

## Serbian Music: Yugoslav Contexts

SERBIAN MUSIC: YUGOSLAV CONTEXTS

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YUGOSLAV CONTEXTS**

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OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS  
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## Chapter 8

### MUSIC OF THE LOST GENERATION: SERBIAN ÉMIGRÉ COMPOSERS

Ivana Medić

Starting from the early 1990s, a period marked by the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the ensuing war, hundreds of thousands of professionals left the country (or, more precisely, the newly established countries that replaced the former Yugoslavia) and settled all over the world.<sup>1</sup> Such a massive ‘brain drain’ from small countries such as Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina has had a devastating impact on many professional realms in the entire region. In the field of classical/art music, at least forty composers, members of different generations, left Serbia, many of them never to return. Admittedly, a number of Serbian composers (or instrumentalists who later specialized in composition) had left Yugoslavia even before the outbreak of war, in pursuit of professional opportunities abroad, among them Ivan Jevtić (b. 1947; lived in France and briefly in Brazil, currently holds dual French/Serbian citizenship), Ingeborg Bugarinović (b. 1953; settled in Vancouver), Dušan Bogdanović (b. 1955; lived in San Francisco, currently teaches in Geneva), Miloš Raičković (b. 1956; lived in France, Hawaii and Japan, before settling in New York), Aleksandar Damnjanović (b. 1959; moved to France in 1978), Mitar Subotić (b. 1961, moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1990, where he tragically died in 1999), Jovanka Trbojević (b. 1963, moved to Helsinki in 1989), and Dijana Bošković (b. 1969; moved to Munich in 1989). However, these were exceptional cases; it was only after the onset of the 1990s crisis in Yugoslavia that a large

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent overview of the events that contributed to the break-up of Yugoslavia and its consequences, see Dejan Djokić and James Ker-Lindsay (eds), *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia: Key Issues and Controversies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), in particular Nebojša Vladislavljević, ‘The Break-up of Yugoslavia: The Role of Popular Politics’, 143–60, and Florian Bieber, ‘Popular Mobilization in the 1990s: Nationalism, Democracy and the Slow Decline of the Milošević regime’, 161–75.

number of composers moved abroad, and the trend has continued in the new millennium.

Since the 1990s the following composers have permanently settled abroad: Vuk Kulenović (b. 1946; currently lives in Boston), Leon Miodrag Lazarov Pashu (b. 1949; Montreal), Katarina Miljković (b. 1959; Boston), Ivan Božičević (b. 1961; Split, Croatia), Mateja Marinković (b. 1961, London), Tatjana Grečić-Dutoit (b. 1962, Santa Fe, NM, USA), Nebojša Jovan Živković (b. 1962; Vienna), Stevan Kovač Tikmajer (b. 1963, Orléans, France), Tatjana Ristić (b. 1964; Kristiansand, Norway), Ognjen Bogdanović (b. 1965; London), Vera Stanojević (b. 1965; Columbus, OH, USA), Dragan Vujović (b. 1965; New York), Nataša Bogojević (b. 1966; Chicago), Milica Paranosić (b. 1968; New York); Ana Sokolović (b. 1968; Montreal), Ana Mihajlović (b. 1968; Rotterdam), Jelena Jančić (b. 1968; London), Aleksandra Vrebalov (b. 1970; New York), Katarina Ćurčin (b. 1971; Toronto), Laura Mjeda-Čuperjani (b. 1971; Pula, Croatia), Snežana Nešić (b. 1973; Hannover), Jasna Veličković (b. 1974; Amsterdam), Djuro Živković (b. 1975; Stockholm), Maja Filipović Frangeš (b. 1976; Zurich), Melinda Ligeti (b. 1978; Abbadia San Salvatore, Italy), Marko Nikodijević (b. 1980; Stuttgart), Jovana Backović (b. 1980; London), Teodora Stepančić (b. 1982; The Hague), Milica Djordjević (b. 1984; Berlin) and Maja Leković (b. 1986; Amsterdam). It is likely that this list is not exhaustive.

The list could also be expanded by including composers who emigrated in the 1990s, but have since returned to Serbia: Svetlana Maksimović (b. 1948, lived in Toronto between 1996 and 2006), Boris Kovač (b. 1955, lived in Italy, Austria and Slovenia in the early 1990s, returned to Serbia in 1996), Boris Despot (b. 1965, lived in Toronto between 1990 and 2003), Igor Gostuški (b. 1966, lived in Vienna in the 1990s, returned to Belgrade in 1999), as well as a group of younger composers such as Branka Popović (b. 1977), Jasna Veljanović (b. 1980), Aleksandar Sedlar (b. 1982), Maja [Mitrović] Bosnić (b. 1985) and Svetlana Maraš (b. 1985), who completed their undergraduate and/or postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom, Ukraine, USA and Finland respectively and returned to Serbia. Another two composers of the older generation, Srđan Hofman (b. 1944) and Ivana Stefanović (b. 1948) spent several years abroad during the 1990s and 2000s because they were in the diplomatic service in South Africa (Hofman) and Syria, Turkey and Romania (Stefanović), but have since returned to Serbia. The remaining forty (or so) composers are unlikely to return, due to a combination of professional and personal reasons.



This chapter is an attempt to track down these émigré composers and to re-incorporate them in a history of Serbian music. The discussion that follows is predominantly based on interviews conducted with members of these 'lost' generations. Between September 2013 and May 2014 I conducted a series of interviews (either in person or online) with Serbian émigré composers.<sup>2</sup> The interviews focused on the reasons behind their decision to leave the country and on their experiences abroad. I am grateful to all composers who responded to my questions and who authorized the use of their answers in this text. Since not all composers were accessible at this point, I also turned to interviews published in daily newspapers and musical reviews, usually when these émigré composers were on a visit to Serbia, and often because their music was being performed in their homeland. Since it is impossible to include all their answers here, I will summarize the main issues and attempt to draw some conclusions. I will also try to keep these conclusions unbiased, in spite of the fact that I also lived abroad for six and a half years – between 2006 and 2013 I studied and worked in Manchester, United Kingdom – and am thus writing from both an insider's and an outsider's point of view.

I should add that in this chapter I only consider academically trained composers.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this decision is that the story of composers and performers (mostly without university education) working in the field of popular music genres has been somewhat different, in that the vast majority of them have chosen to remain in Serbia. They regard Serbia as their base, from which they can embark upon tours abroad and perform for immigrants from former Yugoslav republics. The Serbian diaspora has yet to produce its own pop or folk music star, and the communities in diaspora seem happier to welcome touring musicians who are permanently based in the homeland, possibly because this gives them a sense of maintaining some sort of connection with their roots.

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<sup>2</sup> I interviewed Jovana Backović, Nataša Bogojević, Boris Despot and Svetlana Maksimović in person, at the Institute of Musicology SASA, Belgrade. The following composers were interviewed online: Tatjana Ristić, Milica Paranosić, Ana Sokolović, Ana Mihajlović, Dijana Bošković, Djuro Živković, Maja Filipović Frangeš, Marko Nikodijević, Jasna Veljanović and Milica Djordjević. All composers have given their consent to have their responses published in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Almost all of them are members of the Composers Association of Serbia – the Section for Composers of Serious Music – in spite of the fact that some of them have lived abroad for more than two decades: 'Sekcija kompozitora klasične muzike', at [http://composers.rs/?page\\_id=347](http://composers.rs/?page_id=347)

Of course, composers are not the only musicians who have emigrated during the past twenty-five years; hundreds of instrumentalists, conductors and other music professionals have also moved abroad. However, there is an important difference. In Serbia, a country that still maintains a system of state-funded primary and secondary music schools and music academies and produces a large number of musicians every year, there is no shortage of performers; moreover, since their profession involves foreign travel as a matter of course, the issue of where they are based is much less relevant. In contrast, there are only three state-funded universities in Serbia that offer composition courses – in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Kosovska Mitrovica<sup>4</sup> – and no more than five composers graduate every year. In light of that we can understand the extent of the loss to Serbian contemporary music. The most striking exodus was that of composers born in the 1960s, who were at the beginning of their professional careers at the outset of the war. Before emigrating, the composers of that generation had been transforming the face of Serbian art music, notably in the fields of electro-acoustic music and classical-popular crossover genres.<sup>5</sup> Even more strikingly, at least fifteen of the aforementioned composers (members of all generations) had been employed as teaching assistants, lecturers and professors at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade and the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad (either at the composition or music theory departments), or as teachers at secondary music schools. For example, the list of composers who worked at the Belgrade Faculty of Music before moving abroad includes Vuk Kulenović, Katarina Miljković, Ivan Božičević, Tatjana Ristić, Ognjen Bogdanović, Nataša Bogojević, Milica Parano-

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<sup>4</sup> Kosovska Mitrovica is a town in the north of Kosovo that has been a UN protectorate under UNSCR 1244 since 1999. In February 2008 Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia, under the name of the Republic of Kosova; as of July 2014, it has been recognized as a sovereign state by 109 out of 193 UN member states. See ‘Who recognized Kosova as an Independent State?’, at <http://www.kosovothanksyou.com/> However, Serbia continues to claim it as its own Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. Among EU members, five have not recognized the Republic of Kosova as an independent state: Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. See ‘EU 5 “less likely than ever” to recognize Kosovo’, *B92.net*, at [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2012&mm=11&dd=26&nav\\_id=83353](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2012&mm=11&dd=26&nav_id=83353)

<sup>5</sup> Vesna Mikić, ‘Elektroakustička muzika – Tehnomuzika’, in Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman (ed.), *Istorija srpske muzike. Srpska muzika i evropsko muzičko nasleđe* [A History of Serbian Music. Serbian Music and the European Heritage] (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007), 621.

sić, Ana Mihajlović and Laura Mjeda. Hence it was inevitable that the quality of teaching at these institutions suffered as a result of their departures.

Philip V. Bohlman defines diaspora as a 'condition of placelessness'.<sup>6</sup> He argues that the modern concept of diaspora was established in the fifteenth century, with the discovery of America, the expulsion of non-Christians from Spain and other geopolitical events that caused human displacement to become massive and worldwide. Thus, diaspora became 'one of the defining conditions of early modernism'.<sup>7</sup> When discussing musical diasporas worldwide, Bohlman identifies

three very general forces that bring about the need to leave a place regarded as a people's own. First, there are religious reasons leading to the expulsion from a place of origin. [...] Second, there are peoples and cultures with no place to call their own, thus making it necessary to move ceaselessly (such as the Romas, Kurds, Jews etc.). [...] Third, there are more modern diasporas spawned by socioeconomic reasons. The widespread emigrations and immigrations following from the breakup of empires and the conflicts of nationalism are among the chief causes for the third type of diaspora.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of Serbian composers emigrated due to the third reason, i.e. the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the ensuing civil war, and the immense economic crisis, exacerbated by the economic sanctions imposed by the UN, and by the NATO bombing of FR Yugoslavia in 1999. In his discussion of the exodus of composers from the Balkan countries, including Serbia, but also Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and others, Jim Samson asserts that in at least one case, that of Vuk Kulenović (born in Sarajevo before settling in Belgrade),<sup>9</sup> exile to North America was a direct result of political protest against the Milošević regime.<sup>10</sup>

