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Choirs in Belgrade Music Life in the First Years after World War II (1944-1950)

Abstract

In the People's, and later Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, social life was dictated by politics. The main goal was "to raise the general cultural level of the people" through music. Choral singing which already had a long tradition, was hence regarded as the most useful means for enlightening the masses and bringing music to the masses. The singing of mass and traditional songs was insisted upon; especially the ones with newly added lyrics with a war thematic, while numerous amateur choirs were founded.

Key words

Cultural-Artistic Societies, mass songs, traditional songs, amateur choirs, War of National Liberation.

We were still under the impression of the bombing and the war that still was not over when, on October 20, 1944, Belgrade was liberated from the German occupation.

In the people's and then the socialist republic, social life was dictated by the political leadership. Its beginnings were in cultural centres, adult education centres, cultural and artistic societies and labour actions. Numerous concerts organized by different music institutions were frequently held in Belgrade and its surroundings, in factories, companies, government offices, army barracks, schools, hospitals, on holidays, in the honouring of important guests. The aim was to "raise the general cultural level of the people with music, by creating organizational forms of public music life, by supporting all social measures that raise the musical awareness of the people, but also by indicating to all music creators... the basic and main fundamental problems of their art in the face of the overall task of the cultural policy of our national democracy, which was set by our very new social reality and personified in the brief and clear... tenet of our first five-year economic development plan".¹

¹ Pavle Stefanović, Muzičke diskusije u Sovjetskom Savezu, *Muzika*, 1948, 1, p. 87.

It was considered that art should help “the progressive class in its struggle against reactionism, against a class which, fleeing from life and reality, was doomed to failure... to abstraction, mysticism, individualism, pessimism...”, and that “classless, non-partisan art can be realized only through the increasingly comprehensive, increasingly conscious, increasingly passionate party spirit of contemporary progressive art”.²

Since the orientation towards the popularization of literature, art and music was a priority, the thematics and methods of work were predefined, primarily as socialist realism, and models originated mostly from the Soviet Union which, according to some, was the source of “everything... that we feel as brotherly familiar, pleasing and most dear, based on the living heart of Slavic brotherly unity”.³

Texts about music written in the first years after the war almost did not differ from political articles of that period in terms of their ideas and language. They resembled manifestos and proclamations and were filled with quotations of statements of eminent politicians, enthusiastic glorifications of the War of National Liberation and the building of the brotherhood and unity of our nations, as well as equally enthusiastic hopes for a better life in the future and the belief that music would become closer to the masses and that the workers will become musically literate. The authors of these texts considered their ideas to be new and “progressive”. In addition to musicians-veterans, such views were also propagated by musicians who had not advocated them in the interwar period:

The past activity of our youth in the cultural-artistic field has been lively and fruitful and has yielded many good results. First of all, it has greatly contributed to the involvement of the broad masses of our young people, whose fathers and mothers, living in spiritual darkness in the former anti-people state, were unable to show their children new paths of living and developing. Our present people's state, a country where the broadest masses

² Oskar Danon, Uloga savremene muzike u društvu, *Muzika*, 1948, 1, pp. 5-16.

³ Pavle Stefanović, Delatnost muzičke sekcije Društva za kulturnu saradnju sa SSSR-om, 20. oktobar, July 13, 1945.

*of people will be enlightened in the future, has put its sad past behind it forever and has eagerly embarked on the road of wholesome progress in all areas of material and spiritual culture.*⁴

Mass and folk songs

Choral songs, especially those unrecorded by the critics, played a prominent role in such a cultural climate – they were sung constantly at meetings, conferences, symposiums, events, in primary schools, grammar schools, companies, factories. They were mass and related songs that had arrived with the partisans. Some of them had also been sung previously in Serbian workers' choral societies, such as *Internacionala (The Internationale)*, *Bilećanka (Song from Bileće)*, *Budi se istok i zapad (The East and the West are Rising)*, *Mitrovčanka (Song from Mitrovica)*, *Radnička Marseljeza (Workers' Marseillaise)*, *Radnička himna (Workers' Hymn)*, as well as Anđelić's songs, including *Crvena je krvca (Red is the Blood)*, and Blobner's song *Zdravo da ste hrabri borci (Greetings, Brave Soldiers)*.

The socialist state favoured mass songs that resounded all across the former Yugoslavia. Songs sung during the war were not forgotten either and were joined by new ones, whose content referred to the struggle to build up the country. Through mass songs, music lived a full life as occasional art accessible to the masses, since their texts reflected the atmosphere of the epoch of their creation – during the war their subject matter was related to fighting, while in times of peace it was linked with the building of the country and labour actions. Their texts were translated or replaced with new, revolutionary lyrics. They included the following:

Budi se istok i zapad, Budućnost je naša (Bez strepnje, bez straha) /The Future Belongs to Us (Without Anxiety, Without Fear)/, Život, mladost (Partizane naše celi svet već zna) /Life, Youth (Our Partisans are Already Known Worldwide)/, Nabrusimo kose /Let Us Sharpen our Scythes/, Padaj silo i nepravdo /May You Be Destroyed, Force and Injustice/, Partizanka (Po šumama i gorama) /Partisan Song (Through Woods and Mountains)/, Partizan sam, tim se dičim /I am a

⁴ Mihailo Vukdragović, Muzika na festivalima Narodne omladine, *Mladi borac*, January 1, 1947.

Partisan and Proud of It), *Pesma o radu* (Drugarska se pesma ori) /*Work Song* (A Comradely Song is Echoing)/, *Republiko majko naša* /*Oh, Republic, Our Mother*/, etc.

The characteristics of certain songs display features of their genre. They are solemn, optimistic, with a straightforward expression, catchy, simple, like in a black and white technique. They glorify the struggle, Marshal Tito, the Party, the army and the building up of the country. They are singable, motivated, with an enthusiastic melody of an international character and a frequent characteristic skip to the fourth, fifth and even the octave at the beginning of a composition. The tension of their melodies mounts and culminates in the refrain. They are almost exclusively diatonic, predominantly in keys with a small number of key signatures. They have a marching, strong, energetic and brisk, often dotted, rhythm. They are two-part, with a simple binary or ternary form with variants, sometimes also with an introduction and a coda, and often with piano accompaniment.

Not all Belgrade composers had the same attitude towards mass songs. Some composed them, others were even very successful in this genre, while some did not show enough interest in those intermittent compositions. However, the composers who truly believed in the revolution and were communists by political orientation believed that mass songs should be inspired by folk music and understood as “an art form”, so they suggested that the Association of Composers of Serbia, the Department of Composition of the Music Academy, the press, radio, films, etc. should become involved.⁵

It seems that mass songs should not be treated as artistic. Branko Dragutinović tried to do so and came to the conclusion that the texts to which they were composed were of poor quality, as well as lacking invention, and did not draw from our choral classics and folk music and lacked correspondence between the language and music accents.⁶

⁵ Nikola Hercigonja, Neka zapažanja o našoj masovnoj pesmi, *Književne novine*, March 29, 1949.

⁶ Branko Dragutinović, Takmičenje horova beogradskih kulturno-umetničkih društava, *Politika*, November 25, 1948.

The efforts of certain composers to break the pattern did not significantly raise the artistic quality of the mass songs. Nor could this be achieved by the use of more intense harmonic life in Mihovil Logar's mass songs, Mihailo Vukdragović's more complex piano accompaniment, Stanojlo Rajičić's efforts to retain some elements of interwar youth songs or Milenko Živković's desire for a less simple compositional writing. Nikola Hercigonja, who had participated in the War for National Liberation, tried to conceive mass songs in various ways – in the spirit of the Russian elegy, in unity with the folk partisan song and in the manner of the standard mass song. Who can still remember Baranović's *Prvomajska (May Day Song)*, Vukdragović's *Koračnica (March)*, Živković's *Omladinski poklič (Cry of the Youth)*, Logar's *Pesma prvom petogodišnjem planu (Song to the First Five-Year Plan)*, Rajičić's *Marš minera (March of the Blasters)* or Hercigonja's *Bratskoj armiji (To the Brotherly Army)*?

