

# DROPLETS OF DEW: THE MUSIC OF VERA STANOJEVIĆ

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## ABSTRACT

Vera Stanojević's timbrally-driven compositions, both acoustic and electro-acoustic, have increasingly garnered international recognition over the past two decades. A brief biographical overview, supported with commentary from the composer, is followed by a series of analytical vignettes of select repertoire. The analyses provide brief sketches of the style and compositional approach taken in each work. Works discussed are posted on the composer's Soundcloud website, allowing readers to directly engage, with audio, timbral complexities addressed within.

**KEYWORDS:** Vera Stanojević, timbre, electro-acoustic, post-tonal, compositional process

## INTRODUCTION

Serbian-American Vera Stanojević (1965) is among a substantive number of successful émigré composers born in Serbia in the sixties (Medić 2014: 144). Stanojević's music draws on a variety of influences, and her more recent work is increasingly timbrally inspired, featuring sensitive orchestration of acoustic sound sources, at times enhanced with electronics. This article briefly discusses her career path, and then engages selected works of the past two decades, strategically emphasizing pieces that can be heard on the composer's SoundCloud website.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> soundcloud.com/verastanojevic. The composer's use of electro-acoustic sounds transcend graphic notation in a number of her works; thus, the reader is encouraged to listen to recordings provided on this website.

Through her career, she has garnered a number of accolades, such as the City of Belgrade's October Prize for two earlier works *Dream Visions* for flute and piano (1981) and *Three Diabolical Fantasies* for piano (1982); The Yugoslav State Society for Cultural Affairs Prize (1984) for her early string quartet *Inferno* (after Dante) (1983); the premier by The Dale Garland Singers of *Awake!* for large a cappella chorus (1997); her Vienna Modern Masters Millennium Orchestra commission, *Notturmo* for large orchestra (1998);<sup>3</sup> a number of Ohio (USA) Arts Council awards, including the funding and premieres of two chamber orchestra works, *Dance: to the End of the Circle* (2002) and *Beyond... Return?* (2006), by the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra; *Chamber Music (after James Joyce)* (1997) for mezzo soprano and chamber ensemble, premiered at the Aalto Theater in Essen, Germany, and performed at Ohio University's conference Women in Music: The Last 100 Years; a Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Piano Festival commission, *The Droplets of Dew* for four pianos and electroacoustic sound (2013); and recent Estonian Academy of Music Tallinn (EAMT) Autumn Festival commissions *Story of a Woman* for voice and electroacoustic sounds and *UnCaged* for piano and electroacoustic sounds (2015).<sup>4</sup> In 2015, Stanojević was also Featured Guest Composer for both EAMT and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

She began music studies at age 9 in 1974, at the Mokranjac School in Belgrade, entering the specialized pre-Academy program in theory and piano in 1979 and graduating in 1983. Her path, however, differed from a number of her Serbian émigré contemporaries in various ways from this point on. Upon graduation, rather than pursuing studies in Western Europe or the US, she headed to Moscow, and did so well before the rise in geopolitical tensions and warring that spurned the departure of so many of her contemporaries from the former Yugoslavia in the early nineties (Medić: 144). Regarding this path choice, Stanojević notes:

I was fascinated with Russian culture, with the music and the literature of Russian masters of the end of nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. I was, as well, in awe of the Russian piano school and at the time was still considering my pianistic career. Somehow, I still considered piano as my profession and composition as a pleasure. Composing felt more like writing a personal diary than working. Somehow, even today, it still feels more like an intimate activity than a profession (Stanojević 2017d).

3 *Notturmo* was recorded by the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, Jiri Mikula, conductor, and recorded on Vienna Masters CD VMM 3045.

4 *Story of a Woman* and *UnCaged* are both works that play on the relationship between the performer's improvisations and the composer's manipulation of electro-acoustic sounds in real time. *UnCaged* was also performed in 2016 for Alto/Baritone Saxophones at the Ohio State University Contemporary Music Festival (2016).

Though her aspirations as a performer led her to attend the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory from 1983 through 1990, in the end she received masters and doctoral degrees in Theory/Composition as opposed to Piano Performance. Still, her broader connection to the piano, and in particular, her love of its timbre, can be heard in a number of her works. As she herself acknowledges (*ibid*), the sound-world of the overtone-rich piano informs her music across the board, from more standard-genre chamber works such as her earlier Polyphonic Sonata for Violin and Piano (1987),<sup>5</sup> to her more recent and aforementioned *The Droplets of Dew* for four pianos and electro-acoustic sounds. Regarding her studies at the Moscow Conservatory, she notes:

Moscow Conservatory provided me with exactly what I expected. I had numerous wonderful music teachers and was surrounded with great musicians. My composition professor, Alexander Pirumov, was a very fine musician and taught me a lot. I knew there wouldn't be much space for experimentation and, as I had anticipated, this element was missing. Still, I soaked up a lot of music and studied Soviet giants such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich. It was unavoidable to study in Russia at this time and not fall under the influence of these masters. Surely, it happened to me, as one can hear in my Polyphonic Sonata for Violin and Piano (*ibid*).

Within her works, one hears how electronics, when used, tend to complement rather than define her sound palettes. Titles of a number of her more recent works, from 2013 on, often refer to an acoustic performance medium, such as voice, one or more pianos, or saxophone, and "electro-acoustic sound."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, her use of electronics tends to be more of an enhancement of given acoustic sounds, given her sensitivity to timbral shifts in her music, rather than a desire to synthesize, from the ground up, novel non-acoustic electronically generated sounds. In this respect, her music, along many with other contemporary composers in this day and age of electronic-music software capable of sound manipulations in real time, is apart from earlier renowned electro-acoustic works such as Stockhausen's *Gesang*

5 The *Polyphonic Sonata* was premiered by renowned violinist Evgenia-Maria Popova (currently Department Head of Violin at the National Conservatory of Music in Bulgaria) at the Belgrade Music Festival – BEMUS, 1987, and subsequently performed by Branislav Sisel (with Stanojević at piano), a performance recorded for broadcast on Belgrade Radio and Television.

