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Slovene Music in the later 20th and early 21st centuries: an External Perspective

Slovenska glasba v poznem 20. in zgodnjem 21.
stoletju: pogled iz tujine

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IZVLEČEK

ABSTRACT

V poznem 20. in zgodnjem 21. stoletju glasba na Slovenskem teži k modernizmu ali postmodernizmu. Glede na nenehno medsebojno izmenjevanje kompozicijskih tehnik postaja razločevanje med skladatelji vse manj pomembno.

Music in Slovenia in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries tends towards either modernism or post-modernism. However, with the constant sharing of techniques by a wide range of composers, this distinction is becoming increasingly irrelevant.

In the period just after the Second World War, music in Slovenia was relatively unadventurous: some followed the trends of the pre-war years with neo-classical and folk-influenced works. But by the early 1960s, this had changed dramatically: with the broadening of horizons and the ability to travel abroad now possible, composers felt the impetus to embrace new techniques and ideas. The scene was now set for a great blossoming of musical talent. Gifted young composers such as Vinko Globokar, Milan Stibilj, Janez Matičič and Alojz Srebotnjak were able to study outside Slovenia and join the new culture in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Others such as Primož Ramovš, Ivo Petrić and Jakob Jež were able to travel abroad to observe new music at first hand and to perform their own pieces in front of an international audience. Lojze Lebič, Darijan Božič and Igor Štuhec quickly became part of this group, and later they were joined by Pavel Mihelčič, Alojz Ajdič and Maks Strmčnik. Together they formed the

Slovene avant-garde which was enthusiastically supported by its performers, its public and its publishers. Over the next two decades, it thrived with a large body of high quality, adventurous music that in quantity was far more than might have been expected from such a small group of composers.

Inevitably some avant-garde trends went too far, leaving all but a small proportion of the audience bewildered. This was particularly the case in the German musical circles that focussed on Darmstadt and other centres of the musical avant-garde. One of the main reactions to this came from the United States with the influence of such pioneers as John Cage and followed by the so-called 'minimalists', La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass. This simplification of music and its reversion from the position of 'modernism' was a gradual process that spread across Western Europe, but was not universally adopted. This retreat from modernism occurring across the arts has normally been labelled as 'postmodernism', a term that had at this time gained a certain disapproval. In Slovenia, those composers who aimed for a more straightforward style, relying on regular rhythms, memorable melodies and traditional structures did gain a strong following.

Composers of the older Slovene avant-garde group already mentioned were likely to examine the reception of their music in the light of the new developments. Most continued to compose in the same style, as they had established a firmly identifiable idiom in which they were comfortable working. Of these only Srebotnjak seemed to turn his back on the new music and often worked in a style which derived some of its ideas from folk music. The real problem was for those composers who had an established style to determine if a change of direction was appropriate or desirable.

For younger composers, broadly speaking, those born after the end of the Second World War, the issue was what route to follow and in the event, these musicians followed their own interests and instincts. Of those born before 1960, those pursuing a traditional approach who have established their position in public estimation include Jani Golob, Tomaž Habe, Slavko Šuklar and Marko Mihevc.

Jani Golob (b. 1948) trained as a violinist and then studied composition with Uroš Krek. His interest in music featuring string instruments is already notable, but also his leaning towards the use of folk music, a fact that was clearly confirmed in the *Four Slovenian Folk Songs* for strings completed in 1980, a work featuring melodies from Bela Krajina, Dolenska, Prekmurje and Rezija. One must stress, of course, that Golob's folk-influenced music, like that of his teacher Krek, is considerably removed from the original. His musical idiom, moreover, has always been approachable and indebted to traditional methods. Nevertheless the techniques are expertly handled and the music sensitively written with a strong emotional undercurrent. His concertos for violin and violoncello (1992), violin (1998) and violoncello (2001) stand high in his opus, for their idiomatic string technique and vivid musical imagination. The Violin Concerto of 1998 gives some idea of the use of repetitions and traditional figurations that distantly recall both Mozart and Prokofiev. Also important are his works which derive their inspiration from Slovene history and legend, the ballets *Urška in povodni mož* ('Urška and the Watersprite' of 1985) and *Krst pri Savici* ('Baptism at the Savica') of 1989, as well as the symphonic *Slovenska rapsodija* of 1990.