When preparing questionnaires for the composers, the obvious first question was about their reasons for leaving Serbia. Here one observes a clear generational gap. A majority of composers born in the 1940s, 1950s

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<sup>6</sup> Philip V. Bohlman, *A Very Short Introduction to World Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 115.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Vuk Kulenović is the son of a famous Bosnian poet Skender Kulenović, whose major works were inspired by World War II. Skender Kulenović moved to Belgrade with his family in the 1960s and subsequently became a Fellow of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Vuk Kulenović led the protests organized by the Association of Serbian Composers against Milošević's regime in the early 1990s.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Samson, *Music in the Balkans* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 564.

and 1960s left the country in the early 1990s to escape war and poverty. Most of them went to Canada and the United States, with Canada often serving as an entry point for the older composers before they relocated to the USA, while the younger composers – i.e. those who were of an appropriate age to start postgraduate study – went straight to the USA. Two composers of the older generation who settled in Canada were Leon Miodrag Lazarov Pashu (who left Yugoslavia with his family in 1991, just before the break up of the country) and Svetlana Maksimović (who left with her family in 1993; she has since returned to Serbia). Three younger composers born in the 1960s who went to Canada were Ana Sokolović, who settled in Quebec and has since become one of the most prominent Québécois composers, Boris Despot, who completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Toronto, spending a total of thirteen years there, before returning to Serbia in 2003, and Katarina Ćurčin, who still lives in Toronto.

Two composers left Serbia for Croatia: Ivan Božičević and Laura Mjeda-Čuperjani. Both of them were born and educated in Belgrade and remained in their Serbian hometown throughout the 1990s, moving to Croatia in the 2000s. Božičević is now based in Split, Dalmatia, where he works as a freelance composer and jazz musician, while Čuperjani lives in Pula, Istria, and teaches at the Dobrila University.

On the other hand, the generations born in the 1970s and 1980s, i.e. those who were educated in Serbia during the war and afterwards, stated that the main reason for leaving the country was the feeling that Serbia was too isolated and the composition courses too conservative. The oldest composer who cited this as a reason for leaving was Boris Despot, born in 1965. In particular the composers born in the 1980s, such as Marko Nikodijević, Jovana Backović, Milica Djordjević and Svetlana Maraš, insist that they went westward because they were interested in electroacoustic and computer music, and felt that they could not pursue these interests in Serbia.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the 2000s European countries slowly

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that only two professors at the Department for Composition and Orchestration at the Belgrade Faculty of Music, namely Srđan Hofman and Zoran Erić, encouraged their students to pursue electroacoustic composition and allowed them to get some experience at the Studio within the faculty; see Ivana [Medić] Janković, 'The Recording Studio of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade: History, Development, Prospects', *New Sound*, xx (2002), 93–99. On the other hand, some professors from the department did quite the opposite and actually prevented their students from getting familiar with electronic equipment. Several émigré composers have stated that it was easier for them to move abroad than to

started to relax their visa regimes for Serbian students, and a majority of composers of these generations went to European countries: Germany, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Sweden, Russia, Ukraine, Finland etc. Interestingly, while throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s a number of Serbian composers went to France to study with great names such as Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez and Nadia Boulanger, only two composers who left Serbia after 1990 went to France: Stevan Kovač Tikmajer (Stevan Kovacs Tickmayer, who settled in Orléans) and Milica Djordjević, who had a brief stint in France before relocating to Germany. One may conclude that France was no longer considered at the cutting edge of contemporary music, and that the study programmes and funding opportunities available there were insufficiently attractive to foreign students.

The composers who returned to Serbia cite both professional and private reasons for doing so. Jasna Veljanović, who was born in Germany but completed her secondary education in Serbia and then graduated in composition in Ukraine, admits that although both Serbia and Ukraine are countries in transition, the employment prospects and overall outlook are actually better in Serbia, in spite of the fact that the profession of a composer of classical music is held in much higher esteem in Ukraine. She currently holds a full-time lecturership at the University of Kragujevac in central Serbia, and although she enjoys teaching modules on music theory, she laments that the demands of the job leave her very little time to compose. Two composers, Svetlana Maksimović, who is now retired, and Igor Gostuški, a freelance composer of film and theatre music, returned because they had to take care of their elderly, ailing parents. As to the other returnees, Boris Despot is a full-time professor of sound technology at the Belgrade Faculty of Dramatic Arts and also active as a jazz musician and music producer; Branka Popović is currently a PhD student and teaching assistant at the department of composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade; Aleksandar Sedlar works as a composer, producer and multi-instrumentalist both in the domains of classical and popular music; and Svetlana Maraš is a freelancer.

As to the *émigrés'* employment histories, again we observe a generational difference. A majority of composers born in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s had steady jobs in Serbia; most of them held teaching posts, either at secondary music schools or at music academies and faculties of music. As I have already mentioned, unlike most European countries, Serbia has

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change their composition tutor within the same department, because they feared repercussions.

preserved a system of state-funded primary and secondary music schools established during socialist times; hence the students who enroll at the faculty of music have already received up to ten years of specialized musical training before commencing their studies. The composition graduates in Serbia usually teach theoretical disciplines such as harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, introduction to composition, and like subjects at the secondary music school level, while at the music academies they teach in composition or music theory departments.