6 *Droplets of Dew* for four pianos and electroacoustic sound (2013); *UnCaged*—version for piano and electroacoustic sound (2015); *Story of a Woman* for voice and electroacoustic sound (2015). In addition, one notices a change in her preference for the term "electroacoustic sound" over "Computer-generated sound" in a recent 2017 performance of her *Voyage I* (2006), a work she originally described in 2006 as featuring "computer-generated" as opposed to "electroacoustic" sounds.

*der Jünglinge* or Babbitt's *Philomel*, in that it goes beyond combining purely computer-generated sounds with acoustic ones, and focuses primarily on manipulating and interplaying with the sounds of an acoustic performance medium in order to electronically enhance real-time timbres (see Keislar 2009: 29).<sup>7</sup> To an extent, Stanojević uses what can be called *digital musique concrete*: using advanced digital-signal processing software to precisely mold and shape her sound material, such as in samplings and manipulations of poets' Anne Waldman's and Vasko Popa's voices reading their own poems in *Voyages I & II*. The acoustic sound sources, piano and poets' voices,<sup>8</sup> are on equal footing with the electronic enhancements, enhancements that solely derive from those two acoustic sources.

## ACOUSTIC WORKS

### CHAMBER MUSIC

Stanojević cites her 1997 work *Chamber Music* – a setting of two James Joyce poems for Pierrot ensemble and voice, sans violin – as a significant turning point in her compositional style, where her focus on timbral shifts greatly increased. The poems, from Joyce's eponymous thirty-six-poem collection (Joyce 1907), are "Gentle lady," no. 28, and "My dove, my beautiful one," no. 14, performed *attacca*. She is hesitant to cite *Chamber Music* as the turning point exemplifying this style evolution, but notes "Still, mostly from comments of others, I think that there's a thread [in my work] which can be followed, that of a timbral interest, woven into more traditional characteristics of my music: pitch (melody and harmony) and rhythm, and perhaps the first piece that exhibits those characteristics (if there is ever a clear cut in any development) is *Chamber Music*" (Stanojević 2017d).

She notes "In more recent decades, I discovered 'spectral music' composers, Grisey and Murail, as well as Claude Vivier, whose composition *Lonely Child* [1980] is one of my favorites" (*ibid*). Not unlike Vivier, Stanojević's music is by no means overarchingly "spectralist" as say, that of Grisey or Murail. But a desire for timbral interplay strongly informs her choice of notes, as opposed to other traditional post-tonal methods of pitch organization, such as intervallic or symmetrical pitch-space relationships. The late musicologist Bob Gilmore, in his essay on *Lonely Child*, notes that with the spectralists, "[t]he permutation of notes, whether strictly serial or not, was replaced by a scrutiny of the inner life of sounds" (Gilmore 2007: 4). Both she and Vivier share the penchant for that "inner life." She employs the term "spectralist" in broad strokes, as in

7 In a section of Keislar's book chapter, "A Historical View of Computer Music Technology," subtitled "Human Control of the Digital Instrument," he notes "Whereas the first half of the computer music era was dominated by the composer, the second half witnessed the ascent of the performer."

8 For *Voyage II*, Stanojević employs manipulations of both the poet's voice in native Serbian, and her own voice reading a translation in English.

when she expresses her fondness for Oliver Messiaen's rich timbres as follows: "Messiaen was a spectralist before the spectral movement. His harmonies sometimes come from sound spectra. Mine do, too. I don't rely on computer manipulations to derive the harmony – I use my ears, often inspired by piano resonances" (Stanojević 2017b). Gilmore also shares this opinion on Messiaen, noting that the composer's "way of thinking [as outlined in *Technique de mon Langage Musical*] about the nature of sound is highly prophetic of the spectral aesthetic" (Gilmore, 4). Additionally, she notes her love of György Ligeti, particularly his sensitivity to timbres, and had aspirations of studying with him at the Hamburg Hochschule für Musik once she completed her studies in Moscow in 1990. He retired from professorship, however, in 1989 (Toop 1999: 203). Ultimately, she was attracted in 1990 to the United States by Ohio State University's new music scene, particularly the quality of its electronic music program.<sup>9</sup>

Timbrally inspired gestures can be heard in the beginning measures of *Chamber Music*, which opens with Joyce's poem "Gentle lady, do not sing songs about the end of love." (See Example 1). The cello, pianissimo and muted, timbrally enhances rather than merely "doubles" the vocal line with its *mezzo piano* scoring that fades to *pianississimo* in its minor-third descent from F to D by the end of the word "gentle" in the first measure. The cello's soft minor-third portamento descent is temporally delayed within that measure, giving a subtle echo effect. Dynamics spawn timbre here, as the soft, muted sound levels blend voice and cello rather than distinguish them from one another. As the mezzo-soprano intones "lady" on the downbeat of the next bar in a repeated minor-third F-to-D descent, she softly incorporates the cello's previous portamento, and is this time quietly doubled on F by flute in its lower range, one that slides up to the major third, F-sharp, as the singer again descends to D.<sup>10</sup> One hardly senses the shift in "doubling" of the voice from cello to flute, but the effect is quite haunting. The Joyce poem itself, of course, references Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, particularly Macduff's line to Lady Macbeth in Act II, Scene III, "O gentle lady, 'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak: The repetition, in a woman's ear, Would murder as it fell," just before he announces to the entering Banquo that the king has been

9 Stanojević notes "due to a chance meeting with a professor from the Slavic Department at The Ohio State University, who started encouraging me about moving to the U.S., I wanted to give that possibility a chance as well. I first visited the U.S., traveling from Russia in 1989, to attend the International Computer Music Conference, which took place at Ohio State that year. Impressed by the conference and the studios at the university, I decided to apply there for my doctoral studies. Electro-acoustic music was still the determining factor of where I would choose to go, but the offer of a University Fellowship was what tipped the scale toward the U.S. and Ohio State" (Stanojević: 2017a).