Tomaž Habe (b. 1947) also follows traditional lines in his work. One can point to the *Three Humoresques* of 2002 for violin, guitar and accordion which present a lively and somewhat biting idiom or the more serious and substantial Concerto for horn and orchestra of 2000. One can also go back to an earlier piece for horn and orchestra *Narodna in scherzo* ('Folk Tune and Scherzo') of 1983 to hear the folk influence transformed into something bold and attractive.

The works of Slavko Šuklar (b. 1952) are less well known. In some ways he is only partly a traditionalist, with an eclectic grasp of new techniques which are used from time to time in his music. Like Jani Golob he has a fondness for string instruments, with such works as the *Vocalise concertante* of 1993 for violoncello and orchestra and the *Concerto Panonico* of 2002 for violin and strings. The atmospheric opening of the former with its string glissandi and strident harmonies introduces a group of strong solo recitative statements. In the latter, a more substantial but rhapsodic piece of over fifteen minutes, Šuklar employs similar techniques with recitatives contrasting with strongly rhythmic passages. Another single-movement piece, *Lux tenebris* for orchestra of 2000, based on the final chorale from Bach's St John Passion, is an impressive work that begins in silence and achieves strong climaxes by traditional means.

The music of Marko Mihevc (b. 1957) is much better known, being performed regularly and recorded. His symphonic poem *Equi* of 1990 was the work that brought his name to the attention of the musical public. It has a verve, elan and excitement that are very engaging. The harmonic basis of his technique is mostly tonal with some extended tonality, and even some hints of atonality. It has strong melodic lines and rhythmic structures with occasional hints of the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss and a well defined use of programmatic techniques. A fondness for incorporating popular dances is neither pastiche nor parody, but falls naturally into the style. Two further symphonic poems, *In signo tauri* and *Miracula*, enhance this reputation with works of a similar style. Of his more recent work, the *Trillus diabolicus* of 1997 gives a new perspective on the composer's work with a fresh sense of adventurousness and further use of some modernist techniques.

There have, however, been some who have looked more to the avant-garde for their inspiration, but have at the same time absorbed the ideas of the postmodernists, taking only what is thought to be useful and interesting. Again one can select a small number of composers born between 1945 and 1960 to represent this group most effectively, because now they have achieved an established position with a stable style and have composed a large enough corpus of music on which one can make valid judgements. Their music can be seen as a re-emergence of avant-garde ideas, but with some of the features rethought and as such it represents a continuity with the earlier avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. Five composers from this decade show how the new avant-garde has emerged in Slovenia in the years from 1975.

Aldo Kumar (b. 1954) as a composer does not fit comfortably within stylistic trends, and while his music shows a sense of adventure, his idiom is not normally that associated with the avant-garde. All his techniques are relatively familiar individually, but are placed in juxtapositions that are unusual. His early works, such as *Pet preludijev* ('Five Preludes') for piano of 1980, give some idea of his style, with its repeated ostinato

figures in 7/8 time, its chords of superimposed thirds and seconds and its lingering attachment to classical ternary form. A second piano piece, *Sonata z igre 12* ('Sonata – a Game of 12') from 1986, shows a new sense of organisation. It is a brilliantly conceived set of variations on a rising chromatic scale. Variants are teasingly introduced, by octave dislocation, rhythmic reorganisation, changing register and the use of parallel chords. It economically exploits a limited range of material.

Kumar has always looked outward from Slovenia in his music, having studied in Warsaw with Włodzimierz Kotoński, one of the chief Polish adherents of the European avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s. His music is often inspired by the Istrian peninsula and the Alps. The connection with Istria is strong in the *Istrian Suite* for strings of 1986 and *Istralja* for full orchestra, taking folk and folk-like music through a series of transformations and developments. He followed these with the more diverse and adventurous *Strastra* for organ and orchestra from 2001 and *Improstrastra* for piano and big band of 2002. These pieces cast light on a contemporary work of his, *Čelo Alp* ('The Front of the Alps') for orchestra, which develops and extends techniques found in the piano pieces: the building up of melodic cells, sometimes into ostinatos that themselves merge into textures. There are passages of mysterious intensity and sudden and dramatic changes, sometimes involving silences. In the 1990 cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra, *Na struni Merkurja* ('On the String of Mercury'), Kumar set very vivid words by Andrej Lutman. The choir is treated mostly homophonically with the words not always clearly audible, but acting more as inspiration for the character of the music. As with *Čelo Alp*, brooding intensity is interrupted by the dramatic violence of repetitive ostinato figures. Since Slovene independence, Kumar's music has gone from strength to strength with his unusual combination of modernist and post-modernist features. The piano concerto of 1992, entitled *Post Art or Look*, subtitled *Wolfgang is writing to you*, is a light-hearted reflection on Mozart's style and features. By contrast, the *Varda Concerto*, also for piano and orchestra and completed in 1996, is an exercise in juxtaposing conflicting gestures and techniques, with some hints of folk influence.

