# MUSIC AND SOCIETY
# IN EASTERN EUROPE

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## Table of Contents

# ARTICLES

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# IN THE ORBIT OF SHOSTAKOVICH: VASILIJE MOKRANJAC'S SYMPHONIES[1]

Born into a famous Serbian musical dynasty,[2] Vasilije Mokranjac (1923-1984) emerged as a distinctive talent on his own and became one of the most renowned Serbian/Yugoslav composers of the second half of the twentieth century, a distinguished professor of composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade and a Fellow of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Mainly lauded as a symphonist, he also wrote piano music, as well as music for radio, film and theatre. He won the most prestigious awards in the former Yugoslavia, including the Lifetime Achievement Award. However, his output is virtually unknown outside the former Yugoslav region. An introverted man, who was not keen on self-promotion, Mokranjac did not seek international recognition and rarely ventured out of the country. Moreover, his career was tragically cut short when, aged 60, he committed suicide.

In this article I will argue that the symphonies of Dmitrii Shostakovich (1907-1975) provided a possible model for Mokranjac's symphonic conception. Arguably the greatest twentieth-century symphonist, Shostakovich proved that it was possible to successfully merge "realist" iconology with the nineteenth-century symphonic models and yet create compelling and relevant music. But while it is widely recognised that Shostakovich influenced generations of Soviet/Russian composers, the impact of his symphonies outside of the Soviet Union – especially in the countries such as Yugoslavia that did not belong to the Eastern Bloc and thus stood outside of the immediate Soviet cultural sphere – has rarely been investigated.

Although my decision to compare Mokranjac to Shostakovich in the first ever English-language study of Mokranjac's symphonies might seem

2. Three generations of the Mokranjac family were musicians; one of his ancestors was Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856-1914), the prominent Serbian composer from the late nineteenth-early twentieth century.

problematic in that it poses a risk of him being seen as just one of Shostakovich's countless epigones, it is a convenient way of introducing Mokranjac to a vast majority of readers who are not familiar with his oeuvre.[3] While it is impossible to prove that Mokranjac was directly influenced by Shostakovich, due to the lack of written and oral testimonies, I aim to demonstrate that there are numerous similarities in their approaches to the challenge of writing a "great" symphony in the twentieth century. The fact that Mokranjac lived and worked in a country that had effectively been an Ottoman colony for several centuries and only started to establish its cultural institutions and professional musical life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that there was no local symphonic tradition to build upon; hence, the composers had to look for role models elsewhere.

Just like Shostakovich, Mokranjac is essentially an heir to the late Romantic symphonies; the protagonist of his symphonies is always an individual (possibly the artist himself) struggling against the oppressive and menacing outer world. I will show to what extent Mokranjac's symphonies relied upon Shostakovichian paradigm, but also point to the areas where they departed from his model. While analysing Shostakovich's possible influence on Mokranjac's symphonies, I will situate Mokranjac's output within the Serbian post-World War Two musical scene, analyze specific traits of his symphonic style and attempt to decode his musical symbolism in order to answer a tricky (and tacky) question: did the composer somehow announce his suicide in his music?

## From Socialist Realism to Moderated Modernism

The end of the World War Two found Serbia (and the entire former Yugoslavia) impoverished and demolished. The late 1940s saw the emergence of the first generation of composers trained at the Belgrade Music Academy (nowadays Faculty of Music), which had only been founded in 1937. However, their point of departure was not the avant-garde output of Serbian composers educated in Prague in the late 1920s and early 1930s, mostly in the class of Alois Hába. Upon their return to Belgrade in the late 1930s, the members of this so-called "Prague Group" realised that the time was not yet ripe for Serbian avant-garde music, for two reasons; the first being the fact that the most advanced contemporary music was not well-received by the audiences, and that the critics, composers and performers

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3. In Serbia, Mokranjac's symphonies have been discussed in a book and a series of articles, but the issue of Shostakovich's possible influence has never been raised. See: Marija Kovač, *Simfonijska muzika Vasilija Mokranjca* [The Symphonies of Vasilije Mokranjac] (Belgrade: Association of Serbian Composers, 1984); Vlastimir Peričić, "Druga simfonija Vasilija Mokranjca" [Second Symphony], *Zvuk*, no. 69 (1966); Dušan Skovran, "Treća simfonija Vasilija Mokranjca" [Third Symphony], *Pro musica*, no. 37 (1968): 10-11; Vlastimir Peričić, "Četvrta simfonija Vasilija Mokranjca" [Fourth Symphony], *Pro musica*, no. 65 (1973): 16-19; etc.

worldwide were aware of the "crisis".[4] Many composers who initially advocated for an equation of radical avant-garde music with the radical political left changed their orientation towards more accessible styles, even before the outbreak of World War Two.[5] A member of the "Prague Group", Stanojlo Rajičić (1910-2000) recalled that, upon their return to Serbia, he and his peers realised that "to continue using contemporary musical language meant that one's music would not be performed and would not be understood."[6] The second reason was the underdevelopment of Serbian musical life and its institutions in general. As observed by Melita Milin, "The negation of tradition, which is one of [avant-garde's] main positions, [. . .] was too radical for a young musical culture which had been trying to establish its own tradition during the last century with a lot of enthusiasm and effort."[7]