Related to the specific fighting atmosphere, mass songs marked an epoch in Serbian and former Yugoslav music. They disappeared and were forgotten, but some of them outlasted the period in which they were created – Logar's *Pesma Beogradu /Song to Belgrade/* (1944, text by Tanasije Mladenović), whose first part was a music symbol of Radio Television Belgrade for a while, Hercigonja's *Jugoslavija /Yugoslavia/* (text by Mira Alečković) and Danon's *Uz maršala Tita /By Marshal Tito's Side/* (between 1945 and 1951).⁷

Mass songs from the 1950s and 1960s influenced certain music authors who quoted them in their compositions – they continued to live in Nikola Hercigonja's opera-oratorio *Gorski vijenac (The Mountain Garland)*, where they linked past and present liberation wars with their music, in Jovan Bandur's *Jugoslovenska partizanska rapsodija (Yugoslav Partisan Rhapsody)*, in the works of Danon, Papandopol, Gobec and other composers.

Alongside mass songs, veterans in Belgrade danced the *kolo* and sang folk songs with new, partisan texts, which also introduced the jekavian dialect. The song *Tu djevojka divno igra (There a Girl Dances Beautifully)* became known with the lyrics

⁷ Roksanda Pejović, *Masovne pesme i njihove moguće preteče u srpskoj muzičkoj prošlosti*, XXIV Festival Kurirček, *Tematika NOB in revolucije v sodobni glasbi*, Maribor, 1986, pp. 10-17.

Na Kordunu grob do groba (Countless Graves on Kordun), while the popular *Kozaračko kolo* (Kolo from Kozara) was performed in different textual and melodic variants. *Listaj goro, cvjetaj cvijeće* (Oh, Mountain, Come into Leaf, Oh, Flowers, Blossom) was sung as the song *Oj, svijetla majska zoro* (Oh, Bright Dawn of May), that is, *U Ivana gospodara* (Master Ivan) or as *Skoči kolo da skočimo* (Skip Kolo So That We All May Skip).

New texts were added to old melodies, creating songs like *Druže Tito, maršale* (Comrade Tito, Our Marshal), *Po šumama i gorama* (Through Woods and Mountains), *Hej narode Like i Korduna* (Hey, People of Lika and Kordun), *Drug nam Tito izd'o naređenje* (Comrade Tito Gave Us an Order), *Kraj Sutjeske hladne vode* (Along Sutjeska, the Cold River) and many others.

Different melodies were combined with similar texts, like in the songs *Na vrh gore Romanije* (At the Top of Romanija Mountain), *Veseli se goro Romanijo* (Rejoice Romanija Mountain) and *Ide Tito preko Romanije* (Tito is Travelling Across Romanija). There were also different variants of the same song – that was the case with the songs *Romanijo, visoka planino* (Oh, Romanija, High Mountain) and *Listaj goro, cvjetaj cvijeće*.

It was found that the ambitus of melodies ranged from the second to the eleventh, most often within the perfect fifth and fourth, the major sixth and the minor third. The metrics of two-four, four-four and three-four texts and the rhythm of the *kozaračko kolo* and marches were dominant. Some songs were characterized by heterogeneous metric combinations. Polyphony appeared in the form of diaphony in the seconds, thirds and fifths. The rhymed couplet was the basic form of partisan folk poetry.⁸

Oskar Danon's triptych *Pesme borbe i pobjede* /Songs of Struggle and Victory/ (1943-1948), which also represents the apex of his work in the field of choral literature and in which he tried to achieve a unity of the folk and the artistic, belongs to a specific folk genre; it consists of *Lička balada* /The Ballad from Lika/, *Kozara* /Oh, Kozara/ and

⁸ Roksanda Pejović, Narodna muzika u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i njen uticaj na stvaralaštvo muzičara-boraca (istorijski pregled), XXII Festival Kurirček, *Ljudska glasba v NOB in Revoluciji*, Maribor, 1984, pp. 70-85.