A second composer, Uroš Rojko (b. 1954), lives and works in Germany, but regularly visits Slovenia. He studied with Uroš Krek in his native Slovenia, but also with Krzysztof Meyer, Bogusław Schaeffer and Włodzimierz Kotoński in Poland, and Klaus Huber and Györgi Ligeti in Germany. He has made a particular speciality of chamber music, with an emphasis on sonic memorability, exploiting a wide range of new techniques of individual instruments, but always combining these with a clear structural grasp. For example, an early work for violin and piano, *Štiri novele* ('Four Short Stories') from 1978, shows a strong development of short motives, a keen ear for colour and a metrical precision. The brass trio, *Vinjenke* ('Mellow Pieces') from two years later, is again wonderfully precise in the way that it maintains its metrical irregularity. Its melodic construction uses cells which are developed in the same flexible way as that of his teacher, Krek. As a clarinettist Rojko was on home ground in his *Sedem vzdihljajev* ('Seven Sighs') for clarinet and piano of 1981, concentrating very strongly on the particular sound of the clarinet, especially the use of wide vibrato and glissando, as well as complex florid passages shared with the piano. An extended piece for saxophone and piano called *Godba* from 1992 has a very strong presence and is far more impressive than its modest title might suggest. The

opening section is particularly impressive for its brilliant juggling of different motifs with a narrow range of intervals but a wide range of cross-rhythms.

The solo cello piece called *Ja* (1986, revised 1990) is a virtuoso avant-garde study that goes even further, using, for example, two bows for one player on one cello, a feature which creates some amazingly difficult arpeggio passages. In addition to this, there is the extensive use of harmonics, scordatura, left-hand pizzicato and glissando. In complete contrast, Rojko surprises us with his guitar piece called *Passing Away on Two Strings* of 1984, in which repetitive sounds that are never virtuosic are drawn out in a piece of over twelve minutes' duration, yet it is constantly inventive in the sonorities that it draws from the instrument.

Perhaps even more impressive in its extension of the techniques of a selected instrument is the series of pieces that Rojko composed for the flute in the years 1985-91. The composer himself describes the processes involved: 'The source of the idea is the premise that instruments are not just a means of artistic expression, representing the composer's and the performer's tools. The instrument is an illusion of the individual, is a being that communicates, responds, between it and the performer, the possibility of a mutual contrapuntal dialogue and mutual identification is established.'¹ This work, *...für eine Piccolspielerin* (1985), generates a wide variety of instrumental colour through the performer's vocal means as well as using what is referred to as a pianistic trill. In 1989 Rojko expanded this to contrast the flute with the oboe in *Atemaj*.² In a complicated explanation of his techniques and philosophy, the composer refers to floating as static constellation and movement as dynamic process.³ It explores the conflict between the static elements, but transforming them into dynamic ones, for example, by changing a static continuous sound into a moving one by adding vibrato. *Glass Voices*, also of 1989, combines flute with piano in a brilliant essay in duality and identity. The idea is that the lines of the two instruments become so intertwined that there is 'the illusion of a fictitious instrument, combining the characteristics of both real instruments.'⁴ The final work in this series is *Inner Voices*, scored for flute, doubling piccolo and alto flute and chamber orchestra. This is a more contemplative work which has a passages of an intense harmonic nature, which in the composer's view are based on the principle of inward orientation. This is achieved using narrow glissandos of between a quarter and a half tone, double trills, and the interweaving the lines of the solo instrument, successively piccolo, flute and alto flute, with those of the orchestra.

This ear for sonority has continued with a group of pieces using the accordion. With viola is the contemplative *Elegia per Hugo* (1993) which uses short collections of long-held notes in a slow tribute of overwhelming intensity and *Molitve* ('Prayers') of 1995, a group of seven short pieces that aim at a fusion of the sounds of the two instruments by means already explored by Rojko, involving, for example, glissandos, repeated notes, and the scattering of notes between the two instruments. For accordion with piano,

1 Booklet notes to CD, Ed. DSS 200027 (Ljubljana, 2000), p. 7.

2 The title *Atemaj* is an anagram of the names of the two players who first performed in Zagreb in 1989, Matej and Mateja, but also relates to the German Atem = breath and the Slovene Tema = theme.

3 Ibidem, p. 9.

4 Ibidem, p. 9.

Bagatellen (1994) moves from the diametrically opposite sound of two instruments to a position in which they begin to sound similar, while *Tangos* (1994/5) extracts tango fragments in an analytical way that makes the music dance-like without parody or any alignment with postmodern thought. For accordion with baritone and cello, *Et puis plus rien le rêve* (1992) follows a pattern of long notes, repeated groups, ostinatos and quasi-ostinatos, parlato, glissandos. Taking texts by Ingeborg Bachmann, William Carlos Williams and Apollinaire, it attempts 'to "transpose" words into the acoustic world; the totality of thoughts and meanings, hidden in the verses and between them, is caught in the mood of the musical language.'⁵

Rojko's orchestral music follows similar lines, extending chamber music textures. The elaboration of the 1998 *Evokacija* ('Evocation') for cello and accordion into a work for symphony orchestra in the following year is sure evidence of the way that Rojko's structural plans can be applied to music of different scale. In a sense the principle of the work could hardly be clearer: it makes a contrast between what the composer calls 'a spectrum of composite sounds of differing densities [and] ... a pointillist rhythmical treatment of syllabic periods'.⁶ In other words the main contrast is between dense textures and passages of single notes.

Like Rojko, a third composer, Tomaž Svete (b. 1956), belongs firmly to the newer Slovenian avant-garde. His ideas are distinctive and memorable, but his music, unlike that of Kumar, makes no moves towards the post-modernist stance. His impressive orchestral piece, *L'amôr sul mar* of 1987, is sensuously scored and suggestive of the influence of Messiaen in its textures and harmonies and with its atmospheric sounds all carefully chosen.⁷ His *Godalni trio* ('String Trio') of two years earlier is even more extreme, with textures varying from very thin with fragmentary motives to dense and highly coordinated between the parts. The motivic working is both flexible and subtle. Some of the music has the appearance, although not the rhythmic complexity of passages of some of the string quartets of the American composer, Elliott Carter. Two later typical chamber works should also be mentioned. *Evocazione* of 1995 for soprano and chamber ensemble and *Dyph tongue* for saxophone quartet of 1996. *Dyph tongue* displays a strong avant-garde idiom with fragmentary motives, multiple sounds of the type catalogued by Bruno Bartolozzi, speaking and special tonguing effects. *Evocazione* uses many of the same features, as well as freely coordinated unbarred passages. The soprano's multilingual text is almost instrumental in its quality, especially in the repetitive passages of the Slovene settings. The French words are set more in traditional vocal style, while the concluding Japanese is more ritualistic and rhythmically regular.

Svete's vocal settings, however, have been most notable in his five operas. The earliest, the television opera *Kralj Malhus* of 1987, is a satirical piece in three scenes that last just under half an hour. Sigrid Wiesmann pointed to a flexible variety of types of vocal setting in the work as well as the use of a structure that is indebted to sonata form:

5 Uroš Rojko in the note in the score Ed. DSS 1341 (Ljubljana, 1993).

6 In the booklet notes for the CD recording Ed. DSS 200027 (Ljubljana, 2000), p. 13.

7 First performed in Ljubljana on 14 April 1988.

Von den drei Szenen, aus denen sich das Werk zusammensetzt, ist die erste, natürlich in freier Form, quasi eine Exposition, die zweite, ein Instrumentalsatz mit Ballehandlung eine Durchführung, und die dritte, wenigstens andeutungsweise, eine Reprise.⁸

The radio opera, *Ugrabitev z Ludaškega jezera* ('The Abduction from Lake Laudach') of 1994, consists of a series of atmospheric dramatic miniatures that utilise the medium of radio in a totally involving manner. Many different word-setting techniques are used, varying from spoken words, modern recitative setting, as well as chanting and more extended but fragmentary vocal lines. The later prize-winning opera *Kriton* of 2000 confirms Svete's avant-garde techniques. The vocal settings vary from straightforward declamations to more lyrical lines. His music uses two separate twelve-note rows for Crito and Socrates, as a way of distinguishing their differing characters. The whole work shows a firm grasp of modern techniques 'without getting caught in the postmodernist trap'.⁹

