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## MUSICOLOGIST SPEAKS

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### THERE ARE FEW THINGS THAT I STARTED AND LEFT UNFINISHED

*An Interview with Roksanda Pejović*



A legendary figure not only in Serbian musicology but on a much broader scale, Roksanda Pejović celebrates her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Now, after almost six decades of a dedicated pursuit of musicology, we are talking to her about her perceptions of her education, key figures in her professional life, her career, scholarly work, as well as some personal questions.

Her tirelessness in studying the musical past and publishing her research results is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that over the last ten years alone, Pejović published as many as ten books. The topics of her research range from the general history of music, via the iconography of musical instruments from medieval Serbia (both in Serbian and English), Serbian music performance in the interwar period, to writing on Serbian music,

mainly from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, the musicological oeuvre of Roksanda Pejović – which (thus far, given that two more editions are being prepared for printing!) includes 34 books, hundreds of articles, an abundance of encyclopaedic entries in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (MGG), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, *Muzička enciklopedija Jugoslavenskog leksikografskog zavoda* [*The Music Encyclopaedia of the Yugoslav Institute of Lexicography*], *Leksikon Jugoslavenske muzike* [*Lexicon of Yugoslav Music*], and many other texts – is one of the richest personal bibliographies in Serbian music studies. Impressive even on an international scale, it vividly and graphically attests to her persistent and dedicated efforts at perceiving Serbian music historiography from various angles, constantly supplementing the available knowledge base with new or, at least, broader entries, all for the purpose of presenting the problems as thoroughly as possible. By reading ‘between the lines’, we find out a lot about the author as well: she is a music writer prone to broad historical strokes, with ample knowledge in various fields and a propensity to present large quantities of studiously collected information, a scholar who gladly presents her own conclusions, polemicizes and debates, but is also not reluctant to review her own viewpoints; in the voluminous appendices of her books, in the form of various summaries, tables and chronological tables, the reader will easily find copious amounts of information, while her simple and popular language, often condensed to the utmost, attests to her desire to be communicative.

Several subjects have continually crossed paths in Roksanda Pejović’s musicological work: music iconography, especially concerning Serbian medieval heritage and, in a broader sense, that of the Byzantine area as a whole, is a ‘natural’ field of interest for someone who was educated not only as a historian of music, but also of art (she received her degree in art history in 1954, with the thesis “Problemi istorije umetnosti 18. veka” [“Problems in the History of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Art”]). This conjunction resulted in her doctoral thesis, “Predstave muzičkih instrumenata u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji” [“Depictions of Musical Instruments in Medieval Serbia”], defended in 1984 at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Next, she has written extensively on topics related to music criticism and writing about music; her continual interest in this area was first manifested in her MA thesis “Muzička kritika i esejistika između dva rata” [“Music Criticism and Essay-writing in the Interwar Period”], defended at the Music Academy in Belgrade in 1963. The topics in music criticism and writing

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<sup>1</sup> Complete bibliography can be found in Roksanda Pejović’s latest volume, under the title *Biografija i bibliografija* [*Biography and Bibliography*], Belgrade, publisher unknown, 2013.

on music have been inextricably linked with those related to music performance. Bounded – though not limited – by this framework, Pejović's richly diversified musicological profile promotes curiosity, perseverance, breadth of insight, and methodological consistency.

Like many academics around the world, Pejović put her scholarship work before teaching. However, although she does not define teaching as her most important professional engagement, she has dedicated almost all of her career to this vocation. If we leave aside a one-year stint at the *Jugokonzert* agency (1956) as a correspondence officer, Pejović worked as an educator for almost 40 years – first at the Stanković Secondary Music School (1957–1975) and then at the Faculty of Music (as an assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor, 1975–1995). Upon retirement, she did not sever her ties with education: for several years she was engaged in graduate and postgraduate studies, as well as a supervisor for BA, MA, and PhD theses. Even today she accepts every invitation to communicate her experiences in research in certain fields directly to students.

Her work at the Stanković School was marked by both peculiar as well as some typical qualities of secondary education. The former included the unbalanced age of her pupils (at a certain point, her courses were simultaneously attended by pupils as diverse as young talented children and cadets of the Military Academy, future bandmen). The latter included the students' incomprehension of the basic postulates of the course, as well as disinterest and lack of motivation, due to the conviction that music history is a course of secondary importance. Pejović dealt with all of this in 'her own' way: always looking for original and new solutions. She adjusted her criteria to the capabilities and age of her students, whatever those were, and adjusted the type and scope of the requirements.

