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THE 29TH DAYS OF MACEDONIAN MUSIC

The *Days of Macedonian Music* (DMM) festival was the epicentre of cultural life in the Macedonian capital from March 30 to April 8, 2005. The organizational-creative team of the Macedonian Composers' Union, led by the young composer Soni Petrovski, was for the first time given an opportunity to organize this festival, investing a lot of effort into finally putting it on the map of Europe's important cultural events. The new and fresh concept of the festival, which will be celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2006, is in fact a major shift from previous practice. The organizers' idea was to make a cross-section, during the ten days of the festival, of more significant tendencies and trends and, generally, everything that Macedonia currently has to offer on the cultural level: from contemporary authors and performers who belong to different music genres to traditional music and cultural-artistic societies. In that sense, when we examine the ideological-contentual concept of the festival, we observe a constant reflected in the intention to have each of its segments contain the prefix "Macedonian". All other parameters – concept, idea, style, genre, form – are subordinated to this leitmotif.

Such a concept allowed insight into the broad range of Macedonian music life, but its extremely heterogeneous character created the impression of latent programmatic inconsistency, which in several cases resulted in concerts that served to "fill up the programme".

The central event of the festival was its opening, which attracted great interest of the entire Macedonian public. Indubitably contributing to this, in addition to the central star of the evening – pianist Simon Trpčeski – was the participation of the young pop singer Toše Proeski, who on this occasion appeared in the role of a tenor, performing side by side with three of his colleagues – vocal soloists renowned in the field of classical music. The performance of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was a somewhat surprising departure from the programme concept of the concert featuring music by Macedonian composers Stojan Stojkov, Trajko Prokopiev, Dimitrije Bužarovski and Živojin Glišić, whose music language is mostly traditional, neoromantic, with an inevitable folklore overtone. It was partially explained by Trpčeski's wish to perform the same work he had played a decade before, since this concert marked the tenth anniversary of his first performance with an orchestra. Regardless of the compromise solution which combined the pianist's anniversary and the opening of the festival, such a disruption in the concept created an unnecessary imbalance in the otherwise stylistically uniform concert programme.

The concert itself was otherwise indeed a big cultural event held in the Skopje Universal Hall that was filled to capacity, attended by both the President and the Minister of Culture of the Republic of

Macedonia. The performers demonstrated a high quality of interpretation of perhaps not the best works of Macedonian authors, among which we would like to single out the truly excellent performances of vocal soloists Vesna Ginovska Ilkova (soprano), Ana Durlovski (soprano), Toše Proeski (tenor) and Igor Durlovski (bass) in the slow movement of Dimitrije Bužarovski's *Koncert za klavir i orkestar* (Concerto for Piano and Orchestra). The orchestra of the Macedonian Philharmonic, under the direction of the dynamic and energetic conductor Saša Nikolovski-Djumar, was for the most part a worthy accompaniment for the soloists. Simon Trpčeski once again proved himself to be a great star, demonstrating excellent technique, great talent and unusual charisma which he shows in his specific communication with the audience. It is true that his otherwise technically perfect romantic, almost "Rachmaninovian" reading of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* was somewhat surprising. Nonetheless, Trpčeski fully lived up to the expectations of his listeners, which he again confirmed at a repeat concert held on the second evening of the festival, in the Universal Hall that was once more filled to capacity.

The concerts that followed in the next few days demonstrated the full diversity of the programme concept of the *Days of Macedonian Music*. A workshop and a concert of Macedonian music for fiddle were held at the Museum of the City of Skopje, with Slave Petrovski as the soloist on this folk instrument. Afterwards, admirers of a Macedonian composer originally from Dubrovnik, Ljubomir Brandjolica, had the opportunity to enjoy a concert of ballads and chansons written to the texts of Macedonian poets, performed by the author (piano accompaniment) and his collaborators and friends, mostly amateur singers of less than excellent vocal potential.

From the concert of chamber music held on the following evening, we would like to single out Vanja Nikolovski-Djumar's interesting composition *Duo (Duet)* for saxophone and piano, excellently performed by the young saxophonist Ninoslav Dimov, and Živojin Glišić's *Svita (Suite)* for vibraphone, cello and guitar, both of which stood out from the other works by their avant-garde music language. In continuation of the programme, members of a slightly "out of tune" quartet of trombones of the Macedonian Opera that evidently had too few practice sessions, performed four otherwise interesting and diverse compositions by domestic authors, commissioned for this occasion by the DMM. The style of the performed works ranged from completely traditional, folklore-coloured romantic music language, to impressionistic and jazz elements, to an entirely modern expression.

The excellent concert of the duet Peter Sheppard-Skaerved (violin) and Aaron Shorr (piano) of Great Britain, who performed music of contemporary British authors as well one Macedonian and one American author, was a veritable breath of fresh air in terms of quality. The dynamic violinist made a great impression, flawlessly performing the entire programme, from which we would like to single out the work of American composer Paul Moravec *Arial Fantasy* from 2004, for which the author received the Pulitzer Prize for Composition.

The programme was further filled by numerous concerts of different ensembles and content: a children's musical-stage performance to the music of Stojan Stojkov *Prolećna priča (Spring Story)* in traditional, neoromantic style with a folklore overtone; a concert of young talents, students of primary and secondary music schools of Skoplje, Bitolj and Štip, whose programme featured Macedonian composers of different generations and artistic poetics; as well as concerts of Macedonian sacred (concert of the female chamber choir *Sv. Zlata Meglenska /St. Zlata of Meglen/* and the mixed chamber choir *Mladi solisti /Young Soloists/*) and secular choral music (the female chamber choir and mandolin orchestra of the Youth Cultural Centre of Skoplje). There were also two concerts dedicated to orchestral music of primarily Macedonian authors, performed by the Symphony Orchestra of the Music and Ballet School Centre *Ilija Nikolovski – Luj* and the Macedonian Philharmonic, in addition to which a comprehensive cross-section of the Macedonian jazz scene was successfully made through a performance by the big band of the Faculty of Music in Skoplje. Nonetheless, the majority of concerts were of the chamber type, such as a performance by the soloists of the Bitolje chamber orchestra, the evening of music of young Macedonian composers, concerts of the Macedonian ensemble for contemporary music *Alea, Athelas Sinfoniette* of Copenhagen and others. A performance that stood out in quality was the concert of a Wind Trio of the Slovenian Philharmonic whose programme featured, as a result of cultural cooperation between the two countries, works of Macedonian and Slovenian authors, including the outstanding *Trio op. 67* by the young Slovenian composer Črt Sojar Voglar.

The *Days of Macedonian Music 2005* were formally closed with a performance by *Tanec*, an ensemble for folk songs and dances, which performed the ethno-choreodrama *Za zdravlje i beričet (For Health and Prosperity)* on the Great Stage of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet. On the same occasion the annual awards of the Macedonian Composers' Union (SOKOM) were presented to composers Stojan Stojkov (for the ballet *Ohridska robinja Tašula / Ohrid Slave Tašula/*) and Blagoj Canev (life achievement award), as well as to the *Alea* ensemble for contemporary music for promoting Macedonian music both in the country and abroad.

The accompanying, so-called *off* programme featured, in addition to the already mentioned evening of Ljubomir Brandjolica's ballads and chansons, a ballet performance *Ouch C-Ouch* by choreographer and ballerina Iskra Šukarova to the music of Darija Andovska, a Jam Session in the *Vega* club in Skoplje, workshops for the fiddle folk instrument (Slave Petrovski), new music for solo violin (Peter Sheppard-Skaerved), electronic music (Marek Čolonjevski), as well as a closing debate on the subject of the *Days of Macedonian Music 2005*. In addition to the abovementioned, during the festival the *Telma* television station broadcast films with music by Macedonian authors. Unfortunately, due to a total lack of understanding shown by the Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology of the Faculty of Music in Skoplje towards the festival organizer, the planned ethnomusicological conference entitled *Instrumentalna tradicija zemalja*

Balkana (Instrumental Tradition of Balkan Countries), in which students of ethnomusicology from Belgrade and Skoplje were supposed to participate, was omitted from the programme.

Bearing in mind all the problems relating to the programme, organization, technical and financial issues, which inevitably accompany the realization of such a big and ambitiously designed event, especially in the Balkans, the creative team of the *Days of Macedonian Music* has proven, by strong commitment and hard work, that it is possible to carry out a festival of this type in a responsible and serious manner (and also attract a large number of private sponsors). We would also like to emphasize the truly successful work of the marketing team, which contributed to the good attendance of the audience through high quality and attractive advertising material and an excellently equipped programme booklet.

Notwithstanding the occasional “straying” and inconsistency in the idea and concept of the festival, its main goal was successfully accomplished – Macedonian music was presented in all its diversity, regardless of type, kind, genre, form, character or content of individual programmes. In addition, what we believe to be one of the greatest achievements is that domestic composers were commissioned to create more than 20 works especially for the festival, as well as that the audience had the opportunity to hear over 40 premieres during its course. If the same creative-organizational team is given the opportunity to carry out the next *Days of Macedonian Music* as well, this event will certainly have a bright future ahead of it.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić