
REVIEWS

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Ana Kotevska, *Iseći sa kraja veka. Muzičke kritike i (ne)kritičko mišljenje (1992–1996)* (Fragments from the Turn of the Century: Music Criticism and (Non-)Critical Thinking, 1992–1996), Banja Luka–Belgrade: Besjeda, Clio, 2017, 223 pp. ISBN 978-86-7102-571-3

There are few musicologists in our midst who have made such a 'long-term' commitment to music criticism and with such perseverance like Ana Kotevska. Critical writings by Ana Kotevska have been published in printed media as well as broadcast on Radio Belgrade 2 and 3; in her highly diverse musicological work, the 1990s were also important on account of, among other things, her music reviews published

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in the *Politika* (Политика) daily. These reviews are now collected and bound in the present volume, *Iseći sa kraja veka. Muzičke kritike i (ne)kritičko mišljenje (1992–1996)* (Fragments from the Turn of the Century: Music Criticism and (Non-)Critical Thinking, 1992–1996), published by Clio (Belgrade) and Besjeda (Бесједа, Banja Luka). Taking us some 20 years back, this book brings a fraction, "fragment" (*isečak*) from its author's rich oeuvre, an excellent summary and illustration of the nature and contours of her many years of explorations in music writing and criticism.

The book comprises 90 critical pieces by Ana Kotevska published in the "Music Chronicle" (*Музичка хроника*) section of *Politika* between October 1992 and October 1996. In these valuable 'recordings' of a critical voice focused on attaining a deepened experience of a musical work and performance act/sound as *live presence* in a concrete time, it is easy to recognize the potential of re-actualizing and preserving them in the format of an integrated textual whole. *Fragments from the Turn of the Century* is more than a collection of music reviews. Among other things, the reason for that is that today's readers will approach these texts with different expectations than those who read them on the

pages of *Politika*, 'in passing', daily, impressing them with their horizons of expectations as the *sum total* of their own desires and experiences, along with the inevitable question of what may have changed between reading any two of those texts.

Today, due to our historical distance from them, these critical texts are open to *different* views; they indirectly point out the complex problematics of contextualizing a message/text, relativizing the relationship and hierarchy between the original experience and other, later contexts. Initially written as daily reviews and now brought together between the covers of a book, it seems as if 'fate' itself had snatched these remarkable writings out of their original context, turning them now into a sort of channel taking the reader, without much extraneous noise, right to the 'sources' of experiences from the turbulent 1990s, an aesthetic and existential experience presented from the personal perspective of the author, who makes no effort to conceal her nostalgia.

As a document of a time past and a testimony not only of the capital's musical life, but also the continuity of music criticism at a time of dramatic upheaval at the turn of the century, when art music (still) managed to retain the currency of daily papers, this fascinating book transcends the bounds of a primary source of criticism and may be read on multiple levels. At the present moment, when we must wonder what happened to music criticism in our daily press, Ana Kotevska's book highlights all the beauties, challenges, and risks that accompany a critic's vocation, (re)affirming the standards that younger critics should likewise aspire to. It seems that precisely the need for renewing and resetting the

standards of music criticism by means of this book provides its author with space for her continued engagement with contemporary culture.

Daily music criticism, although necessarily viewed in the context of the cultural policy of the media where it is published, is nonetheless primarily an *individual act* on the part of the critic writing it, a sort of review of the moment and first impression of the event reviewed, while its daily 'expendability' may be transcended only by authors endowed with stylistic brilliance. The writings of Ana Kotevska show precisely that – that the author is a listener first and only then a critic, a *creative subject* who *indirectly* constitutes the work in the act of experience it, demonstrating how an inspired essay may be written with little room, transcending the moment and immediate occasion of writing.

Brought together by their original place of publication, these reviews by Ana Kotevska constitute a dynamic whole with a high degree of internal coherence, a rich 'web of motives' and variations on related topics. The texts are arranged in the chronological order of publication; by a twist of fate, the opening and the closing review, with their titles and contents, effectively frame the book and provide it with dramatic support: the book begins with a text about Ivana Stefanović's music for *Isidora*, a ballet ("Autonomno muzičko zdanje" – An Autonomous Musical Edifice, 16 October 1992) and ends with a symbolically titled review, "I na kraju sarabanda" (And, at the End, a Sarabande"), of Mstislav Rostropovich's performance at Sava Centar on 22 October 1996.

Highly original, not only in terms of her critical approach, but also her interpre-

tative findings, these texts were written as an echo of earlier true chroniclers of Serbia's musical life, annalists of musical events, as Stana Đurić-Klajn (Стана Ђурић-Клајн) used to say, such as Stanislav Vinaver (Станислав Винавер), Pavle Stefanović (Павле Стефановић), mentioned by the author as one of her models, and Dragutin Gostuški (Драгутин Гостушки), who was, as the book informs us, the first to read her reviews published in *Student* (Студент) during the late 1960s. Roughly the same length, each text features its own pulsation, clearly expressing the author's refined critical and aesthetic acumen as well as her sophisticated literary taste. The author describes these "nocturnal writings" of hers as a "process of 'literalizing' and 'musicalizing' musicology and (music) aesthetics" (p. 203). With her piercing musicological gaze (and view), the author strove to take apart Serbia's contemporary production in composition and performance, record the weaknesses and summits of Belgrade's musical scene at the time, the BEMUS festival, the International Review of Composers, the Days of Mokranjac festival, offering subtle, sometimes even minutely crafted insights, such as her texts about new pieces by I. Stefanović (И. Стефановић), V. Trajković (В. Трајковић), and M. Mihajlović (М. Михајловић). Her breadth of erudition and invention enable her to move across various landscapes with ease, and her texts frequently generate space for further considerations of musical phenomena, ranging from those that are 'timeless' and concern stylistic/performing authenticity, the relationship of music and the stage arts, via pointing to new compositional and performing poetics, to problems such as popu-

list programming, the fate of émigré artists, and the like. The author's critical thinking rests on incorporating all the layers and dimensions of a musical work or performance act, as well as the institutional world of art. On the pages of this book, music is also viewed as part of a complex aesthetic experience, as well as one's life practice. In the words of the author, music "is not only an autonomous edifice of sound, but also one of the participants in the drama" (p. 31). In that regard, especially inspired was "Pevanje, mišljenje, plakanje" (Singing, Thinking, Crying), a text about the Second International Review of Composers, which took place in Novi Sad and Sremski Karlovci, published on 26 May 1993, a newly established festival at the time that, in those circumstances, as "a gathering of composers, performers, musicologists, critics, music associations and organizers bristled with not only aesthetic, but also sociological and anthropological meanings and messages" (p. 29). The severity of the current moment is also borne out by the following lines: "As if to bridge an almost surreal reality blocked by war with a possibly normal future, our performers took hold of scores from abroad and, in the absence of their authors, read them with much curiosity, just like shipwreck survivors read the messages that reach them in bottles" (p. 30).

The book also gives us an opportunity to survey the diverse scene of contemporary Serbian music, highly varied in terms of generation, musical language, and poetics, generating the impression that it was precisely during this time that it reached one of its high points. We read about the "river of no return" that took away a large number of budding talents, the absence of

the “Skovran sound”, we learn that half of the members of this orchestra had left the Ensemble overnight, but also that ensembles such as Ensemble for New Music and St. George Strings, which were founded at that time, actively encouraged composers to create new works. In Kotevska’s reviews such as, for instance, “Krstarenje sa Jugokoncртом” (Cruises with Jugokoncртом) from 30 May 1996, we learn about the efforts of cultural institutions that in those uncertain times strove to transcend the “shock to the system” and retain a high-quality musical life on an international level. In this kaleidoscope of snippets from our 1990s musical life we also find review of concerts by foreign artists (Ghena Dimitrova / Гена Димитрова, Mikhail Pletnev / Михайл Плетнёв, Michel Dalberto / Мишел Далберто...), and our musicians who had left the country (Ksenija Janković / Ксенија Јанковић, Aleksandar Madžar / Александар Маџар, Kemal Gekić / Кемал Гекић, *et al.*). It was precisely at this time that some of our leading musicians such as Bojan Sudić (Бојан Суђић), Dejan Mlađenović (Дејан Млађеновић), Ljubiša Jovanović (Љубиша Јовановић), Sandra Belić (Сандра Белић), or Nada Kolundžija (Нада Колунџија) ‘cut their teeth’, matured, and formed their authentic profiles. These pages also record the first performances of a couple of pianists who subsequently developed in different directions, Lidija Bizjak (Лидија Бизјак), only 16 at the time, and Ivan Tasovac (Иван Тасовац), who was a bit older.

In addition, Ana Kotevska’s critical writings shed ample light on their author’s engaged thinking, or, rather, engaged personality, a passionate follower of the capital’s musical life, but also including several

reports from Budva, Prague, Paris, Ohrid, and Verbier. In that sense, they are perhaps even more ‘indicative’ today than they were at the time of their writing.

Her daily reviews, originally printed on the pages of the most influential daily in one country and now read in another and different country (countries), are also marked by the story of the bloody breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the international sanctions against and isolation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In that sense, one should certainly note that this book features a sort of political quality as well. In some of the reviews, there are fleeting but effective flashes of commentary concerning unheated venues, ‘dictated’ musical programming, the contradictory socio-political occurrences of those turbulent years that reflected on the music scene as well, not only concerning the fate of the institutions and the very existence of its protagonists, but also their creativity. We can only imagine the impression that these inspired texts, written ‘as though everything were fine’, made in their original context, in the black-and-white world of the everyday political public, as a newspaper column surrounded by headlines featuring hyperinflation, wars, and sanctions.

Confirmation that during those dramatic years the author was tempting not only the ‘fate’ of music criticism, but also the profession of the critic is delivered by a sort of postlude titled “Epilog, dvadeset godina kasnije. Noćni zapisi za dnevne novine” (The Epilogue, 20 Years On. Nocturnal Writings for Daily Papers). Written in a confessional tone, this epilogue is a testimony about those darker sides of the critic’s job that depend on public media pre-

sentation, her dismissal from Radio Belgrade, the impact of censorship that she experienced at *Politika* in 1996 and stopped writing soon after. Engaging at a turbulent time in our cultural and political situation, willing to voice her concerns every day, and retaining clear criteria, the author has done her part. She was one of the few who were ready to risk their careers and expose themselves to the pressures of current production imposed by the contemporary cultural practice of music.

The book is flanked by a foreword written by Milan Vlačić (Милан Влајчић), editor of *Politika*'s cultural section during the 1990s, subtitled "Ana Kotevska – kritičar u olujnim vremenima" (Ana Kotevska – A Critic in Turbulent Times), and an afterword by Danijela Kulezić Wilson, "Neizrecivo u rečima" (The Ineffable in Words), which provides a musicological take on the reviews.

Unlike the *cold* memory of scholarly histories, the critical texts of Ana Kotevska, thanks to the shadings and nuances with which she so strikingly and vividly conjures up that time, enable the reader to establish a *warm* memory of the immediate (musical) past.

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Dragan Latinčić, *Spektralna trigonometrija – zasnivanje univerzalne muzičko-matematičke analize, (Spectral Trigonometry – Establishing a Universal Musical-Mathematical Analysis)*, Beograd: Zadužbina Andrejević, 2017, 164 pages, ISBN 978-86-525-0299-8

The book of Dragan Latinčić, *Spektralna trigonometrija – Establishing a Universal Musical-Mathematical Analysis*, opens new paths of musical thought, which according to mathematical projections of the trigonometry method, explain the frequent relations of harmonics, as well as relations which appear during the transposition of harmonics to rhythmic configurations. Thus, Latinčić introduces the reader into the world of spectrum and the systemic net of his compositions.

According to the previous opus of this composer, it could be said that his musical language has strived so far to emerge from the frame of the strict Western European tempered system and to come closer to the music of the Middle East, and even Balkan folklore provenance. Therefore, numerous

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