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### SERBIAN MUSIC IN THE PERIOD 1830—1884

In speaking of the development of Serbian music in the period 1830—1884, we have in mind music in Eastern and North-Eastern part of present-day Yugoslavia, i. e. Serbia and Vojvodina. The period under consideration is the time when, after centuries of Turkish rule, partly liberated, Serbia began to take a part in European cultural life. On the other hand, Vojvodina, which was under Austria—Hungary, and considered as South-Hungary, was in a significantly easier position as regards the possibility of cultural contacts with Europe, but had continually to defend its national rights and national identity against German pressure under Bach and the subsequent even more intense Hungarian pressure (especially after 1879). In the sphere of music, these fifty years saw the beginning of Serbian musical culture. Throughout this period, in spite of the political boundary which separated links between Vojvodina (South Hungary) and Serbia in music as in other areas of cultural life were continuously maintained and were of great importance for Serbia.

The crucial stages in the development of Serbian music can be concisely listed as follows: an awareness of the national folk tradition of secular and sacred music; the founding of the first professional musical body in Serbia, the Serbian Court Military Band; a passion for the theatre, especially for plays with the musical components, the first Serbian opera libretti and the first attempts at creating a national opera; the introduction of musical notation for church singing, the first systematic attempts to write down Serbian church chant and the first edition of music in the Serbian church tradition; the founding of the first choral societies and the rapid spread of choral singing; the first trained Serbian musicians and the first virtuoso

performers; the beginning of domestic music-making and of the concert-life; the earliest appearance of national folk characteristics in music compositions; the first music teachers and text-books; the first music library and Serbian musical bibliography and journals; the first music publications; the first stages in the formation of a national style of music within European tradition.

If we want to define this period in terms of personalities in Serbian musical history, we can take as its limits 1831, the year when Kornelije Stanković (1831—1865), the first trained Serbian musician and a figure of great historical significance for Serbian music was born, and the Petar Stojanović (1877—1957), Miloje Milojević (1884—1946), Petar Konjović (1883—1970), Stevan Hristić (1885—1958), years 1877—1885 when were born the Serbian composers who established the place of Serbian music within European musical culture. But above all we must note the year chosen as the final limit of this study — 1884, the year when the first truly characteristic example of an original national style in Serbian music appeared, i. e. the year when the first and the second *Rukoveti* (collection of songs) of Stevan Mokranjatz (1856—1914) were composed and performed.

In the years immediately preceding the period under consideration, the general preconditions necessary for the development of music in European tradition were practically non-existent in Serbia. For while some reflections of European musical culture reached Vojvodina (i. e. South Hungary), Serbia had contacts, especially in the towns, with oriental music, above all with the primitive forms of Turkish music and with Gipsy music which used in its own way both oriental elements and the rich native tradition of folk music. Among the significant events in Serbian music during these decades mention must be made of the earliest publications of Serbian folk melodies — six of them in Vienna in 1815 and ten of them in Budapest — in 1828.<sup>1</sup> These were the first steps towards noting down the Serbian musical tradition which in the following decades was to be the foundation for the development of Serbian music.

The first professional musical body in Serbia was the Serbian Court Military Band. It began to take form in 1830 and was formally set up in Kragujevac in 1831, the years which we have taken as the starting point of our study. These are also the years when Turks granted certain liberties to Serbia (as confirmed in the Sultan's edicts *hatiserifs* of 1830 and 1838).

<sup>1</sup> а) Народна србска песмарица издана Вуком Стефановићем. Част втора. У Виени 1815. Шест песама народних сложио као што народ пеме пева и за клавир угоднио г. Франц Мирецки (Пољак), стр. 356—357.

б) Емануил Коларовић, *Србска народна музика*. Србске летописи, Будим, IV/1828, IV/15, p. 114—6. The music sheet is at the end.



The founder and first bandmaster of the Court Military Band was Josif Slesinger (1794—1870), who came from Vojvodina. He had not received a systematic musical training, but was a very experienced musician. Significantly, he understood from the start the essential function of the national tradition in building up the Serbian musical culture.

Slesinger's work can be traced through forty of the fifty years under consideration. The pioneering work of the first professional musical body in Serbia is fully documented, and these records cast light on the beginnings of music in the European style and the first stages in the development of contacts with Europe. The manuscript music<sup>2</sup> is of particular interest, because it bears not only witness to the technical ability of the musicians and the composer and the wide range of instruments used (sometimes new even in the European orchestras of the time),<sup>3</sup> but gives us an insight into the musical taste, requirements and potential of a given society at a given time. This material ranges from the trumpet calls of the Serbian and Turkish armed forces, simple arrangements of Serbian folk songs and dances, countless marches based on Serbian or foreign melodies and arrangements of various other folk songs and dances — Rumanian, German, Russian, Hungarian, Spanish, Jewish, — through contemporary European ballroom dances — the quadrille, mazurka, polonaise, polka, galoppe, to the selections from numerous operas and music for home theatricals, including the first attempts at creating a national opera. Some of these pieces are impressive in spite of their being on the whole devoid of any sophistication. Among them we find, for example, arrangements of excerpts from operas written in the 1830 s, i. e. precisely contemporary works. Given that some of these MSS were written when the Court was still in Kragujevac (at that time, from Belgrade — a six days' journey in a bullock cart!), the question necessarily arises: how did the music from Bellini's "I Puritani" of 1835, for example, get to Kragujevac by 1840 for Slesinger to arrange it for his wind band? The same applies to certain contemporary European dances: for example the polka, written in Belgrade when the city was still under Turkish garrison in

<sup>2</sup> Arhiv SANU (The Serbian Academy of sciences and arts), Istorijaska zbirka, NO. 7887.

<sup>3</sup> According to the existing scores, until c. 1835 the standard band consisted of: flute, piccolo (not always); clarinets (3—4, always); bass: bassoon, contrabassoon, serpent (until c. 1850); horns (1—2); trompettes (4—5; drums (large and small). In the later scores, one can also find the following instruments: pommer (from 1838); mashinhorn (from 1838); post horn; bassethorn (from 1834); clarin (from 1842); pisto (cornet? — from 1860); bugles (from 1834); ophicléide (from 1834); trombone (from 1836); bombardon (from 1842); tuba (in 1860); timpani (only once). The oboe as such is nowhere mentioned, but the designation "bomb", besides "bombardon", might have been "bombard".

1843, only a few years after the dance first appeared in the ballrooms of Europe. It was a particular attraction to have the melodies of Serbian folk songs arranged in the rhythms of European dances, for instance "Waltz on a theme" (the title is in German) "from the Serbian opera Miloš Obilić".

Music for the theatre holds a special place in this body of material. Soon after the founding of the Court Military Band, the Court Theatre was set up in Kragujevac in 1834. The Serbs have always had a liking for the plays, and the audience regarded music almost as an indispensable part of the performance. One of the plays first acted was a translation from Hungarian, and two pages of music for it survived entitled "opera". The first public theatrical production, i. e. a performance open to anyone who had paid for a ticket, was held in Kragujevac in 1840. It is particularly interesting for the present study because the play which was acted introduced figures from the history of Serbia and music which drew on national folk tradition. In the contemporary press it was said to be "in the form of an Italian opera". This was a real attempt at creating a national opera, and nearly at the same time when similar attempts but under completely different cultural conditions, were made, among the other Slav peoples.<sup>4</sup> What is surprising is not that the individuals who had had the opportunity to see operas should have thought of using such a musico-theatrical form, but rather the milieu, time and place in which these experiments were made the fact that European musical culture first began to reach Serbs through the medium of opera music, i. e. through the most complex combination of music and drama.

Slesinger, like a number of other people who worked in the Serbian theatre at this period, was from Vojvodina. At that time, Vojvodina already had a theatrical tradition. In 1840 the best theatrical company in the whole of present-day Yugoslavia where Serbo-Croatian is spoken, was the "Flying Amateur Theatre" in Novi Sad. The company played in Zagreb in 1840 and 1841 and in 1842 came to Belgrade. As the result of their work, three national theatres were to emerge during the next few decades: in Novi Sad, Zagreb and Belgrade.

From 1841, Slesinger wrote his music for the theatrical performances in Belgrade. He composed for his next to last play in 1861, when the first Serbian national theatre, the *Serbian National Theatre* was set up in Novi Sad. He finished the music for his last play a year or so after the Turks (1867) withdrew from the towns of Serbia, in 1869 when the National

<sup>4</sup> In Bohemia — in 1828; in Russia — in 1835; in Poland — in 1846—47. In Yugoslavia — the attempts to use the national language in an opera were made in Slovenia in the 80s of the 18th century, which was followed by a century long pause; in Croatia — in the fifth decade of the 19th century.