After the war had ended and the Communist Party seized power, the doctrine of Socialist Realism became – albeit only for a brief period of time – the official cultural norm in the newly established Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (later Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Although Yugoslav artists escaped the harsh denunciations that their peers in the countries of the Eastern Bloc were subjected to, the composers were still expected to write accessible, tonal music, loosely based upon "national" musical premises. The professional upbringing of Vasilije Mokranjac and his fellow students, who begun their studies in the immediate post-war years, was influenced by a mixture of social and political circumstances, academic rules and canons. As acknowledged by Mokranjac's classmate Vlastimir Peričić (1927-2000), in the immediate post-war years the representatives of three generations of composers – the elder conservatives, the former avant-gardists who had "converted" (willy-nilly) to Socialist Realism, and their young students – were using almost identical musical language.[8] Another composer, Vladan Radovanović

4. In response to this situation the most outspoken member of the "Prague Group", Vojislav Vučković (1910-1942) wrote an essay "A crisis of contemporary music and the ways of overcoming it." Vučković's ideas are discussed in Jelena Milojković-Đurić, *Usponi srpske kulture – Muzički, književni i likovni život 1918-1941* [The Rises of Serbian Culture: Musical, Literary and Artistic Life 1918-1941] (Sremski Karlovci/Novi Sad: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, 2008), pp. 118-26.

5. See Jelena Milojković-Djurić, "Avenues of the Avant-Garde," in *Tradition and Avant-Garde: The Arts in Serbian Culture between the Two World Wars* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984), pp. 99-105.

6. Milojković-Đurić, *Usponi srpske kulture*, p. 131.

7. Melita Milin, *Tradicionalno i novo u srpskoj muzici posle Drugog svetskog rata (1945-1965)* [Traditional and New in Serbian Music after the World War Two (1945-1965)] (Belgrade: The Institute of Musicology of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1998), p. 84.

8. Vlastmir Peričić, "Tendencije razvoja srpske muzike posle 1945. godine" [Tendencies of Development of Serbian Music after 1945], *Muzički talas*, no. 26 (2000): 70.

(1932-) used the term "academic classicism" to describe the rigid canon that the composition students were subjected to at the beginning of their careers.[9] Peričić acknowledged that the young composers grew up in the atmosphere which did not encourage them to take a trip into the unknown; hence, the springs of academism, i.e., modernized neo-romanticism with elements of (pseudo)national style spread well beyond 1950.[10]

A general opinion among music professionals in the early 1950s was that composers should seek novelty, but without discarding traditional artistic means; also, that gradual and continuous introduction of new techniques was more desirable than an abrupt break with the past.[11] The word "new" here has a conditional meaning, since in the post-war Serbia even neoclassicism could be perceived as new, because that style had barely existed in the local pre-war musical scene.[12] Thus, Socialist Realism gradually evolved into moderated modernism: modern(ist) enough to promote the country's relative openness to the world, but not radical enough to disturb the establishment.[13]

Another reason that contributed towards a preference for academicism in the post-war years was the fact that the Belgrade Music Academy was still only a decade old, with its professors fearful of dilettantism. Hence they insisted that students should master traditional forms of European classical music, believing that without a solid technical base there could be no "superstructure".[14] Mokranjac's composition teacher, Stanojlo Rajičić, a former member of the "Prague Group", turned into a proponent of this autocratic teaching methodology. Furthermore, Serbian composers had been additionally burdened with the task of contributing towards establishing a respectable local symphonic tradition. In post-war communist Serbia and Yugoslavia, the "great" symphony was regarded as a "supreme" genre, the crown of composers' achievements. The reasons for such a stance were twofold, the first being the fact that the symphony was still a gravely underdeveloped genre in Serbian music.[15] Secondly, the symphony was ascribed a special semantic/symbolic meaning, influenced by the Soviet

9. Ivana Janković [Medić], "Sintezijska umetnost Vladana Radovanovića" [The Synthesic Art of Vladan Radovanović], *Muzikologija*, no. 3 (2003): 141–86.

10. Peričić, "Tendencije razvoja srpske muzike posle 1945. godine," pp. 66-67.

11. Milin, *Tradicionalno i novo u srpskoj muzici posle Drugog svetskog rata (1945-1965)*, pp. 56–59.

12. See, for example, Pavle Stefanović, "Dva seva munje u našoj muzičkoj žabokrečini" [Two Lightning-Strikes in Our Musical Conferva], *Književne novine*, 25 March 1954.

13. *Moderated modernism* is an oxymoron which denotes a non-challenging, non-radical form of modernism. See Ivana Medić, "The Ideology of Moderated Modernism in Serbian Music and Musicology," *Muzikologija*, no. 7 (2007): 279-94.

14. Peričić, "Tendencije razvoja srpske muzike posle 1945. godine," pp. 68–70; Kovač, *Simfonijska muzika Vasilija Mokranjca*, pp. 1–6.

15. The very first Serbian symphony was only written in 1907 – it was a youthful work by Petar Konjović (1883-1970) – and the first symphony orchestra in Serbia, Belgrade Philharmonic, was founded even later, in 1923.

