

## THE BEGINNING OF MODERNISM IN THE MUSIC OF SERBIAN COMPOSERS

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**SUMMARY.** Significantly penetrating the years between the two world wars, this situation testifies to the long process of uneven development of Serbian music. Despite the founding of the Belgrade Opera (1920), the gradual growth of performing qualities, the expansion of the repertoire, the premiere of the first Serbian musical and dramatic achievements of modern expression, the influence of popular music remains an almost exclusive privilege of traditional national forms of music. In order to establish internal continuity, they modernized and expanded the existing tradition with new genres, appreciating that sudden new leaps in language can be accepted primarily in those genres that have already gained some continuity in national music.

**Keywords:** modernism, serbian, tradition, nationalism, genres.

### Introduction

Significantly penetrating the years between the two world wars, this situation testifies to the long process of uneven development of Serbian music. Despite the founding of the Belgrade Opera (1920), the gradual growth of performing qualities, the expansion of the repertoire, the premiere of the first Serbian musical and dramatic achievements of modern expression, the influence of popular music remains an almost exclusive privilege of traditional national forms of music. In order to establish internal continuity and gradually move the predominantly patriarchal Serbian horizons, they modernized and expanded the existing tradition with new genres. They did it most of the time in parallel, and not at the same time, appreciating that sudden new leaps in language can be accepted primarily in those genres that have already gained some continuity in national music.

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## The beginning of modernism in the music of serbian composers

“The wars that Serbia fought from 1912 to 1918 at first slowed down, then stopped the development of the musical life”<sup>3</sup>. Although the war could not stop completely the spiritual life, in music, more than in other fields of art, there was a deadlock. The war interrupted the intensive development which, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggested the intense recovery of the missed steps and the establishment of the institutions that represent the basis of the musical life. This would be compensated by a significant delay only in the following development stage:

“The Opera in Belgrade was founded in 1920 (ballet shows took place here from 1923), the Philharmonic in 1923 and the first music high school in 1937. Many other music associations and institutions also contributed to the richness and diversity of the musical life in Serbia (*Cvijeta Zuzorić*, the academic association - *Collegium musicum*, the Kolarac Popular University, many choral ensembles, concerts in many music schools)”<sup>4</sup>.

The performance level continued to increase, and the highest professional standards were set in the field of creativity. The musical press was also very diversified. “During this period numerous magazines were published: *Muzički glasnik* (1922), *Muzika* (1928-29), *Glasnik Muzičkog društva Stanković* (later - *Muzički glasnik*, 1928-34; 1938-41). *Zvuk* (1932-36), *Vesnik Južnoslovenskog pevačkog saveza*, (1935-36), *Slovenska muzika* (1939-41)”<sup>5</sup>. The copyright protection activity was initiated, and the Serbian composers, musicologists and music pedagogues became members of international associations.

In the inter-war period, there is a distinct coagulation of musical events, because the activities of the various generations of composers converge and combine. In the 1930s, Josif Marinković was still active, the same as the composers in the “Belgrade School” (Binički, Krstić, Đorđević). This distinct national line will continue in the fourth decade through the activity of Marko Tajčević, Milenko Živković, Mihailo Vukdragović, Jovan Bandur, but elements of expressionism partially emerge in parallel in the creations of Konjović, Milojević, Tajčević, Logar and Slavenski, and very visibly and challenging in the compositions of the fourth decade by members of the young generation of composers who had studied in Prague, namely: Vojislav Vučković, Ljubica Marić, Dragutin Čolic, Milan Ristić and Stanojlo Rajičić. The first compositions

<sup>3</sup> Marinković, Sonja, *Serbian music*, Belgrade, 2008, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> Šuvaković, Miško. Pejović, Roksanda. Veselinović-Hofman, Mirjana. *History of Serbian Music: Serbian Music and European Music Heritage*, Belgrade: Institute for education Belgrade, 2008., p. 32.

by Predrag Milojević (*Sonatina for piano* from 1926, the *Chord Quartet* from 1928, the *Simfonijeta* from 1930) seem somehow calmer, closer to the neoclassic compositional procedures.

