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Neoromantic »Answer« to the Demands of Socialist Realism: Stanojlo Rajičić *Na Liparu* for bass and symphonic orchestra (1951)

Neoromantični »Odgovor« na zahteve socialističnega realizma: Stanojlo Rajičić *Na Liparu* za bas in simfonični orkester (1951)

Ključne besede: srbska glasba, socialistični realizem, moderni/historicistični modernizem, Stanojlo Rajičić, *Na Liparu*, vokalni cikel, Branko Radičević

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IZVLEČEK

Pričujoči prispevek obravnava prvi cikel samospjevov za sopran in orkester v zgodovini srbske glasbe. Dejstvo, da je bil napisan v 50. letih s strani enega najpomembnejših srbskih modernistov v medvojnem obdobju poraja vprašanja, upoštevajoč kontekst v katerem je bil komponiran, verjetne razloge za njegove kompozicije, kot tudi preverjanje njegovih pozicij v kontekstu Rajičićove ustvarjalnosti in srbske povojne glasbe.

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the first cycle for soprano and orchestra in the history of Serbian music. The fact that it was written in 1950 by one of the most prominent Serbian modernist of the interwar period provokes the questions considering the context in which it was composed, the possible reasons for its composition, as well as the reconsideration of its position in the context of Rajičić's output and Serbian postwar music.

This paper is an attempt to clarify some trends in Serbian music of the 50's in respect to specific socio-historical and cultural circumstances of the period. It's starting point is an assumption that, in the context of European music of that time as well as in the context of the development of Serbian music between two wars, some seemingly and unacceptably "regressive" compositional procedures, decisions and products could be understood as different kinds of modernistic breakthroughs in respect to the conventionally imposed procedures by the Serbian artistic music *mainstream*.

It could be argued that turning to solo song genre (with piano or orchestra accompaniment), which heydays were already in Europe a matter of past, as well as choice of the romantic poetry for that purpose, rarely used already in Serbian lied of 30's and 40's, is at least anachronistic. Besides, if that process took place in the work of Stanojlo Rajičić, one of the more radical Serbian authors of the pre-II world war period, than examining the reasons for this kind of choice as well as its consequences turns out to be necessary and their rethinking purposeful for more general surveys of the spirit of one epoch in one culture.

Much has been written of the nature and provenance of the Rajičić's "swerve" and the conclusions were draw that it occurred even before the official cultural policy made its socialist realist's demands clear. Thus, some Rajičić's pieces of the 40's already show obvious signs of "pacification" of his (melodic, harmonic, rhythmical) language, turning to national thematic and folklore, even though their genres are not favorite ones of the socialist realism.¹ However, besides his obvious quest for different solutions in respect to the prewar ones, and besides generally well reception of his works in the years immediately after the war, Rajičić occasionally had problems and had to deal with severe critiques that aimed directly to his competencies as a composer. Since song cycles of the early 50's² were composed after devastating critique of his *IV symphony*,³ they as some other (mostly concert) pieces of this period are, beside the fact that they could be understood as the prolongation of composers' national trend established during the war, the best examples of the Rajičić's stylistic swerve. What are the reasons of this relatively abrupt rupture with the past of radical modernist?

It would be much to easy to attribute all the responsibility for this "new course" taking, to the bad reception of just one piece, especially if we have in mind: a) that the social realism critiques are at least inconsistent in ascribing formalistic traits to the work of art;⁴ b) that already from the beginning of the 50's thanks to the 1948 split with USSR, cultural policy of the FNRJ and Serbia as well was changed and demands for music "understandable for all" weakened. Also, there is the assumption that, again under the public pressure, Rajičić "in spite" (as Peričić writes)⁵ have chosen to exhibit and prove his compositional skills in the realm of a quite elitist genre as is symphonic lied. Some additional autobiographical facts should also be taken in consideration. At that time Rajičić was in his forties, thus entering his artistic and life maturity where youthful rebellious behavior usually fades away. Also, in 1950 composer enter the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and he already held a class of composition at the Belgrade Music Academy. So, his social and institutional position and engagement, as well as his responsibilities as a professor, could hardly come in terms with radical artistic actions. Finally, direct motive for creation of cycle *Na Liparu* was the death of composer's mother to whom he dedicated this piece. If we should further, and only briefly, consider the reasons for Rajičić's change of direction, we must to the above mentioned facts add that the musical language conquered in song cycles and sur-

¹ There is the symphonic poem cycle on the Serbian folk poetry, as well as some songs of 40's. More in: Vlastimir Peričić, *Stvaralački put Stanojla Rajičića*, Univerzitet umetnosti, Beograd, 1978.

