

first publication

1 Čačinović, Nadežda: Doba slike u teoriji mediologije [The Age of the Image in the Theory of Mediology]. Zagreb: Jasenski i Turk 2001, p. 63.

Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, the classic of Serbian music, considered by many to be one of the greatest Serbian composers, was born exactly one hundred years after, say, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the unique Austrian musical genius and, on a global scale, unrivalled master of musical play, the *play* which is generally regarded as topping the pyramid of man's spiritual power. Consequently, the year 2006, which has just passed, was the year in which the whole world celebrated the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. In Serbia, apart from this global musical jubilee, attention was devoted, albeit modestly, to its great musical jubilee – the 150th anniversary of Mokranjac's birth.

Having no intention to make any comparison between Mokranjac and Mozart, the following can be stated in the aftermath of these two anniversaries. Whereas the need for a continuous (self-)representation of Mozart's music on a global, civilizational scale became a specific »self-generating« phenomenon a long time ago, so that the personal, national, historical, socio-political, cultural... or, more precisely, spatio-temporal identity of this music and its author do not need self-determination and self-confirmation anymore, the (self-)representation of Mokranjac and his music is yet to gather its cultural-sociological-interpretative momentum with respect to self-comprehension and self-representation in the local context, if such a moment has not already passed! Namely, as stated by well-known art theoretician Heinrich Wölfflin, »everything is not possible in every moment«, so that this music can become (if it has an adequate value, and Mokranjac's music has) a »nameless«, »a-national« and »timeless« spiritual, musical good on a broader scale, that is, the property of all of us at any point in time and at any place.

Such pondering over the phenomenon of self-representation in this paper is based on research on the potentials, needs and methods of self-representation and presentation in a music text and a text about music in a broader historical, cultural and social context of Mokranjac's work.

The issues of music-discursive identity formation (personal, collective and national) that impose themselves refer, above all, to the period of romanticism and the ideological-cultural context of the Kingdom of Serbia at the turn of the 19th century to the 20th, as well as to the cultural context in the postmodernist period and the social context of Serbia at the turn of the 20th century to the 21st. Namely, if culture is regarded as an »institutionalized or informally organized production and reproduction of meanings, sense and consciousness«,¹ it is then a multidiscursive notion, which can also be viewed through the discourse of music as a contextualized act – in the sense of (more or less) comprehensive musical statements and expressions, as well as institutionalized structures of the social process of producing (non-musical) meanings – or, in real fact, as one way of expression and communication, including social life in general. Thus, the interpretation of music and its meaning is also the perception of the time in which we live and which we create.

Since a polemic attitude towards reality is the essence of every art language to a significant extent, and since the relationship between art and reality is closely related to the given historical, cultural and social circumstances (and philosophical, epistemological and scientific-technological assumptions), it is interesting to perceive the dimensions and components of Mokranjac's music discourse and the way in which the mentioned relationship between art and reality, cultural, historical and social circumstances, as well as technological and other assumptions, in addition to the possible comprehension of art as the knowledge and creation of reality, are materialized and/or interpreted. In other words, it is interesting to use the phenomenon of self-representation and different musical forms of its manifestation – especially those concerning the ideologies and processes of national identification and ranging from personal, collective and national constitution to the agents of deconstruction – in order to compare the two relatively distant moments in the history of Serbian music (romanticism and postmodernism) on the basis of the reception of the work of Stevan Mokranjac as one of the most significant Serbian musical, artistic and cultural figures in general.

Although all art is influenced, in one way or the other, by the time and society in which it is created, it surpasses the constraints, that is, they do not determine it as art. Thus, the question that imposes itself here is what defines Mokranjac's music discourse as art or what



2 Cf. Rorty, Richard: *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1989, p. XV.

3 Cf. Mokranjac, S. Stojanović: *Predgovor zbirci Narodne pesme i igre sa melodijama iz Levča* [Introduction to the *Collection Folk Songs and Dances with Melodies from Levča*]. In: S.S.M.: *Sabrana dela* [Collected Works]. Vol. 9: *Etnomuzikološki zapisi* [Ethnomusicological Recordings]. Ed. by Dragoslav Dević. Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Knjaževac: Nota Music Publishing Company 1996, p. 12.

music layers make it an essential part of the »deepest, unnamed level of selfhood« as a form of *auto-re-presentation* of the need and desire for experiencing that which lies deepest within ourselves, for some form of unrepeatable autonomy or unique self-realization through music.

However, there still remains tension between private and public regardless of, or just with respect to, the *change of the paradigm* according to which romanticism in art is not regarded as imitation any more, but as an artist's self-realization, as well as a shift in the notion of truth – *which is not sought, but is created* – whereby the notion of necessity is replaced by the notion of contingency and truth becomes man's product, something eminently human and subjective (which means that inter-subjectivity, expressed by means of the subject–subject formula, becomes crucial for comprehension). Consequently, regardless of this historicist shift in European thinking, which substitutes Freedom for Truth as the aim of thinking and social progress – according to which socialization and historical circumstances are that »lowest level«, since »below« *socialization and before history there is nothing to determine that which is human* – some thinkers are still overwhelmed with the desire for personal autonomy or self-realization (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault, e.g.), whereby socialization is the antithesis to something deep within us. On the other hand, some thinkers are overwhelmed with the desire for a more just and freer society (Marx, Habermas and Rawls, e.g.), whereby personal excellence is regarded as »irrationalism« and »aestheticism«.

In that fictitious space *between* – the two visions which, in Rorty's view, cannot be philosophically and theoretically combined – Mokranjac's music, including its reception, has been unfolding for more than a hundred years. Metaphorically speaking, in Mokranjac's work, both visions encompass all levels of music discourse and – in a striking and (insofar as music is concerned) unusually paradigmatic manner – co-exist, inter-twined and united, in the space *in between*, as Rorty would put it, using the language of »liberal utopia«, »a vocabulary of self-creation«, which is »necessarily private, unshared and unsuited to argument« and »a vocabulary of justice«, which is necessarily public and common, and a means of substantiated exchange.² The product of musical imagination and imaginative ability, this specific (musical) space *between* private and public (artistic) freedom – private and public (personal, collective and national) self-awareness, whereby peculiarity, irrationality, aestheticism, as well as universality, rationality and communality do not abolish one another, but converge, interact and amalgamate – created confusion and ambiguity as regards the reception of Mokranjac's work among his students, followers, fans and critics, in the context of music writings, for a long time. It seems that, for the same reason, it prevented, in essence, any musical (normative-creative) or non-musical (socializing-historicist or social-political) negative manipulation, regardless of some (symptomatically/relatively scarce!) »abusing« efforts, but it remained unresponsive, that is, unsusceptible to such agents of dissolution and utilization.

By consistently basing his creative endeavour on a »firm conviction that Serbian art music can evolve only from Serbian folk music«³ and by building the foundations of Serbian music in various fields, Mokranjac's work as a composer and conductor (director of a choir), instrumentalist, melograh, music educator and organizer of musical life and musical institutions came into prominence during the last two decades of the 19th century and in the first decade of the 20th century (until the beginning of the First World War), within the borders of the autonomous Principality of Serbia and then the Kingdom of Serbia (1882), in the time span from the Berlin Congress and the achievement of independence (1878) to the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). This was the period marked by: Serbia's last war against the Ottoman Empire after several centuries under its rule; the achievement of independence, the initial steps made toward developing a capitalist economy; the development of trade, industry and banking; social stratification, that is, the division of society into the trading bourgeoisie (which constituted the major part of the Serbian middle class), rural landowners, craftsmen and workers; the adoption of numerous laws; harmonization with the modern European principles of government; the development of Belgrade into the leading Serbian cultural centre; further implementation of the national patriotic programme; official use of the orthography of the reformed Serbian language; significant dates in Serbian romantic literature, painting, music... It is evident that Mokranjac's founding role in all mentioned activities was crucial for the (re)-presentation of the creative basis and institutional structure of Serbian music as a form of national constitution in the ideological-cultural context of the Kingdom of Serbia at the turn of the century.

Self-representation (personal, collective or national), which is closely related to and/or includes, both directly and indirectly, many other notions and categories, such as self-comprehension, self-perception, the Other as the source of self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-evaluation, self-esteem, self-justification, self-elevation, self-distinguishing, presentation of the model, self-confirmation, self-regulation, self-identification, self-observation, self-investigation, self-expression..., is a (psychological-sociological) phenomenon with which, in essence, Mokranjac was concerned very much, whether consciously or unconsciously, naming it in one way or the other, or not naming it at all. Namely, a strong and constant need for the representation (which always implies self-representation as well) of Serbian folk and art music or, in other words, a well thought-out, planned and systematic manifestation of the different methods, tactics and strategies of its preservation, creation and representation, both in the country and abroad, by activating all available musical-creative, interpretative, educational, scientific, organizational and institutional potentials of Serbia in that period, is the reflection of Mokranjac's concern about different aspects of collective, national and personal musical identity, which forms part of the culture (as reality!) of one communality, one nation and one individual. Mokranjac's potentials, abilities and skills in establishing »control« over that »which should be Serbian musical culture«, or »which we and others should experience« are reflected in his lucid knowledge of the time in which he lived. Consequently, they are manifested through his unerring instinct while selecting the aspects of Serbian (musical) identity to be depicted in a specified situation.

This composer, one of the first formally educated musical artists in Serbia (during the 1880s, Mokranjac studied in Munich, Rome and Leipzig) and a member of the *Serbian Royal Academy* (since 1906) and *French Academy of Arts* (since 1911), displayed extremely refined sensitivity to the following factors of self-comprehension of the contemporary and future national musical culture:

- 1) In 1887, he became the conductor of the *Belgrade Choral Society*, which was one of the central institutions of Serbian middle-class culture and with which he reached his »golden age« as well as the highest point in the history of Serbian choral singing as the dominant form of musical expression in that period.
- 2) From 1888 to 1911, within the concert activity of the *Belgrade Choral Society*, he organized its concerts in the Kingdom of Serbia, as well as its tours abroad (which also had a positive social-political connotation). He conducted the concerts in Dubrovnik, Cetinje, Salonika, Budapest, Sofia, Istanbul, Plovdiv, Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Sarajevo, Mostar, Split, Šibenik, Zadar, Rijeka, Zagreb, Trieste..., receiving almost regularly excellent reviews for the performance of mostly his choral compositions – some of which were written for special occasions and were based on folk motives of the country in which they were performed – and for the presentation of works by other Serbian composers and the composers of the country in question.
- 3) From 1887 to 1900, he taught music at the First Belgrade High School.
- 4) In 1889, he founded the *String Quartet*, the first of its kind in Serbia, in which he played the second violin.
- 5) In 1889, he also drafted a proposal for the manifestation called *Historical Concert*, which was staged as late as 1903. It presented Mokranjac's view on the more recent history of Serbian (choral) music, underlying the concept of the whole history of national music.
- 6) The years 1896 and 1897 were marked by his intensive work as a melograph; during his trips to Kosovo, he recorded Serbian folk motives.
- 7) In 1899, he founded the *Serbian Music School*, whose founding date is regarded as the formal beginning of (institutional) music education in Serbia; he was also its first director and teacher.
- 8) From 1901 to 1914, he taught church singing at the St Sava Theological School in Belgrade. For teaching purposes he edited and published his redaction of *Octoëchos* (1908), a collection of monophonic Serbian church melodies, which he melographed. This collection of church service songs represents the standardized type of Orthodox Church service books.
- 9) In 1902, with his introduction to the collection entitled *Srpske narodne pesme i igre s melodijama iz Levča* [*Serbian Folk Songs and Dances with Melodies from Levač*], he con-

4 Cf. Milanović, Biljana: Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac i aspekti etniciteta i nacionalizma [Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac and the Aspects of Ethnicity and Nationalism]. In: Perković-Radak, Ivana/Popović-Mladjenović, Tijana (Eds.): Mokranjcu na dar [A Gift to Mokranjac]. Belgrade: Negotin, Department of Musicology, Faculty of Musical Art, University of Arts in Belgrade, Stevan Mokranjac Cultural Centre 2006, p. 34.

5 Cf. Marković, Tatjana: Stvaralaštvo Stevana Mokranjca u svetlu (novih) teorija o stilu [The Work of Stevan Mokranjac in the Light of (New) Theories of Style]. In: Perković-Radak/Popović-Mladjenović 2006, pp. 65-67.

6 Cf. Danto, Arthur C.: The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art. Cambridge/MA, London: Harvard UP 1981, p. 146.

tributed to the founding of musical science in Serbia. This introduction is regarded as the first professional ethnomusicological study of Serbian folk music.

- 10) In 1903, he founded the *Association of Serbian Choral Societies* (whose obligations, according to the rules established by Mokranjac, included the distribution of all musical scores and parts published by the Association, distribution of its journals, literary and musical editions, etc.). Its aim was to promote musical culture.

Mokranjac's credit for this frontal generation of the essential factors of Serbian music self-representation has never been brought into question.

However, unlike the public, almost all Serbian music writers, who were also predominantly composers, either negated or disputed the originality and creativity of his work. This was so not only in that period, but also until some fifteen years ago. By contrast, the insights and conclusions based on the current musicological researches (such as those carried out by Tatjana Marković, Ivana Perković Radak, Biljana Milanović, Tijana Popović-Mladjenović...), new and creative approaches to reality and art (as well as man!) and substantiated interpretations of Mokranjac's work – which is almost entirely based on musical folklore or, better said, *folk melody* as the basic musical material – attempt to influence a definite change in the value status of the composer's music in the relevant writings or, in other words, in the science of Serbian music, as well as a broader change in the attitude toward his music in the cultural self-representation of his native environment.

