
FESTIVALS AND SYMPOSIA

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KoMA '7 Festival

With its not so long and yet significant continuity, the festival of contemporary art music, KoMA – (Koncerti mladih autora [Young Authors' Concerts]) – has positioned itself as an event that has developed its increasingly recognizable identity in recent years and undoubtedly confirmed itself as one of the indispensable institutions of the capital's cultural and musical life. The festival's specific concept, focused on the presentation of the annual production of the young generation of composers, students in the first place, and of those who have already started achieving their professional recognition, has also included the works of foreign authors in recent years, giving this

event an international character to a certain level.

KoMA '7, organized by the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, was held at the Belgrade Philharmonic Hall from December 26 to December 28, 2010. Five concerts in all featured more than 30 works, the majority of which had their premiere performance. In the context of the need to present the annual production, heterogeneous in genre, as articulately as possible, the programme was organized into concerts, each dedicated to the works of the same or a similar genre. To this effect, the festival's "dramaturgy", achieved by "meandering" through concerts dedicated to works for solo instruments, chamber ensembles and orchestra, corresponded in a great measure with the concepts of some other festivals, such as the Review of Composers, thus proving to be an optimal solution. As one of the characteristics of the festival programme profile, we could mention the heterogeneity which imposes itself as a result of the diverse demands within the composition curriculum at the local university-level institutions teaching the majority of the festival participants. This justified, and yet, in a certain sense, restrictive constant of the festival, was overcome at the very start by the presentation of compositions that were poetically a little more innovative for the local milieu. Setting the focus of the

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first concert on the production of both foreign and local authors doing postgraduate studies abroad emphasized the need to enrich the festival content precisely with creative work more or less atypical for the local musical context. To be specific, the programme dedicated to works for double bass and electronics was based on pieces, which, in the process of sound materialization rely crucially on the creativity of the performance itself. In view of this fact, the concert inevitably assumed the character of some kind of a “recital” by the American double bassist, improviser and composer Christopher Williams, who therefore took the leading role in the event.

The opening piece was Milica Đorđević’s *Umeš li ti da laješ? – nekomunikacija za kontrabas* [*Can You Bark? – Non-Communication for Double Bass*] in which the author, assuming the above-mentioned performing creativity, used the sound possibilities of the double bass developed through its unconventional treatment as an effective onomatopoeic potential. The following piece was *Distancia(s) III* by the Argentinian composer Ana Maria Rodriguez, who explored the “distance concept” in music by applying several performing procedures in order to confront different sound/acoustic sensations. The work entitled *Kor (Cold)* by the young Israeli author Yoav Pasovsky, featuring a synchronous, live electronic processing of sounds occurring during the performance itself in an effort to re-examine the possibilities of the musical transposition of physical categories such as coldness and heat, was one of the rare pieces presented at the festival partly based on the application of electronics. While Christopher Williams conceived his piece

Profiad as a specific kind of “tuning” which served as a basis for a semi-improvised performance, the last piece of the programme, Teodora Stepančić’s composition *Bass on Table*, was based on the use of a prepared instrument and included visual and performing elements consisting of various forms of treating the instrument from a distance, both with mechanical and electronic agents, such as two electric fans, a hair-string and a mixing station.

The second concert held on the first festival evening, featuring pieces for piano and chamber ensembles, presented almost paradigmatically the scope of poetic and style orientations of the younger generation of mostly local authors. The concert was opened by *Diptih* [*Diptych*] for viola and piano by Vladimir Korać, the composition written in the late-romanticist/expressionist musical language. Miša Cvijović’s compositions *Vreteno* [*Spindle*], with a subheadline “A Painting for the Piano”, and *Gargojli* [*Gargoyles*] for oboe, viola and piano, of a moderately modern musical expression, showed the author’s high level of compositional skills, particularly prominent in the complex piano parts. *Bluezer* for piano and computer by Teodora Stepančić, resulting from the author’s inclination for experiment and performance, presented a personal creative response to an inspiration derived from blues. While *Verstijving* for piano by Corné Roos focused on examining the acoustic effects of particular strokes on the instrument, Alen Ilijić’s composition *Q: Hi, how are you today? A: Squeezed*, conceived through the more conventional use of the piano, demonstrated the author’s no less modern musical expression. Maja Mitrović’s piece, *after d* for flute, voice and keyboard, was presented as the result of her

personal exploration of the tempered system in search of a “new composing act”.

The panoramic preview of the second festival evening also gave an insight into the local authors’ current production of various styles, suggesting this year again the presence of quite different poetic orientations and a very wide field of stimulations and inspirations for the creative act. Yet, there were no steps forward towards experimenting in composing musical pieces, nor towards more unconventional forms of expression. The first concert dedicated to the works for piano solo or duos with piano was the occasion to hear pieces written mostly in the first or second year of composition studies. *Duo za violončelo i klavir* [*Duo for Violoncello and Piano*] by Jelena Srdić, created in the prevailing romanticist tone, sporadically imbued with a more modern expression, and the expressionistically intoned *Svita za klavir* [*Suite for Piano*] by Marko Kovač showed quite a good level of composition complexity.

