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Functional and Stylistic-aesthetic Elements in Serbian Sacred Choral Music of the First Half of the 20th Century¹

This doctoral thesis deals with the generation of composers following Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856–1914), who established the style known as the ‘classical’. The overall analytical approach was equally determined by elements of Orthodox theology and aesthetics, both part of Serbian musical heritage as a whole. The methodology combines a functional and aesthetic view through a theoretical-theo-

logical approach, followed by a comparative overview of other Serbian church art genres during the same period, and finally an analysis of the music. The criterion that defined compositional attitudes was the usage of Serbian chant and the characteristics of the music based by the original approach. The other criterion was the domination of one of two opposite principles: a functional, liturgical style as opposed to a highly artistic and concert style. The text comprises an Introduction, three Chapters divided into a total of nine subchapters, a Conclusion, Supplements, and the Bibliography. The Introduction contains an explanation of the title and subject of the dissertation and a critical survey of existing scholarship on Serbian sacred choral music of the interwar period. Chapter One, “Traditional Church Art: Basic Ideas and Interpretations in the 20th Century” discusses the theological background of genuine aspects of church art, in which symbolism may, from a liturgical perspective, express the ‘flavour’ of another reality. The traditional concept of Orthodox liturgical art discussed in the dissertation represents the basic point from which Serbian composers have ‘moved on’, neglecting the functional aspect and instead favouring aesthetic approaches. On the other hand, the values of their highly sophisticated modern accomplishments have themselves established their own position as an authentic historical part of the evolution of church art. For the purposes of this dissertation, the dogmatic

¹ The doctoral thesis was defended on 17 June 2013 at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. The examination board included: Ira Prodanov Krajišnik, PhD, associate professor at the Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad; Katarina Tomašević, PhD, senior research fellow at the Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade, who chaired the board; Danica Petrović, PhD, principal research fellow at the Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade and supervisor of the dissertation.

and methodological 'circle of rules' of traditional church art served as a critical framework for examining the music. Special attention was given to the meaning of artistic symbols and their status in the theological realm, as well as the general position of music in the complex perspective of the liturgy, representing a synthesis of different arts. The next chapter, "Church Art and Choral Music in Serbian Culture in the Interwar Period", offers a contextual comparative overview of sacred choral music and church architecture, icon and fresco painting, which defined the goals accomplished by Serbian composers as part of the general development of Orthodox art. The fundamentally similar elements of evolution in these different genres always depended on methods of keeping within tradition and, at the same time, allowing a level of freedom for contemporary solutions. It concerns the discovery of potentially common principles in the construction of liturgical symbols, whose final characteristics may define new pieces of art as either primarily liturgical or artistic. The central chapter, "The History of the Genre through the Balancing of Liturgical and Concert Elements" comprises the following subchapters: "Simple Harmonisations and Arrangements of Traditional Chant", "Compositions Close to the 'Spirit' of Serbian Chant", "Original Artistic Approaches", followed by a classification of styles (liturgical-concert style, concert-liturgical style, concert-, and concert-experimental style), and "The Works of the Amateurs". Đorđević, Travanj, Krstić, and Ilić cultivated styles based on traditional harmonization and arrangements of Serbian Chant, through a variety of artistic conventions, from classical to neoromantic. As far

as the *hierarchy of compositional procedures* is concerned, the common tendency was the domination of Eastern Orthodox choral style. Only in some small details does this musical language differ from similar approaches taken by 19th-century composers. Composers who were generally interested in developing an original approach close to the 'spirit' of Serbian chant – Joksimović, Šijački, Milošević, Pašćan-Kojanov, Preprek – used a great variety of Western and traditional Orthodox elements. From the perspective of the *hierarchy of compositional procedures*, it is easy to notice a lack of 'order', or priorities, among these different influences. Their stylistic approaches brought romantic elements together with the typical 'national' models (Stanković, Ostojić, Mokranjac), as well as some important characteristics derived from Russian music. Authors who pursued original artistic approaches represent the most complex stylistic orientation of this period, determined by both Western and Orthodox elements, influences from their own secular works, as well as a specific relationship with the Serbian church choral tradition. In terms of the *hierarchy of compositional procedures*, that is, in terms of detecting the dominance of Western or Orthodox elements, most of these composers achieved a very high level of 'coexistence' of these two principles. On the other hand, the *typology of the adoption of conventions* regarding specific technical elements – the treatment of polyphony and the harmonic-tonal aspect – shows not only a good balance, but may also serve to define the values of each personal approach. Sacred choral compositions by Serbian authors from the interwar period, mainly by emphasizing aesthetic elements, represent an

artistically strong and ambitious creative effort to find new paths in Orthodox Church music. The dominance of the concert type of complete liturgical forms and individual liturgical “numbers”, in addition to formal expression based on canonical hymnography, could only indicate the ‘transformational’ potential of genuine liturgical art. Functional-liturgical works, on the other hand, directly, through the power of the

ritual and the congregation’s ‘live’ communication with God in the communion, lift the participants in the ‘divine drama’ above everything else, even above a perfect artistic reality.

The thesis contains 260 pages, two tables, 27 music examples, three supplements, 263 items in the bibliography, and 649 footnotes.