In her work with university students of musicology, she adhered to the following methods: they were required to give a lecture on a certain subject based on the available literature, familiarize themselves with particular compositions by listening and analysing them, while certain important areas (or those that the students insisted upon) were covered as one-semester courses. She changed her courses every year and no course was ever repeated. Upon completing a course, the students would prepare summaries and texts on the topic of the course and these materials were left available for the following generations.

We should also mention Pejović's activity in supervising BA, MA, and PhD theses. This came relatively late for her, and only in the domain of the national history of music. Most of these papers have dealt with 19<sup>th</sup>-century music and music performance.

*When talking to someone as devoted to their work as you are, questions regarding the beginnings are unavoidable. So, why did you decide to study musicology (or the history of music, at the time)? Did you, in a certain way, anticipate or perhaps know that this would be your lifetime commitment?*

I did not know it, at all. We had no idea what musicology was and I enrolled only to prevent the newly formed department from being shut down at the very beginning. I had graduated the piano at a secondary music school and began studying art history. I wanted to do a favour for my friends from the history of music, namely Dimitrije Stefanović and Miloš Velimirović, and therefore I decided to take the entrance exam and enrol at the music history department. Only later did I realize that I had no sufficient command of harmony or counterpoint, and so I had to take private lessons.

*Can you perhaps remember what the entrance examination was like at the time?*

There was a written and oral part. I also remember that Stanojlo Rajičić was on the examination board.

*What was your previous music education? Do you remember your teachers from your primary and secondary music schools, and what was music education like back then?*

I finished my primary music education in Arandelovac, under Nazi occupation. The knowledge we acquired was modest, the times were difficult, so later I worked very hard to make up for all that was lost. I know that one had to pay to get an education in music and that every good pupil eventually quit music.

I remember that Borislav Pašćan was among my teachers, that Ljubica Marić was among my teachers, almost nobody could understand her, and there were also some old Russian teachers. I took piano lessons with Nina Rendle, who was close to retirement and could not hear a thing any longer. She said that she could not correct every single mistake of mine. Later I moved to the Secondary Music School at the Music Academy, because my aunt had found out that the teachers were better there. And that is how I ended up with professor Milka Đaja. I took courses in music analysis from Dušan Skovran there, we were all delighted, and this was something far more serious.

I remember quite clearly that Emil Hajek told me that I could take the entrance exam if I wanted to study the piano. However, my aunt and my mother thought that I should have won at least five prizes to take this exam. And so I quit the piano, enrolled in art history, met Dimitrije and Miško, and moved to the history of music because of them. That is the gist of it.

*What was the programme like at the time? Who were your teachers, how did they teach, who were your classmates? Can you tell us more about that?*

Apart from Dimitrije Stefanović and Miško Velimirović, there was Vera Raičević. Đura Jakšić also made appearances, I remember that. Yes, I also remember Olga Janković, who had Beethoven's sonatas at her fingertips. That left us quite impressed.

Regarding the programme, Nikola Hercigonja taught the general history of music and Stana Đurić-Klajn taught the national history of music. Stana Đurić-Klajn was a great authority for us: she was a great speaker and that was interesting, a lot of history and not too much analysis. But we loved her. At least I did.

She had finished her specialist studies of the piano in Paris and along the way acquired a great knowledge of music history and culture in general. She was a very sophisticated woman and had a vast knowledge. She was one of those extraordinary examples of interwar upbringing and education and my mother and aunt were similarly sophisticated.

*Were you perhaps attracted by the fact that you recognized in Stana Đurić-Klajn a social and cultural milieu which was familiar and close to you?*

She was my role model because she was able to answer every question we asked her. Those were probably not very tricky questions, but she had what we lacked, because after all, we were 'children of the occupation'. We were very happy with the way she was able to demonstrate her knowledge and illustrate on the piano everything she talked about. Only later did I realize that in fact, she could do a lot more than what she showed us in those short excerpts.

Hercigonja really wanted to make a coup with us. He put in a lot of effort. I was confused by the way he taught; he knew certain things brilliantly, it was apparent that he was a composer, that it was his 'thing', that he understood and felt it, but we listened to Beethoven's symphonies and nothing else for a whole year. On the other hand, one year he only taught Hindemith. In our first year, the whole year, if I am not mistaken, we only studied prehistoric music.

That was presumably a way of teaching us how to work individually. Everything was very well conceived, but that was not the right way. At the time, I was studying art history, not thinking about what I would do in the future, and I learned only what was required of me. Of course, I always got the highest marks at Hercigonja's exams – that was not difficult – but large portions of the general history of music were left uncovered at the university. When afterwards I started working at a secondary music school, it was a living hell: I had to learn by myself all that my university courses had left out, with no lectures, with no consultations, without any suggestions as to how to do it exactly.