10 Although the score indicates "Voice," Stanojević notes on her SoundCloud webpage that the work was "Commissioned by mezzo-soprano Suzanne Blattert and premiered in the Aalto Theater, Essen, Germany;" <https://soundcloud.com/verastanojevic/chamber-music> (accessed 19 July, 2017). A male voice singing the treble-clef line down an octave, in the author's opinion, would lessen the effect of Stanojević's timbral blends, due to its octave displacement.

murdered. Stanojević's darker shading of timbres seems to reflect on Joyce's intertextual reference.

A timbral focus is also heard in the singer's enunciation of the poetry itself, as Stanojević's repetitions of words "Gentle lady, O, Gentle lady" and the thrice intoned "do not, do not, do not" – repetitions not found in the original poem – strike the listener as a indulgence in the beauty of the very sounds of Joyce's Shakespeare-inspired word choices.

The harmonic language is an effective blend of tonality and atonality, one that never veers too far from resonant tertian constructs. The simplicity of pitch material in the opening, with a fairly clear implication of D minor, allows for a focus on these timbral intricacies. The implicit minor-to-major shift, brought about by the flute's F-sharp, is referenced again in the piano's left hand arpeggiation of a G minor harmony in m. 3, whose B-flat is immediately followed by a B natural. In a kind of polytonal gesture, an open-scored, resonant D-flat "sharp-eleven" harmony is then sounded in the second half of m. 3 and sustains into m. 4, while above it, the voice continues to emphasize its sustained G, and the clarinet (in transposed and not "concert" pitch in the score) freely and sinuously outlines a G dominant harmony in second inversion, its chord members mapping onto the larger D-flat sharp-eleven construct as the flute intermittently echoes its G-dominant gestures.

### DANCE: TO THE END OF THE CIRCLE

*Dance: To the End of the Circle* (2002) was commissioned by ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus, Ohio, and is scored for a standard Classical-era orchestra, strengthened with the addition of piano and a late-Romantic-era battery of percussion.<sup>11</sup> In it, one hears gestures, rhythms, and melodies evoking Balkan folk music. On that topic, the composer notes:

*Dance: to the End of the Circle* is an outgrowth of my interest in the folk music of the Balkans, and represents a need to reflect on my musical roots, after many changes of environments – from Yugoslavia to Russia, and then to America. The piece takes its inspiration from the *Kolo*, a type of circle-dance found in the Balkan regions. In this work, I tried to combine and refresh the strict forms of Western music – in this case fugue – with folk elements, however, not simply by arranging the ethnic music into western clothing, but attempting a synthesis that has the spontaneity, directness, and improvisational quality of folk music (Stanojević 2002).

<sup>11</sup> 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in A (cl. 2 alternating w/bass cl.), 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, xylophone, marimba, suspended cymbal, guiro, ratchet, crotale, tambourine, slapstick, woodblock, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, piano, strings.

Stanojević seems here to be echoing Béla Bartók's aesthetic of creating a higher-level melding of peasant and concert music, avoiding what Bartók described as an unsuccessful art using peasant melodies "mixed [...] with Western hackneyed patterns and Romantic sentimentality" (Bartók 1931/1976: 322). The work shows Stanojević's ability to write music with a broader public appeal appropriate for a large-ensemble commission, while not compromising on the use of progressively dissonant harmonies and rather complex rhythms. The accessibility is achieved by framing the work in a broader, traditional A-B-A' ternary, by using folk-derived textures, at times in imitation of the Balkan *tamburica* ensemble, and lastly, by evoking the fugue in a post-tonal context, not unlike Bartók in his opening movement to his *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, a well-tested technique to which a broader audience of classical music enthusiasts would be accustomed.

A constant in the work is the juxtaposition of consecutive melodic minor-third motives, each a half step apart, as can be seen in Example 2, the work's opening measures. A fugue-like theme in 4/4 time provides strong downbeat accents on the C/E-flat motive in mm. 2 and 3, while in m. 3, a neighboring "slide" to a C-sharp/E-natural motive is heard. Similar half-step slides are heard throughout the opening section's fugal statements through m. 22.

Twenty-three measures into the opening larger A section, there is a shift to a 7/8 meter, broken down into a common Balkan 3+2+2 dance rhythm (See Example 3). The shift to pizzicato playing in the strings, combined with the playful tossing of accompanimental articulations between lower strings and violas, offers a more forthright evocation of the *tamburica* ensemble, an evocation suggested earlier in the *sempre marcato e secco* performance indication for the fugal statements (see Example 2). The portamento slur in the first violins over bar 23 also foreshadows the change in character following in the work's contrasting B area, whose theme enters in m. 118 (Example 3). Here, the topic of half-step related keys in opposition is more direct, with an accompaniment emphasizing a G tonal center against the first violin melody's emphasis on F-sharp. The bi-tonal effect is somewhat similar to what is experienced in Bartók's "Boating," from his *Mikrokosmos*, Vol. 5, where the keys of G and A-flat are juxtaposed within a metrically ambiguous context.<sup>12</sup>

Stanojević notes "The mood of this slow contrasting section is altogether different from that of the previous one. Marked *seducente*, or seductively, it is quiet, but far from reserved—Gypsy-like, supple and haunting in nature" (Stanojević 2002).