Marxist aesthetics that regarded symphony as a "substitute" for the Mass in the atheist/agnostic contemporary world.[16] In other words, the symphony was understood as a bearer of humanist and moral values that the Mass had once stood for. Moreover, the reliance of East European communist governments (including both Soviet and Yugoslav) on a collective mythology of World War Two heroism and collective partisan resistance fostered commitment to a Beethovenian type of heroic symphonism. Eric Roseberry observed that "the revolutionary culture that nurtured Shostakovich experienced something of a rebirth of symphonic commitment. [. . .] Far from being creatively inhibiting, the Beethoven canon, with its fresh post-revolutionary optimism, could be viewed as positively enabling. The Soviet symphony [. . .] became for Shostakovich, as for his colleagues, a medium through which to appear to meet the socio-political expectations of the Soviet ideology."[17]

Since the late 1950s, Yugoslav composers and critics started to have regular contacts with the West. However, it was chiefly after the Biennial of Contemporary Music was founded in Zagreb (the capital of Croatia) in 1961 that the composers were strongly encouraged to assimilate at least some of the latest avant-garde techniques (for example aleatorics, micropolyphony and, to a lesser extent, serialism). Ever since its foundation the Biennial welcomed the most important contemporary composers such as Stockhausen, Lutosławski, Kagel, Schaeffer (all in 1961), Cage, Stravinsky (both in 1963) and many others, and provided the young Yugoslav composers with up-to-date information on all the latest compositional trends and techniques.

Although most scholars who analyzed the "post-Bienniale" period in Yugoslav music considered it avant-garde, it is my belief that a majority of composers who were regarded as representatives of the so-called "local avant-garde"[18] actually belong to moderated modernism.[19] The reason for such an assessment is that the "local avant-garde" never really questioned

16. See Mark Aranovskii, *Simfonicheskie iskaniia – Problema zhanra simfonii v sovetskoi muzyke 1960-1975 godov* [Symphonic quests – Problems of the symphonic genre in the Soviet music 1960-1975] (Leningrad: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1979), p. 27. Aranovskii stated outright: "The symphony is a complex construction of signs, a statement, consisting of 'words' with certain meanings." *Ibid.*, p. 160.

17. Eric Roseberry, "Personal integrity and public service: the voice of the symphonist," in Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), p. 9.

18. M. Veselinović-Hofman introduced the notions of the "local avant-garde" and "pseudo-avantgarde" to address the problem of avant-gardes in the countries "outside" of European artistic "matrix". See Mirjana Veselinović, *Stvaralačka prisutnost evropske avangarde u nas* [The Creative Presence of the European Avant-garde in Our Country] (Belgrade: The University of Arts, 1983), pp. 33-34.

19. There are just a few exceptions, such as the aforementioned Vladan Radovanović, or the members of the Fluxus-influenced avant-garde group Opus 4; however, this group was only founded in 1976.

the ideology of moderated modernism, i.e., the determination to open to-
wards Europe and "modernize" Yugoslav cultural life, but not at the cost of
destroying the existing institutions of musical and cultural life, and without
calling for the radical denial of tradition.[20] This, however, did not prevent
the apologists of the "local avant-garde" from being critical of the more
conservative strands of moderated modernism. On the other hand, the con-
servative critics praised the moderated language for its presumed commu-
nicative superiority over the more radical musical means. A fairly typical
attitude is expressed by Dejan Despić, who asserted that Mokranjac "did
not pay attention to all sorts of avant-garde experiments, least to those
which only found their purpose in themselves; and, yet, he expressed him-
self in a musical language which could not be denied contemporaneity. His
works (. . .) have proved that the value of a work of art does not depend on
its style but on its contents."[21] Neither of the two factions had a decisive
discursive power in Serbia; there was never a consensus which composers
were indisputably "the greatest", and this "democratic" situation quite
smoothly evolved into postmodern pluralism.

## Mokranjac, the Symphonist

The turn of events since the early 1950s proved quite traumatic for the
composers of Mokranjac's generation, who did not know how to cope with
the suddenly acquired artistic freedoms and the influx of new styles and
techniques. Many composers went through creative crises: some of them,
such as the aforementioned Vlastimir Peričić, or Dragutin Gostuški (1923-
1998) abandoned composition altogether and devoted themselves to teach-
ing and writing; others, such as Dejan Despić (1930-) continued to write
prolifically using the neoclassical idiom. Finally, some composers, includ-
ing Mokranjac, tried to "modernize" their musical language; however, this
was a long and painstaking process, as they were unable (or unwilling) to
adopt the most advanced avant-garde compositional techniques.

At first glance, Mokranjac's output seems very many-sided, almost
schizophrenically disjointed. This is true of many professional composers
who were living under the communist regimes and were forced to write
different types of music to respond to different cultural needs.[22] After
graduating composition in 1951, Mokranjac produced a series of virtuosic
yet intimate piano pieces, without any epic pretence. Mokranjac's piano

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20. György Peteri defines this position as *defensive integrationism*. See György Peteri,
"Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in Hungary in 1960s," *Slavonica*, 10, no. 2
(2004): 119-20.

21. Despić, *In memoriam Vasilije Mokranjac*, p. 60.

22. For example, Mokranjac's Soviet contemporary Alfred Schnittke admitted that he
often felt like a "split personality," being forced to write one type of music to make a
living, and entirely different music to satisfy his creative urges. Alfred Schnittke, "On Film
and Film Music (1972, 1984, 1989)," in Alexander Ivashkin, ed., *A Schnittke Reader*, trans.
John Goodlife (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 2002), p. 50.

suites (*Seven Etudes, Six Dances, Fragments*, etc.) became immensely popular and entered the repertoires of music students and professional pianists alike. The organisations such as *Jeunesses Musicales* organised concert tours as part of the government's agenda to erase the class and cultural boundaries and to bring culture "to the masses"; thus, Mokranjac's works were performed for the most diverse audiences, including factory workers and elementary school pupils, by the outstanding pianists of the time. Between 1952 and 1971 Mokranjac also wrote 23 scores of applied music. Although his stage and film music is solidly crafted, it still fulfils a predefined role and does not count among Mokranjac's most inspired pages.