Theatre in Belgrade began to function. Both theatres from the beginning had their own small orchestras and conductors, but throughout the period under consideration music in the theatre was beset with problems. The difficulties were not so acute in Belgrade because the theatre there received some official financial aid. Besides, from 1871 the theatre was fortunate in having a Slovene Davorin Jenko (1835—1914), an expert, active and able conductor, who had received his training in Vienna and Prague. For the next thirty years he was to carry the whole burden of preparing music for the theatre, both as a composer and a conductor. He composed the first programmatic overtures in Serbian music and in 1882 the first Serbian operetta.

In the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad the position was more complicated. In the first place the theatre could not get any subsidy because it refused to comply with the demand from Budapest to change its name from "The Serbian National Theatre" to "The Novi Sad Serbian Theatre", and so for decades it subsisted on the profits from its tours in Vojvodina, i. e. on the work of the actors and the contributions and gifts of the public. The company made up for the shortage of financial means to realize the musical part of their performances by drawing on the help of local choral societies when on tour.

In the period under consideration choral societies were a form of musical activity which played a very important part in the cultural development of the Serbs. The earliest Serbian choral society is generally held to have been the church choral society in Pančevo, founded in 1838,<sup>5</sup> although choral singing was also practiced among the Serbs earlier in this period. At the time when the Pančevo Society was founded, Pančevo was a small border town, but had a rich bourgeoisie and a well organized parochial council, which encouraged cultural life and Serbian church chanting as a part of the struggle for national survival.

The highly individual Serbian church chanting was handed down orally, and as religious confession and church chant were also ways of affirming one's nationality, the preservation of the authentic tradition in Vojvodina was something to which people were very much alive. In the early 1830 s in Pančevo they began to think of introducing "musical", or "harmonized" or "notated" singing instead of the "ordinary" singing in church. In practice this entailed the founding of a church choir, which constituted no small problem, both from the political and the financial point of view. The undertaking was successfully realized in 1838. But although the choral society in Pančevo was founded with the aim of introducing the use of musical notation into church

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<sup>5</sup> All historical data about this choral society are to be found in Милош Томанџа, *Споменица Панчевачког Српског Певачког Друштва 1838—1938*, 350 pages, Панчево, Напредак, 1938.

chanting, it was also expected to take part in the public musical life of the town, and this it did with great success. This promising start in the sphere of music and drama in Pančevo and certain other towns in Vojvodina was interrupted by the Revolution of 1848 and the introduction of the Absolutism.

In contrast to Vojvodina, in Serbia, despite a great number of political changes, a succession of different dynasties, uprisings and wars, there was no interruption in the development of music at this period. In the 1840s Slesinger and his band were at the centre of musical life. Thus for example in 1842 they gave the first proper concert in Belgrade. The press reported that the reaction of the public did not come up to expectation because it was said not to be used to such "enteratinments". However, only two years later a group of visiting musicians from the Prague Conservatoire were such a success that the public demanded another concert. One can imagine what a success the orchestra of Johann Strauss the younger enjoyed, when in 1847 they included in their programme some compositions by Strauss on Serbian folk themes!

At this time the first collection of Serbian folk and popular songs arranged for piano were published in 1850 and 1852.<sup>6</sup> In the latter year the National Theatre in Belgrade began to be built. Another contemporary event was to be of outstanding importance in the development of Serbian musical culture — the founding in 1853 of the First Belgrade Choral Society. This was a secular society which initially was of the type of small male choirs popular in Central Europe in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Such choirs assembled for company's sake and to sing together without any particular artistic pretensions. Even the compositions which the Belgrade Choir Society sang were mainly German, sung in the original or in translation. In contrast to this movement which soon came to be called "cosmopolitan", another movement which marked the future development of Serbian music with a tendency to draw on national heritage. In this respect a crucial role was played by Kornelije Stanković, the first trained Serbian musician, who has been already mentioned. Stanković was born in Budapest and received his higher musical education in Vienna. The surprising thing is that Stanković, who was trained as a virtuoso pianist and born and educated abroad, conceived in 1854 at the age of twenty-three the idea of going to Karlovci in Vojvodina and noting down the Serbian oral tradition of church music — an exceedingly difficult and complicated undertaking. He worked on it up to his death at the age of thirty-three. He left three printed volumes of harmonized church chanting

