

MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES: MONOGRAPHS

MUSIC: TRANSITIONS/CONTINUITIES

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



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For Publisher

Ljiljana Nestorovska
Dean of the Faculty of Music

ISBN 978-86-88619-73-8

The publication was supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and
Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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2016

CONTENT

MEDIATING TRANSITIONS, MEDIATING CONTINUITIES

<i>The Musical Score: Continuity and Transition</i> Lawrence Kramer	3
<i>The Human Voice in its Transitional Identities</i> Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman	14
<i>An Archaeology of Listening: a Temporal Stratophony of Musical Discourses</i> F. Tito Rivas	26
<i>Reference in Transition: The Fate of Reference in Serbian Postmodern Music</i> Marija Masnikosa	35
<i>Future of Recent Past – Few Case Studies on Contemporary Electroacoustic Music in Struggle With Technological and Aesthetic Challenges</i> Milan Milojković	44
<i>Music at the Bauhaus – Continuity and Transition of Music within the Context of Design and Visual Arts</i> Sanela Nikolić	54
<i>The Song of Another Earth: Contrasting Musical: Representations of Nature, Technology, and Magic in Battlestar Galactica and Game of Thrones</i> Marc Brooks	68

MUSIC IN TRANSLATION, INTERPRETATION IN TRANSITION

<i>Towards a Terza Pratica Extending the Music-World by the Adjunction of Heterophonies (Contemporary Music does Not Think Alone!)</i> François Nicolas	77
<i>Against Interpretation, 50 Years On</i> Paulo F. De Castro	89

VI

<i>The Language of Music/ology in the Age of Transitions</i> Mina Božanić	99
<i>Serbian Hymnographic References to Music: Historical Implications</i> Ivana Perković	109
<i>Continuity and Discontinuity in Contrapuntal Techniques ca. 1500</i> Denis Collins	120
<i>Constancy and Change in the Principle of Varietas</i> Suzanne Kassian	133
<i>Before and After Metre: To the Issue of “Out-Of-Metrical” Rhythm Research</i> Светлана Чашчина (Svetlana Chashchina)	145
<i>Continuity and Originality: Notes on an Old Controversy Between Aesthetics and Poetics – The Case of Uroš Rojko</i> Leon Stefanija	160
<i>Transition in Continuity – Silence Remediated</i> Ivana Miladinović Prica	168
<i>Constancy, Transition and Change in John Adams’s Instrumental Music: From Minimalism to Post-Stylism</i> Max Noubel	178
<i>“Ludwig Van” as a Transitional Point in Mauricio Kagel’s Oeuvre</i> Radoš Mitrović	190
<i>Bowed String Instruments in Transition</i> Rastko Popović	200
<i>(Serbian) Female Choral Conductors as Mediators and Moderators of the Orthodox Spirituality</i> Dušanka Jelenković Vidović	218
<i>Radio and its Music Practices – Continuity or Transition as a Road to Nowhere</i> Marija Karan	229
<i>The Internet and Transitions of Institutionality in Art Music. Case Study of the Internet Music Competition, an Online Music Competition Founded by the Association of Primary and Secondary Music School Teachers in Serbia</i> Vera Mevorah	238

INSTITUTIONS AS CONTINUITY, SOCIETIES AS TRANSITION

<i>Music and Politics: the Reconstruction of Aesthetics and the Contemporary World</i> Miško Šuvaković	251
<i>People to Come: Utopia and Chronopolitics in Popular Music</i> Andrija Filipović	258
<i>Neither/Nor: Articulating Constant/Continuous Transition in Serbian Popular Music</i> Vesna Mikić	269
<i>Modeling the Continuities and the Transitions of the “Protest Song” Genre – Methodological and Theoretical Reflections</i> Dario Martinelli	277
<i>Defining Jewish-Ness: Hints and Tips in John Zorn's (Extra) Musical Package</i> Smiljka Jovanović	290
<i>Music as a Mediator in the Process of Political and Cultural Transition: the Creation of Yugoslav Music in Radio Belgrade (1929–1941)</i> Ivana Vesić	296
<i>Transitions in the PGP-RTB/PGP-RTS Reflected in the Classical Music Editions</i> Marija Maglov	309
<i>The Works Commissioned by Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS) 2002–2013: Contemporary Music Creation in a Transitional Society</i> Ivana Medić, Jelena Janković-Beguš	317
<i>Oblivion as a Form of Memory in the Transitional, Post-Socialist Society – Damnatio Memoriae of Rudolf Brucci</i> Nemanja Sovtić	330
<i>Frozen in Transition – Laibach's Social Critique?</i> Adriana Sabo	342
Notes on Contributors	359