So, e.g., the thesis that »Mokranjac's works, especially his *Rukoveti* (Garlands), are a musical narratization of collective self-comprehension and self-representation, thus being a part of group self-identification in building the appropriate image of the nation under the given ideological, political, cultural and social conditions«,⁴ or the conclusion (deriving from the study of the musical language of his choral *Rukoveti*, too) that »Mokranjac defined [...] the national tone language«, pointed to »a completely new treatment of the material [...] which can be called *re-composing*«, developed the »recognizable music discourse of Serbian music romanticism«, and that »his work [...] preserved a special status in defining and redefining Serbian national (musical) identity«,⁵ point to the specific features of Mokranjac's music which can be interpreted from the current perspective (in the sense of defining the relationship between an artistic work and its material analogon, whereby the evaluation of an artistic work is the function of its interpretation⁶) as a specified *auto(re)description* that presents a specific self-approach, one's own pre-description, self-understanding and self-representation *relative to, at a distance from and together with* (»unoriginal«, »someone else's«) folklore material.

Leaving the space for other interpretations/evaluations of Mokranjac's music as representation – whereby representation means *to make something present*, re-present and *be similar*, as well as *to stand instead of something else which is only absent*, and where *similarity is irrelevant* – that is, for different interpretations, *mutatis mutandis*, of its discursive formation of personal, collective and national identity, I will conclude this paper with the *description* of Mokranjac's »world« which I consider to be most relevant for its self-representation in the postmodernist period.

Mokranjac's music is based on melody, but not on a melody which tends to reveal or depict the presence of one specific, original tone and has become the metaphor in West European music for the self-expression of a specific personality (a composer who »invents«, or a performing artist who plays or, even more so, sings »with feeling« – which are the special features of romantic views), or a means for establishing close contact with subjectivity as the source and truth. Instead, it is based on a folk melody which belongs to the other, that is, the undetermined and imaginary one who does not need to (and/or cannot) be properly recognized, localized or identified.

If melody implies, in general, »the possibility of reproduction despite individual subjects«, if anyone can sing it, play it, or hear it, and if everyone hums it, sings it, repeats it, varies it, changes it, hears it in himself and at various public places when it becomes popular, then folk melody is all that much more than any »invented« melody. Namely, regardless of its original audience, an »invented« melody »appeals to everyone it can reach; no matter how much the composer is famous, its source becomes nameless or, rather, all-named, including everyone«. As was always the case with folk melody, it is created whenever the subject, no matter who he is, announces that he can vanish, or that he will vanish, or that he is vanishing or, in other words, that its performance is nothing else but separation from any possible source. If a melody



7 Cf. Kramer, Lawrence: Ghost Stories. Cultural Memory, Mourning, and the Myth of Originality. In: L.K.: Musical Meaning. Toward a Critical History. Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 2002, pp. 278-280.

»does not mean but precedes the meaning [...] if it is constantly offering the rising above and falling below its meaning, entry into the ideal plane of autonomy, or inexpressibility«, it can be revived, thanks to its »repeatability«, »as the continuation of subjectivity or its surplus...«.⁷

For a long time, confusion and ambiguity prevailed due to Mokranjac's »discovery« of a specific way in which his peculiarity can be »stitched« like a (folk) melody, while at the same time renouncing itself through a specific approach to the phenomenon of »repeatability« of folk melody, or the way in which his peculiarity is constantly »arising above« and »falling below« its own meaning and significance. Namely, the melody of Mokranjac's music is the *other* of the same, the *same* once again, that »repeatable« folklore, but a *little different* – just as much as to be more seldom, more specific and more exquisite than a large number of the *same*, thus enhancing and expanding its effect, value and coverage. It is evident that »inventing« a melody is not in the focus of Mokranjac's attention. Namely, what provokes his creative impulse is the »inventing« of something else, something »above«, based on the »inventing« of *original purity*, or something »below« a folk melody.

In such a context, the value of Mokranjac's creative endeavour lies in the peculiarity of its expressiveness, which is based on historical significance and discourse, as well as on form and invention, and which abstracts the origin of musical material at a specified level or, better said, in a specified dimension or stratum of reception, as an irrelevant category. Consequently, the value of Mokranjac's works lies in their *impressiveness* and the need for the continuity of memories, for an indefinite period if possible, since they wish to leave traces. Memory traces. The deepest and unnamed...



Dr. Tijana Popović-Mladjenović, musicologist and Assistant Professor at the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Musical Art, University of Arts in Belgrade, teaches world and national history of music (the last decades of the 19th and first decades of the 20th centuries). Her main research interests include contemporary music and the issues concerning thinking in music. Numerous international conference participations and publications on these topics.

Contact: mitide@yubc.net