It was only in the early sixties that Mokranjac finally turned to orchestral music.[23] His orchestral output can be roughly divided in two distinctive groups, the first one comprising the more ambitious works – five symphonies and the *Lyric Poem* (1974), while the second group contains predominantly neoclassical single-movement works such as *Overture* (1962), *Divertimento* (1967), *Sinfonietta* (1969), *Concert Overture* (1969). These works, often commissioned by Serbian chamber orchestras, could be regarded as Mokranjac's "occasion pieces", not much different from his applied music. In these works Mokranjac rarely ventures beyond the tried and tested neoclassical means courtesy of Hindemith or Stravinsky.

The symphonies are a completely different fare. Discouraged from venturing into the "supreme" genre earlier, Mokranjac only tackled the symphony in his late thirties. By establishing himself as a symphonist, Mokranjac gave credibility to his entire oeuvre; it could even be said that Mokranjac invented a "moral persona"[24] for himself (or maybe it was invented it for him by his admirers). Namely, he was regarded by his contemporaries as an intellectual-humanist, who was deeply concerned with the fate of the mankind. The reviews of Mokranjac's new works and obituaries written on occasion of his tragic death testify that he was regarded as "a contemplative and grieving soul,"[25] "a profound spirit of noble tolerance [. . .] a creature of utmost transcendental compassion,"[26] who "tried to understand the past and the future, and the meaning of life,"[27] and in whose works "a battle for the survival of mankind is fought, but also an individual's battle to find its place in that world." [28]

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23. Unless we count in his graduation piece, *Dramatic Overture*, written in 1950.

24. A term coined by Roseberry to refer to Dmitrii Shostakovich's social role. See Roseberry, "Personal integrity and public service . . .", p. 9.

25. Pavle Stefanović, "Vasilije Mokranjac (1923-1984)," Third Program No. 60, I–1984, p. 19.

26. Dušan Trbojević, Enriko Josif, Svetlana Maksimović, *Sećanje na Vasilija Mokranjca* [Remembering Vasilije Mokranjac], *Pro musica*, br. 123 (1984): 28.

27. Despić, "In memoriam Vasilije Mokranjac (1923-1984)," pp. 59-60.

28. Marija Kovač, liner notes to CD *Odabrana orkestarska dela Vasilija Mokranjca*, [Vasilije Mokranjac's Selected Orchestral Works] (Belgrade: Association of Yugoslav Composers, 1998), pp. 5-6.

Mokranjac's First Symphony (1961), while technically well-constructed, featured an uneasy attempt at merging some Socialist-Realist remnants (such as rigid classical form, folk-tinged melodies, e.g., a folksong-inspired subsidiary theme of the first movement) with the more daring expressionist outbursts. However, this symphony did plant the seeds for the future, not least because it introduced some of the Leitmotifs that Mokranjac would use almost obsessively in his later works.

I will now analyse two of Mokranjac's five symphonies. In order to demonstrate to what extent they rely on Shostakovichian models, I will use Eric Roseberry's "dictionary" of Shostakovich's musical symbols and thematic processes.[29] Roseberry himself based his "dictionary" on the Western iconology of tonal tensions as expounded by Deryck Cooke.[30]

*Symphony No. 2 in F (1965)*

Mokranjac's second foray into the symphonic genre is one of his most striking works. There is a significant link between the First and the Second, because the thematic core of the First Symphony – the "*pre*-motif" as dubbed by Kovač[31] – is recontextualised and reused in the Second. The symphony is written in four movements, joined *attacca* and unified by the same material. In particular, the third movement can be regarded as a continuation of the second. The main thematic core of the entire cycle is presented in the Introduction of the first movement, *Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro*. It consists of two short motifs, "a"– played *pp* and based on a descending minor second and an ascending sixth, thus bearing some distant generic kinship with Wagner's "Tristan" motif – and "b" – played *ff* and consisting of a repeated cluster.

EXAMPLE 1 – V. Mokranjac, Second Symphony, first movement – "a" and "b".
(Score published by Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 1972).

29. Eric Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content, and Thematic Process in the Symphonies, Cello Concertos, and String Quartets of Shostakovich*, PhD diss. (New York/London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1989,

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-27.

31. Kovač, *Simfonijska muzika Vasilija Mokranjca*, p. 17.

Both these motifs bear similarities with motifs frequently employed by Shostakovich. According to Roseberry, Shostakovich was literally "obsessed" with the falling semitone, a "well-established symbol of woe in the Western tradition."[32] On the other hand, the repeated clusters of "b" bear resemblance to Shostakovich's oft-employed anapaest figures which, according to Roseberry, represent "a personal motto associated with striving expression"[33]; but also to martial rhythms, which can be found in many of his works, always associated with war-related evil (most notably in the Seventh Symphony). All these commonplace motifs can be regarded as part of the "genetic well of cultural memory"[34] and both Shostakovich and Mokranjac used them as convenient means of evoking "Tristanesque" woe and sorrow, on the one hand, and fear, threat and the inability to express oneself on the other. Whether Mokranjac "borrowed" these motifs directly from Shostakovich or from a more mediatory source (Wagner, Mahler, etc.) is impossible to determine; but the kinship is obvious.

