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Referential contexts of early Slovenian symphonic music

Referenčni konteksti zgodnje slovenske simfonične glasbe

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IZVLEČEK

Zgodnja slovenska simfonična glasba Dusíka in Wratnyja kaže, kako glasba vstopa v kompleksno mrežo estetskih referenčnih sistemov. To potrjuje, da njenega pravega referenčnega okvirja ne določajo ozke etnične meje, temveč ga lahko razumemo kot provincialni okrušek širšega kulturnega konteksta.

ABSTRACT

Early Slovenian symphonic music, written by Dusík and Wratny serves as an example how music enters into a complex network of aesthetic referential systems. This confirms that the true referential framework of Slovenian music is not defined by narrow ethnic borders but can be interpreted as a kind of provincial chip of broader cultural context.

Music enters into a complex network of referential systems within a certain aesthetic reality. The unique relation among constantly varied parameters determines its aesthetic paradigm. With each crossing of the boundaries defined by the referential system comes also the establishment of new relations and terms. Such can be confirmed through an examination of some basic musical concepts in the past.

Early Slovenian symphonic music can serve as an example. We will explore the early symphonic works of two composers who were active in the Slovenian territory at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. They both contributed their first works to the treasury of Slovenian symphonic music. The first is František Josef Benedikt Dusík (Cormundi, Herzwelt, 1765 to sometime after 1816). He was a brother of the more famous pianist and composer Jan Ladislav, who was born into a renowned Czech musi-

cal family, as also noted by Charles Burney.¹ The second is Venceslav Wratny (Wenzel, Wenceslao, Václav, Wrattni, Vratny, 1748-1810), who was active as a musician together with Dusík in Gorizia (Gorica), which is at border region of ethnic Slovenes.² In the National and University Library of Ljubljana and in the Historical Archive of the province of Gorizia (*Archivio storico provinciale di Gorizia*) we can find some symphonic works of both composers.³ These compositions present the very beginning of symphonic work in Slovenia: they were composed in this area, conceived for local instrumentalists and intended for a domestic audience. The aim of this paper is to describe the context of the respective performances and their aesthetic frame. In this we are led by a characteristic musicological aim – to search out the meaning and sense of these works during the time of their origin and at the same time by consequence the revelation of their place in our contemporary world.

In light of their broad education and knowledge, both composers directly represented the highest European musical heritage of their time. They came from the impeccably informed musical circles of the Hapsburg Empire as representatives of the valued Czech tradition of refined musical technique and aesthetic.

Since the middle of the 18th century onwards the latter included an almost self-evident knowledge of the theory of affects (*Affektenlehre*), which forms the basis of the every compositional process. Johann Mattheson, as one of the most important advocates of this theory, formulated in his treatise *Das forschende Orchestre* the famous motto: „*Alles was ohne löbliche Affekte geschieht, heißt nichts, gilt nichts, tut nichts.*“⁴

In the 18th century the composers did not want to break the rule after which the composition should be written in one affect only. Athanasius Kircher listed in the year 1650 eight different affects („*Liebe, Traurigkeit, Freude, Wut, Mitleid, Furcht, Mut und Verzweiflung*“) and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurge in the year 1760 already 27 affects.⁵

Affects were defined by musical-rhetorical figures (*Musikalisch-rhetorische Figuren*) that have, according to Amon: „*immer Gestaltqualität und in der Regel eine ausser-musikalischen Bezug*“.⁶ As a specific language of symbols (*Symbolsprache*) they were formed as melodic figures, different kinds of pauses, figures of texture, and even as specific metric patterns. Some distinctive examples in the symphonies of Dusík and Wratny demonstrate an artful usage of those models. So, for example, in the first theme of Dusík's Second Symphony one can find different sorts of repetitive figures, such as *anaphora* (multiple repetition) or *repetitio*. In addition there is a figure of *katabasis* (ascent) and a rhythmically distinct figure of *trocheus*, derived from the *iambus* at the beginning of the second theme and developed in the recapitulation section.⁷ The beginning of the theme in Wratny's symphony is characterized by the ascent of the melody (*katabasis*) followed by a *circulatio* figure etc. Besides that, in both symphonies

¹ Matjaž Barbo, *František Josef Benedikt Dusík: The Biography of an Eighteenth-Century Composer* (Wien: Hollitzer Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011).

² Aleš Nagode, revision to *Missa in A*, by Venceslav Wratny (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 2000): IX-X.

³ Alessandro Arbo, *I fondi musicali dell'Archivio storico provinciale di Gorizia* (Gorica: Provincia di Gorizia, 1994).