Certain moments in this work foreshadow her later emphasis on timbre. She notes:

There is a gradual increase from *Dance: To the End of the Circle* to *The Droplets of Dew* in my interest in timbre and spectral techniques. An example of a spectral crossfade occurs in *Dance*, measures 104-106 [see Example 6], in a transition section where the trumpet enters mezzo-forte, crescendos to forte, then

12 See Stein 2005, 82–88.

degradandos, during which the clarinet fades in, matching the trumpet dynamic, repeats the trumpet's dynamics (mf-f) and fades out. To be sure, this is a time-honored orchestrational technique, but one I feel is particularly effective here in a spectral sense (Stanojević 2017a).

The A' area opens with fragments of the fugue theme, again juxtaposing C minor and C-sharp minor, gradually reassembling the fugue theme and driving the work to an end-weighted, climactic close, one featuring a brief return of the B area's quiet demeanor before a final, bold pair of articulations that juxtapose D minor and C-sharp minor, leaving the half-step conflict unresolved and transposed up a half-step.

### “DYING,” FROM HOMMAGE À EMILY

Stanojević's penchant for timbral sensitivity intertwines with subtle references to Brahms' op. 91 songs in her 2007 work *Hommage à Emily*, a setting of two Emily Dickinson poems for voice, viola and piano. Regarding this work, Stanojević notes:

I always try to achieve a sense of drama and narrative in my music, and I was inspired by the depth of expression of Emily Dickinson's poems. The instrumentation is the same as Brahms's songs, Opus 91, and I was moved to quote his music in this work. The first song is rather expressionistic, with suspenseful episodes that explore the colors of the ensemble and give a sense of frozen time. The second song is characterized by an outward harmonic simplicity that belies a finely woven shifting rhythmic structure (Stanojević 2017f).

Like the Brahms songs, they comprise a diptych of poems for a lower female voice, the first perceptually slower in overall pulse than the second. Both diptychs feature similar Romantic-era literary tropes that reference nature, Jesus Christ in secularly humanist terms, and death as a means of release from the world's pains. The Brahms quote to which Stanojević refers (see Example 7) is not from op. 91, but rather his famous “Wiegenlied” (“Lullaby”), op. 49, no. 4. It is heard in the first song, her setting of Dickinson's poem “Dying.” She notes that in the Dickinson poem, “Symbolically, one is leaving this world as if falling asleep with a gentle lullaby” (Stanojević 2017a).

Not unlike her treatment of the opening vocal line to her *Chamber Music* in her setting of “Gentle Lady,” Stanojević provides a timbrally atmospheric reinforcement of the vocal line in identical-register unison, now with tremolo viola (see Example 8). The remarkable effect of beginning the song with immediate and dramatic text declamation, as opposed to an instrumental introduction of any kind, instantly captures the poem's protagonist's anguished fear of dying alone. And, similar to “Gentle Lady,” Stanojević draws from a rich palette of tertian and non-tertian dissonances to lend vibrancy to her harmonies, while subtly implying shifting tonal centers at any given



moment. The twice-stated two-chord declamations in mm. 1–4 of the opening word, "dying," both harmonizing a minor-third melodic ascent from C-sharp to E, comprise an initial octatonic-scale-based extended tertian harmony moving to an even more harsh half-step juxtaposition of Viennese tri-chords.<sup>13</sup> The two opening C-sharp/E melodic motives in the voice and viola in mm. 1 and 3, followed by the prominent bass descent from E to C-sharp in the piano in m. 3, create an environment where C-sharp minor struggles, and ultimately fails, to assert a sense of tonality. The viola's timbre gradually emerges apart from the identical-range voice among these boldly dissonant harmonies by virtue of its dynamic swell and tremolo timbre in mm. 2 and 4, following the chromatically-descending opening line from E through D-sharp to D natural that immediately depicts life draining from the protagonist.

The viola continues to have a prominent timbral role in the work. In mm. 15–18, it utilizes flautando-like glissando harmonics over the open G string, a technique famously used in Stravinsky's *Firebird*, in order to sound pitches of the G dominant seventh chord over a rich harmony that may be construed as a quasi-polytonal combination of B-flat flat-13 and E minor seven in the piano, chords upon which the natural tones G, B, D, and F of the harmonic glissando can be mapped. The timbre is launched by the word "snow" in the poem's line "Won't somebody bring the light/So I can see which way to go/Into the everlasting snow?" depicting the ethereal and blurred qualities of snowfall. Immediately following in mm. 19–23, the topic of anguish is again projected, as in the opening, in the tremolo figures of the viola's counterpoint to the vocal line singing "And 'Jesus'! Where is Jesus gone?"

The "Wiegenlied" quote, the timbre of glissando-based harmonics, and the B-flat/E polytonality are effectively combined at the work's close (see Example 9). The peaceful stability of the B-flat pedal combined with the airily quiet utterances referencing the "Wiegenlied" melody offer a sense of transcendence, as the protagonist is able to accept death now that her human companion Dollie has arrived.<sup>14</sup> The quoted melody is first sounded in piano in mm. 54–56 suggesting C major,<sup>15</sup> and then in artificial harmonics in the viola in mm. 59–end on the notes F and A-flat subtly suggesting the opening minor third between median and dominant scale degrees that open Brahms' famous tune. The dramatic opening descent in mm. 1–2, from E to D-sharp to D natural, is reversed in the piano's right hand in m. 60, suggesting a peaceful resignation and perhaps an ascending soul, an allusion made more forthright

13 A "Viennese tri-chord" comprises a pitch-class set whose prime form is 016 (see Roig-Francolí 2008, 122), and is often spaced as Stanojević has done here, with dissonant tritone and major seventh above its bass note in order to best exploit its dramatic dissonances. See, for instance, the opening to Arnold Schoenberg's "Angst und Hoffen" from *Book of the Hanging Gardens*, op. 15. Stanojević's layering of two of these highly dissonant constructs a half-step apart increases that dramatic effect.