Ivana Medić

Jelena Janković-Beguš

THE WORKS COMMISSIONED BY BELGRADE MUSIC
FESTIVAL (BEMUS) 2002–2013: CONTEMPORARY
MUSIC CREATION IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY

ABSTRACT: In this paper we discuss the role of the BEMUS festival in commissioning new musical pieces from Serbian composers in the period between 2002 and 2013. We aim to highlight the high and the low points of the practice of commissioning new musical works in a transitional country such as Serbia, and attempt to foresee the consequences should the present unfavourable circumstances continue and the survival of the festival be brought into question.

KEY WORDS: BEMUS, Festival; contemporary music; Serbian music; commissions

Commissions of new pieces have always served as a strong incentive for composers to write music. Historically, works were commissioned by individuals (usually private patrons) and institutions such as churches, universities etc. Nowadays, new works are usually paid for by the cultural institutions such as opera houses, symphony orchestras, foundations, contemporary music ensembles and, last but not least, music festivals.

The Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS), the oldest (founded in 1969) and the most prestigious classical music event in Serbia, has played a significant role in the promotion of Yugoslavian and Serbian composers' oeuvres. Aside from numerous new works premiered over four and a half decades, a number of pieces have been commissioned from Yugoslavian/Serbian composers by the festival producers and artistic directors (in particular the pieces for large instrumental or vocal-instrumental ensembles, which involve significant production costs). In addition to financial grant awarded to the composers, the commissions carried a significant level of prestige; but the most important benefit for the composers was the certainty that the piece would be performed by distinguished domestic or foreign performers – orchestras, soloists or ensembles. With few exceptions these commissioned works had their first performances at BEMUS and, judging from the existing press reviews and memorial books, these were always highly anticipated events. Some of the commissioned works received the highest accolades such as the Mokranjac Award and the City of Belgrade

Award. Also, after the initial positive reception from the audience and favourable reviews, several works have stood the test of time and had multiple performances over the years.

Throughout the decades of BEMUS history, there have been several periods without any commissioned works. This had less to do with financial circumstances and more with the aspirations and goals of the artistic council or the selector of the festival's programme. During the period analysed in this paper, which started with the onset of economic transition in Serbia after 2000, i.e. after the democratic turnover, the commissions of new musical works were reintroduced in 2002, and this practice lasted until 2013, when it was interrupted by a minor scandal. Although the previous editions of the festival have occasionally witnessed cancellations of certain concerts (mostly due to the performers' illness or visa issues etc.), this was the first time that a composer withdrew a commissioned piece. And since the composer in question was Ivana Stefanović (1948), a highly distinguished member of the older generation who herself had served as an artistic director of BEMUS during its most successful period in recent history (lasting from 2001 to 2006), this incident acquires a special significance and invites us to reconsider the very idea of commissions.

In this paper we analyse BEMUS commissions in the period between 2002 and 2013 from both sociological and musicological standpoints, with an added benefit of having both the insider's (i.e. Jelena's) and the outsider's (Ivana's) insights. We aim to highlight the high and the low points of the practice of commissioning new musical works in a transitional country such as Serbia and attempt to foresee the consequences should the unfavourable tendencies continue and the survival of the festival be brought into question – which seems quite likely at the moment, because the festival's executive producer, the Jugokonzert agency, went into administration in early 2014 due to mounting debts, and the planned programme for BEMUS 2014 was refused funding from the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information.

BEMUS Commissions – how it all begun

In 1971, the third year of the BEMUS festival, several important novelties were introduced. It was the year when the first International Jeunesses Musicales Competition was organised in Belgrade, directly preceding the festival and giving its laureates the chance to be included into the official programme of BEMUS. The second valuable innovation that year was the BEMUS competition for new orchestral works; the winner of the competition would have their work performed during the festival. Since then, and over the next few years, BEMUS enriched Yugoslavian symphonic music with a catalogue of new works.

According to Dejan Despić, even though BEMUS was conceived as a true international music festival right from the start, the cornerstone of its concept (regardless of how it has been interpreted and modified) have always been

Yugoslavian (later Serbian) artists and performers.¹ The festival has striven to stimulate creativity, firstly by announcing the aforementioned competition for new symphonic music between 1971 and 1976. The first competition winner was Vladan Radovanović (1932) for his work *Sonora*, which was performed at the opening of the third BEMUS by the Belgrade Philharmonic conducted by Živojin Zdravković. In the next five years the following Yugoslav composers won the BEMUS prize: Milan Mihajlović (1945), Branka Predić-Šaper (1946), Igor Štuhec (1932), Minta Aleksinački (1947) and Josip Kalčić (1912–1995). Among the prize winners, it was notably Milan Mihajlović who received praise for his composition *Preludio, Aria e Finale per orchestra sinfonica*, and the piece was subsequently published by the renowned Leipzig publishing house Edition Peters.²

In the period between 1977 and 1990 there had been no official commissions; nevertheless, a large number of new Serbian and Yugoslavian works were premiered at BEMUS. Although a majority of pieces presented with this honour were successful, there were a few exceptions; we should mention Zoran Hristić's (1938) work *Zaveštanje (Bequest)* for cowhorn, viola and orchestra premiered in 1988.

A new approach to stimulating the composers' creativity was introduced in 1991, namely direct commissions from some already established composers. This practice lasted from 1991 to 1997 and again from 2002 until now (with several particularities that will be explained later). It is important to highlight the fact that the commissions of new works for the BEMUS festival were (re) introduced in the beginning of the 1990s, at the moment when the dissolution of the SFR Yugoslavia and the imminent civil war was clearly underway. Despite the unfavourable circumstances for the 'musical festivities' to continue, the Artistic Committee chaired by musicologist Ivana Trišić (1945) argued that:

The 1991 Belgrade Musical Festival proved, seemingly more than ever, how deeply rooted in our cultural consciousness, our needs, even our life as a whole, these festivals are. At a time when the issue of the very survival of BEMUS itself permeated the air, normal opinions about what sort of festival we wanted disappeared and coalesced into a united desire that in spite of everything, BEMUS must continue. We were all united in this, artists, public, organisers, critics, the press, radio, television...³

Hence, the 23rd BEMUS in 1991 reintroduced the commissions for new pieces, only this time regulated by the composers from the Artistic Committee of the festival. The first result of this initiative was Zoran Erić's (1950) *Helium*

¹ Dejan Despić, *BEMUS 1969–1998. Trideset godina Beogradskih muzičkih svečanosti [BEMUS 1969–1998. Thirty Years of Belgrade Music Festival]* (Beograd: Jugokonzert, 2000), 155–157.

² *Ibid.*, 24.

³ Despić, *op. cit.*, 103.

in a Small Box, an orchestral work which has since become a ‘classic’ of Serbian new music and which has been performed repeatedly over the years. It is worth noting that during the 1990s, although the festival remained ‘Yugoslavian’ in its concept, the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the sanctions imposed upon what was left of the country (namely Serbia and Montenegro) inevitably shifted focus towards Serbian composers. In the following years until 1997 a dozen new works were composed for various performing bodies, usually for large orchestral or vocal-instrumental ensembles, but also chamber and choral works. A majority of these BEMUS commissions were well received by the critics and the audience alike and several works represent the pillars of Serbian art music composed during the 1990s, among them Milan Mihajlović’s *Memento* for symphony orchestra (1993), Zoran Erić’s *Oberon Concerto* for flute and instrumental ensemble (1997) and Vladan Radovanović’s multimedia work *Constellations* (1997), to name but a few.