² *Četiri pesme Branka Radičevića* (1950, later version with orchestra), *Na Liparu* (1951) i *Lisje žuti* (1953).

³ Cf., Vlastimir Peričić, *Stvaralački...*, op. cit.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

rounding pieces of the 50's was to stay in Rajičić's output for good. Thus, examination of the later works in comparison with works of the 50's shed also a different light to the early works and led to conclusion that whole Rajičić's output could be perceived as neoromantic.

But, now question arises how Rajičić's neoromanticism, exhibited and established in the already mentioned pieces, and most overtly in the cycle *Na Liparu* could be understood in the context of Serbian music of that period? Our assumption is that some of the neoromantic traits of *Na Liparu* could be understood as moderately modernistic/neoromantic "answer" of the composer to the socialist realism's demands made to artistic music. In order to confirm our assumption we must briefly reconsider the general circumstances in Serbian art and culture of the 50's, and then we will try to find out the role of Rajičić's song-cycle in that context. Also, we will try to look into nature of its relation to the socialist realism, the ways it subverts or moves aside from it.

The 50's in Serbian culture, arts and music are predominantly marked by numerous polemics between the exponents of both realism and modernism. Also, polemics were mostly generational ones. In these first years of the break with socialist realism in its worse, older artists stayed "in tune" with it. (Of course, in close relation with literary and visual arts realistic tradition there is a music nationalism of the period between the two wars. In spite of all question that issue of musical realism should arise, for our purpose we will, very roughly, put musical nationalism in the realistic trend of other arts in Serbia.) Younger artists demonstrated their resistance by the means of moderate modernism. Since radical modernist action were already the things of the past, and since those artist were brought up in the atmosphere of war and socialist realism during the years of country's reconstruction and rebuilding, the only possible kind of resistance was (hidden) subversion, rather than the overt destruction of the basis they grew upon. Serbian modernism of the 50's thus, didn't negate its links with tradition and past, was inclined to internationalism and held within itself an academic germ whose development by the end of 50's would result in this art academisation.⁶ Eventually, it created the solid basis for more avant-guard actions of the 60's. These are the reasons why Ješa Denegri marks the art of this period as art of the "postwar late modernism".⁷

Modernist break-troughs in music took place, at first sight paradoxically but for the development of music in Serbia quite understandably, through establishment of different kinds of neo-trends as carriers of new and modernist aspirations in respect to the socialist realism's mainstream that preferred simplified expressive means, specific genres (mass songs and cantatas) and subjects of reconstruction and building and from NOB. Although the above mentioned features of polemics (realism/modernism divide, generational divide) came forth in the best known polemic of 1954,⁸ we must say that the modernist current in Serbian music of the 50's was actually formed in the pieces of then "middle generation" of composers, pre-war avanguardists, members of the "Prague group" – Milan Ristić (1908-1982), Stanojlo Rajičić and Ljubica Marić (1909-2003). In the

⁶ Ješa Denegri: *Teme srpske umetnosti: pedesete*, Novi Sad, Svetovi, 1995.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ The polemic arosed after the concert where the pieces of the students Enriko Josif and Dušan Radić were performed. However, some „older“ composers and writers, like Milenko Živković and Pavle Stefanović, took side of the young artists.

years between 1951 and 1956 with their neoclassical, neoromantic and neoexpressionist pieces they made a definite burst from socialist realism in the realms of subjects, choice of genres and means of music expression. Namely, this process was characteristic by its way of subverting some favorite socialist realism's genres, by its simplicity that is closer to the absolute music than to the simplification that is understandable for "wide audience", by its use of folklore that is moved away from mass and turned to archaic, by its choice of subjects that are in the same time national and international. Moving in the space of "eligible", and let us not forget the then performable, genre and formal solutions they realized modernism that is thanks to its acceptability and generalization apt to academization. Thus, it enters school curricula and becomes reason for resistance of new kind in the music of the 60's.

