that context, concluding that Slavenski was a composer who could be treated equally as Croatian and Serbian ("Josip Slavenski u kontekstu srpske i hrvatske muzike između dva svjetska rata" [Josip Slavenski in the context of Serbian and Croatian music between two world wars]).

Two authors from abroad, Danijela Š. Beard and Ivan Moody, analyse Slavenski's music from the viewpoint of the aesthetics of the Zenit movement.⁶ As someone who was among the early researchers of this topic (Cf. Grujić 1983),⁷ I was especially interested in these two papers. Ivan Moody in his paper "Slavenski, zenitizam i Evropa" [Slavenski, Zenitism and Europe] positions Slavenski in an international context in correlation to the international tendencies of the Zenit movement. Moody considers the *Slavenska sonata* (for violin and piano) and *Chaos* (for symphony orchestra) as central to Slavenski's "search for *barbarogenije*" – the creative force of new, reborn art. Moody also offers an interesting comparison between Slavenski's work as a precursor or predecessor of newer compositions by composers such as Schnittke, Górecki and Tavener – ideas that are intriguing and valuable cues for future researchers of Slavenski's work in European and international context.

With her earlier studies about the composer, Beard positions herself at the forefront of Slavenski scholars abroad. Presenting the case for the central role of Slavenski's music in his connection with the Zenit movement, his concrete vision of the "masculine essence of Balkan discourse", Beard cites his numerous works with "Balkan" titles and concludes that the most ideologically and thematically complete view of the Balkans among them is the suite "Igre i pesme sa Balkana" [Dances and

5 Her text was originally published in the catalog accompanying the exhibition on the 120th anniversary of the birth of Josip Štolcer Slavenski, "Vrag vas skeljil Međimurci, idemo pljesat" (Čakovec, the Museum of Međimurje, 2016).

6 Their texts, originally written in English, appear in the book in Serbian translation by Ivana Medić.

7 I would like to mention another two valuable studies regarding the Slavenski-Zenitism relationship: Milin 2005 and Mikić 2009.

Songs from the Balkans] from 1927. As precursors to the Zenit movement, Beard cites theories that were developed in Croatia at the turn of the twentieth century as well as the idea of unity of south Slavic nations (54).⁸ Beard also states that the Zenit movement was distinctively nationally oriented (56). However, the movement was rather local with ambitions of becoming international; contributing artists from all over Europe presented and published in *Zenit* magazine. This variation of expressionism was similar to Slavenski's view of Balkan folklore and folk music overall as a vehicle for the revitalization of European artistic music, his "folklore expressionism." The movement resonated with Slavenski through the idea of folklore as a "mother tongue" that spreads as a lingua franca throughout the Balkans and unifies nations in the creation of a renewed European art and culture (Grujić 1963: 60). In the final part of her paper – "Antipijanizam' Slavenskog" [Slavenski's "anti-pianism"] – Beard presents a detailed stylistic analysis of the piano suite "Sa Balkana" [From the Balkans], also known as "Aus Dem Balkan" in Schott's edition from 1927. This slightly abrupt transition to analysis of this piano work was probably on account of its second movement "Zagorski tamburasi" being published in the magazine *Zenit* (October 1925, no.36).⁹

Three authors offer new readings of Slavenski's music through analysis. Regarding Slavenski's treatment of piano and the structures of his piano scores, Ivana Medić in "Problemi interpretacije klavirskog stvaralastva Josipa Slavenskog" [Problems in Performing Josip Slavenski's Piano Works] offers a view in opposition to Beard's "anti-pianism." Discussed from the standpoint of a musicologist-performer, she offers a more acceptable term – "robustni pijanizam" [robust/vigorous pianism] (150), a term that equally describes Slavenski's relation with the piano as an instrument of interpretation of the score and the source of greater musical sonority. In that sense, Ivana Medić's paper offers a valuable source for interpreters of Slavenski's piano music.

Miloš Bralović presents a comprehensive analysis of Slavenski's string quartets, "Gudački kvarteti Josipa Slavenskog: elementi modernizma" [Josip Slavenski's String Quartets: Elements of Modernism], underlining their modernistic compositional technique and offering detailed tonal plans in graphic tablets that will please every serious researcher in the field of music analysis. Milena Medić, on the other hand, interprets the composer's creative poetics through aesthetic and stylistic analysis based on Bakhtin's semantic theories of "folklore 'chronotopes'". Following her analysis of the composer's compositional technique, she finds a certain lyrical character in Slavenski's compositional style. This new reading of Slavenski's musical language, from a completely different standpoint, sheds new light on the composer's creative process. Finally, the intriguing title of Jim Samson's paper "Srbo-Hrvat: ko poseduje Slavenskog?" [Serbo-Croatian: Who Owns Slavenski?] was adapted by the editor from a chapter of his earlier book *Music in the Balkans* (Samson 2013: 369–376).

8 Beard presented a similar thesis in wider form in her earlier study: Špirić 2006.

9 In the magazine "Zenit" the composer signed his work as "Jos. Chtolzer-Slavensky" and the title of the piece as "Danse Balcanique" (in Cyrillic: Јос.Штолцер-Славенски, "Загорски тамбураши"). See: Grujić 1983: 55; 57–59.

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As a well known Balkan music specialist, Samson juxtaposes Slavenski's "Croatian" and "Serbian" sides, the importance of the duality that needed to be accepted (and existed) in the composer's work as a whole, unique and antithetical in their synthesis. Thus, his conclusion is that Slavenski – born in Hapsburg Croatia, grew (as a composer) in Serbia – is not and cannot be owned by any of those, as he was Serbo-Croat, Yugoslav, Balkan – and also Međimurac (137–8). This statement strikes a chord with anyone who belongs, lives and works/creates in a world of dual culture, dual heritage, or who has a multinational background. Because of this important reminder, this essay would be, in my opinion, best placed at the very beginning of this collection of papers about Slavenski.

Since there are no English summaries of the articles published, this book limits use of publication to Serbian/Croatian (Bosnian, Montenegrin) language speakers.

It is regrettable that there are still very few recent recordings of Slavenski's music – all are noted in the lists of references by Živković, Kotevska and Ivana Medić (and even those are not widely available as they were published in limited editions).

"At a time when we are rediscovering Slavenski," wrote the author of this text 35 years ago in her book about Slavenski's orchestral music (Grujić 1984). Just recently, I have learned about a film on Slavenski's life being filmed in Belgrade.¹⁰ Let us hope that the rediscovery of Josip Slavenski will never cease.

Sanja Grujić-Vlajnić

¹⁰ From electronic correspondence with one of the actresses, Sonja Kalajić, a violinist, who plays the role of Slavenski's mother Julijana.

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