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<sup>6</sup> *Serbische Melodien herausgegeben von Alos Kalauz*, Hefte I—II, Wien, F. Wessely vormals H. F. Müllers Wwe. (1850, 1852)

and over two thousand pages in manuscript.<sup>7</sup> He also took down Serbian folk and popular songs, which he arranged for choir, solo voice and piano or piano solo. In 1855—56, together with a friend who was a good singer, Stanković made a concert tour in Vojvodina and Belgrade. This was the first concert tour by a Serbian artist. In 1863 he settled down in Belgrade, where he took on the job of conducting the Belgrade choir society, and set the plans for the founding of the first Serbian school of music, which he conceived as eventually becoming a Conservatoire. Illness interrupted his work in Belgrade, and he died in Budapest in 1865. Stanković's ideas and work as a musician were not only of decisive importance for the subsequent development of Serbian music, but also attracted the attention of international musical circles, above all among the other Slav nations, and thus he found his way into a number of the nineteenth-century European musical encyclopaedias.<sup>8</sup>

At the time when Stanković was working in Belgrade, interest in choral musical activity was rapidly growing among the Serbs. It offered a possibility for the mass participation and for a quick and easy contact with music and with Serbian social life and cultural events. In the political situation in Vojvodina after the fall of Bach's régime and later under the pressure for Magyarization, this amounted to a kind of rallying-point for national consciousness. This is why the Serbian choral societies in the nineteenth-century Vojvodina had a strongly marked patriotic and nationalist character, often with political overtones. In contrast to the societies in Serbia, which had already been partly liberated, the societies in Vojvodina were often called "church choral societies", because this made it easier to get permission from Budapest for their activities. At all events, choral societies in this period of Serbian cultural history were, as one historian has put it, "schools for public life" — a milieu in which all kinds of activities — patriotic, nationalist, political, social, cultural, educational, professional, charitable and religious — developed and interacted. Thus it is not surprising that the rôle of the choral societies was enormous.

The rapid growth of interest in choral singing brought with it yet another characteristic feature of Serbian music — a large

<sup>7</sup> The collections of church music were published in Vienna in 1862, 1863 and 1864. The collections of secular songs and his piano compositions were also published in Vienna during his lifetime. The main body of manuscripts (nearly 1500 pages of harmonized Serbian church songs and several hundred pages of notes) is in the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, No. 7888.

<sup>8</sup> *Slovník Naučný* (red. Dr. Frant. Lad. Rieger), Prag 1870, part 8. *Musikalisches Conversations-Lexicon* (Herman Mendel), Berlin 1878, H. 9. *Biographisches Lexicon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, (red. Dr. Constant von Wurzbach), Wien, 1878, part 37. *A Pallas Nagy Lexicon*, Budapest 1897, part XV. *Enciklopedičkij Slovar*, St. Petersburg 1900 (F. A. Brokhaus — Leipzig and I. A. Efron — St. Petersburg), sv. XXI.



influx of foreign, above all Czech choirmasters, and a little later of Czech musicians into the military and theatre orchestras. This was yet another route by which the achievements of European music reached the Serbs. The Czechs moved readily into the Serbian society, many in course of time became fully acclimatized, and some even identified themselves with the Serbs and thought of themselves as Serbian composers. Naturally, not all were equally expert or equally talented, but they brought with them from their native country very respectable and sometimes high musical standards, and herein lies the special importance of their work. With their choirs they also performed, Croat and Slovene compositions, as well as works from other countries, above all Czech and Russian. These choirmasters made up for the limitations of the native repertoire by writing their own compositions. But while these works were "national" in character as regards the poetry set in them, they were mostly not so from the musical point of view, because the composers lacked a feeling for Serbian musical folk traditions. They composed mainly for choir, less often for voice and piano or piano solo, and more rarely for a small orchestra, mainly in theatrical performances.

It is worth noting that the passion Serbs showed for the theatre was such that amateur theatrical groups, the so-called dilettante societies, were set up within the choral societies, especially in Vojvodina. The actors did not come up to the standard of the professional theatre, but as they had good voices and expert conductors, the musical part of their productions was often better than in professional theatres. We can gauge how ambitious their range was if we recall that in 1882, precisely when the first Serbian opretta was performed in the National Theatre in Belgrade, in Kikinda, a small town in Vojvodina, a comic opera by a local composer was put on which was on a higher artistic and technical level than the one in Belgrade.