Moderate nature of the late postwar modernism could be maybe immediately perceived in Rajičić's choice of the poetry for his song cycles of the 50's. Namely, these are not Rajičić's first ever song cycles, but while in between the wars period his musical radicalism was confirmed also in the choice of contemporary poetry dealing with subjects from contemporary life, in 50's composer turns to the classics of Serbian romantic poetry – Branko Radičević and Đura Jakšić, this time showing the respect for the tradition of the Serbian national lied of Marinković-Milojević-Konjović kind. Certainly, even if only partly, with what we deal here is a very "safe" kind of choice, turning to the values that no one should question, so composer would not come in the position to explain and elaborate his choice of the subject.⁹ Also, in the case of *Na Liparu* the possibility of temporary match of personal experiences and sensibilities of two chronologically distant artists should not be excluded, since both in their cycles make a dedication to their late mothers. However, the result is a song cycle set to the Serbian romantic poetry that could be contextualized as a proof of Rajičić's stylistic swerve and reconciliation with the demands of the epoch as well as a proof of typically romantic gateway from reality by the subversion of conventional subject matter. Maybe this Rajičić's choice of poetry could be interpret as a kind of "historicist modernism"¹⁰ in Frisch's sense, where the use of Đura's verses would proclaim a "call to order" and provoke a "healing" effect on, in the sense of thematic subjects, "squalid" Serbian music production.

Maybe it is possible to interpret in the same way Rajičić's choice of genre, only with an additional touch of elitist/academic approach. Rajičić's cycle is the first song cycle in the history of Serbian music with an orchestra accompaniment. Generally speaking, Rajičić's thirst for "filling the gaps" in Serbian music literature with first examples of until then nonexistent genres (e.g. concertos for various instruments) actually reinforces the hypothesis of academic effect and meaning of his modernism. Naturally, in the period between two wars the institutional conditions for the development of this kind of lied hardly existed, and quite frankly speaking, the genre itself rarely provoke the attention of Serbian composers. In some way it turned out to be quite elitist and lied was usually composed by the most prominent and academically oriented Serbian

⁹ However, even the classics like Radičević could come into question, as in the case of earlier Rajičić's song on Branko's verses. This even more confirms the inconsistency of socialist realism's critique. Cf., Vlastimir Peričić, *Stvaralački...*, op. cit.

¹⁰ Cf.: Walter Frisch, *German Modernism. Music and the Arts*, University of California Press, Barkley and Los Angeles, 2005, 138–186.

authors. It could be said that solo song, as a typical romanticist product, in Serbian history of music shares the fate of piano music – it is obligatory part of school curricula, it is usually to be found in the outputs of academic and neoclassical/neoromantic composers¹¹ and as by the rule it is reserved for the expression of the moderately modern trends and not for the radical and avant-garde breakthroughs.

Anyhow, if we focus our attention now to the choice of genre in the era of socialist realism, we must understand Rajičić's decision to turn to symphonic lied as partly (moderately?) subversive, something like: it is vocal-instrumental music, it uses generally known and understandable text, but it is far from being music meant for everybody/anyone. Rajičić ensured the possibility to act from such an elitist position by leaning on the tradition of Serbian lied, especially Konjović's one. For, if it is possible to conceive Jakšić as a "healer" then it is possible to think of Konjović in the same terms in the realm of Serbian music. So, this "return to Konjović" that implies return to the basics of (Slavic) romantic national lied, as well as Rajičić's preparations for the composition of (national) opera, paradoxically at the beginning of the 50's performs a kind of drift from leading aesthetics and provides Rajičić with stable answer to its demands.

But, is that drift sufficient, is that subversion the "real" one, is Rajičić's modernism equally important for the further development of Serbian music as Ristić's or Marić's are? The possible answers to these questions could perhaps be found in the short survey of the means of music expression used in the cycle *Na Liparu*.¹²

The cycle is composed of five songs of various lengths, different moods, characters, tempi and formal solutions. What holds them together is the unique atmosphere of pessimism that comes from Jakšić's verses. So, Rajičić escape from it firstly into the drunkenness (1. song "Pijem") then to love infatuation (3. song "Moja Milka") and finally, in conversation to the late mother (final song "Ponoć") he bitterly complains to life's cruelty and nature of man. Also, the formal plan of the songs in detail follows the form of Jakšić's verses (1 – Jakšić: strophic / Rajičić: ternary song; 2 – Jakšić: couplet / Rajičić: two period; 3 – Jakšić: archaic, rhytmicized octosyllables / Rajičić: developed ternary form abca1; 4 – Jakšić: dialogue / Rajičić: developed song abcba; 5 – Jakšić: free form / Rajičić: introduction, three sections and Coda).

It could be said that Rajičić in typically romantic manner achieves the unity of the cycle through recurrent motives of the folk laments (downward motions, small ambits, minor modes, plagal cadences) and through dramaturgical disposition of the songs that looks like the five movement symphonic cycle. Also, the predominantly syllabic, recitative treatment of the vocal part derived from (in Konjović's tradition) the intonation of the spoken word in the essay of psychologically precise interpretation of the text, as well as the treatment of the orchestra *a tre* that mostly plays the role of the transparent accompaniment, with rare tuttis, and of occasional interpreter of the action and carrier of the some kind of leit-, more precisely reminiscent motif (motif of the "midnight" in the last song with the function to confirm and encircle the free

¹¹ Thus, only consistent solo song composer of the second half of 20th century is Dejan Despić (1930) whose neoclassicism was well established in the 50's. In this light it would be very important to examine the latest piece by Vlastimir Trajković (1946) – *Cinq Melodies* for soprano and orchestra (2005).

¹² For analytical data besides Peričić's book the valuable source is manuscript of the bachelor thesis by Aleksandra Danilović, FMU, Beograd, 1988 largely used in the short analytical survey that follows.

arioso form that is on the edge of operatic monologue) are totally in accord with premises of the national romantic lied. In addition, there are more or less latent, and in the case of one song ("Moja Milka") quite open use of folklore intonation, then some illustrative moments (onomatopoeia of the birds twitter in the falset of the bass in fourth song), as well as prevailing modal scale choices (deriving both from mentioned folklore intonation and from the intonation of the Serbian romantic verses) with only occasional oscillation of the tone centers and few chords, so that romantic, more precisely neoromantic aura of the Rajičić's piece becomes even more evident.

Is it possible then to interpret the neoromantic answer of this strength as an actual drift from socialist realism's demands? Yes, in the measure in which there is a difference between national romanticism and the notions about the music in socialist realism, and bearing in mind the fact that those music nationalists actually were not the thorns in socialist realism sight. However, in the context of later development of Serbian music that, as we have already pointed out, promotes different kinds of neo trends as a modernistic drifts from socialist realism, the course that Rajičić's work takes from song cycles onwards, is possible to mark as some kind of "middle" solution, academic and historicist modernism that, although it doesn't lead the way for further developments of Serbian music as Ristić's, Marić's and later Radić's does, actually realizes as much temporary as stable, as much hermetic as professionally dignified "answer" to the challenges of the moment. Thus, he establishes the criteria of the new mainstream of the Serbian music in 50's, which is to be eventually subverted.

POVZETEK

Izhodišče pričujočega prispevka se zdi domneva, da bi lahko bili v kontekstu evropske glasbe po drugi svetovni vojni kot tudi v kontekstu razvoja srbske glasbe med obema vojnama, nekateri navidezni in nesprejeti »nazadovolni« kompozicijski postopki, odločitve in stvaritve razumljeni kot različne oblike modernističnih prebojev z ozirom na običajno uveljavljene postopke poglavitne srbske glasbeno-umetniške *usmeritve*.

Dokazovanje te predpostavke vodi k bližjemu raziskovanju vokalnega ciklusa *Na Liparu* (1951) Stanojla Rajičića. Ideja, da bi bil ta vokalni cikel lahko razumljen kot specifičen produkt srbskega povojnega zmernega modernizma in ne le kot izključno nazadovolna preokretnica v Rajičićevi karieri, zateva po-

bližji vpogled v okoliščine (splošne in osebne/individualne), ki so vodile skladatelja k njegovi odločitvi. Tako, s pomočjo raziskav posameznih socialno-zgodovinskih, kulturnih in glasbeno-zgodovinskih ter avtobiografskih kontekstov srbske glasbe v petdesetih in Rajičića individualno, pridemo do zaključka, da so ista dejstva, ki bi lahko bila razumljena kot nazadovolna v okviru evropske glasbe omenjenega obdobja, s stališča naprednega razmišljanja, najboljši dokaz blage modernistične pozicije skladatelja v srbskem povojnem kontekstu. Zato, kakorkoli čudno se lahko zdi, je bil visoki neoromantizem Rajičićevega *Na Liparu* eden najbolj verjetnih odgovorov na zahteve socialnega realizma prav v njegovem zanikanju. Kot tak je sčasoma postal točka odklona za nove razdiralne, modernistične preboje v srbski glasbi.