14 "Dollie" was Emily Dickinson's sister in law, Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson.

15 Here, the composer expressively overshoots by a whole step what would have been the leap to scale-degree 1, C, of the original melody; still, the E-to-G motion in the anacrusis to m. 56 comports with the scale-degree 3 to scale-degree 5 motion in the well-known melody.

by the gently ascending false harmonics in the viola in the final three measures. The work closes with a juxtaposition of the harmonies B-flat dominant – sounded in the low-treble register in the piano's left hand and the viola's final note D – and E, suggested by the perfect fourth interval between B and E in the right hand that unfolds in the final three measures.

## RECENT ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC WORKS

### VOYAGE I

Her electro-acoustic compositional output began in the first decade of the new millennium, with a pair of works titled *Voyage I* (2006) and *Voyage II* (2007). Both works feature excerpted sounds of prominent poets – Anne Waldman of the United States, and Vosko Popa of Serbia respectively – reading their own work, along with the composer herself reading English translations of passages from the Popa poem (Popa, 1997). The three Waldman poems used in *Voyage I* are titled “Neurolinguistically: This is the Writing Dance” (2006), and two unpublished poems, “Time Around,” and “Into the Light.” The single 1968 poem of Popa's in *Voyage II* (Popa, 1973) is *Krilata svirala* (“The Winged Pipe”). In both *Voyages*, certain words are electronically manipulated by the composer and combined with vibrant, free-spirited commentary on acoustic piano. Regarding the role of the piano in both works and the title of *Voyage I*, Stanojević notes:

The piano is treated not as a solo instrument, but as an organic part of the sphere of sound. The synchronization of the piano and electroacoustic parts is accomplished in a simple, practical fashion. However, the overall impression of the combination of the piano and electroacoustic music is one of improvisatory freedom. Most of the sounds in the electroacoustic part were derived from the poet's voices using Max/MSP, and IRCAM AudioSculpt and OpenMusic software (Stanojević 2017e).

I picked the word ‘travel’ from Anne's poem<sup>16</sup> and changed it to ‘voyage.’ It seemed appropriate for the title of the cycle that uses poets/poems from different parts of the world (and different languages). I still plan to add more poets/poems to the cycle” (Stanojević 2017a).

The improvisatory freedom of which the composer speaks is immediately apparent in the opening measures of *Voyage I* (Example 10). Gestures are notated

16 Waldman's performative readings of her poetry regularly evolve, suggesting subtly novel interpretations and suggesting a freedom from any “urtext” mentality. In the recorded reading used by the composer, the poet, rather than intoning her published opening line “This is the writing dance” (Waldman 2006) instead intones “this is the writing *travel* dance” (my italics), with her voice rising a bit on the word “travel,” as if to point out the novel introduction of the new word in this particular reading.

within bars that do not suggest any particularly audible meter or change of meters. Rather, individual bars often frame rhythmically free utterances that are offset by articulative "downbeat" initiations in either the electronic sounds or piano, such as the marked change in texture with the onset of two-hand trills in m. 3, the agogic arrival in m. 5, or offset registers, such as the high C-flat of m. 6 or the low E in m. 7 that initiates a broad, upward arpeggio. These gestural "downbeat" arrivals, even amid the constantly changing time signatures, allow the listener to subtly experience the quarter-note pulse of sixty beats per minute. The perceptual pulse allows the dance topic within the poem, "Neurolinguistically: This is the writing dance," to be experienced by the listener, even in the absence of any sampling of, and thus reference to, the word "dance" in Stanojević's composition. The sampling of very few intoned words from the actual poem suggests that Stanojević's admiration for the poet's performative delivery of text is, at the very least, on par with her admiration of the broader poem. William Gibbons (Gibbons 2008: 9) draws upon Umberto Eco's notion of intertextually-informed readers (Eco 2004) – that is, readers familiar with the entirety of the referenced text – in order to suggest that a "narrative expansion" occurs in the minds of such informed readers experiencing incomplete texts in a musical setting. This allows the listener to incorporate the broader narrative or message of the text (in this case, a poem) as they experience the musical work. Such an informed reader may sense the maintained pulse and vibrantly animated piano gestures in *Voyage I* as a dance-like feature of the music.

The timbral vibrancy experienced in the work comes, in part, from Stanojević's quasi-tertian pitch selections, in conjunction with her chord spacing. The first three measures limit themselves to a collection of six notes (C, E-flat, E, G, A-flat, and B-flat) that can combine to form an extended tertian on C, as a C dominant-seventh with a split chordal third and minor thirteenth, or in jazz parlance, "C-dominant, sharp-nine, flat-thirteen." To this conglomerate, she gradually saturates her pitch palette by introducing B-natural to the collection in mm. 4–6 and other tones, C-sharp, D, and F-sharp in m. 7. The effect is a kind of harmonic stasis in mm. 1–3 and 4–6, one that is then tossed aside with dissonant saturation in m. 7. The dissonance of measure 7 is offset by the timbral resonance of the open-spaced seventh chord on E (with both major and minor chordal sevenths) in upward arpeggiation. Emphases on select pitches, such as the right hand's high G in mm. 1–4, and the right hand's C in m. 5, also contribute to this static effect. The stasis allows the listener to absorb the dissonances slowly, allowing for the intended perceptual focus on the blend of timbres between the electronic and acoustic sounds.

### THE DROPLETS OF DEW

Stanojević's recent composition for four pianos and electro-acoustic sounds, *The Droplets of Dew*, is a beautifully delicate tour de force of sculpted timbres and gestures that again draw upon the melding of acoustic sound sources complemented with electronic sounds primarily derived from those acoustic sources. The title comes

from a haiku by renowned seventeenth-century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho, which translates as follows:

*I like to wash  
the dust of this world  
in the droplets of dew.*

In sampling timbres of her own primary instrument, the piano, Stanojević seems to be entirely in her element. The roughly ten-minute work unveils more expansive moments of harmonic stasis than heard in her earlier works, which invites the listener into a more meditative space, allowing for directed focus upon the brilliant kaleidoscopic shifts in color and texture. Its material, whether featuring accessibly diatonic collections or more involved ones, is distributed with a timbral, textural, and registral acumen on par with what is experienced, for example, in a slow-tempo miniature of Webern's, such as the fifth movement from his *Sechs Bagatellen für Streichquartet* no. 5 or the fourth movement of his *Fünf Stücke für Orchester*, but now intertwined with the vibrant articulative landscape that, in more intense moments, is reminiscent of a virtuosic Ravel piano work, such as *Jeux d'eau*.

The work opens with a sound sample of a soft, single drop of water into a pool, amplified to balance with the pianos and to magnify its timbral complexities. Underneath that attack, a single G-sharp piano string is rapidly strummed with fingernails by the pianist (inside the piano, above the harp) and quietly swells, providing a quasi-tonal anchor for a series of delicate, upper-range attacks among the other pianists sounded in the opening 20 seconds of the work, muted or plucked, in articulative dialogue with the tape's water droplets (see Example 11). Those timbrally variant attacks comprise pitches that all map onto the first five notes of a G-sharp Phrygian scale (G-sharp, A, B, C-sharp, and D-sharp).

In m. 8, more complex, chromatic tone clusters are strummed. Namely, the chromatic set between D-sharp and G-flat (pitches 3, 4, 5, and 6 in "integer" notation)<sup>17</sup> in Piano 1 and the chromatic space spanning G-sharp to B-flat (pitches 8, 9, and 10) in Piano 4 three beats later. Of note is that these clusters, while providing dissonant half-step juxtapositions that softly generate complex overtones, also mostly continue to map onto the featured five-note G-sharp Phrygian pitch collection (8, 9, 11, 1, 3, 4, 6) save for the notes F (5) and B-flat (10). This static collection spans over the first 40 seconds or so of the work, providing a fixed-colored canvas that allows the listener to focus on the dialogue between the stratified entries.

A new pitch of C natural in m. 12, Piano 1, initiates a transitional chord progression spanning the next 30 seconds through m. 18, essentially implying an A-flat major dyad (A-flat/G-sharp and C), to F-sharp minor, to D-flat sharp 11, and finally B-flat minor-major, all over the strummed, pedal G-sharp in Piano 2. As seen in Example 11, the chords'

17 Integer notation simply assigns a digit to every equal-tempered pitch-class. Zero (0) is C, 1 is C-sharp or D-flat, 2 is D, 3 is E-flat or D-sharp, etc.

tertiary qualities are made explicit through their open, resonant, chordal spacings. This progression narrows down to a single, finger-muted D-flat, softly harmonized by tones in the "tape" (not shown in the score) that suggest an open fifth above a low D-flat (D-flat, A-flat, and E-flat), above which a softer sounding F is heard, suggesting a D-flat major 9 harmony. The tape then shifts its harmony to a soft B-flat/C dyad, conjoining with the solitary plucked D-flat to suggest the B-flat minor harmony implied in the earlier progression, a chord that will anchor the exclusively static B-flat minor pitch collection for a roughly two-and-a-half-minute span. During that span, washes of color abound through alternations between string-strummed ascending and conventionally executed ascending and descending sweeps of the first five tones of B-flat minor in Piano 4, while other pianos provide more conventionally performed washes of arpeggiated minor ninth harmonies projected in a soft whirl of delicate cross-rhythms (see Example 12).

The break from that stasis at around the 3'50" mark (consult the Soundcloud recording) then builds into more complex pitch collections that complement a larger, end-weighted build in dynamics and texture, one that never entirely abandons the implicit B-flat center that eventually closes the work.

The extensive use of stasis in *The Droplets of Dew* complements Basho's haiku exquisitely, allowing the listener to focus on the rhythms and contours of the literal washes of sound conveyed in Stanojević's gestures. In that sense, our musical experience is one in which the dust of our own worlds is washed in droplets of dew, those notes carefully splashed across all of the composer's scores, much to our delight.

## CONCLUSION

Stanojević's rather eclectic artistic path is one that leaves in its wake a collection of beautiful works that seem to elude any given geographically, culturally, or performance-medium defined school of composition. Her early musical career involved studies in piano, theory, and composition at the Mokranjac School of Music in Belgrade, and featured a number of performances of her music in and around Belgrade in the mid-1980s that came after she was awarded that city's renowned October Prize in the young composers' category. Yet, her adult studies came after she left Serbia (then part of Yugoslavia) for Russia at the age of 18, followed by studies in the United States at age 26. Her music is not absent of Serbian influences or topics, as evinced a number of her works, such as *Dance: To the End of the Circle*, her earlier *Kolo/at the edge* String Quartet,<sup>18</sup> or *Voyage II*, framed around sound samples of famed Serbian poet Vasko Popa. Additionally, in her latest composition, *Triptych* for string quartet, one arguably hears in the opening movement, "In a Circle," a loose evocation of the *tamburitsa* ensemble in its syncopated pizzicato gestures and audible time signature changes (See Example 12). The literal encircling of the pitch A by half-steps G-sharp and B-flat recalls Bartók's penchant for axial symmetry, while also providing a simple canvas of pitches that allow the listener to focus on the passage's rhythmic and timbral intricacies.

18 Performed at the International Review of Contemporary Music, Belgrade, 1995.

Yet, she has never thought of herself as belonging to any one compositional trend. For example, this newest work, *Triptych*,<sup>19</sup> comprises a return to a more conventional medium, the string quartet, following a number of more experimental and improvisatory electro-acoustic works such as *Uncaged* (2015–16). A number of forthcoming commissions are, again, for conventional mediums, including a duo for two flutes to be premiered in Belgrade (April, 2018), a piano concerto for symphonic wind band to be premiered in her resident city of Columbus (at Ohio State University), and a piano trio. The upcoming April 2018 Belgrade premiere, in addition to being a featured composer in May, 2018 at the *Umjetnost i žena* (*Art and Woman*) Music Festival at the Art Academy in Osijek, Croatia, are inroads for the composer towards her long-held goal of bringing performances of her music closer to her original home of Belgrade. The composer herself is quick to note “belonging to all, or at least many, current trends is, in its own way, tantamount to belonging to none. I make use of what I feel best expresses my idea in any given context, be it something that belongs to my own musical culture, or writing in a post-minimalist, spectral, or more traditionally tonal manner. In that sense, I don’t think of myself as belonging to any one trend or movement” (Stanojević, 2017d). Trend or none, as titles of her works throughout her career illustrate, all of her music shares a desire to powerfully express human affect, and, in every gesture, does so with admirable qualities of timbral sensitivity and exquisite timing.

19 *Triptych* is a three-movement string quartet (performed *attaca*), commissioned by the New York based Mivos Quartet, who premiered it in October of 2017.

## Examples:

## Chamber Music

I

The image displays two systems of a musical score for Chamber Music, "Gentle Lady".

**System 1:**

- Flute:** Starts with a first ending bracket [1] and a tempo marking of *Lento* with a metronome marking of ♩ = 56. The music begins in 5/4 time and transitions to 6/4. Dynamics include *pp* and *(gliss.)*. The instruction *sempre poco animato* is present.
- Clarinet (Bb):** Starts with *con sord.* and *ppp* (gliss.) *pp*. It transitions to *senza sord.* and *mp*.
- Violoncello:** Starts with *pp* and *con sord.*. It transitions to *senza sord.* and *mp*.
- Voice:** Lyrics: "Gen - tle La - dy, O, Gen - tle La - dy." Dynamics range from *mp* to *mf*.
- Piano:** Accompanying piano part with dynamics *p* and *mp*.

**System 2:**

- Fl.:** Starts with a second ending bracket [2] and a tempo marking of ♩ = 66. Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*
- Cl.:** Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*
- Vc.:** Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*
- Voice:** Lyrics: "do no, do no, do no." Dynamics include *mf* and *cresc.*
- Pia.:** Dynamics include *mp* and *cresc.*

Example 1: Opening to Chamber Music, "Gentle Lady"

## Dance: To the End Of the Circle

*1* Allegro ritmico (♩=ca. 172)

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in A

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Timpani

Percussion

Piano

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double bass

Tambourine (fingers)

*p*

*mp*

*sempre marcato e secco*

Allegro ritmico (♩=ca. 172)

*mp*

*sempre marcato*

*mp*

*sempre marcato*

Example 2: Measures 1–3 of Dance: To the End of the Circle



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22

Fl. 1.

Ob.

Cl. *a 2* *mp* *leggero e poco ironico*

Bsn. *a 2* *f* *ff* *p*

Hn. *open* *f* *ff*

Tpt.

Timp. *f*

Perc.

Pno. *f* *ff* *unis.*

Vln I. *mp* *leggero e poco ironico* *sim.*

Vln II.

Vla. *unis.* *pizz. div.* *p*

Vc. *unis.* *f* *ff* *pizz.* *p*

Db. *f* *ff* *pizz.* *p*

Example 3: Measures 22–4 of *Dance: To the End of the Circle*

116 **Lento; rubato**

Fl. - - - - -

Ob. - - - - -

Cl. *pp* 1.  $\overbrace{\text{triple}}^3$   $\overbrace{\text{triple}}^3$  *pp*

Bsn. - - - - -

Hn. *p*

Tpt. - - - - -

Timp. - - - - -

Perc. - - - - - *mp* *l.v.* *crotale*

Vln I *mp* *arco* *Seducente*

Vln II *p* *arco; con sord. (off)*  $\overbrace{\text{triple}}^3$   $\overbrace{\text{triple}}^3$

Vla *p* *con sord. (off)*  $\overbrace{\text{triple}}^3$   $\overbrace{\text{triple}}^3$

Vc. *pp unis.* *arco* *pizz. non div.*

Db. *p* *pizz.*

Example 4: Measures 116–120 of Dance: To the End of the Circle

Example 4, continued: Measures 116–120 of Dance: To the End of the Circle

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34

102

Fl. *f*

Ob. *f*

Cl. *f*

Bsn. *f*

Hn. *f*

Tpt. *f* 1.(open)

Timp. *ff* > slap stick

Perc. Snare Drum (snares on) *f* > rim shot

Pno. *f* *ff*

Vln I *f* div. *ff*

Vln II *f* div. *ff*

Vla. *f* *ff*

Vc. *f* *ff*

Db. *f* *ff*

Example 5: Measures 102–108 of *Dance: To the End of the Circle*

Example 5 (continued): Measures 102–108 of *Dance: To the End of the Circle*

39 *fff*  
 Wait  
*ff* *molto espr. e poco rubato*  
 ♯ (hold until the next marked change)

43 *rall.*..... *a Tempo ma poco rubato* *rit.*.... *a Tempo*  
*p* *part.* *sempre poco a poco cresc. al*  
*mp* *pp* *pp* *loco*  
 I hear her feet, her feet, her feet up - on the stair!