The delicate and sensitive works of the fourth of these composers, Brina Jež-Brezavšček, are most impressive. *Presenečenje* ('Surprise') of 1983 for solo violin is a short study in violin techniques. The more substantial *Aulofonia domestica* for oboe, clarinet and percussion of 1988 explores a number of new woodwind techniques, particularly the 'smorzato' and the use of multiple sounds. The use of a wide range of percussion is particularly effective as it is used with the greatest musical sensitivity, as can be heard in the opening section in which all three players perform on the percussion instruments. The coordination between the parts is generally fairly free except when there are obviously important harmonic implications.¹⁰

More recently these techniques have been well developed and extended. The texture of *Perfume Composition* of 1996 for solo viola is a bewitching quasi-two-part illusion. The string techniques used in the *Meditation in Five Images* for violoncello and piano of 1997 are not so extreme, with sustained sounds, extensive use of precisely imagined chords and a strong rhythmic drive. Its five separate movements dwell on individual musical characteristics. The opening slow *Mantra or Introduction* has quiet sustained cello notes set against obsessive repetitive piano figures. *Attenuation* blends the sustained notes with scattered notes from the piano, while *Thickening* gives the piano strong faster chordal passages with the cello moving away from meditative sounds to the piano's rhythmic momentum. *Vicinity* for piano solo gradually transforms the rhythmic and harmonic sounds to more contemplative single ones. Finally, *Thoughts or Parallels* combines the sustained sounds with the harmonic ones in a slow homophonic procession in octaves of Messiaenic intensity.

More important is the orchestral *Sonsong – Sonorous Variations* for orchestra, first performed in 1999. It treats in kaleidoscopic fashion large numbers of differently scored short melodies, some of which are clearly audible and others, partly because of the complexity of the textures and the orientation of the horizontal and vertical, are

8 See Siegrid Wiesmann: 'O »Kralju Malhusu« Tomaža Sveteta – Zu Tomaz Svetes »König Malhus«, in Primož Kuret (ed): *Slovenska glasba v preteklosti in sedanjosti – Slowenische Musik in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Ljubljana: Kres, 1992), pp. 239-243.

9 Tomaz Svete in Črt Sojar Voglar (ed): *Skladateljske sledi po letu 1900 – Composers' Traces from 1900 Onwards* (Ljubljana: Edicije DSS, 2003), p. 231.

10 First performed in Ljubljana on 14 April 1988.

not audible as such. Some of the work captures the spirit of Charles Ives's music. The composer described the construction in the following way:

Little melodies in various orchestral sounds, represented by different instrumental sections, were put together at first horizontally, then using a vertical sound material ... Since this material was strongly amorphous, I had divided it into a rigorous succession of units, composed of nine little parts ... These nine-bar units have their own typical symbols, sonority and contents.

Each little melody has its own contents, not heard or recognizable autonomously at all. It is a matter of concealing the existent ... contributing to the general effect in a broader sense of the music. Therefore, the succession of little nine-bar units is done in a sense of mutual correspondence and development, and is by no means interchangeable.¹¹

Some of the ideas of making music work on different levels are also found in her *Orpheus* of 1989, which combines bass clarinet with an electronic tape. While the composer talks of a conflict between the gentle lyre of Orpheus and the rough sounds of the bass clarinet, there is also a deliberate matching of the two sound sources, for example, in the bass clarinet's openings that emerge out of a random collection of electronic sounds and the blending of smooth and steady electronic 'chords' with 'Bartolozzi' multiple sounds on the clarinet.

Electronic sounds, however, have been explored extensively and in depth in the work of the fifth composer, Bor Turel. After his basic studies in Ljubljana, like many of his contemporaries, he continued his work abroad, in Paris, Montreal, Salzburg and Graz. His music has been extensively performed in Zagreb, Hungary, Copenhagen, Vienna, Paris and Ljubljana.

Turel's early music explored the world of advanced instrumental techniques and compositional devices. A significant work is the first of *Trije dogodki* ('Three Events') for piano which dates from 1974 and which develops the idea of irregularly repeated notes and asymmetrically placed flourishes. His use of the prepared piano dates from this time in, for example, *Repetition Music* of 1976 and *Piano Parts* of 1977. The former uses minimalist techniques of repetition of short fragments, while the latter works with scattered fragments. Perhaps of more significance for future developments is *Chance Music* of 1976 in which there is an ingenious layering of different types of music. Taking its cue from some of the methods used by Steve Reich, *Music for Two Pianos* produces overlapping ostinatos that move in and out of synchronisation with each other.