Branislav Stevanić’s piece *07, solo pesma za tenor i klavir* [*07, Song for Tenor and Piano*] – inspired by Ottó Fenyvesi’s poem – was conceived as an engaged work in the context of portraying social differences and anchored in the revolt against the “very thought of capitalism”, which can certainly be noted as a rare case of “political” activism in the field of composing among the younger-generation artists. *Život sa ogrlicom* [*Life with a Necklace*] by Branislav Stojanović, inspired by Charles Bukowski’s poetry, offered one of the possible ways of the musical characterization of cynicism with traditional means of music. The composition by Nemanja Sovtić, *Dijalozi* [*Dialogues*], resting on the “desire to dynamically present different

kinds of dialogues in a music medium”, culminated through a gradual dramaturgical development in a monologue demonstration of dominance over the interlocutor due to a “desire to physically override the interlocutor’s voice”, reflecting also the author’s final doubt in the success of the dialogue itself. Matija Anđelković introduced himself with *Genesis II*, which was in a poetic sense based on a specific personal creative communication with the “sound universe of French music from baroque to this day”, showing his artistic maturity noticeable in a deliberate and subtly developed musical associability with chosen historical references, and also in his effort to come closer to more modern artistic acts of post-modernist orientation while searching for his own poetics.

The works by Ksenija Komljenović, Stanko Simić, Draško Adžić, Luka Čubrilo and Janko Vasiljević, performed at the second concert on the same festival evening, confirmed the authors’ poetic orientations, already shaped to a certain degree. One thing, though, that could not escape one’s notice such as the not clearly enough profiled tendency of a number of authors whose works were presented at the last two concerts of the festival was the inspiration by musical, literary or visual models stemming from the national or a wider Balkan cultural context. In that sense, Draško Adžić built his composition *O travama i tmini* [*On Grasses and Darkness*] under the strong influence of the melodies from the Octoechos which – reflected through the author’s personal musical fantasy and a specific composition and technical procedure – “contributed to the archaic quality distinctive of the old tradition of folk chanting”. Being of a more cosmopolitan artistic

orientation, Janko Vasiljević used the meaning of the term *Mahala* (neighbourhood, territory, a name for Romani quarters used in the Balkans) for skillfully bringing oriental melody and Latin American rhythm into a relationship. In his composition bearing the same title, those two elements create a compact and a very dynamic musical flow, proving that highly different musical idioms can coexist. The literary works of Vasko Popa, Aleksandar Tišma and Dušica Grujić Stanković served as models for *Tri pesme za sopran i klavir* [*Three Songs for Soprano and Piano*] by Stanko Simić. They were conceived as specific poems for piano and voice, in which the relation between the accompaniment and the leading line was relativized, the same being applied to the identity of the “high voice” which, according to the author, did not necessarily have to be a “female character”. *Ritual za dve oboe, klavir, violončelo i kontrabas* [*Ritual for Two Oboes, Piano, Violoncello and Double Bass*] by Luka Čubrilo, presented as the award-winning composition by the *Klangforum* ensemble from Vienna, displayed the author’s recognizable inventiveness and compositional act. With its contemporary sensibility, Ksenija Komljenović’s composition *A Visit from the Insomnia Fairy*, created as a consequence of introspection, united the references to various musical idioms – from romanticist, to impressionist, to expressionist – providing the communicative potential of the piece in their subtly developed relations.

The final festival evening was dedicated to pieces for viola and orchestra and, accordingly, featured mostly works by the authors who had already started their professional careers. The last concert intro-

duced the dedications to Saša Mirković, the violist who performed all the compositions on the programme together with the *Metamorphosis* ensemble under conductor Aleksandar Sedlar Bogoev. The opening piece was *Stardust* by Branka Popović, essentially a motorically produced musical flow consisting of “minute *sound particles* which are”, in the author’s words, “able to stimulate the most diverse sound experiences by *projecting* the musical experience of each individual listener”. *Jeux de (la) vie analogique* by Ana Gnjatović was formed by constructing the musical flow in an analogy with a constant sprouting process “as the consecutive, repeated beginnings of life on an endless matrix”. Inside the composition’s almost punctualistically formed structure, as a latent musical potential, effective melodic and rhythmic motives, succinct in their content, glide by as unspecific references/associations of certain musical topics. Dragan Latinčić introduced himself with *Ex Ponto*, in which he combined various music materials originating in folklore from quite a wide geographical area, including the Balkans, Asia Minor and the Middle East. Sonja Kalajić’s piece *Leteća svita* [*Flying Suite*], represented by its first movement called *Soko* [*Hawk*], was specifically devised as an “enthusiastic salute” to the *Metamorphosis* ensemble and violist Saša Marković, written in the musical language of romanticism. Marko D. Aleksić employed a literary model which served as the musical inspiration for his piece *Plava grobnica* [*Blue Tomb*], based on Milutin Bojić’s poem of the same title. The historical place/fact coloured with Bojić’s artistic sensibility, being referred to by the atmosphere in Aleksić’s work, found its success-

fully performed artistic meta-reflection, which certainly confirmed the popularity of “grand topics” at the contemporary artistic moment, as well. The last piece to close the final festival evening was Aleksandar Sedlar Bogoev’s *3P*, a three-movement concert for viola and chamber ensemble. In the background of various distinctive situations, musical fragments/clichés varied in style, including also those from the popular music domain, were brought into connection, by means of an enviable compositional and technical skill, in a typical post-modernist manner.

The seventh KoMA Festival offered a review of the annual musical production of the young generation of composers, with the prevailing impression of continuity in a poetical and aesthetic sense, compared with the production from previous years. The participants from abroad were definitely a refreshment to the musical offering, their guest appearance proving to be an occasion for establishing professional contacts and making an atmosphere of creative reflexivity in both directions. As a unique event offering the chance to hear, in its condensed form, a diversified annual production of authors who already deserve the serious attention of the public, the festival confirmed the necessity of its existence once again and certainly qualified to grow into an event that bears more importance than it currently has in its local musical context owing to the quality conditions of concert production, high level of performance and good organization.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović
