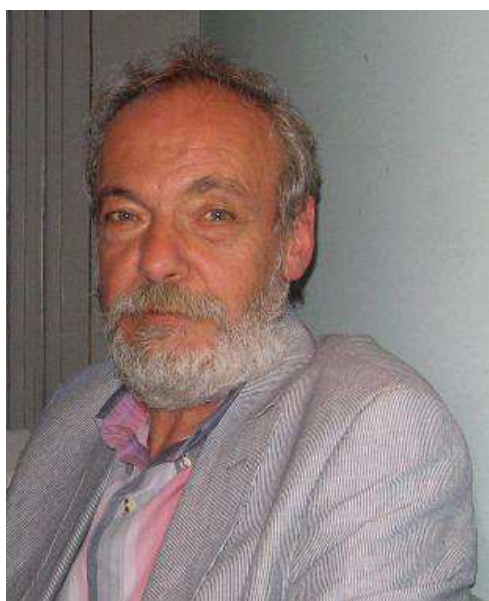

COMPOSER SPEAKS

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*Vesna Mikić**

Department of Musicology,
Faculty of Music, University of Arts, Belgrade

A LOOK AT THE MIRROR/SCREEN¹ **Pop-up Interview with Srđan Hofman**



Srđan Hofman

The thematic register which truly announced and paved the way for the two issues of our journal published in this year, a year of great anniversaries – and which was formed in the last number of 2013 along the lines music-politics-language, proved to be the right choice at a time that was not only “out of joint” but apparently “out of its wits”. At such a time, marked by an incessant quest for stable, rational and perspicacious answers concerning our profession and the “world around us”, we turn to those in (our) music world whose works, commitment and merits provide the “fulcrum”, the point at which, at least temporarily, we find a “refuge”; we find meaning

* Author contact information: mikic@eunet.rs

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and “mechanisms of survival”. Thus, the fact that Srđan Hofman (1944) turned seventy this year ought to be regarded as a symbolic coincidence, an opportunity to pay tribute, to the best of our current abilities, to all his achievements, primarily in his creative work, but also in his praiseworthy contributions in the spheres of our educational and cultural policies (albeit these can be conceived of as another form of his art). There does not seem to be a more suitable collocutor on the subject of the relationships between music and politics, for this is a man whose experiences in both domains of social life (insofar as they could be distinguished) are not only unique, but they set up a kind of unattainable standard.

Precisely owing to such an orientation in this interview, I avoid identifying Hofman as a composer. Certainly, the very title of this rubric defines him as one, and we believe (or are about to find out?) that he styles himself as a composer.² It

² Hofman’s creative output belongs to diverse genres; it is marked – as for instance along the line from *Hexagons* to *Mirrors* – by an incessant search for a perfect, autochthonous “sonic object”, never at the expense of clearly defined and resolutely obeyed formal principles. This search has logically led towards mastering the electroacoustic medium; thus, in our milieu, Hofman stands out for the consistency of his activities in that field. Works (selection): orchestral: *Movimento energico* (1968, graduation work); *Symphony in two movements* (1969); *Concerto dinamico* (1971), *Concerto Episodes for Violin and Orchestra* (1972); chamber: *Succession of the Legal Code – Four Letters* for Clarinet and Two String Sextets (1974); *Hexagon – A Farce* for Violin, Cello and Piano (1976); *Movable Mirrors* for Two Pianos – Four Players (1979); *It’s Coming! – Sound Objects* for Eleven Strings (1981); *Refrains* for Wind Quintet (1983); *Replica* For Violin and Piano (1990); *Hadedas – A Statement and Three Developments* for Cello and Piano (2004); *Musical Toys* for Amplified Cello and Double Bass (2008); soloistic: *Hexagons – Monodrama* for Cello (1975); *Hexagons – Pastoral* for Violin (1975); *Time-machine* for Piano (1990); *Recitative and Toccata* for Organ (2004); vocal-instrumental: *Cantus de morte* for Mezzo-soprano, Narrator, Mixed Choir and Orchestra (1978); *Hexagons – Ritual: Musical Scenes* for Six Groups of Girls, Orff Instruments and Conductor (1978); *Games* for Mixed Choir, Narrator ad Piano (1984); *Makamba – Ritual* for Women’s Choir and Chamber Ensemble (1997), *Mirror* for Trio (mezzo-soprano, cello, piano) and Chamber Ensemble (2012); choral : *Imprints of Sound* for Mixed Choir (1982); *What Have I Said?* For Mixed Choir (2007); electroacoustic: *Déjà vu* for Saxophone (Clarinet) and Tape (1985); *Who Am I?* for Mezzo-soprano, Eight Actresses, Women’s Choir, Chamber Ensemble and Tape (1986); *Puzzle I* for electronics (1988); *Puzzle II* for electronics (1989); *Samples* for Flute, Clarinet, Sampler AKAI 1000 HD and Apple Macintosh Computer (1991); *Musica concertante* for Piano, 13 String and Electronics (1993); *Signs* for Flute, Cello, and Live Electronics (1994); *Duel* for Piano and Live Electronics (1996); *Nocturne of Belgrade Spring 1999* for Chamber Ensemble, Live Electronics and Audio Tape (1999); *Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor* for *Two Amplified Harps and Sound Processors* (2010).

I will mention only the basic biographical data: Srđan Hofman (1944) graduated in 1968 and received his masters’ degree in composition in 1972, class of Professor Stanojlo Rajičić. After teaching at the Josip Slavenski School of Music (1968-1974) he continued his career in pedagogy at the Composition Department of the Music Academy, later the Faculty of

is, then, up to me to induce him into disclosing his other identities. The multitude of these identities has been constantly invoked in his music by the question of “Who am I”, in the sphere “outside the mirror/screen”,³ the sphere of different forms of social relations in the fields of pedagogy, (culture) politics, (educational) politics, and finally (cultural) diplomacy, all of which constitutes something like a “meta-identity”: the composer as an intellectual.⁴

Music in Belgrade (going through all the ranks: assistant 1974, assistant professor 1978, associate professor 1986, full professor 1994). He was the vice dean (1983–1989) and then the dean of the Faculty in two terms (1989–1998), as well as the vice rector of the University of Arts in Belgrade (2007–2009), President of the Composers’ Association of Serbia (1978–1979), Chairman of the Board of Sokoje – collecting society (2006–2014). He founded the Faculty of Music’s Recording Studio (1985) and was its head until this year. He is one of the founders and the first selector of the International Review of Composers (1992). He was the ambassador of FR Yugoslavia (later Serbia and Montenegro) in the South African Republic (2002–2006). His works have been performed at concerts and festivals at home and abroad. He received the Mokranjac Award for the work *Looking at the Mirror of Anish Kapoor* for Two Amplified Harps and Sound Processors (2010). He is the author of theoretical works *Fundamentals of Electronic Music* (Nota, Knjaževac, 1995).

³ In Hofman’s music, the search for “identity”, marked by “looks” into the mirror/screen and by the question Who am I? can be conceived of as a symptom of the quest for a perfect “sonic object”, for example in the works: *Movable Mirrors* for Two Pianos – Four Players (1979), *Who Am I?* for Mezzo-soprano, Eight Actresses, Women’s Choir, Chamber Orchestra and Tape (1986); *Duel* for Piano and Live Electronics (1996); *Looking at the Mirror of Anish Kapoor* for Two Amplified Harps and Sound Processors (2010); *Mirror* for Trio (mezzo-soprano, cello, piano) and Chamber Ensemble (2012). See Mikić, Vesna, “The Duel as the Answer”, *International Magazine for Music New Sound*, 8, 1996, 39–42; Mikić, Vesna, „Hofman’s Electroacoustic Music / Constructing a Story of Serbian Electroacoustics and Beyond”, *Music and Society in Eastern Europe*, vol. 7, 2012, 11–21, Idyllwild, CA; Mikić, Vesna, “From (Listening to) *Moving Mirrors* to (Listening Through/In) *Mirrors in Motion* – Srđan Hofman: *Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor* for two Amplified Harps and *Logic Pro* Software”, *International Magazine for Music New Sound*, 37, I/2011, 63–74; Veselinović-Hofman, Mirjana, *Fragmenti o muzičkoj postmoderni* [Fragments on Musical Postmodernism], Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 1997.

⁴ By ascribing the identity of an intellectual to my interlocutor, I do not intend to portray him as the nowadays familiar and ubiquitous figure of an intellectual “general practitioner”: on the contrary, my aim is to point to the specific position of an intellectual in today’s world and in our (musical) culture, to underline the specific difference that intellectuals must make with respect to society today. If an intellectual is a person whose “specific activity proposes ‘the course that a society ought to take’”, and whose “political and intellectual engagement earns him the reputation and recognition he already enjoys in his field” then all this – and having in mind also everything that has been said in the introduction to this text – speaks in favor of the “metaidentification” of Srđan Hofman as a „composer-intellectual“. Qtd. sfter Jane Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual, Music and Ideology in France*, Oxford–New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, 4–5.

This specific “shape-shifting” nature of Srđan Hofman is definitely a product of his outstanding vitality, perceptiveness, intellect and his lasting fascination with people and their relations, their world and life. I have, therefore, conceived this interview as a “pop-up” questionnaire, because Hofman’s different “modes of appearance” will inevitably “overlap”, “intersect” and “spring up” during this conversation, and because I have countless questions. Clearly, such a starting point for conversation also relies on that quest-like quality that characterizes the creative work of Srđan Hofman, so well. But, seeing that whenever we use language – be it music, politics or language itself that we speak about – we chiefly speak of ourselves, I have taken the liberty (and I promise to withdraw to the role of a listener afterwards) to shape this interview in accordance with both my own musicological observations on Srđan Hofman’s music, and on my professional, quarter of a century long acquaintance with him.

Do you think we can begin this conversation with a “rough” question: who are you? A composer, professor, politically committed “cultural activist”, ambassador? More precisely, is any of your professional identities “stronger”, or is there a “source identity” from which all the others emanate? Of course, when you reflect on all that you have worked on and accomplished, is it possible to set up a hierarchy of a kind, and make a decision in that sense, regardless of your education, life circumstances, politics? Or do you think that if you give a definitive answer to this question, the “quest” will no longer be amusing?

My “source” professional identity certainly stems from composing; I am primarily a composer. I do not think one can become a professor of composition and survive without any shame as a pedagogue in that field, unless one is continually and permanently engaged in creative work, unless one is a practitioner, who performs these tasks as a matter of course. Composition classes, and for that matter also orchestration, are not only lectures.

All my other professional, or if you wish “social” commitments, all I have done in my life is determined by my being a composer, and owing to that, a university professor. I wished, and somewhat naively believed I could influence the content of professional, even political decisions that produced direct consequences on the social position of music creators, the promotion of their works, the level of the protection of their rights, the quality of art studies, the material and social status of higher education in Serbia, particularly the status and activities of the University of Arts and the Faculty of Music. Even my appointment as an ambassador was not the result of my being a “general practitioner” in politics, but precisely because I came from the world of art and culture. This happened at a unique, decisive moment when it was realized that the radically new

foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia could not be represented by people who, until October 2000, had been active and agile promoters of the previous policies.

Naturally, the various occupations I have been engaged in throughout my working life along with my primary profession, directed me towards mastering the basic knowledge, skills and facts from many other fields. In order to be successful as a member of collective decision-making and executive bodies, various committees, working groups, etc., I had to know more and to think more quickly than the others did, and to propose acceptable and sustainable solutions to the problems we were all confronted with.

First contacts with music? When and why did you decide to study composition?

The first thing that springs to my mind is a *Grundig* record player and a large collection of LP records that my father diligently enlarged, and which I very often listened to with my parents. I also remember being regularly taken to concerts from my earliest childhood, the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra included. I was fascinated by the sound of the orchestra, the multitude of lines harmoniously complementing each other in these compositions: I felt it then, but could not explain how anyone could conceive and accomplish it.

When I was eight, I began to play the violin. I finished the “Stanislav Binički” Primary Music School, played for a few years in the Radio Belgrade *Youth Philharmonic*, and it was quite natural that I should continue with my music studies. I enrolled in the “Josip Slavenski” secondary music school where (fortunately) at that time there were no separate instrumental and theoretical departments, so that instrumentalists also received piano lessons and a very serious theoretical education. On the other hand, the scope and the standards the school imposed in general education was really very modest, so my parents promptly enrolled me into a “normal” high school, division of mathematics and science, for fear that my education would remain defective. Thus, for three years I attended both schools, only to decide in my fourth year to study music as a profession, but not the violin. My decision was strengthened by the support and encouragement I received for my first attempts in composition from my teachers of Harmony, Counterpoint, and Forms: the composers Radomir Petrović, and – quite young at that time – Berislav Popović and Petar Ozgijan. Berislav Popović played a particularly important role in my reaching greater maturity, who encouraged me to transcribe my improvisations correctly and to provide them with an adequate form. He gave me informal, but proper composition lessons, and finally introduced me to Professor Rajičić with whom I studied for my bachelors’ and master’s degrees.

The first awareness of politics and political life as the regulator of social relations?

Political events, recent world political history, memoirs, sociological studies and the like: for me this was interesting reading matter while I was still a high school student. Besides, at the time I was growing up, political events, domestic and worldwide, were the main content of news and the press; the system of socialist self-government included, at least nominally, a large number of people in social engagement; political and propaganda events on a massive scale were relatively frequent. I was, therefore, more than aware of the decisive influence of politics on the establishing of a value system, and on the social relations in the country. This order of things appeared to be stable, lasting, and from my vantage point – unquestionable. This may be the very reason why I did not pay much attention to it, nor was I included in the activities of youth or student organizations at that time. Until the age of thirty, I was, according to the jargon of that time, “socially inactive”.

You belong to the line of modernist composers dedicated to the exploration of sound, of the possibilities of working with sound. In that sense, did you follow the example from other composers? Whose music had special significance for you? Finally, while you matured as a composer, was there any circle of friends or like-minded colleagues with whom you could share your fascinations? How important were your experiences from the Zagreb Biennale or Opatija Review of Composers?

Already as a student, I discovered that what particularly interested me in music was exciting sonority, the processes of continual, but subtle changes within it, the created beauty (or ugliness) of what I later came to call the *sonorous object*. Specific features of a musical sound result primarily from the joint effect of its harmonic content, construction and disposition of chords and its spectral characteristics, articulation of the timbre and intensity of impulses produced by the instrument (voice), or some kind of mixture of instruments (voices). During the 1960s and well into the 1970s, “new music” that was familiar to me was dominated by vertical seconds and by a quest for previously unexploited means of producing sound with voice or musical (or even “non-musical”) instruments. It is understandable, then, that I listened to musical works and analyzed the ways in which the texture and sonority were realized, particularly in compositions by Lutoslawski (for instance *Trois poèmes d’Henri Michaux*), Ligeti (*Requiem, Lontano*), Penderecki, Ozgijan, Lebič, Ramovš, Maksimović, Sakač, but also the creators of new orchestral solutions who did not belong to the same poetics: Shchedrin, Zimmerman, Obradović, Bergamo... Besides, I was fasci-

nated by the refinement and creativity of the “old” composers in building sonic situations: Berlioz, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, Respighi, Stravinsky, Bartók; in a different, specific way in Honegger, Schoenberg, Berg, even Vivaldi, who certainly never thought about that aspect of his music.

Although the *Music Biennale* and the *Opatija Review* were precious sources of information (I would also add the *Warsaw Autumn*, concerts of the Radio Belgrade Choir and Orchestra dedicated to new music, the broadcasts and concerts of Radio Belgrade III Program), our knowledge of new music, looking from our present perspective, was somewhat narrow, filtered through the program policies of art directors (editors, selectors, program committees...) of domestic festivals, concert seasons, radio programs. Procuring recordings, scores, periodicals, analytic studies and professional literature from abroad was complicated and expensive, and we lacked even a superficial insight into the entire scope of contemporary music production: insight that would help us select potentially useful material in a more comprehensive and systematic way. What I mean to say is that we did not have the Internet, we exchanged information, records, scores that any of us would sporadically “come across” when travelling abroad. When I say “we”, I mean primarily the generation with whom I studied and intensively socialized with: Milan Mihajlović, Andrija Galun, Ivana Stefanović, Aleksandar Kolarević, Jelena Milenković, and somewhat later, Zoran Erić. Our interests were similar, but even then, we did not hold identical opinions. I would underline the fact that I hail from the Belgrade school of composition – at that time still under a heavy influence of neoclassical procedures – and this fact certainly influenced my development. Just remember the compositions of Belgrade students and graduates some ten years older than my generation; just the fact that in Zagreb, even in the late 1960s, students of Professor Stjepan Šulek finished their studies with baroque fugues and passacaglias, or Brahms-like symphonies at best; or that composition studies in Prague consisted chiefly of writing detailed reconstructions of the style, formal patterns and procedures of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven... and see how far you can get! At the same time, in many European centers, composition was taught as if no music had ever existed before Webern. I was fortunate that my work with Professor Stanojlo Rajičić, and with Petar Bergamo, who began his career as an assistant when I was a fourth-year student, as well as the overall content of the studies at the Academy, provided a broad basis for my future independent studies and enabled me to “specialize” in various ways.

It also seems possible to regard your creative work so far from the perspective of intermedial relationships – and I don't mean relationships between musical

media (your experience with the electronic medium will merit a separate question), I mean the fact that in your works one sometimes discovers (perhaps partly hidden) (voco)visual “triggers”? I am referring to pieces like *It’s Coming!*; *Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor*; *The Mirror*, and why not also *The Duel*, *Musical Toys*, *Samples*, *Hadedas*? *Musical/sonic objects seem to be the same as voco-visual ones, are they not?*

I would also add verbo-impulses. My musical ideas are often triggered by the meaning, the experience, but sometimes merely by the sound of a certain text, verse, word, or a combination of phonemes. Thus, already the composition I wrote for my master’s degree, *Concerto Dinamico* for symphony orchestra, was “secretly” spurred by my experience of the novel *The Dervish and Death* by Meša Selimović; the composition *Succession of the Legal Code* for clarinet and two string sextets was actually based on four poems from *I Have No More Time*, by Desanka Maksimović. In the first movement, the clarinet even “sings” Desanka’s verses: “*I, the Emperor of the Serbs, Greeks and Albanians, give this Code of Laws, and let there be no other codes beside mine*”. For the composition *Makamba* for women’s choir and instrumental ensemble, I first wrote the “verses” in a non-existent, irrational language, choosing phonemic combinations that sounded interesting, but also shaping the stanzas, their relations and rhythms in a way that to me appeared as though evoking an unknown, mysterious, magic ritual. The form and content of the fifth movement of *Cantus de morte* establish an analogy with the meaning and structure of the poem *And Silence Ensued* by Desanka Maksimović, through two visually conceived “funnels” turned sideways, stacked one on top of the other and aiming at opposite directions. The one is characterized by great rhythmic density (and high dynamic level) which gradually thins out, slows down, the note values becoming ever longer and dynamic lower (metaphorically, it spreads out and moves further away). The other is first filled with the wide ambit of a twelve-tone simultaneous sonority, and after eliminating tone by tone, narrows down to a single tone.

I examined analogies between an imagined or actually experienced visual sensation and the content of musical structure most consistently in *Movable Mirrors* and *Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor*. This examination was carried out at the level of compositional procedure, which abounds in symmetrical chords, inversions, retrograde motions, stretto imitations, irregular augmentations, diminutions, echo effects, etc. In the works *It’s Coming!*, *Who Am I?* and *Puzzles*, for example, I rather relied on the similarities I was discovering between the data that we receive simultaneously with our senses of sight and hearing, enabling our comprehension of and our orientation within the sound-filled space we dwell in; making it possible for us to experience that space even

when the data is disjoined, when we are deprived of visual information and left with the auditory sensation alone. In that sense, the intimate experience provoked by the actual sights and sounds of night, both real and metaphorical, above our city, was the immediate trigger and the source of all musical material for the composition *The Nocturne of the Belgrade Spring 1999*.

Thus, I listen to music, and at the same time I imagine it visually, as the movements of some undefined, constantly changing, transparent, sound-producing objects, or as moving sounds drawing closer to each other, departing into the infinite, then returning, reverberating, assuming hazy visual forms. Being a composer, I know how to gradually clarify these initially hazy musical ideas through a long process of composing, how to test their potentials, to render them precise, to fashion them into a music flow meticulously and in detail. The voco-visual aspect of the idea remains a kind of trigger, concealed or only hinted at by the title, although I am aware that it could be materialized, for instance, in the form of an animated computer graphic, 3D animation, video art and the like. For such multimedia “excursions” that would require mastering the techniques of various arts, I simply did not find enough time in my life. This is why (with the exception of *Ritual – A musical Scene for Six Groups of Girls, Orff Instruments and Conductor*, and *Imprints of Sound* for mixed choir, which belong to multimedia art) some of my pieces only approach what Vladan Radovanović termed *factitious polymedia art*.

This frame of thinking was inspired by your engagement in the Group for Multimedia Arts, within Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies at the University of Arts, which happened at the very end of your career as a Professor?

The work with graduate students of art at the Department of Multimedia Arts – young artists whose primary education belongs to various areas of art – was for me a great challenge, a refreshment, as well as an opportunity to systematize my knowledge and ideas about multimedia arts and to find ways in which different aspects of music can be explained to listeners who, as a rule, do not possess significant prior knowledge of this art. As part of the main subject (Realization of a Multimedia Work), I am nonetheless concerned primarily with the sonic layer of multimedia projects, sharing the responsibility for their overall content with Professor Čedomir Vasić. I believe that our cooperation functions perfectly.

And, since it really sounds harsh when you say of a professor that he is no longer active, the question that logically follows is: does a professor ever cease to be actively involved with his work? What does professorship mean to you?

He does: from the legally defined moment, depending on the date of birth, a professor can no longer be active in teaching, nor a member of examination boards. I have not reached that stage completely: “freshly” retired, this year I still teach master and doctoral students of composition, as well as students at the University of Arts.

My pedagogical career began almost forty-five years ago when I was still in my last year of studies, first at the “Josip Slavenski” Secondary School of Music, and afterwards at the Academy of Music. Generally speaking, teaching arts (and for that matter sciences, as well) includes two essential components: first, the content of the subject is changing all the time, for the “life” of art constantly assumes new forms, media, new poetics, techniques, modes of representation..., and second, each year there is a new generation of students: new, young, ambitious people are coming, each of them with their own specific interests, inclinations, predispositions, abilities, prior knowledge, character traits... Therefore, my work with each new student was always a new challenge, which has compelled me to continually keep abreast of and analyze developments in musical (artistic) production. This – at least I hope so – prevented me from falling into a routine of endlessly repeating the same, a routine which would be boring to me in the first place. Yet, unlike a specialized summer course, a seminar or a workshop, academic studies of composition are necessarily broad in scope, and they must rely on fundamental, long-lasting postulates of shaping sound that are deeply ingrained in any musical work. What I mean to say is that a good school ought to possess a certain amount of conservatism, pointing at the same time towards various ways of surpassing it, to encourage the searching, inquiring spirit of students and develop their creative individualities. I do not really believe that a freshly enrolled student of composition is already aware of what he or she wants to create, what compositional procedures to apply and what types of music will become (or cease to be) close to their hearts. Accordingly, an important task of studies is to enable students for independent thinking by introducing them to various compositional ideas, philosophies and techniques, and to provide them with a professional basis for mastering anything that may become the object of their closer interest during their careers.

Composing is a long process of mentally organizing and testing various variants of material, finding their potentials for development, examining alternative ways of shaping the music flow, and finally, of writing it down minutely, yet functionally. This means that each young composer, already during his studies, must find his own individual method of work, his own sequence of actions whereby his, sometimes vague, ideas will be transformed into a complete musical work. The professor’s help and counsel are needed in that process, as well.

I believe that in pedagogy, it is very important to establish relationships of mutual confidence between the teacher and the student, relationships in which both sides contribute their maximum of knowledge, time and invention so that the student is enabled to realize the full potential of his talent. For me it is very important that the student write each of his compositions to the best of his abilities, in accordance with his current technical and general musical knowledge, his natural creative intelligence, inventiveness and imagination. I wish to create a situation in which the student competes with himself, not with his colleagues from the same, or from other classes, or with the classics.

Your early professional years also meant political and (cultural)-political engagement, first in the Composers' Association, then at the Academy of Music. You served two terms as Dean of the Faculty of Music (1989-1998). This was a time that demanded a specific form of political engagement – not only within your own institution and in the domain of educational policies, which goes without saying – but also one which apparently involved much greater risks. From the present distance, would you share with us your views on that time, both in general and regarding your own position? I must add that we felt quite confident, having you in those positions.

For six years I was a vice-dean, and subsequently for nine years the dean of the Faculty. When Darinka Matić Marović was the dean, and Nikola Rackov and I, vice-deans, the Faculty building was refurbished, central heating introduced, many new instruments, spare parts and accessories procured, and a recording studio established; the Faculty began with its regular concert activities and systematic research; international cooperation developed... Although the gradual entropy of the social system, as well as economic problems became ever more clearly manifest, while the government seemed to endure in a kind of mild hibernation, higher education still enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, tolerable financial means and social prestige, so the whole of society, complete with the Faculty, functioned fairly well. However, after the failed historical opportunity for a painless transition into a multi-party democracy and market economy – for which Yugoslavia in the late 1980s was in every respect better prepared than the countries of the “Eastern bloc” – the blood-and-soil ideology prevailed. Thus, after the orchestrated nationalist rallies in Serbia, and the elections in Croatia won by the Croatian Democratic Union permeated with elements of Ustasha ideology, after intimidation and shameless war-mongering propaganda through the media, we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of the creation (some called it a “revival”) of tiny national states. The claims for such nation-building were based now on some self-proclaimed historical rights,

and then on the demographics of a given region, but the borders were drawn by weapons, and in the course of that process, the ethnic composition of disputed territories was being forcibly altered. As we all know, this was accompanied by war crimes, murders and looting. In Serbia, there were sanctions to boot, with the accompanying economic, cultural and every other form of isolation, galloping inflation, dreadfully empty shops, banks with no money, hospitals without medicines, salaries (of university professors, for instance) which at a certain moment fell to the equivalent of four to five German marks a month, shortages of fuel, heating... The early 1990s saw not only the total breakdown of the Serbian economy, but also the destruction of the existing system of values, socially acceptable moral norms and the functioning of the legal system. In such circumstances, my main preoccupation was to sustain and advance the professional level of teaching at the Faculty, to create an atmosphere in which both teachers and students could devote themselves to the development of their profession. I was convinced that we could not allow the best high school students who were to become our students, or the students already enrolled in our Faculty, to end up professionally as a “lost generation”. The human ability for intensive learning and the swift acquisition of new knowledge is tied to a certain age; particularly in music, one can hardly ever make up for lost time. This is why I persevered – rather successfully at that – in keeping the Faculty outside of politics, and politics outside of the Faculty, defending, to the extent possible, the autonomy and authority of the Faculty and University. Together with my vice-deans Zoran Erić, Fern Rašković, later Zorica Dimitrijević-Stošić, I managed, especially after the signing of the Dayton Accords and loosening of the sanctions, to secure the most essential means for work, for artistic and scholarly activities; we even managed to maintain modest international cooperation. We were given occasional support by certain individuals from the establishment, and after 1995 by the Soros Foundation.

I departed from this policy only once, during the big students’ demonstrations against the rigged local elections in Belgrade, in the winter of 1996–97. I expressed my public support for the students, took part in their rallies and protests (the Faculty of Music students’ “headquarters” was based in the Dean’s office), and suspended teaching at the Faculty. I was of the opinion that a fair and square organization of elections was in the interest of every individual, regardless of their political views, and that the academic community had the right and duty to uphold basic democratic principles.

I resigned my function, together with my vice-deans, in protest against the new Law on Higher Education, passed in 1998. According to the Law, the Minister was authorized to appoint deans and rectors, while deans were given excessive power, especially in the process of appointing teaching staff. Our

Faculty and some faculties of the University of Belgrade put up strong resistance against this socialist-radical assault on the autonomy of higher education, and although the resistance was crushed with the aid of individuals and groups within each of the faculties, it left certain consequences. After all, the governing bodies (or the overall policies) of faculties and universities in Serbia do not change in accordance with the results political parties achieved in elections. Just how important it is to uphold the attained level of the autonomy of higher education is best understood if we look at the disastrous state of cultural institutions, artistic ensembles, schools, not to mention state-run enterprises, precisely because each political party that was in power interfered with the appointment of managements in these institutions.

Concurrent with this, your efforts in the field of cultural politics, primarily within the Composers' Association, did not subside. Precisely at that time which was "out of joint", you initiated and established (together with Milan Mihajlović, then president of the Composers' Association, and Ivana Stefanović) the International Review of Composers, bringing into this project your experience in organizing an earlier festival Music in Serbia. In short: the Review now and then – how would you compare the two, conceptually, financially, geographically, politically...?

My program concept of the Review arose from the need to present to the public each year new works by Serbian composers, after the Yugoslav Review in Opatija had become a local event, closed to Serbian composers. I believed that the Review's task was to offer the broadest possible view of domestic musical production, on condition that the presented works fulfilled the elementary professional criteria. In that sense, the Review was in one of its segments a true cross section of our current production, rather than a selection that would in any way reflect my personal judgments, affinities, inclinations or interests. I wanted to present this fair-like content in the context of the current, rich and varied production in the world, and to this end, the selection of foreign composers was of particular importance. In those circumstances of isolation from the world, of a strong ideology of "back-to-the-roots" and "traditional values" in culture, the Review, even if of limited influence, was a subversive event which proved that composers and musicians in Serbia were alive and active, and were not resigned to the existing state of affairs.

The founding of the Serbian Music Information Center, the former "home" of our journal, also goes to your credit. How do you comment on its being closed?

The Music Information Center partly took over, and then successfully developed the functions that until the break-up of Yugoslavia had been performed by the information office of the Alliance of Yugoslav Composers' Associations. Under new legal provisions, the field of action of a collecting society was largely limited to collecting and distributing royalties, and this made the relationships between the collecting society (SOKOJ) and MIC complicated; yet, with mutual good will and common interest, this could have been negotiated. Unfortunately, it turned out that the creators of popular music, holding a two-thirds majority in all SOKOJ governing bodies, did not recognize that common interest. All my efforts to make government institutions in charge of cultural affairs interested in the survival of the Center (and of course the Legacies of Josip Slavenski and Vlastimir Peričić) came to nothing. As a result, Serbia, unlike the majority of culturally advanced countries, has neither a reliable insight into its own musical life, an integrated musical archive or the promotional material devoted to music. This says enough about the preservation of the cherished national identity that the "world power-mongers" and domestic "Eurofanatics" aim to destroy, and about genuine care for the promotion of national cultural values.

In the past decade you were also the vice-rector of the University of Arts. In that position, which at that moment involved a re-engagement of your educational-political identity in the implementation of the Bologna system, you achieved remarkable results, and left a trace similar to the one you left at the Faculty, briefly described as a stable/orderly system. What is your opinion about the possibilities and modalities of the application of the Bologna "recipe" in our environment, given our tradition, infrastructure and financial means? It seems that in this manner we could talk about any aspect of our social reality?

I don't think that rules and procedures can completely regulate and foresee every aspect of a certain activity, including university education. On the other hand, the lack of fixed rules or their selective use, open a wide space for overstepping one's authority, abuse of function and inconsistencies in decision-making. In order to determine just to what extent a system ought to be regulated, one must possess a detailed knowledge and understanding of the functioning of a faculty or a university, especially regarding the specific features of art studies.

Speaking about the implementation of the then new Law on Higher Education, fashioned in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Declaration, my engagement in the Rectorate of the University of Arts was primarily concerned with the newly formed doctoral studies in the field of art: creating the concept, defining criteria, contents and procedures. I encountered diverse starting positions among my colleagues, the questions of whether, in the first place,

there was such content and subject matter in art that could be taught beyond the undergraduate level; whether doctoral studies should be only for exceptional, already established artists, or they were a natural and immediate continuation of studies for excellent students; why should an artist need doctoral studies and theoretical reflection on his own work, the context in which he creates etc. Although doctoral studies in art still elicit certain doubts in our academic community, and they do have their shortcomings, I believe that the foundation for their successful “life” and further development has been laid. In a broader sense, the ideas of a unified European area of education, student and faculty mobility, the right of students to choose their own plan of studies (hence professional qualifications), the obligation of responsible and continuous fulfillment of duties by both students and teaching staff – these ideas are close to my mind. Such ideas, however, are not sufficiently supported by legal provisions, which are mostly concerned with excessively detailed (and in the field of arts often illogical and economically unsustainable) norms of working conditions; and there are extra complicated administrative procedures of accreditation, planning, reporting, quality assessment, recognition of exams taken at other faculties and foreign diplomas, etc. Compound this with resistance on the part of a good portion of the academic community to any change in the routine modes of work, and add the organizational difficulties, chronic financial problems of students, and the total lack of material support from the government for the reform of higher education, and the result is that in our society, the ideas of the Bologna Declaration to this day remain only a dead letter.

The end of the last question actually foreshadows the next one in its intentional widening of the focus towards the society. Namely, at the beginning of this century, owing to your political engagement in the Social Democratic Party, and your professional achievements, you were appointed ambassador (of FR Yugoslavia at that time, later Serbia and Montenegro) to the South African Republic (2002-2006). You boldly accepted the post and found yourself in the world of diplomacy. How different is that world from the world of music/arts? Or perhaps in your case there is no difference? And how did it feel to come back home?

Besides South Africa, I “covered” eight other countries in the region. This happened at the time when our foreign policy was all too ready to neglect our ties with African countries, the manifold ties that previous generations had spent a great deal of effort and means to develop, albeit in different political and economic circumstances. I saw it as my task to understand, analyze, assess and inform the Ministry about the key aspects, dilemmas, goals and perspec-

tives of foreign and domestic politics in each of these countries. At the same time, I sought to offer detailed and objective information to the governments, non-government organizations, opposition, business associations, trade unions, academia, our diaspora and the public at large in the region, and especially in South Africa as the regional leader, about the situation, politics, problems and aims of our country. I thought that in the long run, a wider awareness of the state of affairs could lead to a better understanding between countries and peoples, and further to the recognition of common interests, to more intense and comprehensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Besides, I was very much preoccupied with day-to-day practical and administrative jobs in the embassy; I was thus far removed from, as you say, “the world of music/art”. For the first time in my life, I had to keep regular office hours, in addition to other duties pertaining to the ambassadorial function; I was part of a strict, inviolable hierarchical chain, characteristic of the functioning of the Ministry.

Yet, my true profession occasionally helped me with establishing close, politically so important contacts with government officials and other citizens of South Africa, as well as within the diplomatic corps. I learned how important general culture was in diplomacy, the handling of all sorts of information one incidentally picks up from the first day of school, and I understood the importance of choosing the appropriate, convincing manner of addressing each possible collocator.

Upon your return, you became Chairman of the Board of SOKOJ; soon afterwards, you “plunged” into a huge debate about author’s rights. The system needed reshaping?

The order of events was actually the reverse, and in order to understand the complex causes for this “debate”, it is necessary to take a step backwards.

I would like to remind you that the founders of the SOKOJ, organization for the collective protection of author’s rights, were composers’ associations from the former Yugoslav republics and provinces, which governed SOKOJ through their representatives. These associations were concerned, among other things, with cultural policies, the advancement of the social status of composers, the presentation of new works, organization of concerts, and they had elaborate criteria and procedures for the admittance of new members. This means that a large number of composers of popular music and authors of lyrics, some of whom were extremely prosperous in the music industry, were for decades excluded from the decision-making in SOKOJ, and therefore deeply discontented.

On the other hand, after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the whole system of the collective protection of authors’ rights crumbled virtually overnight. Its revival

in Serbia was hindered by the interruption of the foreign payment system, inflation, the general shortage of money, rule-breaking on a massive scale, the thriving of contraband and pirate editions, and especially by the “witticism” of large broadcasting companies, supported by the government, whereby it was deemed a patriotic act not to remunerate world authors (but domestic ones were also affected). The people had the right to watch and listen to whatever they were served, free of charge at that. These large broadcasters would allegedly compensate “their” chosen authors through an organization of their own making.

Although politically and formally speaking the situation changed after the year 2000, even in this domain the state has not succeeded in achieving full compliance with the law and the financial discipline of the users of musical works, nor has it managed to secure the efficiency of the judicial system to which SOKOJ applied countless times. “I won’t pay, and nobody can do anything about it” is the attitude emblematic of the practices of Aleksandar Tijanić, the former director of the Public Service of Serbia, and such an attitude survives practically to this day. I will also remind you of Minister Mladen Dinkić’s strong populist propaganda, soon codified into legal provisions, whereby the state, in token of support to small entrepreneurs, exempts them from paying royalties to the composers whose works they use! Does this mean that the state can likewise relieve young married couples from paying their dues to the private owner whose flat they rent, or to grant a novice entrepreneur a start-up credit so that he can take a picture from an exhibition to beautify his premises and attract customers?

All this has led to a long-lasting and drastic fall in the collection of royalties, hence to significantly diminishing the funds for distribution among composers. These funds were symbolic during the 1990s, and since the year 2000, they have not increased sufficiently (nor quickly enough). The discontent of composers, particularly those who were not members of the Composers’ Association, with the results SOKOJ achieved, was unfortunately directed less towards the problems of exacting payment from users, and more, that is, primarily, to the expenditures of SOKOJ itself, and to the schemes of distribution of royalties. The culprits for the current state of affairs were sought in the entire community of academic composers (although in the mid-2000s their share in the overall distribution amounted to some 9%); accusations were then narrowed down to the SOKOJ Board, and especially to the long-standing director Ivan Tasić, who was accused of the most incredible criminal offences without a shred of evidence. In such a heated atmosphere, immediately prior to my return from Pretoria in 2006, the new SOKOJ statute was introduced, according to which membership in the Assembly (its most important governing body) was determined by the royalties of each individual composer, with some measures

to protect the “minorities”, i.e. composers of art music; the same principle was applied to other bodies of SOKOJ. Thus, the usual way of securing authority to govern companies, corporations, banks, enterprises, etc., was “transplanted” into our organization for the protection of music rights: the practice applied in many other countries.

At that specific moment, I was a new “character on the stage”. As it happened, I had not taken part in those previous arguments, and this was to my advantage. Through my influence as Chairman of the Board, the situation calmed down gradually; I managed to neutralize the “extremists” and steer the bodies of the organization towards constructive joint efforts, towards respecting democratic procedures, and I contributed to activities that were more vigorous and to the better business results of SOKOJ (renamed now as SokoJ). Besides, we have managed to preserve, at least for the time being and after a great deal of discussion, the general principles of the distribution of royalties, which begin by assigning different “initial” values to musical works with respect to their being categorized as either art or popular music, and also with respect to their complexity and their intended use. These principles have been preserved despite the fact that our society, led by the electronic and printed media, devotes increasingly less attention, recognition and support to artistic creation, and in the field of music it does not make distinctions in category and value between works belonging to high art, and those belonging to the music industry.

After a long while, I lately attended the defense of the doctoral artistic project of your student Svetlana Savić, and was surprised that the disputes over electronic music still linger. To what extent are these debates political, and to what extent are they musical? Could you possibly answer this question from the position of a professor, and from the position of the founder of the Faculty of the Music’s Electronic Studio (1985), author of the Fundamentals of Electronic Music (1995) and, of course, a composer of electroacoustic music?

I believe that in the context of your question, the medium, electronic or otherwise, is of secondary importance. The question is about the specific subjective evaluation of ideas, musical styles, aesthetics and compositional procedures in music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This evaluation relies on the affinity for certain ideas and procedures, and a hostility towards others. Electronic music began as a direct manifestation of the tendency towards the radically novel, the expression of such a tendency, and it is by nature oriented towards exploration and research; yet today, it can easily simulate or “suck into” its tissue, any recognizable musical or extramusical piece of information. It may, however, serve as a mere signifier which stands for everything that many of my

colleagues considered to be musical blind alleys, misguided attempts with no sense or value, within whose frameworks it was, and still is, simply impossible to compose an artistically valuable work. When such personal attitudes are transferred from the choice of a musical “language” for one’s own creative work to the imposition of a value system into which all young composers must fit in order to earn recognition, and especially if such personal attitudes are expressed as a tendency to radically revise the history of new music, then we are in the domain of politics.

So we are back to the current academic/political antagonisms, but also back to where we started. The difference between recording/composing music and recording/composing sound from the position of a dedicated explorer of (new) sound?

I am puzzled by this question. If you mean the differences between composing and recording non-electronic music, and recording/composing sounds for electronic music, then such differences do exist. The composing of any instrumental, vocal or vocal-instrumental piece starts from the existing, familiar sonic facts that we have imposed on ourselves by the very choice of the performing ensemble. The composer combines these facts, reorders and mixes them, creating sound colors and values needed for the work. The ultimate result of the compositional process is the score, the form written down, that is, of what instrumentalists/singers are supposed to execute, synchronously and precisely, so that the composition, through the act of performing, may exist in its auditory mode. The audio recording of such a composition aims to register, as faithfully as possible, everything that an acoustically suitable space would allow us to hear, indeed everything that is actually heard in a rendering of the piece in an appropriate (concert) space. Any intervention by the recording engineer to alter the authenticity, the “natural quality” of the sonic image as such, is, in my opinion, unwelcome, unless it is executed with the aim of producing a specific, electroacoustic variant of the work: the procedure I tried out while recording and mixing my composition *Movable Mirrors*.

The composing of an electronic (and electroacoustic) composition also expands to the domain of creating sounds for the work, and it does not end with the written score (provided it exists in the first place), but with the recording, or the recording of the electronic part of a mixed media work. Sounds for an electronic piece can be electronically generated, but they can also be “natural” sounds from our acoustic environment. Unlike the recording of music, the recording of sounds for an electronic work very often starts from a desire to find a specific, unusual mode of recording, which enables us to discover in sound

certain details otherwise inaccessible to our sense of hearing, or the recording takes place in a characteristic, not easily accessible or even bizarre space. Such a material, already “roughly” processed so as to become music, can subsequently be further elaborated with electronic equipment.

Finally, does the “actual” political engagement of an artist abolish, in your opinion, the need for artistic political engagement, or are we all political beings, whatever our engagements might be. What are your views on the relationships between music and politics?

After everything I have tried in life, I believe that an artist ought not to be involved in “actual” politics, for it will soon become his profession, often a very unpleasant profession. The rules of political games are firmly established and fully worked out, and it is impossible to build into them any kind of “artistic” (or scientific) approach. The exceptions are reserved for extreme situations, and everyone, including an artist, is entitled to rebellion, to protest, to civil disobedience. On the other hand, I firmly believe that the engagement of artists in the domain of cultural politics, promotion of art, preservation of cultural heritage and artistic education is much needed.

I have read a great deal about artists who advocated political engagement through works of art, music included; I am familiar with their ideas and aims, many of these ideas I respect. However, I value the achievements of such creators according to the artistic level they attain, not the advanced political ideas they champion. Personally, I have never felt the need to create “engaged art” (music), probably because it implies a certain adjustment of content and form to the habits, the educational and cultural level of as wide a circle of recipients as possible; besides, such a work must have a sufficiently clear, unequivocal “message”. With both of these aspects of music created with the intention to influence the circumstances of a society, I have little affinity. Anyhow, I believe that politics influences music inevitably and intensely through its manifold impact on all its institutions, but music has no influence whatever on politics. It can only be used (and abused) to political ends.