

Article received on October 11, 2004
UDC 78.071.1:791.61

Zorica Premate

COMPOSERS IN THE FIRST PERSON
Belgrade, Student Cultural Centre, September 16-19, 2004

A group of young composers, musicologists, theoreticians of art and musicians rallied in an association called “Chinch” succeeded, in compliance with its objectives, in organizing an excellent festival of contemporary music in Belgrade, designed in the way it is done in many European music centres: a clear and intriguing programme concept, a concise and busy schedule of events, and the best possible results given the available funding and organizational resources. “Composers in the First Person” is the first in, hopefully, a series of festivals at which the currently most relevant music creators in the world will present themselves to a Belgrade audience personally, through lectures, discussions, concerts and projections. This was the first time Louis Andriessen and Gilius van Bergeijk from the Netherlands and Bernhard Lang from Austria visited Belgrade. Alongside the three of them, the festival also gave lots of space to our young and successful composer Jasna Veličković, who acquired her master’s degree in composition in the class of Louis Andriessen at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague and whose artistic work is highly esteemed in the Netherlands. If one were to look for a common denominator in such a selection of authors in this age of irreducible artistic trends, then it would most certainly be creative-philosophical meditation on sound, an intellectualism preciously enlivened by a specific sense of wit, humour and playing with music concepts and sound matter. In that sense, all the works performed at the festival’s three concerts, works of Andriessen, van Bergeijk, Lang, Veličković, but also of Vuk Kulenović, Miloš Raičković, Irena Popović, Ivan Brkljačić, Robert Lepenik and Edda Strobl, explore the possibility of artistic creation’s survival in a situation when “all the notes have already been written” and “all the concepts have already been tried out”. Agreeing that the world of sound is one and that the position of the creator is that of a player who, according to his own idea, deconstructs, dismantles, divides up that world, and then, again according to an original concept, constructs, assembles, puts it together all over again, all the authors at the “Composers in the First Person” festival expect their art to find an intelligent and educated listener who will penetrate the deeper political and philosophical motives of their actions and uncover an explicit ironic message about music that has, nevertheless, survived its grand ending at the beginning of the 21st century. From Bernhard Lang’s project “Theatre of Repetitions” where the languages of music and movement, out of a desire to identify themselves, are separated more and more in their illusory connotativity, to the TV version of the opera *Rosa, The Death of a Composer*, which was written by Louis Andriessen and Peter Greenaway and which pungently parodies and

ionises the fetishes of mass culture, television, cowboy films, machismo, the machine and kitsch-love of the “grand opera”, to toying with the performer and the listener in the stuffed and with installations disfigured presentations of well-known works from the classical repertoire in Bernhard Lang’s *Piano Installations*, to frivolously toying with harpsichordisms in Kulenović’s *Virđžinal (Virginal)*, to parodying or “adding to” Bach in Jasna Veličković’s composition *Good Bach*. Not to mention Miloš Raičković’s “new classicism” and his *Sonata za klavir (Sonata for Piano)* which, in a mixture of irony and despair once again cries out for pure and simple sound and formal proportions that are forever lost in the contemporary world.

For a long time, the world order of contemporary music has been looking for deviations in the relationship between the sign and the signified, between what is heard and what is thought, between honesty and pretence, creation and the created, kitsch and spirituality. All the works performed at the first international festival “Composers in the First Person” deserve to be discussed separately, and such attention should be particularly paid to the guests, composers who in fact realized the nominative from the title of the festival by presenting themselves as peers of their audience, disposed to exchange opinions and suggestions and open to all questions. The performing achievements of the festival have not only brought back into the limelight, after a long time, such a great domestic artist as pianist Nada Kolundžija (who was the highlight of the entire first concert of the festival), but also represented a new domestic chamber ensemble called “Chinch Bug”, which performed impeccably and with a sense of contemporary sound Jasna Veličković’s complex and demanding scores *Fantazija (Fantasia)* and *Strelka* and Louis Andriessen’s famous composition *Hoketus*. The organizers of the festival should be particularly congratulated on the excellent (bilingual) programme booklet in which, in addition to precise programmes of concerts and basic information about the composers and performers, there was also room for short and informative interviews with guests. The “Chinch” association and its ensemble of the same name have shown that it is possible, in Belgrade today, to accomplish the virtually impossible: organize a festival both intriguing and exemplary in terms of programme, performance and organization.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić