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THE PLACE OF CLASSICAL MUSIC FESTIVALS IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY

A review of a master's thesis, the University of Arts in Belgrade/Université Lumière Lyon 2, France

The master's thesis entitled *The Place of Classical Music Festivals in a Transitional Society* was penned in English under the mentorship of Prof. Milena Dragičević-Šešić, Ph.D. It was defended at the University of Arts in Belgrade, at the Department of management in culture and cultural politics in the Balkans, on October 19, 2006.¹ The focal point of the research are six art music festivals, which differ between themselves by tradition, program orientation, budget, organizational structure and size, and which were examined in a wider social-political-economic context of the transition in Serbia. These are festivals in Belgrade (Bemus, the Belgrade International Cello Festival, the Guitar Art Festival and the International Tribune of Composers), in Novi Sad (NOMUS), and Arandjelovac (the event *Marble and sounds*). The selection of events had manifold motives behind it, but primarily there was the desire to analyze some of the festivals which I had indirectly been familiarized with throughout the years, in the sense of production, as this enabled me to speak "from direct experience", and not just from the position of a theoretician.

The name of the thesis itself has a double meaning. Primarily, it marks an attempt to find "a place under the sun" for the festivals within an unfavorable social context, occurring as a consequence of an economic transition. On the other hand, the title can also be interpreted in the light of *significance, role or the meaning* of festivals in a transitional society and *for* that society. Viewed from that aspect, research was directed towards the analysis of using the festivals potential, especially referring to the possibilities of a subregional and regional cooperation, and presenting Serbian art music on the international scene and, why not, making profit. My basic hypothesis is that Serbian classical music festivals will have to change and adapt their organizational structures and management in order to justify their further existing; also, that the application of new management techniques, alternative financing sources and developed propaganda activities can secure not just their existence, but also their development, while new possibilities, which evolve from a gradual transition to a market economy, must be recognized and used.

The interdisciplinary character of the topic has also conditioned diverse perspectives of the chosen festivals, along with the use of research techniques "borrowed" from various scientific disciplines (management theory, psychology, sociology, musicology). The topic was divided into five main chapters: *The Introduction, Transition – Definitions of the Term and its More Specific Interpretations, Festivals in Focus, Management of the Festivals in a Transitional Society – Overcoming Difficulties, Taking*

¹ The committee consisted of Dr. Jacques Bonniel, full professor and dean of the Faculty of anthropology and sociology at the Université Lumière, Lyon 2 (France), Dr. Radivoje Dinulović, head of the scene design department at the University of Arts in Belgrade, and the mentor.

Advantage of Opportunities and the *Conclusion: Festivals as an Investment in the Future of Serbian Society*. At the end of the dissertation are the acknowledgments and a bibliography.

In writing the second chapter, called *Transition – Definitions of the Term and its More Specific Interpretations*, I relied on the available references on transition in the former Eastern bloc countries and in the states formed after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Starting from the definition of the concept of (post-socialist) transition, I came to the relevant issue of the beginning of transitional changes in Serbia. Unlike other eastern and southeast European countries, in which socio-economic changes began at the beginning of the 1990s, the process of transition in Serbia (or rather the SRY) could not begin prior to the democratic changes in 2000, as until then it was not possible to display an inclination towards integration – either global, European, regional or subregional. This decade-long delay is the reason why in Serbia the legislative, economic and other changes are just now beginning to accelerate, which in turn causes problems in the functioning of art organizations.

In the third paragraph, *Festivals in Focus*, I presented the results of my research of select festivals, carried out in the period from February to May 2006. The research was carried out based on a questionnaire developed by the European Festivals Association (EFA-AEF) for the *European Festival Research Project*,² which combines qualitative and quantitative research methods. Responses to the set questions were given by artistic and administrative directors, or to be more precise, the executive secretaries of the festivals, and I showed the obtained results in a diagram – in the aim of an easier comparing of festivals according to all the relevant parameters (organizational structure, the budget, the international element, the audience, etc.). The analysis of the festivals which ensues has also been illustrated by a study of the Belgrade International Cello Festival, in which instance can clearly be seen the consequences of a transition on classical music festivals if the internal weaknesses and environmental threats are not recognized on time and an effort to remove them is not made.

In the fourth chapter, *Management of the Festivals in a Transitional Society – Overcoming Difficulties*, I reviewed various techniques of institutional positioning, auto-evaluation, organizational diagnostics and strategic planning, developed by Ichak Adizes, Keith Diggle, Milena Dragičević-Šešić, and Sanjin Dragojević. I showed their application on the examples of the analyzed festivals, which can serve as some sort of ‘reference’ for festival managers and other art manifestations in Serbia.

In the last chapter – *Conclusion: Festivals as an Investment in the Future of Serbian Society*, I gave possible answers to the subject of the thesis title – the place and significance of classical music festivals in 2006 in Serbia, a country going through painful economic changes, while contemplating the structure of its future society and attempting to regain credibility from the international community. The problem of the future defining of cultural politics, which is in Serbia only at its inception, will have a large impact on the future of the festivals. It is my conviction that today’s cultural politics, that is, public

² I relied on the version of the questionnaire from November 2004. The results of this large project, which is still ongoing, can be found on the website of the European Festivals Association - www.efa-aef.com.

intervention in the area of culture, should as its main aim have the democratization of cultural institutions, in order to enable an equal access to all Serbian citizens, including underprivileged social groups. I am of the opinion that classical music festivals can represent an excellent means of intercultural mediation for diverse social groups, considering that they are potentially very visible and appropriate for promoting in the media, and thus the messages which they convey can reach a large number of people. In addition, through various accompanying programs or repositioning the regular programs from the usual concert venues, festivals can also pique the interest of people who generally are not included in the category of classical music audiences. My final conclusion is that art music festivals in Serbia have good survival prospects and can develop further if the numerous social advantages they offer are recognized; in short, their significance lies in the possibility of promoting cooperation on the local and international levels, contributing to the developing of social consciousness and conscience and as a result of the former, increasing the overall quality of life in our country.

Translated by Elizabeta Holt