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32. Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content, and Thematic Process* . . . , pp. 331-33.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
34. Alexander Ivashkin, "Introduction," in George Odam, ed., *Seeking the Soul – The Music of Alfred Schnittke* (London: Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 2002), p. 5.

The main theme of Mokranjac's Symphony No. 2 is stated at Fig. 2, in tempo *Allegro*, featuring a brusque chromatic motif of narrow range, followed by consecutive augmented and perfect fourths.

EXAMPLE 2 – V. Mokranjac, Second Symphony, first movement – the main theme.
(Score published by Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 1972).



The narrow chromatic motifs are very typical of Shostakovich; most notably, his own monogram D-S-C-H (i.e., D-E flat-C-B). Moreover, Roseberry notes that the arpeggiated fourth as a theme-building interval is no less ubiquitous in Shostakovich.[35] As I have mentioned, Mokranjac employed a motif based on consecutive fourths as a thematic core of his First Symphony. By being reutilised in the Second, this "pre-motif" possibly acquires a meaning of representing the composer himself. This theme evolves into a fully-fledged march at Fig. 3, thus suggesting that the main plot is an individual's destiny in times of war. The second theme (Fig. 9, *Poco meno mosso*) is based on the motif "a" from the Introduction – the musical representation of sorrow and suffering.

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35. "A particularly characteristic fourth figure in Shostakovich is the arpeggiation of a perfect and sharpened fourth as a melodic anacrusis." Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content, and Thematic Process* . . . , pp. 339-40.

The entire Development, starting from Fig. 11, is based on the martial rendition of the first theme; it is joined from Fig. 15 by the second theme, played *fff*. Both themes sound together at the culmination point (Fig. 16); the second theme is "sharpened" by harsh trills. The second culmination occurs at Fig. 18: themes are presented in such a way that they "mirror" each other; perhaps the composer's point is that war and woe are inseparable. This section finishes with a true cataclysm, an "explosion" of sound at Fig. 19. A short Coda, instead of recapitulation, rounds up this extremely dramatic movement; after the explosion, only scattered fragments of the first theme remain, followed by a "threnody" in woodwinds and strings, based on the theme of sorrow.

The symphony continues with a funeral march (*Adagio grave*). Unsurprisingly, Roseberry asserts that "one of Shostakovich's most pervasive leitmotifs in his late works is that of the funeral march."[36] In Mokranjac's symphony, the main "funeral" theme is repeated four times, separated by short "episodes" based on motifs from the first movement (descending chromatic movement and consecutive fourths – the "pre-motif"). From Fig. 7 the ominous trills from the culmination of the first movement return, announcing another "explosion" at Fig. 8. The movement ends suddenly and violently.

The third movement, although in a sharply contrasting tempo (*Presto*) actually continues where the second movement was cut short, and appears like a large contrasting episode within it. It is an "evil" scherzo – another type frequently found in Shostakovich's symphonies.[37] In Mokranjac's symphony, the main scherzo theme, based on "a" from the Introduction, is interrupted two times by *tutti* clusters. It is followed by ascending and descending "pre-motif", interrupted by the same clusters. At Fig. 5 (*Poco meno mosso*) the scherzo is briefly substituted by a march based on the "pre-motif", but it resumes from Fig. 6. At Fig. 12 a quiet Coda reveals that the scherzo theme bears generic kinship with the *Dies irae* sequence; unsurprisingly, Roseberry argues that the frequent employment of a falling minor third in Shostakovich's works as a symbol of pain has its origin in *Dies irae*.[38] The third movement ends with a return to the "funebre" second movement; another battle has ended, it is time to bury and mourn the dead.

The fourth movement contains the final battle. Kovač describes the form of this movement as Rondo with episodes.[39] However, the main theme actually only appears twice in its recognisable form, played by timpani and piano, at Figs. 1 and 12; both times it is announced by a short introduction (although a brief reminiscence to the theme is heard at Fig. 6[+4]).

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
39. Kovač, *Simfonijska muzika Vasilija Mokranjca*, p. 40.

Therefore the form is better described as tripartite, with a developmental middle section based on·the main theme, from Figs. 5 to 11. The theme itself is again martial in character; the fact that it is performed by the piano is important in the light of the fact that Mokranjac himself was a pianist and author of arguably the best and most enduringly popular piano oeuvre in Serbia. Thus, one might argue that in this movement he finally reveals himself as a protagonist of the battle. Apart from the martial rhythm Mokranjac reintroduces several motifs from previous movements, such as the motifs built out of consecutive and parallel fourths, the ominous trills, anapaest figures, ascending and descending chromatic motion, etc.

The recapitulation of the main theme leads into the symphony's final and most violent culmination. Tremolos in *fff* in the entire orchestra lead to clusters – "explosions", very similar to those that the second movement has ended with. There is no apotheosis, no hope left; the symphony ends with an act of total destruction; the protagonist does not survive.

As we have seen, Mokranjac follows the traditional four-movement symphonic design; however, he compresses the movements, omits recapitulation and constantly adds tension, ending almost every movement with cataclysmic outbursts. One finds numerous similarities with Shostakovich's style, mostly in the realm of employment and manipulation of thematic material and the overall symphonic concept. But while even the gloomiest pages of Shostakovich's music can easily turn into grotesquery or lighten up with lyrical outbursts, Mokranjac's writing is consistently expressionistic. His concept is a profoundly tragic one; the images of death and suffering are not counteracted by a hope for redemption. There is no room for comfort, escapism or witty intrusions, no place to hide from attacks. Despić observes that Mokranjac's music was "a complete opposite to the man who created it, whom we knew as a man of quiet little voice, withdrawn gestures and humble expressions. But actually, and this is the case with every great artist, his music was his real voice, gesture, expression, his true face. All these screams and convulsions, ominous rhythms and dark colours from his symphonies reveal a pessimistic worldview, which tore him apart."[40] While it is too far-fetched (and tedious) to suggest that the composer's suicide is announced already in 1965, the deeply tragic layout of Mokranjac's Second Symphony leaves little doubt that the composer was prone to fatalism and pessimism, and that behind the timid façade his inner life was in a state of turmoil.

Between the Second and the Fourth Symphonies, Mokranjac produced another one, the Third (1967), a work that continued all the tendencies already observed in the Second. Based on the same material, featuring the same expressionistic musical language, the same contraction and merger of individual movements, the Third rounded up Mokranjac's creative preoccupations of the 1960s. His penchant for employing a single thematic core

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40. Despić, "In memoriam Vasilije Mokranjac," pp. 59-60.

and for erasing borders between the movements anticipated the compression of Mokranjac's symphonic cycle into a single-movement symphony or "poem", typical of his final creative period. Namely, all of Mokranjac's large scale works from the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Fourth Symphony (1972), *Lyric Poem* for orchestra (1974), *Musica Concertante* for piano and orchestra (1976), Fifth Symphony (subtitled *Quasi una poema*, 1979), and *Poem* for piano and orchestra (1983) are written in a single-movement form. However, unlike the unpretentious single-movement neoclassical overtures and divertimentos that Mokranjac wrote during the 1960s as "digressions" between his "serious" works, the new monolithic symphonies/poems are impressive achievements, mostly taking up the shape of an enormous dramatic arch.

The Third Symphony has announced another prominent feature of Mokranjac's late works, namely the employment of a twelve-note row. Incidentally or not, Mokranjac's turn to twelve-note rows coincides with Shostakovich's efforts in the same direction. Shostakovich used incomplete rows in his Thirteenth Symphony *Babii Yar* (1962) and in his String Quartets Nos. 9-11, before he went on to employ full rows in all but two movements of his eleven-movement Fourteenth Symphony (1969). Mokranjac, on the other hand, having debuted the note row in his Third Symphony, went on to base the entire Fourth Symphony on twelve-note material. However, neither of the two composers follows the rules of dodecaphonic and serial music: they use rows either as passing illustrations, or as themes that undergo traditional thematic development, without ever being subjected to dodecaphonic constructive principles. Critics such as Peričić spoke affirmatively of these procedures, believing that they resulted in a "refreshment of melodic and harmonic language without sacrificing pure musical logic to a rational construction."[41] Both Shostakovich and Mokranjac used twelve-note themes to express negative phenomena; Roseberry asserts that Shostakovich, via Mahler and Berg, employs the multiple twelve-note themes as a life-destroying harmonic symbol, while in his musical vocabulary the triad plays a life-affirming role.[42] Similar symbolism can be observed in Mokranjac's works, although the areas of life-affirming tonality are much rarer in his symphonies. Aside from the Fourth Symphony, a twelve-note row also plays the role of the main theme in Mokranjac's *Musica Concertante* for piano and orchestra.

Since the early 1970s Mokranjac gradually transformed his symphonic style and achieved a synthesis of expressionistic procedures that he had used in the previous decade with a new, refined, lyrical sound world, embroidered with elements of (neo-)impressionism. *Lyric Poem*, Mokranjac's best known orchestral piece, unfolds through a series of contrasting episodes unified by the same thematic core. This adoption of a "montage"

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41. Peričić,"Tendencije razvoja srpske muzike posle 1945. godine," pp. 69-70.
42. Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content, and Thematic Process . . .* , p. 351.

principle could have also been inspired by Shostakovich, who had employed it practically since the beginning of his career; it has found great application in his first four symphonies. On the other hand, Mokranjac's Fifth Symphony – *Quasi una poema*, with its contemplative, non-conflicting dramaturgy, resembles Shostakovich's final meditative cycles, such as his Fifteenth Quartet, the work in which the ailing, elderly composer faces up to his own mortality.

As for Mokranjac's compression of the symphonic cycle into a monolithic form, which was a natural outcome of his principle of constant transformation of a single thematic core, it is difficult to regard Shostakovich's early single-movement works, the Second Symphony *October* (1927) and the Third Symphony *First of May* (1930) as possible models, because they do not rely on traditional thematicism and development, unfolding instead as a series of tableaux with choral finales. However, plausible models can be found among Shostakovich's late string quartets, most notably the Twelfth (1968) and Thirteenth (1970). The Twelfth unfolds in two movements, but the first movement is but a brief introduction before the elaborate second, based on the same material. Both this and the Thirteenth Quartet contain "free" twelve-note rows, unhindered by dodecaphonic rules. As discussed by Judith Kuhn, the single-movement Thirteenth Quartet shares many musical gestures with the Fourteenth Symphony, and can be considered as a further exploration of its topoi – most notably, it is a series of reflections on human mortality.[43] Moreover, Kuhn analyses the structure of the Thirteenth as an arch form[44] – and, as I have already mentioned, all of Mokranjac's single-movement works also unfold in an arch form.