⁴ Reinhard Amon, *Lexikon der musikalischen Form: Nachschlagewerk und Fachbuch über Form und Formung der Musik vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Wien: Doblinger in Metzler, 2011), 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Barbo, *František Josef Benedikt Dusík* ...

one can find the composers' distinct processing of a dramaturgical division of musical language after rhetorical models, attributed by Mattheson to a persuasive language of sounds (*Klangrede*).

The craftsmanship of a skilful musical language most probably also represented one of the most important referential frames of the reception of Dusík's and Wrattny's works at the turn of the century. It was a symbol and at the same time a concrete response to the highest achievement of contemporaneous musical creativity, an elaborate Czech version of what was modern, fashionable, "*in trend*". Undoubtedly this was closely related to the notion of the shininess of the Hapsburg court. The transfer of the world of imperial superiority to the level of not only some bourgeois culture but also and foremost to that of a provincial milieu was one of the referential frameworks that essentially determined the reception of the symphonies of both composers.

This reception framework being Ljubljana or Gorizia was at that time not primarily established by a substitution of imperial or aristocratic snobbery with some bourgeois culture. It was more designed as a validation of the local dignitaries, such as the Attems or Codelli nobles in Gorizia or the aristocratic families in Ljubljana.⁸ Through the symphony they actually legitimized their own (perhaps even only virtual) place within the wealthy circles of the world at large; thus also in front of their local audience demonstrated their own culture, raised far above provincial borders alone.

The high social status of composers such as Dusík, who travelled throughout the Hapsburg Empire and was active on all of the various and most valued theatrical stages from Milano to Graz, directly confirms the fact that the true referential framework of Slovenian music was not defined by narrow ethnic borders but for a long time (if not always even till today) was defined by a broader cultural space. It means that Slovenian music did not constitute some totally independent historical path referring only to itself. On the contrary, it always followed the style of Vienna's, Prague's, or Venice's fashion; its development was modelled after the steps already taken in large centres.

This might seem as a kind of a demolition of a national myth about the autochthony of Slovenian culture. This was, after Dragotin Cvetko, self-referentially affirmed in the successive stages of musical styles by means of historical cause-effect relations ("the line of progress", "razvojna linija") between individual events in the closed Slovenian ethnic space, where a compositional idea would activate some other idea, followed then by another and so on.⁹ On the contrary, Slovenian music can be interpreted only as a kind of provincial chip of some broader historical, geographical, or cultural context. The title of this paper thus has to be understood in the sense of a representation of broader connections within which "Slovenian symphonic music" is included.

The same symphonic works of Dusík and Wrattny, which emanate the tempting image of a sophisticated, celebrated event, so dear to the audience of the early 19th century, were at the same time illuminated by the attractive glitter of profane greatness dressed in religious refinement. Undoubtedly, if there would be any trace of the performances

⁸ Alessandro Arbo, *Musici di frontiera: Le attività musicali a Gorizia dal Medioevo al Novecento, Monografie storiche Goriziane* (Gorica: Comune di Gorizia, 1998).

⁹ Gregor Pompe, "Miselna izhodišča Dragotina Cvetka", *De musica disserenda* 8, no. 1 (2012): 45–52. Matjaž Barbo, "Pomen Dragotina Cvetka za razvoj slovenskega glasbenega zgodovinskega", *De musica disserenda* 8, no. 1 (2012): 53–65.

of these works some decades later, a romantic spirit would discover the traces of an aesthetic trance – of a spirit who flies over the material world demanding the conditions of concentrated contemplation.

Pioneer works in the field of symphonic music expose their first place namely in the sense of the autonomy of instrumental music. So are the considered symphonies witnesses of instrumental music as independent of the yoke of vocal or any other determination, and rather as a musical language itself. The latter does not represent only the importance of a musical event as such, but also the sophistication of aesthetic contemplation above all other kinds of contemplation. Seemingly boring religious contemplation is replaced by a tempting profane aesthetic contemplation. Nevertheless, the basic principle remains the same: divine Parnassum is replaced by a sophisticated line of musical creators, the religious texts are substituted by »*Monumenta Artis Musicae*« (or »*Denkmäler der Tonkunst*«), divine commandments are now Adler's »*zuhöchst stehende Gesetze*«, and the temples are transformed into the "houses of art". The apparent autonomy thus degenerates into a new "religious" consecration, which can be understood, interpreted and enjoyed only by chosen admirers. They push away all those, who cannot understand the "high art" and can not speak its language. The former aristocratic elitism is replaced by a cultural elitism that is in no means more human or accessible to all.