Concurrently with this exploration of new instrumental techniques was Turel's use of electronic sounds. A work such as *Musique de l'eau* of 1976 presents water-like sounds with extra echo and resonance to build up into complex textures. It has similarities with that other Slovene water-piece, Milan Stibilj's *Maurica* ('Rainbow'). From the same year

¹¹ This detailed explanation was given by the composer in the programme booklet for Slovenski glasbeni dnevi 1999 (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 1999) for its first performance on 13 April 1999.

Musique de la porte uses modified door sounds as did Pierre Henry's *Variations on a Door and a Sigh*. The layering technique found in some of the instrumental pieces can be found in three electronic pieces of the next few years: *Continuity*, *Electronic Experiment* and *Images*.

Turel in the 1980s felt able to combine the two types: instrumental music and electronic sounds. This is the electroacoustic music which he has made his speciality, using, for example, flute, piano, trumpet and recorders. *The Endless Loop* for flute and tape of 1983 shows this well with a carefully constructed plan embracing a wide range of techniques, though it is not possible to demonstrate the structure in a short example. In *The Spiral* of 1986 Turel transferred a series of three-dimensional geometric constructions into musical form. One particularly intriguing concept comes from the idea of circles and arches moving around an axis. This is translated into musical terms as repeated ostinato patterns on the piano over sustained or slowly changing growling electronic sounds. Later on in the piece Turel merges the two sound sources with electronic 'noise' as away of reconciling the conflicts of the different sound types. Probably his most famous piece also dates from the same year, *Sonotranjosti* for cello and tape with its subtle matching and contrasting of the cello's sound with similar or nearly similar sounds on the accompanying tape.

Turel's work embraces numerous other ideas which move into the theatrical and multimedia areas and he composes extensively for radio. For this medium one fascinating work is *Med besedami in tisinu* ('Between Words and Silence') from 2002, in which the words of the Slovene poet Dane Zajc are treated as sound objects without ever losing their semantic significance.

It is difficult and somewhat invidious or even capricious to make a selection of a number of younger Slovene composers to illustrate the newest range of music. Yet there is a sufficient number of works of eight Slovene composers born during the 1960s and 1970s that have been performed, published and/or recorded to make at least a provisional assessment of their music.

Of the composers who have to some extent followed post-modernist techniques, one can make some useful observations on four: Dušan Bavdek, Vitja Avsec, Rok Golob and Bojana Šaljić. It should be stressed here that there is no real consistency between the styles of these four composers and are only grouped together for convenience.

Dušan Bavdek (b. 1971) is a composer who is working in a traditional idiom, but has adopted some of the techniques associated with the minimalists. His music is always approachable and communicates well. The lighter side of his style can be found in his *Capricietto* of 1997. Vitja Avsec (b. 1970) is a composer whose style is wide ranging, with delightful, biting humour in his *Danza ritmica* for accordion of 1997. On the other hand he has created some very deep and serious sounds and woven motivic complexity into his symphonic movement of 1995 called *Gea*. Perhaps more obviously related to popular music is that of Rok Golob (b. 1975), whose style is immediately approachable. It is no criticism to say that there is something of the style of some film music in its bold and evocative sounds. Bojana Šaljić (b. 1978) shows an adventurous inclination in many ways. She has shown a strong preference for using electronic means of sound production, but giving this a modern twist with a lively sense of humour and an immediacy of

effect that encourages an instant response. Her piece called *1000 V* gives some idea of the manipulation of sounds in space and time in a manner that has become common in electronic music.

Of the Slovene composers born during the 1960s who have pursued more adventurous techniques, the one with the most impressive and consistent corpus of works is Nenad Firšt (b. 1964). Among the published and recorded music, the most important works are undoubtedly those for string instruments. Firšt's natural affinity with strings arises from his skill as a violinist, having studied with Rok Klopčič in Ljubljana. This appears in Concertos for violin and for cello, and in the Concertino for double bass. Numerous chamber works can be added to this collection, *Nekaj divjega* ('Something Wild') for violin, *O mejah, ki so ostale* ('About Remaining Borders') and *Monotipje* ('Monotypes') for violin and piano, and *Bi* for two violins, as well as three string quartets and various works for viola, cello and double bass. Yet Firšt's skill in writing for strings is only a part of his importance as a composer. He has a strong sense of effective structure, sometimes using symmetry in a subtle and unpredictable way. The prize-winning Third String Quartet of 1988 is a skilfully planned continuous multi-movement piece. Its economical use of motives is emphasised by its brilliant use of sharply etched melodies and clearly imagined counterpoint. Transparent textures are also a feature of the Concertino for double bass and chamber orchestra, also of 1988, in which the lyrical musings of the solo instrument are constantly apparent. The composer's formal imagination is carried one stage further in an unusually named piece from 1991 for violin and double bass called SSSSS. The five 'Ss' represent the five sections or free variations that constitute the work (Semplice – Sereno – Strepitoso – Scherzoso – Sognando). The variety and resourcefulness of the ideas are very impressive. The two outer slow sections symmetrically frame the three faster ones which are dance-like with constantly varying time signatures, sometimes with remote hints of folk music.