A note on learning languages: when I came to the university, i.e. to the Academy, they had an old teacher who had graduated German in some German city and taught from the most difficult German books on music. I had never been bad at foreign languages – I spoke French and English, and I had German in secondary school during the occupation; in fact, I did ask to have English, but there was no other choice and I had to learn German. Therefore, I had to annotate every sentence with the meaning of every word – there was a lot of sentences where I did not know a single word! – and took private lessons, eventually becoming able to read German literature on music. My command of foreign languages ends about there. I even taught myself Italian, which is not difficult if you speak French. So, there you go: French, English, German, Italian, and Russian (everybody had to learn Russian at the time and everybody at the Girls' High School had to hold a class in Russian; I think that mine was on Herzen).

*How would you describe your 'baptism of fire' in teaching? What were your main challenges when you started teaching music history and music appreciation at the Stanković Music School?*

I was lonely at Stanković, I was lonely quite often in general. I had problems both in preparing my classes and relating to my colleagues: I was the only history teacher and I realized that if I were rigorous – that was it, the students would not learn a thing. If I gave them bad marks, the teachers' assembly would bump them up. It was difficult to organize a class when I had in front of me a singer, who had already graduated from the Academy, and next to him a violinist who was, say, twelve years old. What could I do? I tried to devise something that would be acceptable to almost everyone, to quiz them often, even outside the classes, and to divide the coursework into several smaller parts, to make it easier for them and to maintain a certain professional integrity.

To this day, I get laughed at when I say that I wrote a textbook only because the headmaster of the Stanković Music School told me to. But that is what really happened. I taught myself everything, right from the beginning. Really, I started writing, and learned in the process. I borrowed books on contemporary music from Dušan Skovran and Branko Dragutinović, from Skovran in English, and from Branko Dragutinović in German.

Slowly but surely, my little booklets started coming out. I took pains to get them published – and everything else after them – and then I ventured to sort out all of that and publish it in two volumes. At the time, it was an excellent book; it even received some international award for layout and design, as they say today. I am extremely proud of the fact that my reviewers were Vlastimir

Peričić, Branko Dragutinović, and Stana Đurić-Klajn. Such a book cannot have a single error. In everything that came later, especially after Vlastimir Peričić's death, some errors must have crept into that. At first, errors annoyed me very much, they could haunt me even for a year, and later, with every new book, this 'time of aggravation' grew shorter.

*Could you tell us more about working at the Faculty? What principles guided you in your work with students? Was there any interaction between the teaching and scholarly aspects of your career?*

I approached teaching as something natural, something that accompanied what was principal for me, and that was my scholarly work. I am a conversationalist, who want students to participate, who wants to find out the solutions together with her students. You probably remember it, too, me often saying "what was that, I can't remember..." It is an approach completely different from those colleagues who stand up before the audience to show that they know everything and would never admit to being wrong.

I never fought for students, term papers, BA or MA theses, but that does not mean that I did not help everyone who asked me. I have always helped everyone as much as I could. But I was not the one to assist the less capable ones, only to improve their marks. If I am working on something, then I have to do it properly, all the way. There are few things that I started and left unfinished. There, that is my attitude towards work, both in education and research.

*How did you choose the topics of your scholarly work?*

Well, I had some direction there. With Stana Đurić-Klajn, I could deal with performance and criticism. She worked in history, but also in all other subjects to an extent. In fact, she managed to outline everything, to leave a mark on everything... I believe that one day, when (and if) the archives are thoroughly researched, something else will crop up and my writings will be, let us say, supplemented.

At any rate, what Stana Đurić-Klajn had begun with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the interwar period, I continued to develop. Later I would supplement my objects of study with other topics, bit by bit. Therefore, my main fields are criticism, articles, books, and performance. Of course, I could not make it without compositions, but they were not a priority.

*So, Stana Đurić-Klajn directed you towards the topics related to writing about music and music performance. How did you come to the other major field of*

*your research, depictions of musical instruments on medieval Serbian monuments?*

It was Dragotin Cvetko. I was still working at the secondary school, doing some things for the Composers' Association, some analyses by ear (that was interesting, no scores). I met Cvetko at the Association, I was pregnant then, and he told me about what Primož Kuret and Koraljka Kos had done in Slovenia and Croatia. I was afraid that I could not do it, there were monasteries to visit, a lot of travelling, I got scared. Cvetko told me that he believed in me and that I should write a thesis summary. I already had a few articles, mostly for excellent international conferences on art history, held in Macedonia, and so I did have some writings on instruments. As a research topic in art history at the time, the middle ages were 'fashionable'.