Instrumental music – together with the symphony as its highest achievement – became a symbol of the magnificent autonomy of the human spirit. Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* represents the monument of this monument. His and Beecham's colourful orchestrations of Handel's music are an expression of the understanding of the splendour of this instrumental spirit. It is easy to imagine how some of Dusík's or Wratny's symphonies would sound under such an interpretation. By all means they perfectly suit these standards as an expression of the national autonomous spirit and of a Slovenian symphonic style that is a monument of a highest grade.

Without doubt this would activate a reaction to search for a historically authentic interpretation. A necessary condition for this would be (in Dusík's case this has even been realized,¹⁰ a critical source treatment and potential historical-critical edition (*historisch-kritische Ausgabe*,) with critical commentary (*kritische Bericht*,). This would be followed by a true historically "authentic" interpretation of the same symphonies, played on the old instruments, with historically testified instrument tuning and size of orchestra, original tempo, ornamentation, agogic, and appropriate rhetorically founded interpretation. Even thus, the basic idea would be transformed into a metaphorical distance, distinctive even for some Harnoncourt: »*indem er rhetorischen Prinzipien generell anerkennt, ohne sie aber auf einzelne Teile eines Werks zu projizieren*«. ¹¹

Searching for an authentic interpretation of music is actually only an extreme consequence of the metaphysics of absolute music, which conceived its parallel peak with the self-referent structure of some dodecaphonic or serial music. Music does not speak anything else but its own language; it is not related to any metaphysical content, or to the unspeakable transcendence of Wackenroder, or to any data about the time, place,

¹⁰ František Josef Benedikt Dusík, *Simphonia grande in G*, ed. by M. Barbo (Ljubljana: Muzikološki inštitut Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti, 2007).

¹¹ Reinhard Amon, *Lexikon der musikalischen Form* ..., 183.

circumstances of its origin, or to the composer's biographical information, or to any other broader cultural references.

A closed system of a pure structure was yet loosed by the deconstruction of its borders and with an opening of its barriers. On the one hand, this was reached by the demolition of the rigorous organisation of the serial system by the aleatorical rupture of its hermetic structure. On the other hand, the same was achieved by interpretation that declined the pure structural elements of Schenkerian or Fortean analysis and brought back (with a little help of hermeneutics) the broader interpretation of music through Foucault's (musical) practices.

In our case the hermeneutics would bring the interpretation of the *sense and meaning* (*Sinn und Bedeutung*) of Dusík's or Wratny's symphonies through the conditions of the emergence of these works, together with the tradition of *Affektenlehre*, thus getting closer to the idea of the authentic interpretation of music from the past.

The semiotics of music would spread the understanding of the process of the creation of musical meaning from connections to rhetorical models to inner musical elements, as formulated by Kofi Agawu: contrasts, conflicts, musical ideas in sequences, articulation.¹² Ratner would on the other hand try to find the meaning of the harmony and cadences in Dusík's music.¹³

Parallel to that phenomenology would be the search for a "scientifically provable" aesthetic recognition. The understanding of symphonic structure would thus in our case be based on the traces of the pure elements of the phenomenology of sound:

„Das Unhörbare im Hörbaren betrifft einmal den Hintergrund der Stille, von dem alle Tongestalten und Tonfolgen sich abheben. Dieser Hintergrund darf nicht verwechselt werden mit einem bloßen Mangel an akustischen Reizen, er gleicht vielmehr dem Schweigen in der Rede, dem leeren Schreibblatt oder der Leinwand, die sich mit Farbgestalten und Farbkontrasten füllt.“¹⁴

In this sense, Waldenfels can imagine soundscapes (*Klanglandschaften*) of New York as „eine gigantische Alltagskomposition“.¹⁵ This idea reminds us of Stockhausen's famous and at the same time highly and critically rejected definition of the events of 9/11 as the highest achievement of art.

Waldenfels is right in the belief that:

„Musik gleicht [...] der Sprache darin, daß sie als multifunktionales und multivalentes Phänomen auftritt.“¹⁶

Thus his analysis of an "auditory world" (*Hörwelt*) is based on the persuasive concept of "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*). Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether a phenomenological "cleaning up" to the elements of the phenomena does not reduce it to only the essentials, i.e., just that through which "multifunctionality and ambiguity" are defined. Soundscapes (*Klanglandschaften*) of New York cannot be „eine gigantische Alltagskomposition“ without being *understood* as such. Ambiguity has its sense and

¹² V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing With Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹³ Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980).

¹⁴ Bernhard Waldenfels, "Lebenswelt als Hörwelt", *Netzwerk junge Ohren*, 2008 (http://www.jungeohren.com/netzmagazin_beitrag.html?ID=69&ruebrik=7, accessed August 25, 2012), 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

meaning only through the addition(s) of a different single “unambiguity” in the search for different referential relations that define a single sense and meaning. Thus the complex network of relations between meanings, understanding, even *wonder* is weaved. One can also find in seemingly incompatible phenomena surprisingly convincing parallels. So for instance: were not the eager advocates of absolute and programme music of the 19th century led by the same idea of the magnificence of musical expression of the absolute Me (*Ich*)? And could we not compare the principle of the aesthetical valuation of Schubert’s Lieder to the liturgical legitimization of Palestrina’s motets – apparently persuasive but at the same time indefinable. The same is true even for the seemingly firm aesthetics of Boulez’ *Structures*. Our reception and valuation is led by a similar seeking of a pure musical language, recognizable in some unique cultural space and seasoned by a hint of metaphysical dignity.

The logic of a similar vindication of apparently diverse systems enables different interpretations of musical works, as we have seen in the case of Dusík’s and Wratny’s symphonies (this, however, can not be true for instance in the case of some empty virtuosity of a violin etude, or in a dry dance rhythm, or in a trivial march). In the same time, musical works allow a constantly fresh “aesthetic” valuation when such music enables an ambiguous interpretation and a multi-layered understanding, and is opened up into a metaphysical space.

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POVZETEK

Glasba vstopa v kompleksno mrežo referenčnih sistemov z določeno estetsko realnostjo. Enkratno razmerje med stalno spreminjajočimi se parametri določa njeno estetsko paradigmo. Z vsako prekoračitvijo meja, ki jih določa referenčni sistem, se vzpostavijo nova razmerja in odnosi, kot nam kaže raziskava nekaterih temeljnih preteklih glasbenih konceptov.

Za primer si lahko vzamemo zgodnjo slovensko simfonično glasbo. Članek se osredotoča na dva skladatelja, ki sta bila dejavna na Slovenskem konec 18. in na začetku 19. stoletja, F. J. B. Dusík in V. Wratny. Napisala sta nekaj simfoničnih del, ki pomenijo začetek slovenskega simfoničnega ustvarjanja: bila so napisana na tem področju, namenjena tukajšnjim instrumentalistom in namenjena domačemu občinstvu. Članek opisuje kontekst njihovih izvedb ter njihov estetski okvir.

Oba skladatelja sta nedvomno s svojo pojavo, s široko izobrazbo in razgledanostjo s sabo nosila najvišjo dediščino takratne evropske glasbene kulture. Oba sta prihajala iz glasbeno odlično informiranih krogov habsburškega imperija, zlasti kot zastopnika med glasbeniki cenjene češke tradicije obrtno suverenega in zgledega glasbenega stavka. Nekaj izbranih primerov iz njunih

simfoničnih del tako dokazuje umetelno rabo tedaj popularnih glasbeno-retoričnih modelov, ki po Matthesonu zaznamujejo prepričljiv glasbeni jezik (*Klangrede*).

Obrtno spretna glasbena govorica je predstavljala verjetno tudi enega od pomembnih referenčnih okvirjev recepcije del Dusíka in Wratnyja v njunem času. Nedvomno je s tem v korak hodila tudi predstava o bleščavi habsburškega dvora in njegovega privzdignjenosti. Svet dvorne vzvišenosti, prenešen ne le na raven meščanske kulture, temveč tudi pod okrilje provincialnega miljeja, je tisti referenčni okvir, ki je nedvomno določal recepcijo njunih simfoničnih del.

Nedvomno ta recepcijski okvir tedanje Gorice ali Ljubljane ni postavljajal v ospredje kake meščanske plačljive kulture, ki bi nadomeščala snobizem zaprtega aristokratskega oziroma dvornega kroga, temveč je bil bolj namenjen potrditvi lokalnih veljakov. Tako je bil torej pravi referenčni okvir slovenske glasbe zamejen s širšim kulturnim prostorom kot pa ga določajo ozke etnične meje.

To sicer morda navidez ruši razširjen nacionalni mit o avtohtonosti slovenske kulture in z njo glasbe, ki jo lahko v skladu z naslovom interpretiramo kot provincialni okrušek nekih širših zgodovinskih, geografskih oz. kulturnih povezav.