Thanks to the political and economic crisis of the early 1990s, it became impossible for composers to survive on their measly teachers' salaries and rapidly declining commissions (not to mention that, due to hyper-inflation, the money was losing value at an astonishing speed, which meant that the already meagre amounts of money that they received quickly became worthless). This was particularly traumatic for the generations born in the 1950s and 1960s, those who were raised in Socialist Yugoslavia and expected to have a steady job and secure income. Thus, in spite of the ever-decreasing number of tenured positions available in the USA and Canada, they did their best to obtain full-time or part-time teaching posts in their adopted countries, in addition to freelance work; that was the case with Vuk Kulenović, Leon Miodrag Lazarov Pashu, Katarina Miljković, Tatjana Grečić, Vera Stanojević, Milica Paranosić, Ana Sokolović, Aleksandra Vrebalov and others. For example, Katarina Miljković is currently Chair in Music Theory at the New England Conservatory; Vuk Kulenović is Professor of composition at Berklee College of Music in Boston; Dragan Vujović teaches at the Academy of American Studies High School in New York, etc. Some of them have more than one employment; for example, Nataša Bogojević gives private piano lessons in Chicago, and works part-time as a composition tutor at DePaul University. Likewise, Milica Paranosić juggles three jobs: she is an adjunct professor in composition and music technology at the Juilliard School, a co-director of the New York-based Composers Concordance (an organization for contemporary music), and the owner of a private music school ParAcademy. Tatjana Grečić-Dutoit, meanwhile, moved to Santa Fe, NM after completing her doctoral studies in Pittsburgh, PA, and is now an Assistant Professor of Music at New Mexico Highlands University and owner of a publishing house Core-Age Records and Publishing. Ingeborg Bugarinović has ventured outside of the realm of music and owns a nursery school Inge's Family Childcare.

In contrast, the younger generation of Serbian composers usually went abroad straight after graduation, with little work experience. Of these, Jovana Backović now works in London as a voice and piano teacher at a private

music school, Snežana Nešić teaches in Hannover, and Djuro Živković is a part-time lecturer at the Royal Academy in Stockholm. The majority of the other composers who have settled in Europe survive as freelancers.

Not all émigré composers continued to compose after they emigrated. Maja Filipović Frangeš has married in Switzerland, and now works in the charity sector. Ognjen Bogdanović works as a DJ in London and composes 'serious music' only sporadically, usually after being persuaded by his Serbian friends to write something for them. Nataša Bogojević, based in Chicago, went through a creative crisis lasting for about 10 years; in her words, this was a reaction to the trauma of moving to the United States, going through a divorce and having to do two jobs in order to raise her children as a single mother. Her return to composition occurred gradually, after she started copying her old manuscripts into Sibelius software, and revising them in the process; through doing that, she slowly regained her interest in writing new works.

A number of composers have been very active, with a steady string of commissions and major awards. They include Djuro Živković, based in Stockholm, whose work *On the Guarding of the Heart* won the 2014 Grammeyer Award for music composition, Marko Nikodijević, based in Berlin, who won a handful of awards, including the Gaudeamus annual prize in 2010, and Ana Sokolović, living in Montreal, who also won several major awards; in 2012 the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec (SMCQ) marked the twentieth anniversary of her arrival in Quebec with a celebration of her body of work.

The most diverse answers came for the question about the differences between the contemporary music market in Serbia and abroad. Ana Mihajlović, who lives in Rotterdam, said that contemporary music in The Netherlands has a much wider audience, with numerous contemporary music festivals, big and small, that have managed to survive, though she notes that even in an affluent country such as The Netherlands funds for contemporary music have been drastically cut. Moreover, according to Mihajlović, it is easy to find performers interested in contemporary music in the Netherlands, which has not always been the case in Serbia, where a majority of performers prefer to stick to the tried-and-tested classical repertoire. Djuro Živković pointed out that his adopted homeland Sweden is a country with a small population, and that Swedish musicians are forced to think globally and pursue international careers. A very good standard of living in Sweden allows the government to invest in contemporary music, which in turn increases composers' chances of getting commissions for new works. Furthermore, the Swedish Association of Composers has established a 'minimum wage' for composers, i.e. the

tariff below which they should not accept commissions. This is confirmed by Tatjana Ristić, who lives in Norway and praises the Scandinavian countries not only for their economic stability, but for having clear regulations and a well-defined status for all professions, including composition. Ristić has reduced her teaching duties at the Agder University from full-time to part-time, in order to have more time for composition.

Maja Filipović Frangeš, who now lives in Zurich, observed that, in stark contrast to Serbia, contemporary music is frequently performed in Switzerland, with the concerts usually sponsored by successful business corporations. There are also public funds available to contemporary artists but, according to Filipović, it would still be near impossible to organize major cultural events without corporate sponsorship. Marko Nikodijević praises Germany as a country that invests huge sums of money in education, culture and state-funded broadcasting corporations. He testifies that artists in Germany do feel the populist market pressure, but that there is also a well-organized resistance against the closing down of orchestras, state-sponsored theatres or ensembles. Nikodijević's view is endorsed by Milica Djordjević, who was in France for three years before relocating to Germany in 2011. She tells us that German support for contemporary music is second to none, since huge efforts are paid towards educating audiences and making contemporary art accessible to all social strata. Nikodijević finds it particularly interesting that in Germany it is quite normal to see members of the political elite attending festivals of contemporary music, not to mention opera and ballet, and art exhibitions, something unimaginable in transitional Serbia, where political elites are not interested in art. (Actually, this was also the case in Serbia during the socialist era and during the Milošević dictatorship.) Moreover, Germany has a highly reputable authors' agency GEMA, the highest proportion of orchestras in the world, a professional network of performers and ensembles specializing in contemporary music, several important radio stations, insurance policies tailored for artists, and a considerable number of fellowships and residencies available to composers, both the established names and the newcomers. In such a stimulating environment, it is easier to go freelance. Still, as estimated by GEMA, less than 5% of German composers can comfortably live off composition only, and Nikodijević, whose works are published by Sikorski, is among the privileged few.

Jovana Backović praises the openness of the British music market, which is highly competitive but open to experiment and accepting of styles that cannot be easily pigeonholed. She admits that she found the Serbian system of music education, inherited from communist times, too rigid, conservative and dismissive of both experimental music and of po-



pular music genres. On the other hand, Jasna Veljanović compares Serbia to Ukraine and concludes that the contemporary music market in Serbia is underdeveloped not only because of constantly diminishing funding, but because, unlike in Ukraine, Serbian audiences have not been systematically educated to understand and appreciate classical and contemporary art music alike. Thus in Ukraine the concerts of new works are attended by all social strata, while in Serbia new music is only written for a narrow circle of specialists.

Stevan Kovač Tikmajer is critical of the fact that contemporary composition has lost the aura of a true art. He says: 'The problem with the western world today is that art is understood as a diversion to occupy one's leisure time, a commodity to give instant pleasure to the idle upper classes. In North America, all music is "entertainment", while in France, where I live, everything is "spectacle". Music is no longer appreciated, but consumed'.<sup>12</sup> This observation is confirmed by a host of composers based in the USA and Canada. An interesting testimony is that of Nataša Bogojević, who was a teaching assistant at the Belgrade Faculty of Music, a widely performed composer, and a member of the unofficial group *Sedam veličanstvenih* (The Magnificent Seven)<sup>13</sup> before moving to the USA. She admits that she was completely unprepared for the American way of life, which requires business acumen and skills such as career planning, self-marketing and self-analysis, which she did not possess. Her observation that it is all but impossible to get noticed in the USA is confirmed by Jim Samson: 'For Bogojević, Miljković and Vrebalov there has been a steeper mountain to climb. [...] the North American pool is a large one, and it is hard to be noticed; there are many composers with impressive curricula vitae of whom few in the wider musical world have heard'.<sup>14</sup> Bogojević quickly realized that to be a composer in Chicago meant that one had to

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<sup>12</sup> Adrian Kranjčević, 'Stevan Kovač Tikmajer: Panonski vidik koji zvuči tajnovito' [Stevan Kovač Tikmajer – A Mysterious-sounding Panonian Landscape], *Nova misao – Časopis za kulturu Vojvodine*, 3 August 2011, at <http://www.novamisao.org/2011/08/stevan-kovac-tikmajer-panonski-vidik-koji-zvuci-tajnovito/>

<sup>13</sup> Aside from Bogojević, this group was made up of Vladimir Jovanović, Srđan Jaćimović, Igor Gostuški, Isidora Žebeljan, Ognjen Bogdanović and Ana Mihajlović. Jaćimović is now deceased, Bogdanović and Gostuški write popular and 'functional' music, Mihajlović is in Rotterdam, and Jovanović works at the Electronic Studio of Radio Belgrade. Of the original seven, only Mihajlović and Žebeljan, who is still resident in Belgrade, have continued to compose prolifically.

<sup>14</sup> Samson, *Music in the Balkans*, 566.

find a steady job to pay the bills, and then to pursue a career in music as a hobby – unless one was born into a wealthy family and did not have money worries. Vuk Kulenović confirms Bogojević's observation. He points out jokingly that 'in the USA, it is impossible to find funding for a performance of an orchestral work unless you are a son or a lover of an investment banker or the owner of Coca-Cola'.<sup>15</sup> Joking aside, Kulenović bitterly regrets that almost two thirds of his total output of over 100 works has remained unperformed.<sup>16</sup>

Bogojević is critical of the fact that composition courses at the major American universities are still dominated by serialism or post-serialism. As a composition teacher at DuPont, she has been criticized for letting her students write what they like, instead of teaching them 'proper' composition (read: serialism). On the other hand, she praises the very dynamic amateur musical life in the United States, with countless chamber ensembles and orchestras, school orchestras, performances of all sorts of music in churches, and so on. She observes the abundance of amateur composers who predominantly work in the domain of electronic music, using contemporary software such as Logic Pro. All of these contribute to a diverse musical life in their local settings, but make it near impossible for a classically trained composer to make a living.

Svetlana Maksimović and Leon Miodrag Lazarov Pashu have had similar experiences in Canada. In his lengthy interview with the Canadian Association of Composers, Lazarov Pashu admits to a cultural shock when he arrived in Canada, caused by what he perceived as 'pragmatism, capitalism, free market economy; the self-propaganda attitude to "sell" yourself; the strong influence of money on the society, the culture and individual lives; the importance of the stock market; the feeling of passing and changing of everything – styles in clothes, but also in music and in art; in a word – a completely different living environment';<sup>17</sup> however, he admits that Canada has provided him with 'a feeling of stability'.<sup>18</sup> Svetlana Maksimović points to the fact that the 'ghost of Milton Babbitt' is

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<sup>15</sup> Muharem Šehović, 'Mužičko pismo iz Bostona' [A Musical Letter from Boston], *Politika*, 29 January 2010, at <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/intervjui-kultura/Muzichko-pismo-iz-Bostona.lt.html>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Colleen Renihan, 'Interview with Leon Miodrag Lazarov Pashu', *Canadian Music Centre* (2009), at [http://www.musiccentre.ca/sites/www.musiccentre.ca/files/resources/pdfmedia/IoMM\\_Lazarov\\_Pashu\\_interview.pdf](http://www.musiccentre.ca/sites/www.musiccentre.ca/files/resources/pdfmedia/IoMM_Lazarov_Pashu_interview.pdf), 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

still very much alive at North American universities and that the composition courses are still based on serialism; on the other hand, in recent years there has been a surge in interest in electroacoustic music. Being interested in neither, Maksimović had to carve out her own path, drawing inspiration from Eastern religious teachings.

