

MUSIC IN POSTSOCIALISM: THREE DECADES IN RETROSPECT

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More than three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, an international team of contemporary musicologists has produced a long-awaited analysis of the complex transformations that have affected (and continue to affect) the soundscape of the European countries (and beyond) that escaped the communist regime in the 1990s and have now entered the new European socio-economic, cultural-artistic, political and geographical framework created after that date. It is to the credit of a remarkable team of editors made up of three renowned scholars from Serbia—Biljana Milanović, Melita Milin and Danka Lajić Mihajlović—who have managed to bring together another seventeen scholars from thirteen countries. They produced sixteen studies collected in the volume entitled *Music in Postsocialism: Three Decades in Retrospect*, published in 2020 by the Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

The joining, integration or/and reintegration after 1990 of the former communist bloc states into the European democratic space requires a clear analysis of the scholarly approach and of what the editors consider the work to be: namely, a major contribution to “transitional/post-socialist studies in music” (p. 3). The key terms of the discussion in this volume capture, in the finest nuances, the phenomenon of the profound transformations that have taken place in these states throughout more than 30 years since their incorporation into the new circumstances of a free Europe. These are the terms “post-socialism” and “post-communism” (see the discussion on p. 2), with the editors finally opting for a title that includes the concept of “post-socialism”, while also accepting the arguments of their contributors to decide on any term that they feel is appropriate to the context under examination (p. 2). As a result, we are dealing with a large-scale, tripartite project with contributions from renowned specialists. The editors’s Introduction (*Music in Postsocialism – Looking Back at the First Three Decades*) offers a synthetic approach and a meaningful insight into the main political and cultural issues related to the main theme.

The first part of the volume (“Rethinking the Past, Shaping the Present: Tradition, Memory and New Music”) includes six studies mapping and contextualising—with a diverse methodological apparatus and a keen critical eye—music and contexts belonging to the Slovenian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Serbian, East German/GDR and even Georgian musical past (the last one in the former-Soviet context). In his study “Postsocialism and Other -isms in Slovene Music Since 1991: Post/Modernity, Post-Historicism (Post-Classicism), Post-Nationalism, and Glocalism”, Leon Stefanija (Ljubljana) investigates, on five levels, the post-socialist music production in Slovenia, its reshaping after 1990, the place of nationalism in the making of a new musical arena (including the role of ethnic minorities in this context). It seems to me that the attempt to define a nation-wide strategy to protect national musical creativity by setting up a broadcasting system for local music (including popular music), as opposed to imported music, is wholeheartedly encouraged. Lithuanian post-socialist art music scene of the last three decades is meticulously analysed through a selection of representative works in the chapter by Gražina Daunoravičienė (Vilnius), entitled “Reflections on Lithuanian Postsocialist Music in the Framework of the Genotype Institution”. Diachronically, the author identifies four categories of musical ‘genotype’ in Lithuanian works, their “genetic identity”, and how these are reflected in contemporary Lithuanian music creation. In the study “Rethinking the Soviet-Era Georgian Music”, Rusudan Tsurtsunia (Tbilisi) diachronically examines Georgian musical culture, with an emphasis on the moment of Soviet oppression imposed by “radical socialist realism” (p. 72) and the pursuit of the goal of “identifying ideology with art” during the Stalinist period. Tsurtsunia informs us that—as in other communist states—there were Georgian composers during this era who were producing valuable and ideologically unsubservient music with a certain personal identity, a situation that would improve after Khrushchev. The post-socialist period, in the specialists’s opinion, has been turbulent in political and socioeconomic terms; however, this has not prevented the emergence of a generation of composers of certain value.

The next two chapters examine religious / sacred music in Ukraine and Serbia, one of the areas of musical composition that was intensely and constantly censored, marginalised and persecuted by the communist regime—a phenomenon that was observable in all countries under Soviet influence. The first study by Lyubov Kyyanovska (Lviv), entitled “National and General Signs of the Ukrainian Church Music of the Present”, proposes a detailed radiography of a rich material, some of it unpublished, divided into two categories, “religious music” and “sacred music”, and further divided into several subgroups. The investigative view not only of Orthodox practices and the compositional production inspired by this ethos, but also of the musical phenomenon manifested in the Catholic Church in the western part of the country, sometimes with reference also to the Protestantism, is welcome. At the same time, the author probes in depth the themes and genres that emerged with the post-1990 revival of sacred music due to the interest of a generation of young

people. Starting from the nationalism of the 1980s and the “strong national project” culminating in the “renaissance of Serbian culture” (p. 110) at the end of the aforementioned period, the study “Serbian Orthodox Choral Music: Its Revival Over the Three Last Decades” by Bogdan Đaković (Novi Sad) focuses on religious music productions, concentrating on the works of four important Serbian composers after 1990. It is significant in this context that the analyses of the works of the four composers are supplemented with extensive interviews on various topics (theological, dogmatic, technical-compositional, aesthetic, etc.), which increases the understanding of these composers' visions of the musical phenomenon manifested in the liturgical context. Written by Dalibor Davidović (Zagreb), the sixth and concluding study of Part I of the volume (“After the End of the World. On Music in Hans Jürgen Syberberg’s *Café Zilm*”), is surprising in that its author, although Croatian, writes about a German topic. The focus of his research is the work of an artist who is not a composer but a film director, namely Hans Jürgen Syberberg. The horrors that took place in his home village during World War II become Syberberg’s lifelong obsessive theme. Returning to the place of his birth after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German artist sets up his life project, “The Nosendorf Project”, with *Café Zilm* as part of it, along with complex installations, projections and happenings. Davidović immerses himself in the music used in *Café Zilm*, music that comes from the German tradition, as the author attempts to decipher its role in Syberberg’s art.

The second part of the volume bears the title “Festivals and Institutions: Strategies of Existence and Survival” and includes five studies dedicated to the dynamics of music and arts institutions and festivals in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, Hungary and post-socialist Russia. Knowing that not all communist states were the same, just as not all of communist political systems functioned in the same way in each and every country, it is more than obvious that political, economic and socio-cultural contexts and factors are crucial in the post-socialist countries that aim to redefine their musical lives. The first chapter is by Jelena Janković-Beguš and Ivana Medić (“On Missed Opportunities: The International Review of Composers in Belgrade and the ‘Postsocialist Condition’”) and focuses on the well-known and longest-running festival of contemporary music in Serbia, founded in 1992. In addition to the intense effort of systematising a vast amount of material (1992–2020) and discussing the events and situations that the festival has gone through in the turbulent political and economic contexts that Serbia has experienced during these three decades, the remarkable analysis carried out by the two scholars also has the exceptional merit of being grounded in their own expertise, from the inside, as they were involved in the running of various editions of the event. According to the authors of the study, the International Review has always been a festival of “academic composers” (p. 142), and the period mentioned above has been segmented into three stages: (1) the “‘war years’ (1992–2000)”, (2) the “‘transition’ phase (2001–2006)” and (3) the “‘stagnant’ phase (2007 to present)”.

In her study *Festival/isation of Art Music – the Collapse or Recreation of Sarajevo Concert Life*, Fatima Hadžić (Sarajevo) deals with music festivals of the last three decades in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is more than obvious that such events are dynamic and function as an economic, cultural and beneficial engine for the cultural scene nationwide. The author also emphasises that festivals become an instrument for legitimising the political power that supports such initiatives and plays a crucial role in the distribution of financial resources, the majority of which come from public funds. The chapter by Valentina Sandu-Dediu (Bucharest), “Socialist and Postsocialist Histories Reflected in the Recent Past of the Bucharest Philharmonic”, investigates the changes undergone by one of the most important concert institutions in Romania, the Bucharest Philharmonic. Founded in 1868 and predominantly state-funded, it is understandable that cultural and artistic policies were dictated to an overwhelming extent, especially during the socialist period, by the official politics of the time in Romania. The author examines in detail all these changes and political interferences that caused the Philharmonic to become exclusively state-owned (after 1945), which was reflected in the strongly ideologised content of the repertoires and concert engagements of the Philharmonic in Romania and abroad. The period of the last three decades is one of transition dominated by moments of crisis, including financial, but also by the persistence of a minimal resistance through the promotion of repertoires for a wide audience, and, with some exceptions, without a real concern for the promotion of new works and premieres.

Starting from a letter written in 1992 by a group of four composers born after 1947 to another group, also of four composers but “modernists”, oriented towards Western models, who nevertheless had held leading positions in Hungarian cultural life, the study by Anna Dalos (Budapest), “Critical Years: Debates in the Field of Hungarian Music (1988–1992)” discusses in depth the most turbulent and politically difficult transitional period in Hungarian musical life (1988–1992) through the lens of three of the country’s major musical institutions: the Hungarian Composers’ Association, the National Philharmonic and the Hungarian Music Society. The situation is strikingly similar in terms of reactions, atmosphere and results to what happened in Romania after 1989: tribulations and accusations between composers from different generations, acid discussions about the privileges enjoyed by some politically subservient members, protests, withdrawals from office, etc.—all of these reactions were aimed at the preservation and promotion of contemporary music, cultural-artistic policies in line with pan-European free market guidelines and musical institutions of all kinds. The study by Lidia Ader and Konstantin Belousov (Saint Petersburg), “Music and Business in Postsocialist Russia”, provides a detailed account of the economic challenges faced by Russian opera and ballet companies, orchestras and musical institutions in general after 1989. The two scholars identify the new financial mechanisms governing the current market economy of musical life in the major Russian metropolises (especially St Petersburg and Moscow), high-

lighting the decreasing role of the state in exclusively managing the music industry and its attempt to indirectly support the phenomenon by including private and corporate sponsors.

The final part of the volume, “Changing Landscapes of Traditional and Popular Musics”, begins with two studies that investigate traditional music in Romania and Kazakhstan. In her chapter “Folklore in the Communist Period and Its Later Extensions: The Romanian Case”, Speranța Rădulescu [+ 2022] (Bucharest) explores the drastic transformations that traditional music in Romania underwent between 1945 and 2019, their dynamics and the (mostly destructive) role that the media played in promoting rural music. Gulzada N. Omarova’s (Almaty) study, “Postsocialism and the Culture of Kazakhstan: National Music in the Era of Global Changes”, analyses diachronically and with a critical eye, the phenomenon of traditional music culture before and after 1991, the year of Kazakhstan’s independence from the Soviet Union, partly from its educational and artistic models. In Omarova’s view, during the communist era, the state played a central role in controlling folk music and, in parallel with the infusion of Western sound (generally exotic for Central Asian states), encouraged the popularisation of traditional musical genres of questionable value. After 1991, the state, through a nationwide strategy and special programme (both cultural-artistic and educational), attempted to recover this sound heritage. Claire Levy’s study “Euphoria and Creativity: Bulgarian Music in the Time of Transition” presents a dynamic radiography of the musical phenomenon in Bulgaria, focusing mainly on the study of the years 1980–1990. The balance between the Eastern and the Western sound, the diversity of music and the musical practices of the various communities and minorities in this country, gave birth to fusion and underground music, with lyrics whose messages are direct, using an informal, uncensored, ironic language. All this sonic melange reveals the complexity of the music that individualizes and personalizes Bulgarian music in the European context and whose common element seems to be the *ethno* component. The last study in the volume, “The Phenomenon of Slavic Metal. The Case of Poland” by Anna G. Piotrowska, examines the history of the penetration of metal music in her country and the role that Scandinavian metal bands played in promoting it in Poland. Piotrowska observes how, during the socialist period, Slavic mythology became part of the religion in a predominantly Catholic country, becoming an essential component in the bands’ message. Moreover, major figures of Slavic paganism became central themes and anti-communist dissident symbols.

In conclusion, we are in the presence of one of the most profound and consistent musicological contributions produced in recent years on the dynamics of the post-socialist musical phenomena in Europe and Asia. The richness of the methodologies used in investigating the research topics, the diversity of analytical perspectives, the expertise of the specialists—a majority of whom are natives of the countries they have studied, and who have lived and worked in the systems that they

analysed—are additional indicators of the outstanding value of this volume. I believe that the studies in this book not only show the turmoils and difficulties that the musical arts experienced with the transition from socialism to post-socialism, but also constitute a well-founded theoretical reference that will help us to better re-define the future and the objectives of musical-artistic and educational institutions, each with its own specificities and character, in the entire post-socialist space.

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