Example 6: Stanojević's musical quote from Brahms' "Wiegenlied," beginning in m. 44 (mm. 39–51 shown), in "Dying" from *Hommage à Emily*

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 "DROPLETS OF DEW: THE MUSIC OF VERA STANOJEVIC"

## Dying!

Emily Dickinson Vera Stanojevic

(when pedal use is not specified apply it *ad lib.*)

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Example 7: "Dying," from *Hommage à Emily*, mm. 1–23.

52 *mp espr. ma dolce* *rit. ....*

Death... won't... hurt... now... Dollie's... *rit. ....*

58 *p* *rall. al Fine*

Dollie's... here *rall. al Fine*

*p* *gliss.* *gliss.*

*ppp*

Example 8: "Dying!" from *Hommage à Emily*, mm. 52–end

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## Voyage

♩ = 60 after Anne Waldman Time....

Electroacoustic Sounds

Piano

3 13" Ground.... 17"

El. Sounds

Pno.

6 22" 26"

El. Sounds

Pno.

Example 9: Voyage I, mm. 1-7:

## The Droplets of Dew

Vera Stanojevic

♩ = 60      0:00      0:04      0:12      0:20

Tape

Piano 1

muted (press the strings with fingers near the nut and play on the keyboard) *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *f*

ord. *mf* *p* *f*

Piano 2

silently depress the key and strum the string *mp* *mf* *sim.*

Piano 3

pluck the string *mp* *sim.*

Piano 4

silently depress the keys and strum the strings *p* *mf* *p* *f*

8      0:24      0:40

Pno. 1

*f* silently depress the keys and strum the strings *mp* *ord.* *mp*

Pno. 2

*mp* *sim.*

Pno. 3

*p*

Pno. 4

let ring *f*

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 "DROPLETS OF DEW: THE MUSIC OF VERA STANOJEVIĆ"

15 0:52 1:00 1:08 muted 1:20

Pno. 1 *mp* *p*

Pno. 2

Pno. 3 pluck the strings *mf*

Pno. 4

24 1:36

Pno. 1

Pno. 2 muted (press the strings with fingers near the nut and play on the keyboard) *mf* *mf*

Pno. 3 *mf* let ring

Pno. 4 silently depress the keys and strum the strings; do not emphasize the beat *mf* *sim.*

Example 10: Opening of *The Droplets of Dew*, mm. 1–27 (continued)

34

2:16 (muted) 2:24

Pno. 1

*mf* *mf* *mp*

Pno. 2

let ring *mp*

Pno. 3

*mf* pluck the strings

Pno. 4

39

2:28 2:32 ord.

Pno. 1

*mp* *mf* *p* *pp*

Pno. 2

*mp* *mf* *pp* let ring

Pno. 3

Pno. 4

ord. *p* *mp* let ring *una corda*

Example 11: *The Droplets of Dew*, mm. 34–43.

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## МАЈКА ОРАВИЦ

## КАПИ РОСЕ: МУЗИКА ВЕРЕ СТАНОЈЕВИЋ

## (САЖЕТАК)

Српско-америчка композиторка Вера Станојевић једна је од многобројних успешних уметница и уметника српског порекла који већ дуго живе и раде у иностранству (Medić 2014). Њени успеси током последње две деценије обухватају велики број награда, поруцбина и наступа у својству гостујућег композитора на престижним музичким фестивалима. Животни пут је ову композиторку водио из Србије до Русије, а затим до Сједињених Америчких Држава. Једна од константи током читаве њене композиторске каријере јесте љубав према клавиру, иако Вера Станојевић није пуно писала за овај инструмент – али се инспирисала његовим валерима. Њена одлука да студира у Москви првобитно је била подстакнута жељом да апсорбује традицију чувене руске пијанистичке школе, али и да овлада компоновањем у стилу руских мајстора XX века, првенствено Шостаковича и Прокофјева. Међутим, њено интересовање за тембр и за стваралаштво спектралиста попут Жерара Гризеа (Gérard Grisey), Тристана Мураја (Tristan Murail) и Клода Вивијеа (Claude Vivier) навело је да се посвети испитивању могућности електроакустичке музике и допринело њеној одлуци да студира композицију на Државном универзитету Охаја. Данас Вера Станојевић живи и ствара у Коламбусу, главном граду државе Охајо, где се налази и поменути универзитет. У овом раду, након кратког осврта на значајне моменте из композиторкине биографије, хронолошки истражујем композиционе приступе које Вера Станојевић примењује у својим акустичким и електроакустичким остварењима. У свим њеним скорашњим делима, без обзира на то да ли је у њима коришћена електроника, приметно је усмерење на тембр. У електроакустичким остварењима, електронски звуци су углавном изведени из акустичких извора коришћених у самим композицијама, или евоцираних у њима, чиме се остварује комплементарност електронских и акустичких боја, наместо њиховог оштрог контраста.

Кључне речи: Вера Станојевић, тембр, електроакустичка дела, пост-тонална музика, композициони процес