In his final creative phase Mokranjac experimented with Olivier Messiaen's system of "modes with limited transposition" (which cannot be found in Shostakovich's works): for example, his *Lyric Poem* and Fifth Symphony are based on Messiaen's Second Mode.[45] Furthermore, even though some musical references and even onomatopoeia can be found in Mokranjac's late works (for example evocations of church bells, folk pipes etc.), he never felt compelled to use typical Shostakovichian sound imagery drawing from a wide range of social experience, from highbrow to

43. Judith Kuhn, "The String Quartets: In Dialogue With Form and Tradition," in Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich*, p. 63.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

45. This mode, based on interchanging semitones and tones, had been known in the past as "Rimsky-Korsakov's mode," "Scriabin's mode," etc. However, it is likely that Mokranjac was directly inspired by Messiaen, because his students testify that they studied Messiaen's music in his composition class. Vladimir Tošić, "Iz pedagoške radionice Vasilija Mokranjac" [From Vasilije Mokranjac's Compositional Workshop]," in Nadežda Mosusova, ed., *Vasilije Mokranjac's Life and Work* (Belgrade: Association of Yugoslav Composers – MIC, 2004), p. 165.

lowbrow, from ritualistic and vernacular to urban and futuristic. Although both Mokranjac and Shostakovich worked as composers of stage and film music, Mokranjac did not often mix these two professional realms, and his "serious" works are rarely based on themes "recycled" from his incidental music.

## Symphony No. 4 (1972)

In Mokranjac's Fourth Symphony, the basic arch layout is combined with elements of sonata form and sonata cycle. The work unfolds through a series of extreme contrasts; however, they are unified by the same thematic core, and the symphony starts and ends on a single note C. In the Introduction, the C evolves into a theme comprising the 12-note chromatic total; however, the theme itself cannot be said to be a proper note row, because some notes are repeated. The theme consists of two motifs: the rustic, narrowly-ranged "a" (C-C#-D-E-D#) in the deep strings, perhaps imitating the sound of Serbian folk instrument "gusle" which accompanies the singing of epic songs, and the slightly more elaborate "b" (F-F#-B-G#-G-A-E-B flat) [EXAMPLE 3].

EXAMPLE 3 – V. Mokranjac, Fourth Symphony, Introduction – "a" and "b".
(Score published by Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 1978).



Just like in the Second Symphony, the two motifs "a" and "b" serve as the basis for the entire thematic content of the symphony; in particular the

motif "a" serves as a kind of a "motto" theme.[46] In Mokranjac's Fourth, the motto theme "a" will be thrown into different contexts and "attacked" by various other musical materials, before returning unto itself.

In the introduction, the theme is varied and repeated several times, sometimes in imitation, sometimes in inversion, but never according to the rules of dodecaphonic writing; Mokranjac refuses to subject his protagonist to any sort of schematicism, instead letting this theme evolve quietly and tentatively. The beginning of exposition at Fig. 6 brings the first radical transformation of "a", rhythmically compressed from semibreves to semiquavers and thrown into an agitated musical course. This musical representation of the "outer world" sharply contrasts the meditative introspection of the introduction. From Fig. 11 the "b" segment of the theme reappears, also rhythmically compressed, and serves as a basis for fugato; from Fig. 12 it is combined with "a". The first culmination appears at Fig. 14 with brash clusters which grind to a halt on the note G flat – a tritone away from the initial C, thus emphasising the furthest possible distance from the quiet and introspective introduction.

The second theme at Fig. 15 is, again, derived from "a"; however, the minor seconds have turned into even harsher major sevenths. They lead into the second culmination, which would have played the role of a concluding statement in a sonata exposition; it ends with an inverted "b" to announce the beginning of the development section. The introduction of martial drums just before the development, followed by martial rhythms in low brass, suggests military connotations, already familiar from Mokranjac's Second Symphony.

The development unfolds through several waves of constantly increasing tension, resulting in forceful culminations. At Fig. 32 the first and second themes appear simultaneously: this would have been the moment of the recapitulation in sonata form. At Fig. 42, after a lengthy retardation and a general pause, the tempo changes to *Andante:* this would have been the beginning of the slow movement in a sonata cycle. Theme "a" is stated in *pp* in slow motion; however, this brief moment of calm is suddenly terminated and the theme is squashed into semiquaver sextuplets played *fff*. As observed by Despić, "The occasional, rare moments of rest in Mokranjac's works are mere pauses before the heavy battles continue, or moments of peaceful contemplation, however they do not sound as music of peace, but of surrender."[47] The change of tempo at Fig. 45 stands for what would have been a Scherzo; motif "a" is inverted, then from Fig. 48 replaced by the second theme in woodwinds, leading into another "explosion" after which,

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46. Roseberry defines motto themes as "derivations of main thematic material from a single characteristic and concise motive heard at outset, which can serve in the double capacity of referential motto and thematic germ." Roseberry, *Ideology, Style, Content, and Thematic Process . . .* , p. 104.

47. Despić, "In memoriam Vasilije Mokranjac," pp. 59-60.

at Fig. 49, the tempo changes again to *Lento*, at Fig. 50 to *Allegro*, and at Fig. 51 again to *Lento*. Just as he had done in his Second Symphony, Mokranjac combines the elements of the symphonic *Adagio* and *Scherzo;* but here these two movements/genres virtually fight for predominance. At Fig. 54 Mokranjac begins a lengthy decrescendo, based on the inverted "a", to prepare recapitulation i.e., finale. However, the recapitulation at Fig. 59 is so compressed that it would be only correct to label it as a Coda. Kovač claims that at the beginning of Coda the twelve-note theme is stated for the first time in its entirety; however, this is not true because the "a" and "b" are again separated by some repeated notes. The theme returns to its contemplative state from the beginning and the symphony dies away on a single note C in *pppp* [EXAMPLE 4]. While such an ending is a logical outcome of the arch-shaped contour of the symphony, this "primordial" resonant C which appears after the battles fought with the chromatic twelve-note theme – codified in Shostakovich's symphonies and quartets as a symbol of death and mortality – could again be read as a sign of Mokranjac's decision to withdraw from life and "return to the Source".

EXAMPLE 4 – V. Mokranjac, Fourth Symphony, Coda – "a" and "b" repeated.
(Score published by Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 1978).

## Conclusion

As shown, Mokranjac's symphonies present a strong kinship with Shostakovich's oeuvre. Both Shostakovich and Mokranjac represent an aesthetic that regards music as expressive of attitudes to life; they rely on nineteenth-century models, merging Beethoven's revolutionary heroism, Wagner's saturated musical symbolism, Tchaikovsky's pathetic confessions and Mahler's neurotic sensibility with twentieth-century traumas. Both composers employ a variety of nineteenth-century narrative techniques such as leitmotif, motto theme, cyclic themes and, most importantly, transformation of themes as an all-pervasive principle. The same themes reappear in multiple works, which reinforces their mimetic potential and an almost obsessive quality. However, a major difference is that Mokranjac's symphonies lack references to balletic, popular, vernacular and other "lowbrow" music(s). Unlike Shostakovich (or Mahler before

him), Mokranjac does not represent the outer world by references to popular and urban music genres, dance music or even folk songs; there are no open parodies or grotesquery. The only exception is Mokranjac's frequent employment of martial rhythm, as a commonplace signifier of war and war-related evil.

Ostensibly, Mokranjac had an easier career path than Shostakovich. Being several decades younger and working within a more liberal cultural system, Mokranjac was not suffering under outright tyranny; he did not have to endure denunciations and humiliations. That is not to say that the circumstances under which he was working were not challenging. Ever since deciding to become a composer, this shy and introverted man faced high expectations to live up to his famous surname; it is no coincidence that he carefully avoided the genres championed by his ancestor Stevan Mokranjac (such as church music and folksong-inspired choral, music) and, instead, made a name for himself as a composer of piano and orchestral music. By choosing the symphonies as one of the main realms of his activity, Mokranjac took up the responsibility of having to write substantial and meaningful works, in order to contribute towards the development of the hitherto insignificant Serbian symphonic tradition. Without an immediate local predecessor to look up to, Mokranjac found in Shostakovich a suitable role model for writing a "great" humanist symphony in the twentieth century – not least because Shostakovich worked in similar cultural context and demonstrated that it was possible to write symphonies that would respond to the often contradictory cultural needs of the socialist/communist societies. It was Shostakovich who synthesised the nineteenth-century musical symbolism and grandeur with contemporary musical techniques, and while he shunned the latest avant-garde fads and never returned to the radical modernism of his youthful works from the 1920s, he nevertheless managed to write deeply meaningful and expressive music that has stood the test of time.

Aside from using a very similar musical vocabulary to Shostakovich's, Mokranjac also embraced his role of a revered intellectual-humanist, who was deeply concerned for the fate of mankind. Both composers were regarded as chroniclers of their times in their respective societies: Gennadii Rozhdestvenskii asserted that Shostakovich was seen as a "Pimen" by his Soviet peers,[48] and the already cited remarks by Despić, Peričić, Kovač and others testify that Mokranjac was held in a similarly high regard by his Serbian contemporaries. For both these artists to be able to embrace the old-fashioned role of "artist-as-keeper-of-moral-values," they had to live

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48. See Gerard McBurney, "Encountering Gubaydulina," *The Musical Times*, 129, no. 1741 (March 1988): 121.

in societies that were still bound together by a romanticized notion of *Gemeinschaft*[49]; their brand of symphonism depended on the idea of unified national community that East European communist governments promoted, and that was reinforced by a collective mythology of World War Two. Both Soviet and Yugoslav audiences were conditioned to remember the patriotic war by partisan films, mass public spectacles and such, in which music played an important role. Due to this conditioning, the audiences could hear and interpret the martial and warlike aspects of Shostakovich's and Mokranjac's symphonies as references to World War Two heroism, sacrifices and suffering.

However, the same violent outbursts, extreme contrasts and collisions, cataclysms and threnodies in Mokranjac's symphonies that were commonly heard as signifiers of war, acquired another, yet more profound meaning after the composer's tragic death. Rather than confronting and blurting out his innermost concerns and psychological struggles "in real life," Mokranjac only gave them voice through his music. He used his symphonies to perform a brutal self-analysis, to give voice to his inner turmoil and to purge his demons. Unfortunately, his symphonies end with the defeat of the protagonist, i.e., the composer himself; and, in his case, life tragically replicated art.

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49. The terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellchaft* were used by Ferdinand Tönnies to distinguish between two types of systems: the communal society, regulated on the basis of traditional social rules, and the associational society, dominated by rational self-interest. Ferdinand Tönnies, ed. Jose Harris, *Community and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).