“The Serbian composers, for reasons easy to understand, accepted later the modernist tendencies, but some of them almost managed to catch up with the international avant-garde tendencies in two stages: firstly, in the 1930s, then in the 1960s, which allowed postmodernism to become more than a reflex of the world events, but also a spontaneous reaction to the modernist principles of several national composers”<sup>6</sup>.

We can notice four stages of Serbian modernism, next to their main representatives listed below. The criteria for this approach are classified by Milin Melita in his article<sup>7</sup>:

Stage I (1908–1945): Petar Konjović, Stevan Hristić, Miloje Milojević, Josip Slavenski, Marko Tajčević.

Stage II (1929–1945): composers from the “Prague group” - Mihovil Logar, Predrag Milošević (forerunners), Dragutin Čolić, Ljubica Marić, Vojislav Vučković, Stanojlo Rajičić, Milan Ristić.

Stage III (1951–1970):

- a) Neoclassicism. Milan Ristić, Dušan Radić, Dejan Despić, Vladan Radovanović, Enrico Josif.
- b) Neo-expressionism. Stanojlo Rajičić, Vasilije Mokranjac, Aleksandar Obradović.
- c) Poetic archaizing. Ljubica Marić, Dušan Radić, Rajko Maksimović.

Stage IV (1956–1980): Vladan Radovanović, Aleksandar Obradović, Petar Ozgijan, Petar Bergamo, Srđan Hoffman, the Opus 4 Group.

Petar Konjović was firmly anchored in the Romantic aesthetic, but also took strides towards modernism, firstly in a small number of compositions from the years of his studies in Prague (1904-1906), when he was strongly influenced by the rich Czech musical scene, and later in the compositions from the inter-war period, from the time of his intense contacts with world contemporary music, especially with opera. “The most important genre of Konjović’s opera is the musical scene (*Ženidba Miloša Obilića /Vilin veo, 1917/, Knez od Zete /1927/, Koštana /1931/, Seljaci /1951/ i Otadžbina /1960/, scenska muzika za pozorišne komade*)”<sup>8</sup>. Konjović earned his place

<sup>6</sup> Milin, M. *The stages of modernism in Serbian music*, Belgrade, Musicology 2006 Volume, Issue 6, Institute of Musicology – SANU, 2006., p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, p. 106.

as the most important Serbian opera composer because of his long term involvement in the opera, but above all because of the value of his creations in this field, as well as the diversity of the genre and of the stylistic richness of his expression. He started with national romantic operas such as *Ženidba Miloša Obilića*, after which he created a musical drama in the compositions written between the two world wars (the creations *Knez od Zete* and *Koštana*), which are stylistically enriched with expressionist elements (especially in *Koštana*). The period of his late creation is represented by the popular comic opera *Seljaci* (according to J. Veselinović) and by *Otađzbina*. Konjović's contribution to Serbian symphonic music is, also, extremely important.

"He is the author of the first symphony in the history of Serbian music (*Symphony in Do minor* 1907, reworked in 1922 and 1954, edited by Jakšić), significant symphonic variations: *Na selu* (based on the themes *Pušči me*, 1915), symphonic poems: *Serbia liberata* (his graduation work from Prague) and *Makar Čudra* (1944), Three psalms for chord orchestra and the Concerto for violin *Jadranski kapričo*. Konjović's most popular symphonic work is *Simfonijski triptihon* from *Koštana*"<sup>9</sup>.

Two string quartets belong to chamber music: The concerto suite for wind quintet, Sonata quasi una fantasia for violin and piano, miniatures for piano (*Legend, Pastoral, Igra*) and for violoncello and piano (*Hajdučka, Igra*). Konjović's musical language, which was born out of the national language and his Mokranjac roots, was determined by a set of late romantic means of expression, which in the 1920s and the 1930s were enriched through impressionism and expressionism. It is important to underline the fact that through his folkloric perspective, Konjović goes beyond the scope of romanticism and applies certain compositional procedures in processing the folklore, which are specific to the so-called "folklorist expressionism" of the national schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The idea of national in his creation was developed in the most logical way. Without the opposition between the national and the contemporary based on models already experimented with and which survived, in Konjović's creation, folklore is a real leading principle.

The activity performed by Stevan Hristić (1885-1958), composer, conductor and pedagogue, was also developed, fruitful and diverse.

"Hristić's creation is not very ample, but it includes ample works: the opera *Suton* (1925), the ballet *Ohridska legenda* (1947), the oratorio *Vaskrsenje* (1912), several compositions for orchestra (scene music for theatre plays), religious music: *Liturgija, Opelo*, concerts (*Simfonijska fantazija za violinu i orkestar, Rapsodija za klavir i orkestar*), as well as choral compositions: *Jesen, Dubrovački rekvijem*." (Šuvaković, Pejović, Veselinović-Hofman, 2008, p. 52)

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<sup>9</sup> Marinković Sonja, *Serbian music*, Belgrade, 2008, p. 18.

The composer brought an original and valuable contribution to Serbian opera music through *Sutonom* (1925), opera which combines the experience of the veristic musical drama and the elements of the impressionist musical language. Its premiere took place in 1925, and for the musical life of Belgrade and its young opera house at the time, it meant a significant stylistic and repertory revitalization. This creation paved the way for the development of Serbian music in the following period. Its musical language is characterized by a rich melodic invention, a sumptuous orchestral range, a wealth of late Romantic and partially impressionist harmony, a clear formal structure. In his orientation, mainly romantic, he differs slightly from his other two contemporaries, Konjović and Milojević, whose creations contain several radical interventions in the contemporary stylistic expression. Hristić is closer to Mokranjac's roots, and his creation represents a real bridge between the romantic foundations and the modern tendencies.

One of the most important personalities of Belgrade's musical life in the inter-war period was Miloje Milojević, composer, musicologist, conductor, pianist and pedagogue. Milojević's creation reflects good knowledge of the achievements of late German impressionism, French impressionism, the expressionist aspirations of the time in both basic versions of German expressionism and in folklore, which he adopted after 1939, in the last period of his creation. "Milojević is a maestro of miniature, the most important composer of solo songs in the inter-war period (the song cycle *Pred veličanstvom prirode*, with the songs *Jesenja elegija*, *Japan*, *Nimfa*, *Vetar*, *Ćutanje*, *Zvona*, *Molitva majke Jugovića zvezdi Danici*, *Božićna pesma*, *Molitva usred polja* and *Pesma orla*, the creations on the lyrics of French poets, *Tri pesme za visoki glas op. 67*), and also the author of many choral compositions"<sup>10</sup>.

He dedicated many compositions to the piano, from the first miniatures of Op. 2, through a series of cycles and collections of pieces for piano (*Četiri komada za klavir*, *Kameje*, *Moja majka*, *Ritmičke grimase*) composed in a wide range of styles from late romantic and impressionist miniatures to expressionist compositions, and in the last part of his creation we find the mature piano expression of folkloric expressionism in the compositions: *Melodije i ritmovi sa Balkana*, based mainly on his own folklore collections. Contemporary musicological research shows an increasing interest in Milojević's ballet - *Sobareva metla* (1923), which was created in collaboration with artists in the surrealist circle of Belgrade. Renewed attention is paid also to the composer's symphonic creations (the poems *Smrt majke Jugovića* and other compositions for symphonic orchestra (*Seoske scene*, *Srpska igra*, *Srpska rapsodija*, *Postanje ljudi*) and chamber music (chord quartets, sonatas, many chamber ensembles).

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<sup>10</sup> Milin M. *The stages of modernism in Serbian music*, Belgrade, Musicology 2006 Volume, Issue 6, Institute of Musicology – SANU, 2006, p. 107.