Konjuh planino /Oh, Konjuh Mountain/ (in this last song, composed to Miloš Popović's text, the composer did not use the melody of the revolutionary song with the same name).⁹

Choirs of Different Institutions and Cultural and Artistic Societies. Professional Choirs

Intensive choral music-making after the liberation also reflected on numerous choirs which were founded in an unorganized manner, subsisting for a while, with some of them even competing between themselves, but soon ceasing to exist. There was an impression that most institutions had their own choir – there was a strong insisting on workers' choirs, on the “cultural and artistic enlightenment of the working class” which was given “wide developmental and progressive opportunities”.¹⁰

In order to give some direction to the amateur work of above all the workers and the youth, cultural and artistic societies were founded as a form of guidance aimed to introduce amateurs to the world of music. These societies also included choirs, most often as the most prominent group. They performed different compositions, from folk songs and mass choruses to Renaissance and contemporary music, from foreign to Serbian works and compositions from the South-Slavic region.

However, a high level of music culture could not be achieved overnight, so that the majority of societies were still at the beginning, since there was not much progress towards music-making that could come close to the artistic, but some individuals still believed that “culture and art will be in the hands of the working masses”.¹¹ Few workers' choral societies had a professional choirmaster, musician-conductor, an adequate program without insignificant compositions and a model interpretation without “clumsy” and “illogical phrasing”.¹²

Year after year the same objections were raised regarding the interpretation and the inadequate program or programs exceeding the abilities of the choir – sometimes

⁹ Roksanda Pejović, *Oskar Danon*, Beograd, Univerzitet umetnosti u Beogradu, p. 156.

¹⁰ Pavle Stefanović, *Smotra radničkih horova*, 20. oktobar, April 6, 1945.

¹¹ Nikola Hercigonja, *Horovi i orkestri na smotri sindikalnih kulturno-umetničkih društava u Beogradu*, *Glas Narodnog fronta Srbije*, February 14, 1947.

¹² *Ibid.*

only one of these two elements were satisfactory and hardly ever were they both at a relatively high artistic level. It was said, at the review of union cultural and artistic societies held in 1947, that popular compositions could culturally educate the listeners, so that works characterizing the struggle of the masses against the oppressors and those capturing the spirit of folk and Slavic music were recommended. Excessive chanting, unnecessary caesuras, inappropriate changes of tempo and unnatural diction came under criticism. It was assumed that a choir accompanied by an instrumental ensemble has a fair chance of success.¹³

The joy of music-making lasted as long as constant practicing, provided that the members of cultural and artistic societies had ambitions to make guest appearances abroad or participate in an international competition, which meant a lot to those who were behind the iron curtain.

The socialist government did not embrace music societies that had been active between the two world wars, except for worker's societies, so that, with few exceptions, only their activity was revived, while the fate of other societies was mostly a gloomy one. The Belgrade Choral Society orientated its activities towards singing in church, as the *Stanković* Music Society, and by extension its choir, ceased to exist, while the Academic Choral Society *Obilić* changed its name to the Academic Cultural and Artistic Society *Branko Krstanović*.

Newly founded cultural and artistic societies, predominantly named after politicians and veterans of the War of National Liberation, changed choirmasters, which had a negative effect on the quality of their performance; nonetheless, the strongest ones still managed over the years to win recognition in the country and abroad. We will consider only those that were founded in the first years after the war.

As soon as April 1945, the local cultural and artistic union board in Belgrade organized a concert of ten workers' choirs. They included the old choral societies *Abrašević*, *Nikola Tesla* and *Jedinstvo (Unity)*, as well as choirs of the Board of Transport, the choir of bank clerks and the choir of municipal-telegraphic-telephonic employees.

¹³ Ibid.

The same year, 1945, the cultural and artistic group of KNOJ (the National Defence Corps of Yugoslavia) demonstrated the results of its work at a concert in Belgrade, having gained some experience at a series of military events. It had excellent, vigorous vocal material and was disciplined. It was believed that it “convincingly demonstrated the spirit of our army” and that it “caught up with and surpassed our old renowned civic choirs”, as well as that “its quality demonstrates the general political enlightenment of artistic groups”.¹⁴ However, its choirmaster was Srećko Kumar, the well-known conductor of civic choral societies, and the one deserving credit for its success.

Choirs also had an important place at the Yugoslav Youth Festival in 1948 which saw the participation of workers, high school and university students. Certain results were also observed in the group of less qualified musical participants with “young and healthy vocal materials”, clear diction, well-mastered rhythm and dynamics and a “well-learned text”. Flaws were perceived in the open manner of singing, the unforced music phrases and unclear articulation. Choirmasters of more advanced choral groups had a music education and a gift for leading a choir, but they wanted to achieve special effects, which made their conducting unmotivatedly arbitrary and even naturalistic, yet their effort were rewarded, with Borislav Simić being awarded first prize, Branko Kaluđerović second prize and Borislav Pašćan third prize.¹⁵

However, when the Belgrade choirs’ cultural and artistic societies performed at a competition organized within an international competition in 1948, they did not make a favourable impression. Twenty-eight choirs with over 1600 members competed. In most cases the young choirs did not have adequate work conditions because their members were often otherwise engaged and their choirmasters lacked expertise. The programs had two parts – the first comprised mass songs, while the second consisted of artistic compositions. The most frequently performed composition was Stevan Mokranjac’s *Osmo rukovet (Eighth Garland Song)* – it was performed eight times

¹⁴ Pavle Stefanović, *20. oktobar*, July 27, 1945.

¹⁵ Branko Dragutinović, *Muzičke priredbe na Festivalu omladine Jugoslavije, Politika*, November 12, 1948.

using different concepts, which resulted in a diversity of opinions about this leading figure of Serbian music.¹⁶

It is true that choral music-making had become popular, but it seems that “the majority of choirs were regressing” since they were not familiar with the basic principles of choral technique. They lacked vocal uniformity and homogeneity of sound, the correct articulation and an attitude towards the content of the compositions. The inexpertly led choir sang in a forced manner and the choir-masters lacked conducting techniques. Nonetheless, five prizes were awarded.¹⁷

In an attempt to solve the problem, it was suggested that help should be provided to conductors outside Belgrade by organizing for music experts to visit the countryside, to attend rehearsals and provide useful advice on conducting, so that Milenko Živković prepared a short course in choir leading.¹⁸

A national review of choirs held in 1950 demonstrated that unoin choirs had achieved some results and that dilettantism was slowly abandoned, but the problems remained the same. Certain choral societies performed mass songs harshly and “jerkily in the phrasing, roughly in the rhythm, while the diction was also inappropriate”. The same problem concerning the performing of the same compositions arose once more – five out of the eleven choirs had Mokranjac’s *Deseta rukovet (Tenth Garland Song)* on their programs.¹⁹

Insight into the first steps of the more renowned choral societies in the first years after the liberation meant the initiation of their monographs. Not all societies fully took advantage of the privileges granted to them, as did *Abrašević* and *Đoka Pavlović*. *Ivo-Lola Ribar* and *Branko Cvetković* had a significant early developmental stage, while *Branko Cvetković* later developed into a first-rate choral ensemble.

¹⁶ Predrag Milošević, O horovima kulturno-umetničkih društava Beograda, *Glas Narodnog fronta Srbije*, December 18, 1948.

¹⁷ Branko Dragutinović, Takmičenje horova beogradskih kulturno-umetničkih društava, *Politika*, November 25, 1948.

¹⁸ Milenko Živković, Umetnost horskog pevanja. Kratak kurs vođenja hora, *Omladinska pozornica*, 1950, 1, 5-11 and 2, 87-93; Umetnost horskog pevanja, 3. deo, *Omladinska pozornica*, 1950, 3, 172-177; Umetnost horskog pevanja, 4. deo. Elementi interpretacije (II, III), *Omladinska pozornica*, 1950, 4, 249-259 and 5, pp. 321-331.

¹⁹ Stana Đurić-Klajn, Horovi, orkestri i solisti na saveznoj smotri, *Politika*, February 3, 1950.

The workers' cultural and artistic society *Abrašević* continued its activities in the choral and drama groups immediately after the liberation. It brought together workers who had fought in the war, training them in the spirit of socialism and making an attempt to educate them artistically.²⁰ It gave concerts and performed at the review in 1945, alongside other workers' choral societies, *Nikola Tesla* and *Jedinstvo*, while in 1948 it won first prize for its excellent vocal material and "harmonious joint music-making" achieved by conductor Bogdan Babić.²¹ At the national review of choirs in 1950, *Abrašević* was the best at performing mass songs.

The newly founded cultural and artistic society *Ivo-Lola Ribar* also performed from November 1944. It played at the Srem Front, youth labour actions and congresses, giving a large number of concerts and bringing together young intellectuals. Its leaders became renowned representatives of their professions – Dušan Skovran was the conductor of the choir, Soja Jovanović led the drama group, while Olga Skovran led the folklore group.

Although amateur, this very sonorous choir had a specific technique and expressiveness and beauty of tone, but its interpretation was forced and "sometimes veered into naturalism".²² Its repertoire included works by former Yugoslav composers, and it won one of its early prizes in Prague in 1947²³ and another prize in Belgrade in 1948, at the Yugoslav Youth Festival.

In the cultural and artistic society *Doka Pavlović*, formed as a cultural and educational section of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Front, with drama, chess, sports and recitation groups, the music section was represented by a choir, a folk orchestra and a dance orchestra. Choral concerts were organized in many places across the former Yugoslavia.

Branko Cvetković, a cultural and artistic society of railway workers and shipyard workers, became known due to its choral and folklore groups. It had a wide repertoire

²⁰ D. Skovran, *Abrašević*, *Leksikon jugoslavenske muzike*, 1, Zagreb, Jugoslovenski leksikografski zavod *Miroslav Krleža*, 1984, p. 2.

²¹ Branko Dragutinović, op. cit.

²² Branko Dragutinović, *Muzičke priredbe na Festivalu omladine Jugoslavije*, *Politika*, November 12, 1948.

²³ Texts on choral societies were written by Roksanda Pejović in: *Leksikon jugoslavenske muzike*, 1, Zagreb, Jugoslovenski leksikografski zavod *Miroslav Krleža*, 1984.

that ranged from Renaissance to contemporary compositions, including Yugoslav works. In 1947, headed by Bajšanski, it gave positive results in both the choice of program and interpretation,²⁴ and in 1948 it won first prizes in Zagreb and Belgrade, owing to its “uniform sound, solid practice and finesse of interpretation”,²⁵ overall musicality, correct diction, appropriate tempos and dynamics,²⁶ in 1950 its excellent performance of Mokranjac’s *Primorski napevi (Seaside Melodies)* was commended,²⁷ while in 1952 it won first prize at a competition in Zagreb. Over time it managed to achieve stylistically accurate interpretations and cultivate a culture of sound.

The first steps of the cultural and artistic society *Branko Kršmanović* were not very different from other societies of the time. Led by Josip Kalčić, the choir won second prize at a choral competition of Belgrade cultural and artistic societies in 1948. Nonetheless, it developed into the strongest choral society by far, elevating the choir to a high level of expression, winning renown in the country and abroad and, under the long-standing direction of Bogdan Babić from 1949 to 1980, becoming a symbol of the contemporary interpretative approach. It made guest appearances in many European countries and went on six big American tours, holding concerts on other continents as well and participating in numerous music festivals worldwide. This society deserves credit for the fact that music production from the region of former Yugoslavia was heard all around the world.

In addition to amateur choirs, there were also three professional choirs in Belgrade in the years after the liberation, of which the choir of the Belgrade Opera and the Radio-Choir continued their existence from the period between the two world wars, while the choir of the Yugoslav Army Club was founded in 1948 as a part of the Orchestra and Choir of the Yugoslav Army Club. The members of these choirs, the majority of whom were musically untrained, not only engaged in their basic duties, but also performed a diverse repertoire, and nearly always carried out the conductors’ intentions and received favourable criticism.

²⁴ Nikola Hercigonja, op. cit.

²⁵ Branko Dragutinović, Takmičenje horova beogradskih kulturno-umetničkih društava, *Politika*, November 25, 1948.

²⁶ Predrag Milošević, op. cit.

²⁷ Stana Đurić-Klajn, Horovi, orkestri i solisti na saveznoj smotri, *Politika*, February 3, 1950.

The opera choir was led by Milan Bajšanski (working with this ensemble for nearly twenty years, from 1945 till 1963), who had many opportunities to show its skill in choruses of Slavic operas up to 1950, especially in *Prince Igor* (staged in 1948) and *Boris Godunov* (presented in 1948), but also in certain Italian opera works. After that period, during the Belgrade Opera's large tours abroad, choirs nearly always attracted the attention of the critics with their quality, due to an excellent sound and being very well rehearsed.

The Radio-Choir was revived by Milan Bajšanski in 1944 and led by him until 1946, followed by Svetolik Pašćan (from 1946 till 1948) and once again by Bajšanski (from 1948), after which, under the imposing directing of conductor Borivoje Simić from 1949 onwards, it performed for thirty-one years and became a highly renowned professional ensemble.

When the need arose, these two choirs also performed vocal and instrumental compositions at concerts, whereupon they had to adapt to some demands of conductors which differed from their usual routine. In the first years after the war, in November 1945, they participated in the performance of Sergey Prokofiev's cantata *Alexander Nevsky*, and in January 1948, they sang in Yuri Shaporin's cantata *On the Field of Kulikovo* and Mihailo Vukdragović's cantata *Vezilja slobode (The Embroideress of Freedom)*.

*Exceptionally sonorous and technically solid, the vocal group of the Opera and Radio Choir, excellently prepared by Svetolik Pašćan and Milan Bajšanski, completely rose to its difficult task and, for its part, contributed to the success of the performance.*²⁸

In 1949 they contributed to the realization of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ninth* Symphony, which, although conducted by Baranović, did not please the critics. Although insufficiently rehearsed, the choir was the best participant, and its work nevertheless presented its vocal values.²⁹

²⁸ Branko Dragutinović, Dve kantate na koncertu Beogradske filharmonije, *Politika*, January 19, 1948.

²⁹ Branko Dragutinović, Dva značajna muzička događaja: Bethovenova Deveta simfonija i Šopenova proslava, *Politika*, October 27, 1949.

The third active choir gave concerts within the Artistic Ensemble of the Yugoslav People's Army, founded in 1947: in addition to the symphonic orchestra, also founded were a male choir that grew into a mixed choir in 1947, a light orchestra, a Slavic quintet, a group of singers of folk songs, a group of vocal soloists and a folk orchestra. The basic task of the ensemble was to preserve and propagate the music heritage from the War of National Liberation and to stimulate production inspired by this war, so that it held concerts at army barracks, cultural centres and numerous other institutions where it addressed a wide audience. However, it at the same time fostered art music, so that later on, under the direction of conductor Mladen Jagušt, it deserved credit for stylistically appropriate performances of oratorio compositions.

In the 19th century, we had patriotic songs encouraging the fight for liberation from the Turks. In the 20th century we also sang mass battle songs and songs to celebrate our victory over the German occupiers. They were both dominant in particular periods, when the war atmosphere influenced the mood of the masses. Through the gradual stabilization of the political situation, they turned into memories, while art music, liberated from occasional music-making, gained more space and undoubtedly a larger number of its own admirers and devotees.

Translated by Jelena Nikezić

Summary

In the People's, and later Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, social life was dictated by politics. The main goal was "to raise the general cultural level of the people" through music. Choral singing, with already a long tradition, was hence regarded as the most useful means for enlightening the masses and bringing music to the masses. The singing of mass and traditional songs was insisted upon; especially the ones with newly added lyrics with a war thematic, while numerous amateurs' choirs were founded. The most prominent were the choirs of the Cultural-Artistic Societies, such as Ivo Lola Ribar, *Branko Krsmanović*, and Branko Cvetković.

Choirs with professional conductors achieved certain artistic results, but generally speaking, there were many disadvantages - such as an inadequate knowledge of choral techniques, a disbalance of voices, an absence of sonorous homogeneity, irregularities in articulation and the interpretation of the lyrics, as well as somewhat

forced singing. However, this is not true of the professional choirs of the same period – the Opera Choir, Radio Choir and the Choir of the Artistic Ensemble of the Yugoslav Army.

It was advocated that composers should compose mass songs in the spirit of the international songs of the same genre like *Budi se Istok i Zapad* (*The East and West are Raising*) or *Padaj silo i nepravdo* (*Down, Force and Injustice*). However, the efforts of certain composers to break with clichés did not lead to important artistic results, although the influences of such compositions as *The Songs of Battle and Victory* by Oskar Danon, or the scenic oratorio *Gorski vijenac* by Nikola Hercigonja, were evident.