After several turbulent years (including the notorious 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia), during which there were no commissions for new works, the beginning of the new millennium – coinciding with Slobodan Milošević’s removal from power and the onset of economic transition in Serbia – brought a renewed interest for commissions, thanks to the initiative of Ivana Stefanović who was appointed the Artistic Director of BEMUS in 2001 (the Artistic Director replaced the former Artistic Committee). Her successors Sreten Krstić (1953) and Zoran Erić carried on with this concept, which resulted in a number of new works, a majority of them written for the symphony orchestra or for large chamber and vocal-instrumental ensembles.

Transition in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia / Serbia and Montenegro / Serbia

Before we analyse the recent BEMUS commissions, we must first observe the context in which Serbian culture exists – or rather survives – nowadays. The term *transition* has two possible meanings. In the broader sense, this term represents the change of the social system.⁴ The change of the social system does not come about ‘naturally’, by itself, but it is a deliberate, politically initiated change that encompasses a range of social subsystems: economical, political, legal, cultural, etc.⁵ The transition is complex, because it is not possible to change all segments of the social order simultaneously.

Today the term *transition* is primarily used in a narrower sense to describe the political, economic and social changes characteristic for the contemporary

⁴ Nada Švob-Đokić (ed.), *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe* (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2004), 9.

⁵ Nada Švob-Đokić, *Tranzicija i nove europske države [Transition and new European states]* (Zagreb: Barbat, 2000), 98.

post-socialist societies of the Central, East and South East Europe which have abandoned the socialist social order and are striving towards capitalism.⁶ The contemporary post-socialist societies must abandon the centralised, governmentally regulated and planned production and transform into the market-oriented mode, which is again related to the nature of property (private instead of public property). The second decisive goal is a successful international integration or networking into the total international exchange, the communication, as well as subregional, regional and global connection.⁷ Hence transition is a by-product of *globalism*, which represents an increased and deepened internationalisation and the dominance of market-oriented economy onto the contemporary world map. A majority of the aforementioned societies have already achieved the main goal of transition by becoming members of the European Union, while other countries – Serbia among them – have more-or-less approached this goal.

The change of ownership – *privatisation* – is the most important system change and the basis for the restructuring of the former socialist countries. However, the results of the process of ownership change were disappointing everywhere, because the way in which privatisation had been conducted in most states led to unemployment, the rise of the criminal groups and organised mafia, marginalisation of the once-leading social strata and the rise of the new economic elites.⁸

The influence of transition to the cultural sphere

A majority of cultural institutions in Serbia still belong to the public sector, which means that they are heavily dependent on the subventions received either from the Ministry of Culture, or from City Councils – both for the realization of programmes and for the salaries of their employees. These organisations are not prepared nor willing to enter the ‘free market’ of entertainment. Should they? This is a question of cultural policy, which is commonly defined as *the state intervention in the field of culture*. In Serbia, this is a very complex topic, for at least two reasons. Firstly, as Vesna Čopič has observed, the basic problem which has not been resolved in most post-socialist countries is redefining the status of public institutions: whether they represent the ‘extended arm’ of the state, that is, the organisational entities by which the state offers public goods to its citizens, or are they independent.⁹ In SFR Yugoslavia the Communist

⁶ Švob-Đokić, *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe*, op. cit., 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Švob-Đokić, *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe*, op. cit., 144–45; Milena Dragičević-Šešić i Sanjin Dragojević, *Menadžment umetnosti u turbulentnim okolnostima [Artistic Management in Turbulent Circumstances]*. (Beograd: Clio, 2005), 22.

⁹ Vesna Čopič, “Transition in Culture in Terms of Reconceptualizing the Role of the State, the Profession and Civil Society”, in Nada Švob-Đokić (ed.), *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe* (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2004), 47.

Party controlled the quality and distribution of public goods, including 'cultural goods'. After the introduction of the multiparty system, a question arose: who would take over the responsibility to decide whether the public goods are delivered in a proper way. The solution was sought in professionals, employed by state organisations, because it was believed that only such autonomy of public professions would prevent political abuse of the area.¹⁰ However, in practice, there is no real autonomy since the funding bodies (ministries and local governments) impose various means of political control on public organisations, including the cultural ones, for instance by appointing certain politically involved individuals as board members or general managers of these organisations.