Among other Slovene composers born during the 1960s, Peter Šavli (b. 1961) has many substantial achievements. Having studied composition with Alojz Srebotnjak in Ljubljana, as well having completed a Masters Degree at Yale University and a Doctorate at Cornell in the United States, he also has an impressive pedigree. Soon after completing his studies in Slovenia in 1988, Šavli composed his piece, *The Road Less Travelled*, for four saxophones, a work that shows no signs of academicism. Already there is a strong but very untraditional interest in the beautiful and smooth sonorities of the quartet, using sensuous harmonies with no use of tonal progression. Contrasting with this is what the composer calls 'a free counterpoint of loosely notated parts,'¹² which employs numerous unorthodox playing techniques. To move from this delightful chamber music to a full-scale concerto for the solo instrument was a major step, but one which Šavli accomplished with some assurance. Completed in early 1992, his *Saxophonia* was written for alto and baritone instruments. Again it uses carefully imagined harmonic sounds, especially in the dense textural passage that begins the work out of which the solo instrument emerges. The melodic nature of the saxophone is exploited in various ways that involve clashing with the powerful sounds of the dense tutti. It also includes,

12 In the booklet notes for the CD recording Ed. DSS 200034 (Ljubljana, 2002), p. 8.

however, the interweaving of subtle sounds similar to those of the earlier quartet with a range of unexpected and unusual instruments, including the alto flute, the vibraphone, the ocarina and the tenor recorder. Composed in 1999 towards the end of his studies in the United States, *Devant une neige* for chamber orchestra is a masterly essay in the control of sonority, texture and form. Out of the beautifully imagined chords of the opening emerge fragments of melody which are effortlessly transformed. The nine sections follow each other without a break but are almost effortlessly blended, helped by the subtle movement from harmonic to melodic features and back again. The Piano Concerto of 2001 presents the harmonic/melodic conflict by means of various motives and other note-groupings, but combines this with a brilliant virtuosity for the piano.

Two further composers born in the 1960s are considered here: Larisa Vrhunc (b. 1967) and Urška Pompe (b. 1969). Their music is always adventurous, employing a wide range of avant-garde techniques. They have both worked abroad: Vrhunc studied at the Geneva Conservatory of Music, with Gilbert Amy in Lyon and at various composition courses in France, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Belgium, while Pompe pursued post-graduate studies in Budapest and various composition courses abroad. Both composers emphatically represent the new Slovene generation.

Vrhunc's music is full of delightful surprises, always with something new or interesting to say. Typical of this is the set of six miniatures called *Gratis 0-6* for flute, clarinet and double bass of 1996, brilliant sketches which exploit unorthodox instrumental techniques with beguiling sounds. The rhythmic ingenuities of the second piece are particularly memorable. The third is also notable, in this case for the ingenious way that it produces a single melodic line for most of its length by matching the tone-colour of the last note of one instrument's phrase with the first note of the new instrument. From the same year, the piano trio called *À Kogoj* produces vivid recreations or paraphrases on five of the *Malenkosti* ('Bagatelles') for piano by the Slovene composer, Marij Kogoj (1892-1956). The work gives some indication of the composer's recognition of her heritage, as well as emphasising the very terse and elliptical nature of the original pieces. New works have come in quick succession. *Regen Liebe* creates a musical piece from a spoken text that makes reflections before, during and after the rain. Using sung voices, *Ubi est?* for mixed choir connects with the tradition of well blended choral singing, but introduces into the setting numerous newer choral techniques. It makes a strong link with the past without compromising the forward looking approach that characterises Vrhunc's music. Many of her recent works are for chamber ensembles, a fact that makes performances more likely. A group dating from 1999 and 2000 display a widening of horizons that suggests future developments. Neo-Stravinskian ostinatos and quasi-ostinatos of *Open Rite* recall the rhythmic vitality of the second of the pieces in *Gratis 0-6*. The sextet for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion called *Spirale* ('Spirals') makes very great play with trills and flourishes in a developing way that is hinted at by the subtitle, 'potovanje' (journey). The wind quintet *Celo* ('Even') is subtitled 'looking for perfection, putting pieces (of instruments) together, successfully?'.¹³ The instruments are often matched in tone colours, something that may have been anticipated in the earlier

13 In the booklet for the CD RTV Slovenija 106200 (Ljubljana, 2000), p. 9.

Gratis 0-6. The last of these chamber works has the elaborate title *Satelitov trop nam zvezde kraj oznani – čas hiti* ('A Flock of Satellites Announces the Star's Place - Time Flies') for violin, horn and piano takes its title from the poetry of Slovenia's most famous poet, France Prešeren. Its character comes from the sense of searching for a means of expression: single groups of notes, short flourishes, scatterings of counterpoint, silence.

Urška Pompe's music is precise and detailed, often working in very exact metrical lengths, something that is apparent in the brilliant four-movement *Solo* for cello of 1996. Despite the lack of regular barring or even the absence of barring, it has enormous rhythmic momentum, particularly in the second section marked 'Agitato'. In its procedures and like the music of Larisa Vrhunc, it takes only what it wants from avant-garde techniques. The metrical precision is more obvious in the *Trio – Pogovori* ('Conversations') for horn, trumpet and tuba of 1999, which displays a virtuosic counterpoint of juxtaposed 'incompatible' motifs, of free moving but exactly controlled melodies, and of single pointillist notes. A recent work by Pompe, *Čuječi* for wind quintet of 2001, reinforces the trend of metrical complexity. The title means roughly 'those who listen intently'. Indeed, because of the difficulties of synchronisation and coordination, the work could never be performed by players that did anything else, but as listeners the same criterion applies because the gestures, the correspondences, and the interactions are all so subtle that we could easily miss them or their significance.

This dichotomy between modernist and post-modernist techniques is not clear-cut because there is considerable overlap between the two groups. It is likely that much of the two 'styles' will become the common property of all composers without any philosophical or aesthetic problems arising. What is most important is that there has been a renewed surge of enthusiasm for ensuring that a serious music culture is reinvigorated and grows. Younger composers have been following the solid tradition that had been built up in the 1980s and earlier and will almost certainly follow the works mentioned here with others that are similarly challenging and interesting. With the new opportunities presented by the current situation, there is likely to be a new flourishing of native Slovene musical talent.

POVZETEK

Po 2. svetovni vojni je bila glasba na Slovenskem po svojem stilu večinoma neoklasicistična in pod vplivom ljudske glasbe. Zahvaljujoč potovanjem in študiju v tujini je vedno bolj prihajal do veljave modernizem, ki so ga zlasti podpirali takrat mladi skladatelji, kot so Globokar, Stibilj, Maticič, Ramovš, Jež in Petrič. Kot reakcija je v poznih sedemdesetih letih prišlo do poenostavljene zbirke tehnik, kar danes označujemo s pojmom postmodernizma. Skladatelji, ki so dosegli zrelost v zgodnjih osemdesetih letih, pa so bili postavljeni pred izbiro, da se odločijo za eno ali drugo. Razlikovanje med avantgardo oziroma modernistično držo in postmodernisti je postalo izrazitejše v poznih letih 20. stoletja, pri čemer so med prvimi bili Aldo Kumar (vključujoč glasbo pod določenimi ljudskimi vplivi), Uroš Rojko (zlasti z glasbo, ki uporablja

napredne instrumentalne tehnike), Tomaž Svete (še posebej z operami), Brina Jež-Brezavšček (z glasbo, ki uporablja napredne instrumentalne tehnike) in Bor Turel (vključujoč veliko elektronske in elektro-akustične glasbe), medtem ko druga skupina piše bolj tradicionalno glasbo – Jani Golob, Tomaž Habe, Slavko Šuklar in Marko Mihevc. Ker pa sta obe skladateljski skupini izmenjevali različne kompozicijske tehnike, je razločevanje postalo vedno bolj zabrisano, proces, ki ga je še bolj poudarilo delo mlajše generacije skladateljev, rojenih po 1960. Kljub temu je še vedno zaznati postmodernistične poteze v glasbi Dušana Bavdka, Vitje Avsca, Roka Goloba in Bojane Šaljić, ter modernistične značilnosti pri Nenadu Firštu, Petru Šavliju, Larisi Vrhunc in Urški Pompe. Ta in tak razvoj je pripeljal do raznovrstnih in domiselnih del skladateljev najrazličnejših prepričanj, kar je dober obet za prihodnost slovenske glasbe.