Thus, Milojević's idea as a maestro of the miniature, that is a composer of chamber and solo music, changes gradually and acquires a more objective perspective on his overall creative contribution, impressive not only through the richness and diversity of Milojević as writer, interpreter, pedagogue and composer of varied interests, inspired artist, excellent professional whose many compositions have anthological value (especially, *Intima za gudački orkestar*, many solo compositions and opuses for piano, chamber music and choral creations, such as: *Muha i komarac*, *Slutnja*, *Pir iluzija*).

The series of miniatures we will focus on was composed by M. Milojević: the four pieces for piano op. 23 are programmatic, exploiting from this point of view a strong Romantic influence. The first refers to VIEUX CONTE, then to SOIR MELANCOLIQUE, AU CREPIUSCULE LE LYS REVAIT and DANS LE JARDIN. The set of miniatures was published in Paris, in 1921.

The soloist discourse is symphonic, suggesting an orchestral approach and thinking through the flexibility with which the composer uses different piano registers, moving swiftly among them and offering new timbral colors to the melodies which use register change. The same quality is enhanced also by the presence of complex multi-layered virtuosity formulas, which reflect a deep attachment to the late Romantic sonorous perspectives. The piano music he proposes is ample, with multiple orchestral reverberations, and an accentuated virtuosity dimension.

The tonal discourse is maintained as the main melodic manifestation, with modal insertions which ensure the originality of the compositions in the spirit of an authentic local specificity. At the agogic level, we notice the flexibility of the musical discourse, which acquires post-Romantic freedom of expression, through the segments in which the tempo becomes *ad libitum*, but also through the multiple recitative-like phrases (which are based on a poetic, more relaxed approach of the musical tempo).

The first part, VIEUX CONTE proposes a clearer discourse, almost Baroque, in his metro-rhythmic pulsating articulation, built on a formula which suggests the traditionalism expressed by the title of the piece.

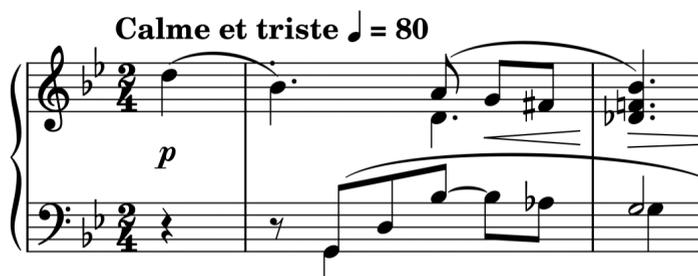
E. g. 1

**Gracieux** ♩ = 116

M. Milojević - Four pieces for piano op. 23 (Vieux conte), m. 1-3

The second piece in the series is the most articulated from a melodic point of view, where the discourse evolves towards modal dimensions, but with a post-Romantic dissonance. The higher voice preserves the main role in the semantic construction of the piece, reminding of Chopin-like desiderata. The harmonic complexity. The variability of the indications of tempo and expression (*calme et triste, pressez, retenir un peu, moins vite, plus vite et joyeux, légèrement et joyeux, expressif, très passionné, avec douleur, les harmonies estompées, très lointain*). The composition takes the form of a reprise, which entails returning to the initial theme in a varied context, even more marked by melancholy (*Lent, con douleur*), promoting the expressivity of the acute register. The last six measures bring again to the foreground the echo of the initial theme in a simple rhythm, strictly tonal (*très lointain*).

E. g. 2



**M. Milojević - Four pieces for piano op. 23 (Soir melancholique), m. 1-2.**

The third part, *AU CRESPIUSCULE LE LYS REVAIT*, exploits another dimension of the musical discourse – the ornamental one (*Très calme et doucement expressif*). In the first section, the flexibility is visible in the metro-rhythmic plan, highlighting the alternation of the sequences in composed ternary meter (12/8, 9/8); the second segment follows closely the ideal of romantic virtuosity (*comme un souffle*), and the end of the tripartite construction reflects the initial data.

“During the war, the musical life of Belgrade includes a rich polyphony of various creative stylistic and genre orientations, which shows that the Serbian musical culture reached its full maturity and plenitude, and this is also confirmed by the many and constant contacts of his musicians with other developed musical environments”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Šuvaković, Miško; Pejović, Roksanda. Veselinović-Hofman, Mirjana. *History of Serbian Music: Serbian Music and European Music Heritage*, Belgrade: Institute for education Belgrade, 2008, p. 55.

There were strong relationships between the main musical Yugoslavian centres from Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, and those in Czechoslovakia. The openness and the importance of the musical setting in Belgrade at that time attracted many Yugoslavian artists whose work was connected to Belgrade for a longer or shorter period of time. Josip Slavenski's activity (he remained in Belgrade from 1924 until his death in 1955) and that of Mihovil Logar (from 1927 until his death in 1998) had an important influence during this period.

Josip Slavenski was a composer of the elementary power of expression, daring to explore new expression possibilities and, thus, very encouraging for younger creators. While Miloje Milojević's tendency towards modernism was the most pronounced in his creations which were not inspired from folklore, Josip Slavenski, as well as Petar Konjović (in an even more pronounced manner than him), had a sensibility for folklore which was expressed spontaneously through modernist means. The decisive event for his compositional development was, undoubtedly, his meeting, when he was a student, with Bela Bartok's music, which gave an impulse to his creative style. The increased emotional expression in his works received an expressionist accuracy, which was achieved by using daring solutions, mostly in terms of harmony and rhythm (bitonality to atonality, polymetric). His extended creation includes all the genres, with the exception of opera and ballet. Slavenski's compositions stem from the popular songs, approached from an expressionist point of view. His form is usually that of rhapsody, free, with the most freedoms in harmony, and he bases the instrumentation on the acoustic laws that he especially investigated. "Out of his creations it is worth mentioning: *Simfonia Orijenta* (1934), a cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra which shows man's spiritual world, his feelings, his restlessness, contemplation, ecstasy and triumph. In the seven parts (*Pagani, Jevreji, Budisti, Hrišćani, Muslimani, Muzika, Pesma radu*) he describes the evolution of spirituality from the oldest times to the modern times" (Milin M. 2006, p. 108). One of his most beautiful compositions was *Slavenska sonata* for violin and piano, and *Balkanofonija simfonijska svita* based on a very original concept, which offers a musical panorama of the Balkans. At the time, Slavenski's chamber music received special recognition (for the first string quartet he received significant international recognition at the Donausingen Festival).

Marko Tajčević (1900–1984), who also aspired to a modernist approach of folklore, can be considered the youngest in the first stage of Serbian musical modernism. At the centre of Tajčević's compositional interests were vocal creations (many laic and religious compositions: two liturgies, *Četiri duhovna stiha, Opelo*, many solo pieces), and his works for piano are very important, especially the series *Sedam balkanskih igara* (1926), which brought his worldwide popularity. Tajčević is one of the few composers who

in the inter-war period as well showed he was close to Bartok's approach to folklore. He is the author of many important theoretical textbooks (*Osnovi muzičke pismenosti*, *Opšta nauka o muzici*, *Osnovna teorija muzike i Kontrapunkt*), many of them are still in use today.

It is difficult to precisely determine the duration of individual stages. For the first stage we took into consideration the year of Milojević's (1908) solo song *Nimfa*, which includes modernist impulses from the field of French impressionism and German modernism, and for the end of this period we took into consideration the end of WWI, when the composers in this group continued to write in a similar way, but the meaning of such compositions no longer had innovative power so as to make it fall at least partially under the realist socialist leadership framework.

## Conclusions

Modern large-scale works had no prospect of continued survival in the concert repertoire even in the period between the two world wars. It testifies to the long-standing problems of the national music tradition, especially as a result of its interrupted and uneven development. Serbian composers educated abroad contributed to the formation of music. In this process, attitudes toward tradition — national / folk musical heritage and modernism — have broadly articulated current trends. Due to the growing number of professional musicians, the continuous life of concert and opera and research on music, variants of contemporary European discourses can also be recognized in Serbia. Of course, with a special emphasis on those regarding the folk musical heritage and the ways of transposing it into high art.

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