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### NOVI SAD MUSIC FESTIVAL 08

The concept of a festival, no matter how original and imaginative it may be, always depends on several factors – to begin with, on the finances, then on the festival offer of a particular environment, and finally on the ‘consumers’. If we exclude, for a moment, the ‘economic’ issue (which, of course, is not in the centre of attention here), the Novi Sad Music Festival 08 most certainly fulfilled its function as a ‘delegate’ of art music, as was the case over the past several years. First of all, since being the only festival in Vojvodina featuring the ‘serious’ sound, it included various programmes which suited the taste of different audiences, and also because, for several years, efforts have been made to add more genres to the programme. The step forward toward a syncretic artistic expression is a sign that the NOMUS (Novosadske muzičke svečanosti [Novi Sad Music Festival]) organisers have ‘updated’ their information on contemporary music and that they are aware of the areas of art where the played sound and the spoken word meet in a new way. The festival’s motto, *Reveal the Music*, suggested to the audience the organisers’ intention to include attractive, but less often performed pieces on our stages.

During the eleven NOMUS 08 evenings, 14 symphony, chamber and solo concerts were held, as well as concerts for choir and orchestra and stage performances. Additionally, the programme included some accompanying events – exhibitions and workshops – which undoubtedly gave an extra value to the festival offer.

The three concerts of symphonic music featured the *Symphonists of Vojvodina*, *RTS Symphony Orchestra* and the *Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra*. At the opening night already, the hosts led by maestro Berislav Skenderović resounded with the festival’s motto, reminding of the rarely performed *Mala svita* [*Small Suite*] (1984) by Rudolf Bruči and pointing to the necessity of performances of works by Vojvodina’s composers which are seldom placed on concert repertoires.

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Beethoven's *Concerto for Violin, Violoncello and Piano* with the French soloists well-known to the Novi Sad audience – Vahan Mardirossian (piano), Jean-Marc Phillips Varjabedian (violin), and Xavier Phillips (violoncello) – as well as the *Symphonic Dances* by S. Rachmaninoff were the main part of quite an ambitiously conceived opening. The Macedonian maestro Borjan Canev, with his fellow-countrymen, offered a programme which also suggested 'revealing of music' – Barber's *Essay for Orchestra* No. 1, Britten's *Four Sea Preludes* from the opera *Peter Grimes* and Elgar's *Violin Concerto* were truly *revealed* to the audience, especially owing to the incredible virtuosity of David Garrett, the violinist. Finally, the Belgrade symphonists under the conductorship of Jung Chil Lee from Korea performed the *Russian Easter Overture* by Rimsky-Korsakov, Dvořák's *Eighth Symphony*, as well as Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, together with Rita Kinka on the piano, owing to which the symphonic music offered at NOMUS 08 satisfied the craving both for unrevealed and already popular musical pieces.

Chamber music has been and still is the most successfully performed programme at NOMUS. This certainly owes to the fact that the majority of concerts followed the 1997 concept, ideally created by the cellist István Varga, a professor at the Academy of Arts at the time. The ad hoc ensembles which performed at NOMUS 08 gathered local and world musicians who prepared the programmes announced in advance during the several festival days. In ensembles of this kind, the synergy of various artistic sensibilities resulted in superior performances, almost as a rule.

The first chamber music presentation of this kind was given by violinists Alexander Janiczek and Murriel Cantoreggi, violist Johannes Erkel, violoncellist Richard Lester and pianist Aleksandar Madžar. Janáček's *Intimate Letters* and Dvořák's *Quintet* Op. 81, as well as the arrangement of Mozart's *Piano Concerto in A Major*, KV 414 for this ensemble, were performed in a manner that was not meant to imply the exclusivity of rarely performed pieces, but rather to reveal a new quality to already known works. The same is true for the interpretation of Beethoven's *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*, Op. 102, No. 1, Britten's *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*, Op. 65 and Prokofiev's *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*, Op. 119 by the French artists, Xavier Phillips and Vahan Mardirossian, who also performed on the opening night. In addition to these pieces, they gave sound to the records of the Armenian melograph, conductor and composer, Komitas Vardapet (1869 – 1935), arranging them for violoncello and piano, and offering the audience the opportunity to become familiar with one more folklore tradition (very close to ours).

Because of the programme concept, the third chamber music concert at NOMUS required an unusual instrumental ensemble, which included, besides the string quartet from the first chamber music evening, the pianists Rita Kinka and Ratimir Martinović, and Laura Levai Aksin (flute), Aleksandar Tasić (clarinet), Ivica Marušević (contrabass) and Srđan Palačković (percussion). Part one of the programme featuring Haydn's *String Quartet*, Op. 64, No. 2 and Janáček's *String Quartet* No. 1 had an atmosphere that did not quite match part two, when Saint Saëns's *Le Carnaval des animaux* was performed, with the actor Petar Kralj as narrator. Namely, this part two was more suited for some musical matinee intended for younger audiences which would surely be most thrilled with this kind of piece. This musical joke was not even technically well played due to (for usual local conditions) sound wiring problems.

Already known to the Novi Sad audience, the Hugo Wolf String Quartet made its contribution to the NOMUS chamber genre by appearing on the stage twice, with violist Cristina Biwank and pianist Jasminka Stančul. Performing on their own, the ensemble played Beethoven's *String Quartet in B Flat Major*, Op. 130 and Schumann's *String Quartet in A Major*, Op. 41/3, while, accompanied by the viola, they played Brahms's *String Quartet in G Major*, Op. 111, Mozart's *Quartet* KV 478, and Schubert's famous *Trout Quintet* with the piano accompaniment.

The one and only choir music concert included in this year's NOMUS brought recognition to a recently established ensemble, the *Vojvodina Mixed Choir*. Having confidence in the professional ensemble he founded, conductor Andrej Bursać chose for this occasion a challenging score of Rachmaninoff's *All Night Vigil* as a true 'graduation exam' in performance.

It seems that recitals of the Novi Sad Music Festival more often remain in the shadow of the more glamorous festival events, so at NOMUS 08 there was only one solo performance by the French pianist Jean Eflam Bavouzet whose original interpretation of Beethoven and Debussy aroused quite opposite reviews. This artist held a master course afterwards, presenting from a pedagogical aspect his pianistic experiences to younger generations.

Other NOMUS 08 concerts deserve to be mentioned together, not because they belong to the same genre, but because each is a sui generis exception. Surely, the 'musical joke' *Medved* [Bear] resists most the genre and media definition. Based on Chekhov's story with the same name, it was directed and played by the extraordinary actor Zijah Sokolović. This musical-dramatical happening composed of a mixture of classical theatre, improvisation, pantomime and jazz session, was

dominated by the actor who conjured up, without a set or costume, a charming love story ‘confronting’ his verbal role of Grigory Smirnov to his partners in the dramatic texture – a saxophone, which played the person Grigory was in love with (Primož Simončič), and a bass guitar, which was Luka, the servant (Izstok Vidmar). All of this was accompanied by drums (Marjan Stanič). The *Lolita* ensemble completely understood the author’s idea, and it was owing to the entire artistic ‘team’ that NOMUS 08 made a step forward outside of the classical music genre, which was just what it needed. Almost the same applies to the performance of *The Soldier’s Tale* by Igor Stravinsky, given by the actors of the *Serbian National Theatre*, Boris Isakovič and Jasna Đuričić, together with the chamber ensemble (Vesna Stanković, violin; Ivica Marušević, double bass; Mladen Đorđević, cornet; Nenad Janković, bassoon; Branislav Aksin, trombone; Aleksandar Tasić, clarinet; Srđan Palačković, percussion; Mate Bekavac, clarinet; Kristina Šuklar, violin; Iris Juda, viola; Michael Williams, violoncello). Although stated as ‘narrators’ in the festival programme, these artists managed to ‘upgrade’ the narration by manipulating sound (talking into the microphone the contents that are retold, and not using the microphone in dialogues), thus simulating more protagonists and giving a splendid performance of Igor Stravinsky’s version of a famous Russian fairy tale without any stage effects (technical problems with sound wiring jeopardized to some extent the artistic performance here as well, so this segment of stage management generally turned out to be the organizers’ weak spot, similar to the sound problem in Yugoslav films). This musical ensemble (with fewer members and without the narrator) then played an opus by the contemporary author Oswald Golijov (1960), *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind* for klezmer clarinet and string quartet. The special instrument from the clarinet family was presented by Mate Bekavac.

Another unusual musical happening at NOMUS 08 was the concert given by accordionist Richard Galliano and the *Tangria* band (Jean-Marc Phillips Varjabedian, violin; Phillip Aerts, double bass; Raphael Mejias Vega, percussion). Cherishing a new style called ‘new musette’ inspired by French popular music from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the band of his colleagues, Galliano made a ‘fusion of tango and arias with traces of Piazzola and Bach’<sup>1</sup> for the Novi Sad audience.

A step out of the ordinary closing ceremony with symphonic music was the performance of the musical *Les Misérables* by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg based on the famous novel by Victor Hugo. In the production of the *Madlenianum* opera house, this musical-dramatical

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from the NOMUS programme booklet, written by Marija Adamov, 21.

project, the popularity of which is confirmed by numerous productions on musical stages worldwide and over 50 million spectators, was presented by director Nebojša Bradić, conductor Đorđe Stanković, and the brilliant Zafir Hadžimanov as Jean Valjean, definitely the most important and most inspiring character in the play. Together with the other participants who undoubtedly contributed to the excellent performance of the musical, these artists gave this year's NOMUS closing night all the qualities of an ending of a cultural happening that reaches far beyond the framework of a local event.

Besides the above-mentioned master course, the accompanying programme at this year's Novi Sad Music Festival also included a successful exhibition of photographs showing NOMUS history by Nenad Milikić. Sure enough, with the suggestive scenes, it also visually encouraged the Novi Sad audience to attend the festival. One more 'live' segment of the festival – the *Muzika i mediji* [Music and Media] workshop – was organized under the concept and coordination of senior lecturer, Ira Prodanov Krajišnik, PhD. It offered the opportunity to students of different departments of the Academy of Arts (musicians, painters, photographers, playwrights) to listen to lectures on music copyrights (Ljiljana Rudić-Dimić, PhD), the use of music on television (Snežana Nikolajević, PhD), the recording of music events (Siniša Bokan, MA) and on music events from the Novi Sad past (Marijana Kokanović, MA), and to actively participate in issuing the NOMUS Bulletin. By supporting this project, the organizer of NOMUS, Jeunesses Musicales of Novi Sad, invests in the aspect of education which seems to be rather poorly represented in our degree-granting educational institutions, and yet necessary for becoming a music critic.

Given the obvious aspiration to provide a versatile programme at the most important festival of art music in Novi Sad, it could be recommended to the organizers of NOMUS to try and present the works of contemporary Serbian authors (with most attractive performers), to include perhaps some new dance performances, interpretations of intriguing pieces of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century choral music, and also author evenings dedicated to Vojvodina's composers. In general, anything for which home country visitors (or even those from abroad) would come to Novi Sad. Something like *Exit of the art music*. Why not?

Translated by Goran Kapetanović