Secondly, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the ensuing wars in the 1990s caused a strong advent of nationalism and an aggressive renewal of national myths and false histories in the former Yugoslav republics. During that decade all cultural institutions in Serbia and the neighbouring countries experienced a radical deterioration of their social position – the decrease of financing, loss of professional personnel, the first encounter with market-oriented business logic, the rise of the nationalistic cultural myths, lack of self-criticism, the interruption of cultural contacts with neighbouring peoples and the oppression of the minorities' cultures.¹¹ At the beginning of the 2000's the new countries that emerged after the dissolution of Yugoslavia entered the ongoing process of redefining cultural identities, accompanied by a strong tendency to identify themselves with European cultural values. In Serbia, these tendencies led to a certain ascent and renewal of cultural life at the beginning of the new millennium. However, after several fruitful years the world economic crisis of 2008 brought new problems, which led to a further impoverishment of the already troubled society. Dragičević-Šešić and Dragojević have pointed out that the issues of cultural democracy and the quality of cultural life are not of primary importance in societies plagued by crisis (and transitory societies undoubtedly fall into this category).¹² It is understood that in such societies the greatest efforts are being directed towards the preservation of the cultural system, which is commonly related to the big city centres and public institutions. But even this notion of 'preservation' is dubious because, in the circumstances where cultural politics has not been properly defined, the decisions on what is to be preserved are made arbitrarily, i.e. those who are currently in power have a decisive say, according to their own interests and goals.

¹⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹¹ Švob-Đokić, *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe*, op. cit., 2–3.

¹² Dragičević-Šešić and Dragojević, op. cit., 15–16.

BEMUS and Jugokonzert vs. Transition and Globalisation

Now we return to our main topic – the contemporary music creation in the transitional Serbian society. We are using the works commissioned by the BEMUS festival as examples of the elitist, non-commercial form of cultural production, which should be regulated by a responsible national cultural policy. As we have mentioned, during the 1990s the commissions served to (re)affirm certain renowned composers' reputation, and a majority of composers indeed delivered quality works that have stood the test of time, in spite of being written during the worst decade in our recent history. At the beginning of 2000's, the Artistic Committee was replaced by Artistic Director (a position occupied by three persons between 2001 and 2013: Ivana Stefanović, Sreten Krstić and Zoran Erić), who were responsible for securing new works. Here is a full list of BEMUS commissions since 2000 (all works commissioned by the Artistic Director, unless stated otherwise):

Table 1: Works Commissioned by Bemus 2002–2013

Festival edition	Composer	Piece	Instrumentation
34th / 2002	Milan Mihajlović	Povratak / <i>The Return</i>	Cello and Orchestra
	Tatjana Milošević	Spyro*	Piano trio
35th / 2003	Ivan Jevtić	Svečana uvertira / <i>Festive overture</i>	Orchestra
36th / 2004	Svetlana Savić	Re-verzije / <i>Re-versions</i>	Instrumental ensemble (Nonet)
37th / 2005	Vlastimir Trajković	Pet pesama Stefana Malarmea / <i>Cinq poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé</i> [Five Poems by Stéphane Mallarmé]	Voice and Orchestra
38th / 2006	Anja Đorđević	Bog grada – Choir of Souls / <i>The God of the City - Choir of Souls</i>	Mixed choir and string orchestra
	Božidar Obradinović	Romar	Female choir and piano
39th / 2007	–	–	–
40th / 2008	Zoran Erić	Između činova, farsa-epizoda / <i>Entr'acte, Farcical Episode</i>	Orchestra

41st / 2009	Dijana Bošković	Koncert za gudački orkestar - omaž ruskim kompozitorima / <i>Concerto for String Orchestra - Homage to Russian Composers</i>	String orchestra
42nd / 2010	Stevan Kovač Tikmajer	Skamenjeni odjeci (In Memoriam Rudolf Brucci) / <i>Resonances Turned Into Stone (In Memoriam Rudolf Brucci)</i>	Orchestra
43rd / 2011	Milan Mihajlović	Senke snova i mora / <i>Shadows of Dreams and of the Sea</i>	Female choir and instrumental ensemble
MusMA	Božidar Obradinović	Poštar Ševal samostalno pobeđuje vreme / <i>Postman Cheval Conquering Time Autonomously**</i>	Piano
44th / 2012	Srdan Hofman	Ogledalo / <i>The Mirror</i>	Trio (voice, cello, piano) and chamber string ensemble
MusMA	Ivan Brkljačić	Veliki kazan / <i>The Big Chasm**</i>	Percussion ensemble
45th / 2013	Ivana Stefanović	Obala / <i>The Shore</i>	Obligate violin, chamber ensemble and strings
MusMA	Ana Gnjatović	<i>Balance-lost**</i>	Mixed choir

* commissioned by the Ministry of Culture

** commissioned as part of the MusMA programme

– the works were not performed

The very first commission in the new millennium, the work *Povratak (The Return)* for cello and orchestra by Milan Mihajlović, premiered during the 34th BEMUS, confirmed the significance of this initiative, because it was praised by the critics and received the City of Belgrade Prize for the year 2000. Mihajlović himself holds a record for the highest number of commissions (4 in total), encompassing all three cycles of commissions (the 1970's, the 1990's and the 2000's); obviously, this testifies to his high reputation in our country. Another work commissioned by BEMUS in 2000's was awarded the City of Belgrade

Prize, *Cinq Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé pour chant et orchestre* by Vlastimir Trajković (1947–), premiered in 2005. From the vantage point of view, during the period when the composer Ivana Stefanović was the Artistic Director of BEMUS (2001–2006), she opted for the ‘tried and tested’ i.e. trusted leading composers of her own generation (born in the 1940s and 1950s, with the exception of Svetlana Savić, born in 1971), a majority of whom were the professors of composition at the Belgrade Faculty of Music. Almost all commissioned works were analysed and discussed in the magazine *New Sound* by Serbian musicologists such as Vesna Mikić, Ana Stefanović and others.¹³

The artistic director of the festival changed in 2006, but at that moment the festival programme was already completed, so Ivana Stefanović was still in charge. That year, two short choral works were commissioned from younger composers Anja Đorđević and Božidar Obradinović (both born in the 1970’s) for multimedia programme called *Mokranjac – New Action*, to mark the 150th birthday anniversary of Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856–1914).¹⁴ The new artistic director became Sreten Krstić – a violin virtuoso who had lived in Germany and been a member of the Munich Philharmonic since 1980, being promoted into principal concertmaster in 1982. Obviously, an artistic personality such as Krstić would have an entirely different idea on contemporary music than Ivana Stefanović. Thus, the first BEMUS with Krstić’s personal stamp on it, in 2007, did not feature a new commission; instead, there was a lot of jazz, popular European classics, Baroque music etc. There was a single concert titled *Emigrant Valse* that featured Serbian premieres of works by Serbian female composers living abroad. One of the performers was a flute player Dijana Bošković (1968), a fellow expat living in Germany, and Krstić decided to commission a piece from her for the following 41st BEMUS. During Krstić’s artistic direction, only a piece commissioned from Belgrade-based composer Zoran Erić *Entreacte, farce-episode for symphony orchestra* (2008) broke the pattern of commissioning works from émigré composers. However, this was a coincidence rather than Krstić’s proper intention, because the concert *Emigrant Valse* had been planned by Jugokonzert and Krstić only agreed to it after much persuasion. In 2010 Krstić commissioned a work from Stevan Kovač Tikmajer (1963), a Serbian composer living in France, on the basis of his successful col-

¹³ Vesna Mikić, “Subverzija reverzibilnosti / Reverzibilnost subverzije” [“Subversion of Reversibility /Reversibility of Subversion“], *Novi Zvuk [New Sound]* 25 (2005), 55–9; Ana Stefanović, “*Pet pesama Stefana Malarmea od Vlastimira Trajkovića*” [“*Five Poems by Stéphane Mallarmé* by Vlastimir Trajkovic“], *Novi Zvuk* 28 (II/2006), 166–74, Vesna Mikić, “*Romar/Bog grada ili isceliteljska moć muzike? Nova dela Božidara Obradinovića i Anje Đorđević*” [“*Romar/The City God or the Healing Power of the Music? New pieces by Božidar Obradinović and Anja Đorđević*“], *Novi Zvuk* 29 (I/2007), 37–41.

¹⁴ See Mikić, “*Romar/Bog grada ili isceliteljska moć muzike?*”, 37–41, where the author discusses how these new pieces sounded next to Stevan Mokranjac’s works.

laboration with Gidon Kremer. Tikmajer's work, performed at 42nd BEMUS, was quite disappointing for Belgrade audiences, who were not very familiar with his oeuvre, while the composer himself complained that there was little time to prepare the premiere and that the Symphony Orchestra of Serbian Radio and Television was underrehearsed.

When Zoran Erić, a prominent Serbian composer and Professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Music took the helm of the Artistic Director in 2010, he restored Ivana Stefanović's practice of commissioning new works from 'tried and tested', Belgrade-based composers. He also green-lit the introduction of another novelty, namely the concerts organised as part of a large European project *Music Masters on Air (MusMA)* initiated by the Flanders Festival. The project encompassed festivals from some 10 European countries, where the new pieces would be commissioned from composers from those countries, and then the pieces would be performed at multiple festivals and broadcast on their national radio stations (which also took part in the project). The idea of the MusMA project was to give international exposure to the younger generation of European composers. One of the authors of this paper, Jelena Janković-Beguš, Programme Editor of Jugokonzert at that time and a keen advocate of Serbian contemporary music, selected three composers whose works would be performed in 2011, 2012 and 2013: Božidar Obradinović (1974) (piano piece), Ivan Brkljačić (1977) (piece for instrumental ensemble) and Ana Gnjatović (1984) (vocal/choral piece).

Then came the year 2013 and 45th BEMUS, which was carried out in extraordinary circumstances. The bank account of Jugokonzert was blocked because of mounting debts, and the Ministry of Culture refused to pay their share of the festival budget using a mediatory institution (theatre DADOV); thus the festival underwent drastic cuts. The project MusMA was cancelled: hence Ana Gnjatović's work was not performed. Moreover, the performance of the new piece that was supposed to be one of the 2013 festival highlights – coincidentally, commissioned from none other than Ivana Stefanović – had to be cancelled due to composer's dissatisfaction with the chosen performers. According to Jugokonzert staff, there was a misunderstanding between the composer, who submitted a piece for obligate violin, chamber ensemble and strings, and the festival producers, who ordered a piece for a particular instrumental ensemble called Studio 6 (harp, trumpet, recorder, accordion, cello and oboe). The reduced budget of the festival did not allow an enlargement of the Ensemble Studio 6 with so many additional musicians to perform Stefanović's piece, so the producers suggested that the piece could be performed by the ensemble Metamorphosis, a string orchestra led by the violist Saša Mirković which had already been booked for the festival with an excellent violinist Stanko Madić as the soloist. However, the composer refused this alternative solution and requested another orchestra and soloist, which was not possible, due to financial constraints. Therefore, the composer cancelled the performance of her piece.

Frustrated by this cancellation, and by the fact that his planned programme had undergone so many cuts and changes, Zoran Erić resigned from his position as an artistic director, adding to the already sinister atmosphere surrounding the 45th festival. The question which lingered in the air was: *Who was to blame?* Was it the supposed incompetence of the festival producers, who could not provide adequate performers for the premiere to take place? Or was it the combination of unfavourable external factors, which led to the lack of good will for the festival? In short, do we blame economic transition or the human factor for the scandals of the BEMUS 2013, which put a huge question mark on the very survival of the festival?

As observed by Dragičević-Šešić and Dragojević, the crises in cultural subsystems arise as a consequence of deeper economical and political crises. According to these authors, the external factors which have got a particularly strong negative influence on the cultural subsystem are the following:

- a) *crises of public policies and public sector* (lack of professional competence in cultural administration, creation of developmental policies which neglect the field of culture and its performers, inadequate privatization, poor coordination among different sectors and levels);
- b) *underdevelopment of relationships among three sectors (public, private, civil);*
- c) *crises of institutions (their position and social role), highlighted by insufficient development of the staff, leading to de-professionalization* (lack of competence and neglect of own experiences and successful practices), especially in comparison with the demands of the world market and new relations in culture;
- d) *crises of participation and cultural market, caused by the lack of interest of potential audience faced with global market of entertainment and its vast offer, leading to change of tastes and values.* The crisis of interest in cultural goods and contents, especially local ones, further deepens the crisis of cultural institutions and organizations, as well as the sector as a whole.¹⁵

It is fair to say that the crisis in the cultural subsystem of BEMUS was caused by a combination of these factors, both external and internal. The failure to adapt to the transitional, more market-oriented economy and to secure diversified funding over the years while public subsidies were constantly decreasing – these are the signs of the internal weaknesses within the institution (in this case, Jugokonzert, the producer of BEMUS). However, the lack of a clearly defined cultural policy in Serbia, and especially with respect to such an ‘elitist’ cultural product – the contemporary music creation which is predestined for relatively limited audiences, clearly jeopardised the field of art music in the country. For, BEMUS is not the only event which has been ‘snubbed’ by the

¹⁵ Dragičević-Šešić and Dragojević, op. cit., 23–24.

Ministry of Culture, nor is it the only one which poses the question: *Does anybody actually care about classical and contemporary Serbian music anymore?* During the 1990's, when Serbia was isolated and troubled in so many ways, artistic events were the sites for escapism for Belgraders; therefore, premieres of new works at the BEMUS festival were regarded as important signs of intellectual rebellion. But now, in the era of the internet, reality shows and global attractions, it is no longer the case. This particular art form is interesting only to a small group of dedicated followers and/or practitioners, and even they seem to be less and less interested. This is a real shame because Serbian culture as such, small and relatively young, is inevitably going to disappear in the overwhelming global cultural currents if there is no one to take care of it. The aim towards European and global integrations, as one of the main features of the post-socialist transition, poses both opportunities and challenges to our culture, and the greatest danger is that of the culture being left to the 'market', read as: left to chance. So, what needs to be done is to redefine cultural policy that would, on the one hand, focus on an intensive collaboration of Serbian cultural institutions with their European counterparts, and on the other hand, stimulate domestic creation through systemic and efficient support to all generations of Serbian composers, at the same time educating the Serbian audiences to recognise and acknowledge the importance and artistic results of such creative efforts.

Epilogue / Post scriptum: 2014 and Beyond

As feared, BEMUS barely survived the year 2014 and the fact that its long-standing producer, Jugokonzert, went into administration. Snubbed by the Ministry of Culture and Information, the festival was of modest proportions, consisting of six concerts only, and the newly appointed artistic director, the renowned Serbian composer Svetislav Božić (1954–), opted for a programme that mostly consisted of 19th and early 20th-century music. While this programme was dubbed 'the new conservatism' by Ivana Stefanović in her report written for the National Cultural Council (Stefanović 2015), it was very well received by the audiences and, for the first time in its recent history, the festival actually made some money! The festival programme 2015, produced by a newly founded institution CEBEF (Centre of Belgrade Festivals) will also rely on the fan favourites and the early 20th-century classics. While, at the moment, there are no commissions of new works, Svetislav Božić has expressed his desire to reintroduce this practice for the forthcoming festivals. We can only hope that this important incentive for music creation will indeed be reinstated, and that BEMUS will continue to enrich the repertory of Serbian contemporary music with high-quality new works.

SUMMARY

Throughout the decades of its history, Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS), the oldest and the most prestigious classical music event in Serbia, has played a significant role in the promotion of Yugoslavian and Serbian new music. Many new works have been commissioned by and/or premiered at the festival. The beginning of the new millennium – coinciding with the onset of economic transition in Serbia – has brought a renewed interest for commissions of new works, thanks to the initiative of Ivana Stefanović, a composer herself, who was the artistic director of the Belgrade Music Festival from 2001 to 2006. Her successors Sreten Krstić and Zoran Erić carried on with this concept, which resulted in a number of new works, a majority of them written for symphony orchestra. However, the ever unstable economic environment in Serbia has presented new challenges for the BEMUS festival in recent years, which have affected its programme.

In this paper we discuss the BEMUS commissions in the period between 2002 and 2013 from both sociological and musicological standpoints, with an added benefit of having both the insider's and the outsider's insights. We aim to highlight the high and the low points of the practice of commissioning new musical works in a transitional country such as Serbia, and attempt to foresee the consequences should the unfavourable tendencies continue and the survival of the festival be brought into question.