Most émigré composers remain in touch with their Serbian roots, and to some extent, follow the work of those composers who stayed in the homeland. Again, we can see here a generational divide, as the émigré composers mostly follow the work of their immediate peer group, with whom they remain friends, and they use Skype and social networks such as Facebook to maintain regular contact. Marko Nikodijević admits that he is not too interested in the classical music scene in Serbia (although he holds his former composition teacher Srđan Hofman in high regard), but he does follow the underground electronic music scene; although this is mostly dismissed by local established composers as 'trivial', it has attracted a much greater following among young audiences than 'serious' contemporary music. Tatjana Ristić is grateful to the Association of Serbian Composers for sending her regular updates on musical events in Serbia even though she has lived in Norway for more than a decade, while New York-based Milica Paranosić relies on her friend, the musicologist Vesna Mikić, to keep her informed on the contemporary music scene in Serbia. Paranosić has found it difficult to compare American and Serbian music markets because she has not had any commissions or other music-related activities in Serbia since leaving the country.

Another interesting issue is the influence of Serbian traditional and popular music on the outputs of the émigré composers. While in Serbia, all of them lived in urban centres and received instruction in 'cosmopolitan' classical and contemporary musical styles, while folk and traditional music were seen either as something alien or inferior. Thus, very few of them incorporated Serbian or Balkan traditions into their works. However, the situation changed when they emigrated, and a number of them started to respond to these influences. The likely reason for this was not nostalgia, but a desire to offer something new and original in the new environment.<sup>19</sup> A prime example here might be Aleksandar Damnjanović

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<sup>19</sup> An interesting case for comparison is that of the Slovenian-French composer and trombonist Vinko Globokar, who has spent a great part of his career abroad. His employment of Bosnian songs (*sevdalinke*) and the evocation of the round dance *kolo* are very much an expression of nostalgia for Yugoslavia, the lost country where he had spent his formative years. See Dragana Stojanović-Novičić,

(self-styled as Alexandre Damnianovitch), who has lived in France since 1978, and yet regards himself as a Serbian composer and frequently references the Serbian Orthodox heritage.<sup>20</sup> Some younger composers, such as Milica Djordjević, have referred to the oldest layers of the Serbian folklore heritage, but only in terms of employing the non-tempered scales, traditional heterophony and rhythmical patterns typical of the region. The one composer who was firmly 'into' Balkan music even while she was living in Serbia was Jovana Backović, who had a band Arhai with whom she performed contemporary *world-jazz-fusion* arrangements of traditional songs. She continued with Arhai in London, and they have recently released a CD *Eastern Roads*.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the composers who embraced Balkan musical idioms after emigrating include, among others, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Katarina Miljković and Nataša Bogojević, possibly due to the aforementioned necessity to 'stand out from the crowd' in an overcrowded North American music scene. In his discussion of these three composers' recent outputs, Samson praises Katarina Miljković, whom he calls 'A latter-day Xenakis',<sup>22</sup> and her works such as *Threads* (2005), *Window* (2006) and *Drop* (2007) for their 'appropriate sense of distance'. On the other hand, he is not enamored of Vrebalov's 'crude symbolism', as exhibited in works such as *...hold me, neighbour, in this storm...* (2006), a work that Samson dubs 'a kind of musical sermon on the political divisions of the Balkans'.<sup>23</sup> He adds:

Arguably a work such as *...hold me, neighbour, in this storm...* conflates a number of discomforts. First, there is the facility – in two senses – with which ensembles like the Kronos Quartet feel able to draw world music into the realm of a western cultural production, without a hint that there might be any problematic associated with this transfer. Secondly, there is the presumption of the artist who poses as healer, and in doing so gains the sympathy of the audience before a single note is heard. And lastly, there is

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Vinko Globokar: *Muzička odiseja jednog emigranta* [Vinko Globokar: The Musical Odyssey of an Emigrant] (Belgrade: Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 2013), 129-41.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvie Nycephor, 'Alexandre Damnianovitch: de l'orient à l'occident'. *Muzikologija/Musicology*, v (2005), 167-80.

<sup>21</sup> Ivana Medić, 'Arhai's *Balkan Folktronica*: Serbian *Ethno Music* Reimagined for British Market'. *Muzikologija/Musicology*, xvi (2014), in press.

<sup>22</sup> Samson, *Music in the Balkans*, 565.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Interestingly, there are very few musical works that provide a commentary on the political events in the Balkans during the 1990s; see Melita Milin, 'Art Music in Serbia as a Political Tool and/or Refuge During the 1990s', *Muzikološki zbornik/Musicological Annual*, xlvii/1 (2011), 216.

the awkward positioning of the outsider who is at the same time an insider. This latter is of course the issue of exile.<sup>24</sup>

When asked what needs to be done to improve the status of contemporary music in Serbia, all composers in exile answer: 'More money!' But they also remark that the first requirement is defining a clear cultural policy and establishing systemic support for contemporary music, in order to make the occupation of a composer economically feasible. Several composers have complained of sectarianism and corruption in Serbian cultural institutions. Moreover, they have expressed the view that audiences should be educated and contemporary music should be promoted, e.g. there should be TV shows dedicated to contemporary composers, both domestic and foreign; music academies should establish departments for students who wish to specialize in performing modern music; the state, i.e. the Ministry of Culture, should have a clear vision of the role of contemporary music and other arts in society and why they should be nurtured; radio and TV stations should actively commission and record new works; new music should not be performed only at specialized festivals for the educated elite, but also at mainstream music festivals; finally, there should be more openness towards all music genres and new ideas. All these practices had been part of official cultural policies in socialist Yugoslavia, but as a result of the devastating wars and the equally traumatic transition, they have been abandoned in almost all former Yugoslav republics. Nikodijević bluntly asserts that the transition from socialism to liberal capitalism in Serbia has dismantled all the positive legacies of socialism and preserved only the worst ones; thus, he argues that, in the case of musical composition, what has survived has been anachronism and academism, coupled (since the onset of the 1990s) with a (neo-Orthodox) quasi-spirituality and with burgeoning nationalism; it goes without saying that he has zero interest in either of these.

Of all the composers who have lived abroad for more than ten years, only three have expressed any interest in returning to Serbia. Vuk Kulenović is the most likely candidate to do so, because he is approaching retirement, whilst Tatjana Ristić and Ana Mihajlović, would only return if they could find suitable teaching posts in Serbia (such as those that they have held at the Belgrade Faculty of Music before emigrating). Currently, however, there are very few opportunities, as all positions have been assigned to those who remained in Serbia. Those composers who have re-

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<sup>24</sup> Samson, *Music in the Balkans*, 566–567. It should be mentioned that one of the main reasons for the Kronos Quartet's support of Vrebalov's work is her close personal relationship with the quartet founder, violinist David Harrington.

turned, such as Boris Despot, complain that they have been sidelined and overlooked.

As to the issue of the émigré composers' inclusion in (or exclusion from) both local (Serbian, former Yugoslav) and global (read: Western) histories of music, it is not just the musicologists who are undecided; the majority of the composers themselves no longer know where they belong. Melita Milin asserts that the issue of who gets included in histories of music is a political one.<sup>25</sup> And Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman observes that countries such as Serbia, which have built their professional cultures under the influence of a (western) 'centre' or 'centres' will forever be marginalized, due to the ever-present imbalance of power: 'the (sub)conscious of that centre contains some psychological reminder of its professional-historical value, which always justified the centre's conviction that such an advantage gained it the natural right to the status of an arbitrator – in spite of the fact that the periphery was often musically more creative and innovative than the centre'.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Samson points to the paradox that of all Serbian contemporary composers, the one with the highest international profile is actually Isidora Žebeljan, who has never left Serbia, because although 'Belgrade may not be the centre of new music, it provides Žebeljan with a clearly focused identity as a Serbian composer (she was elected to the Serbian Academy at a surprisingly young age), and a base for the highly-skilled Europe-wide networking that has made her one of the most widely performed Serbian composers today'.<sup>27</sup> This leads Samson to observe that

composers of an older generation such as Xenakis and Ligeti would probably not have made the mark they did on the new music had they remained in Greece and Hungary respectively. There was a rather clear sense of centre and periphery in the 1960s, and for these composers the charismatic centres of new music in Europe and North America proved to be the gateways to international acclaim. [...] Arriving at the centres did not guarantee visibility, of course; they were nothing if not competitive arenas. But avoiding the centres all but guaranteed invisibility. For a later generation

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<sup>25</sup> Melita Milin, 'General Histories of Music and the Place of the European Periphery', *Muzikologija/Musicology*, i (2001), 142-45.

<sup>26</sup> Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, 'Music at the Periphery Under Conditions of Degraded Hierarchy Between the Centre and the Margins in the Space of the Internet', in Tilman Seebass, Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman and Tijana Popović-Mladenović (eds), *Identities: The World of Music in Relation to Itself* (Belgrade: Faculty of Music, 2012), 25.

<sup>27</sup> Samson, *Music in the Balkans*, 567.

the conditions were rather different. [...] For this generation the major cultural centres are no longer quite the passport to fame they once were, and this may have some bearing on the story of our Serbian women composers. In the end, a clear local identity, such as that carefully cultivated by Žebeljan, may prove more valuable than an allegiance to cosmopolitan modernisms.<sup>28</sup>

In this respect, Serbia has long shared the destiny of all small peripheral cultures that have not been ‘on the radar’ of the major European cultural centres. This is confirmed by the Italian musicologist Luca Cossetini, who, in his overview of the electroacoustic music by Vladan Radovanović (b. 1932), admits that

very little is known in Italy of the musical production of Vladan Radovanović, as goes for almost all the rest of Serbian and former Yugoslav artistic music of the twentieth century. Former Yugoslav composers are exceptions in the Italian books on history of music. The only composers cited are the ones who worked in the big West European centres (e.g. Ivo Malec).<sup>29</sup> Italian publications about electronic music are focused on a canonical view of music creation that implies a West-eurocentric idea of culture, thus ignoring those realities that do not fit the schemas that German, French and – to a lesser extent – Italian composers and musicologists had developed in the last fifty years.<sup>30</sup>

Cossetini argues that the main reason for this is the language barrier, which in the past had made access to primary and secondary sources on Serbian and former Yugoslav music very hard. But although nowadays this issue has largely been bypassed thanks to the internet and Google Translate, this does not solve the problem of the still prevailing imbalance of power between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’, between the rich and the poor, the large and the small.

Thus, when it comes to deciding who gets included in which histories of music, someone like Ana Sokolović, who left Serbia more than twenty

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 568.

<sup>29</sup> The same observation could also apply to the aforementioned Slovenian (i.e. former Yugoslav) composer Vinko Globokar, who made a name for himself as an active participant in the West European avant-garde scene both as a trombonist and a composer; he is best known as a collaborator of both Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, the two major protagonists of the post-WWII European avant-garde.

<sup>30</sup> Luca Cossetini, ‘Beyond the Mix. On Vladan Radovanović’s Mixed Electronic Music’, in *Stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* [Vladan Radovanović’s Oeuvre] (Belgrade: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2013).

years ago before making any sort of impact there, and who has won major national accolades in her adoptive country Canada, is likely to be regarded as a Serbian-born Canadian (Québécoise) composer. In fact, it was only after Sokolović made a name for herself in Canada that the protagonists of the contemporary music scene in Serbia paid attention to her work, and she has only recently been (re)introduced to Serbian audiences.<sup>31</sup> The same applies to Aleksandar Damnjanović, Nebojša Jovan Živković and a few other composers who have only recently been (re)discovered in Serbia, after finding fame abroad. An interesting case is that of Marko Nikodijević, who was selected a few years ago to receive the Mokranjac Prize, the top national accolade in Serbia, but had the award withdrawn when it was discovered that he had renounced Serbian citizenship in order to obtain a German passport. Hence, in future histories of music, he is likely to be regarded as a naturalized German composer (he has just won the 2014 Deutscher Musikautorenpreis [German Composers' Prize] in the category Promotion of New Talent)<sup>32</sup>. Should they decide to remain permanently in the countries where they are now based, the same will probably happen to Jovanka Trbojević, Dijana Bošković, Vera Stanojević, Djuro Živković, Snežana Nešić, Melinda Ligeti, Jovana Backović, Milica Djordjević and others who left Serbia while relatively young and who are building careers abroad. On the other hand, the composers who were already established names before emigrating, such as Vuk Kulenović and Leon Miodrag Lazarov Pashu, will forever be regarded as Serbian (or, more precisely, Yugoslav, or Former-Yugoslav) composers, in spite of the fact that they have spent several decades in emigration. Miloš Raičković claims that he is 'both here and there', and although he has spent a good half of his life abroad, he still feels that he has left Belgrade 'only temporarily'.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the composers born in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s are likely to remain 'split personalities',

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<sup>31</sup> In 2012 her chamber opera *Svadba/Wedding* was performed at the 44<sup>th</sup> BEMUS Festival in Belgrade to positive reviews; see Ksenija Stevanović, 'Baština u stilizovanom ruhu' [Tradition in a Stylized Outfit]. *Politika*. 19 October 2012, at <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Kritika/muzicka-kritika/Bastina-u-stilizovanom-ruhu.lt.html>

<sup>32</sup> 'Nikodijevic, Marko'. *Sikorski*, at [http://www.sikorski.de/5692/en/nikodijevic\\_marko.html](http://www.sikorski.de/5692/en/nikodijevic_marko.html)

<sup>33</sup> Zorica Premate, 'Tonsko podsećanje na čistu vodu' [Sound Reminder of a Pure Water and Better Times], *Politika*, 21 August 2010, at <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Kulturni-dodatak/Tonsko-podsecanje-na-cistu-vodu-i-bolja-vremena.lt.html>



themselves unsure whether they still belong to their homeland, and yet unable to fully integrate into their adoptive countries. Were the funds for performances of contemporary music in Serbia more than symbolic (or, recently, non-existent<sup>34</sup>), it would have been possible to organize regular performances of substantial new works by Serbian composers in exile and to reinforce the feeling that they 'still belong'. Unlike some other, larger émigré groups, Serbian composers have been unable to establish diaspora communities abroad because they are so dispersed. As a consequence, everyone is ultimately left to their own devices and, more than anything, it is their personal decision whether they want to attempt to fully integrate into their new environments, or to remain 'unclassifiable' and 'in a no man's land'.

#### COMPOSERS' PERSONAL WEBSITES

Aleksandar Damnjanović <http://www.damnjanovitch.com/>

Aleksandra Vrebalov <http://www.aleksandravrebalov.com/>

Ana Sokolović <http://www.anasokolovic.com/>

Ana Mihajlović <http://www.behance.net/anamihajlovic>

Boris Kovač <http://www.boriskovac.net/>

Dijana Bošković <http://www.dijana-boskovic.com/>

Djuro Živković <http://www.zivkovic.eu/>

Dušan Bogdanović <http://www.dusanbogdanovic.com>

Dragan Vujović <http://www.draganvujovic.com/>

Ivan Božičević <http://free-st.t-com.hr/Ivan-Bozicevic/>

Ivan Jevtić <http://ivan-jevtic.net/>

Ivana Stefanović <http://www.ivanastefanovic.com/>

Jasna Veličković <http://jasnavelickovic.com/>

Jasna Veljanović <http://jasnaveljanovicranko.musicaneo.com/>

Jovana Backović <http://arhai.com/>

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<sup>34</sup> In 2014 the Serbian Ministry of Culture denied funding to the only festival of contemporary art music, the International Review of Composers, which has caused a huge backlash in Serbian musical circles. Letters of support for the festival, both from Serbia and abroad, have been published on the website of the Serbian Composers' Association, at <http://composers.rs/en/?p=1400> and <http://composers.rs/?p=3498#more-3498>.

Jovanka Trbojević <http://composers.musicfinland.fi/musicfinland/fimic.nsf/WLCBND/trbojevic>  
Katarina Miljković <http://www.katarina-miljkovic.net/>  
Maja Bosnić <http://www.zabuna.org.rs>  
Maja Leković <http://mayasound.webs.com>  
Marko Nikodijević [http://www.sikorski.de/5692/en/nikodijevic\\_marko.html](http://www.sikorski.de/5692/en/nikodijevic_marko.html)  
Melinda Ligeti <http://www.acustronica.com/melinda-ligeti.html>  
Milica Djordjević <http://www.milicadjordjevic.com/>  
Milica Paranosić <http://mparanosic.wix.com/milicaparanosic>  
Miloš Raičković <http://library.newmusicusa.org/MilosRaickovich>  
Nebojša Jovan Živković <http://www.zivkovic.de/>  
Ognjen Bogdanović <https://soundcloud.com/ognjen-bogdanovic>  
Snežana Nešić <http://www.snezana-nesic.de/>  
Stevan Kovač Tikmajer (Stevan Kovacs Tickmayer)  
<http://www.tickmayer.com/>  
Svetlana Maraš <http://www.svetlanamaras.com/>  
Teodora Stepančić <http://teodora.stepancic.com>  
Tatjana Grečić-Dutoit <http://www.tatiana.core-age.com/>  
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