An important aspect of the activity of the choral societies was their promotion of concerts in the provinces. Beside the choral part of the programme, these concerts included recitations of poetry, soloists, and often performances of plays or sometimes contributions from military orchestras, which were still a rarity. Such mixed programmes were to be popular for decades to come, not only in small towns but even in the National Theatre. It was particularly important that Serbian professional artists, some of whom had won international reputation, took part in such shows. It is interesting that beside the obligatory settings of folk melodies or compositions based on Serbian folk music they performed the same programmes as in the great musical centres. Their brief visits to their hometowns were meteor-like in their effect and aroused feelings of admiration and pride, but did not always have a lasting influence. The impression made by the periodical

visits of foreign artists, whose programmes sometimes also included artistically more or less successful arrangements of Serbian folk melodies, was much weaker than that left by famous native musicians.

Music-making by native performers developed mainly in the range of piano music for two or four hands, songs, solo or duet, with piano or harmonium accompaniment and in the concerts of military orchestras, usually combined with theatrical performances. But choral singing, the only type of musical activity accessible to the wider circles of society, long remained the most popular form of music. Here Slawjanski's famous Russian choir, which toured Serbia a number of times, made a profound impression in the late 1870s. It was renowned for the excellence of its choral performances. This stimulated promotion of the artistic potential for this form of music making, the most accessible to the Serbian society of the time, and made choral singing even more popular among Serbs. The highest point was to be reached by the choir of the Belgrade Choir Society under the direction of Stevan Mokranjatz which in the last decade of the nineteenth century outstripped the success of the famous Russian choir "Slawjanski" in a number of European countries.<sup>9</sup>

The year 1884 has been taken as the final one in this survey, precisely because of its connexion with Stevan Mokranjatz. He was the first Serbian musician to have a clear perception of the needs, potential and prospects for development in Serbian musical life of his and the following period. In 1883—4, half way through his course of studies<sup>10</sup>, he was to compose his 1st and 2nd *Rukovet*, a kind of choral rhapsody of a specific form and type. These were the first examples of a truly original and individual national style in Serbian music. They are characterized by their delicate sense of national folk tradition, the profound psychological interplay between words and music, their exceptional sensitivity to harmony and deep feeling for and knowledge of choral texture.<sup>11</sup> Although there had already existed a series of musical works of indisputable value which similarly derived their inspiration from native folk tradition, Mokranjatz was the first to create, right from his list *Rukovet*, a work with a true and very specific national identity, and thus to raise Serbian music, in its own characteristic form, to the standard of international music. For this reason he was to be the mainstay and often the inspiration of Yugoslav composers right up to the present day.

<sup>9</sup> In Russia, Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey, Hungary.

<sup>10</sup> S. Mokranjatz has studied in Munich, Rome and Leipzig.

<sup>11</sup> Almost without exceptions, secular and church compositions of S. Mokranjatz are choral «a cappella» (15 *Rukoveti*, the rhapsody *Primorski napevi*, *Kozar*, etc. and the *Lithurgy* — the orthodox Mass, the *Requiem* — *Opelo*, etc.).

## СРПСКА МУЗИКА У РАЗДОБЉУ ОД 1830. ДО 1884.

## Резиме

Период о коме говоримо јесте време када је, после вишевековне турске власти, ослобођена Србија почела да узима учешћа у културном животу Европе. Током тог времена, Војводина је била под Аустро-Угарском и остваривала је културне контакте с Европом, али је непрекидно морала да брани своја национална права и идентитет од снажног немачког утицаја, у Бахово доба, и од каснијег мабарског утицаја. На пољу музике, током тих 50 година стварају се основе српске музичке културе. Свест о народној традицији световне и духовне музике обележје је читаве епохе.

Раздобље о којем је реч отпочиње оснивањем прве професионалне музичке организације у Србији — дворски војни оркестар — и рођењем првог школског српског музичара, Корнелија Станковића (1831—1865), и траје до године у којој су се појавили први уистину карактеристични примери изворног националног стила у српској музици — до године када су написане и први пут изведене прва и друга „Руковет“ Стевана Мокрањца (1856—1914), једне од најизразитијих личности у историји југословенске музике. То су биле године када је рођена она генерација српских композитора (Петар Стојановић, Петар Коњовић, Милоје Милојевић и Стеван Христић), која је утврдила место српске музике у оквирима европске музичке културе.