I was lucky... and anyway, I had a lot of luck in my scholarly work. The Library of the National Museum was in disorder, and a friend of mine was working there. When I had time, I would come to the Library and peruse the books one by one, looking for pictures depicting musical instruments. That is what scholarship was like at the time! After about a year, I compiled the literature, and a bit later wrote the thesis. Cvetko had only one objection, regarding the order of the sections, but told me, "I am counting on you, I know nothing about it". That was fair of him, I liked it.

*Which books do you like in particular? Are there any books or articles from your oeuvre that you would like to highlight in particular and why?*

Regarding books, my main criterion is their usefulness to me. And useful are Stana Đurić-Klajn's articles in the 'Three-Headed History'<sup>2</sup> and *Muzički stvaraoci* [*Music Creators*] by Vlastimir Peričić. As for my own things: our joint History, the one we wrote together.<sup>3</sup> It contains a lot of information. And what I also like: music criticism between the two wars.<sup>4</sup> I also like, and I do not know why, Dragutin Gostuški and Pavle Stefanović, when they are both in the

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<sup>2</sup> Josip Andreis, Dragotin Cvetko, and Stana Đurić-Klajn, *Historijski razvoj muzičke kulture u Jugoslaviji* [*Historical Development of Musical Culture in Yugoslavia*], Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Roksanda Pejović et al., *Srpska muzika od naseljavanja slovenskih plemena na Balkansko poluostrvo do kraja XVIII veka* [*Serbian Music from the Settling of the Slavonic Tribes in the Balkan Peninsula to the End of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*], Belgrade, Univerzitet umetnosti, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Roksanda Pejović, *Muzička kritika i esejistika u Beogradu (1919–1941)* [*Music Criticism and Essay-writing in Belgrade (1919–1941)*], Belgrade, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 1999.

same volume.<sup>5</sup> That is about it, nothing else. In other words, what can help me quickly and what I am certain is good.

In a way, every new book is better than the previous one, because my knowledge improves and I make more comparisons. Things I have done before, e.g. criticism and performance, when I sit down to work – it practically writes itself, I barely consult the literature, but when I am doing something new, it takes a lot of time. I do not know how to do it, I try it one way – it does not work, then another – wrong again, and again... it takes a lot of effort to come up with the right way.

Late in my life I came to this, too: why do we always castigate ourselves as ‘underdeveloped’ and treat ourselves with condescension? There is only one Beethoven, there is only one Mozart, the rest – they are more or less the same as here. Mokranjac, for example – he is tremendously valuable, he is the pinnacle of the Balkans for sure, perhaps even of Europe!

*If now you could change anything in your career, what would it be?*

I would not have worked at the Faculty at all. I would have worked at the secondary school, I would have retired, read nice books, walked around town, and attended concerts.

*This means that you would not have got involved in scholarly work?*

Yes. And I would not have regretted it. Even now, I have no idea what Ada Ciganlija looks like, or the Nebojša Tower, or many other things, as if I were living in a foreign city.\*

*What would be your ‘recipe’ for success, except work?*

Persistence in completing one’s education, the right circumstances, professionalism in work, honesty, availability of information, striving to approach matters creatively (not everyone can do that), coherence, and clear articulation. One should always complete one’s work. If I had the right material conditions,

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<sup>5</sup> Roksanda Pejović, *Muzičari-pisci u beogradskom muzičkom životu druge polovine 20. veka. Kompleksno posmatranje muzike: Pavle Stefanović. Dragutin Gostuški* [Musician-Writers in the Music Life of Belgrade during the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A Complex Approach to Music: Pavle Stefanović. Dragutin Gostuški], Belgrade, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, Katedra za muzikologiju, 2012.

\* Ada Ciganlija is a popular island on the river Sava in Belgrade. Nebojša Tower is a famous tower of the Belgrade Fortress. (Translator’s note)

I would come up with the same solutions as Curt Sachs! And not only I, but everyone else who does things the right way.

Life circumstances, that is very important. One needs ample time to do work. How could I work now if my grandchildren were around every day? If my husband had been a different person, I could never have done so much work. You cannot achieve everything in life, you cannot have it all... you have to give up something. If you try a bit of everything, eventually you go to pieces. So I chose this, without occupying high positions, without being a boss, without organizing conferences... no, I had no time because of my work. And how it will be evaluated, I do not know. We will see.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović