Researching Music in Slovenia: One Hundred Years Later

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ABSTRACT

The article observes distortions of the historiographical narrative about the musical culture of Slovenia in the past, caused by specific circumstances of the formation of the Slovenian nation and the dominance of nationalism. It also outlines the strategies applied by Slovenian musicology since the second half of the twentieth century to escape the grip of nationalistic ideology.

Keywords: history, musicology, Slovenia, nationalism, methodology

IZVLEČEK

Članek opazuje sledove popačitve historiografskega pogleda na glasbeno kulturo današnje Slovenije, ki je bila posledica specifičnih okoliščin izoblikovanja slovenskega naroda in prevlade nacionalistične paradigme. Predstavi tudi strategije in poti, s katerimi je slovenska muzikologija od druge polovice 20. stoletja iskala odmik od nacionalističnega ideološkega okvirja.

Ključne besede: zgodovina, muzikologija, Slovenija, nacionalno gibanje, metodologija
When I was invited to prepare a paper on the challenges of Slovenian musicology one hundred years after the founding of the University of Ljubljana, I was first concerned about the occasion on which we were dealing with this topic. On anniversaries, it is right to look back at the path we have walked and the achievements we have made. However, such commemorative events often turn into (self-)promotional bragging, the purpose of which is far from the search for truth. In it, the positive bias, which – as psychology teaches us – is necessary for survival, usually escapes the reins at an unbridled gallop. Therefore, the first decision was that the paper should not become a kind of festive Facebook selfie. It must try to find a balance between consolidating awareness of the historical significance of achievements and a critique of the errors and deviations on the journey that our profession has undertaken over the last century.

The next dilemma was the one that – unfortunately – still largely determines life and work in Slovenia: the world or home. Should I focus my attention on global musicology, that is, on the challenges of Slovenian musicology in the modern, rapidly changing globalised world, of which we are increasingly a part and which, of course, concerns us, too? Or should I concentrate on the local setting and its specific professional problems, conditioned by the unusual geographical, social, economic and cultural conditions in which the Slovenian nation has developed and lives today? I decided on introspection, which will try to answer the question as to why, in modern Slovenia, we still have to ask ourselves about two musicologies: domestic musicology and global musicology.

The last dilemma that arose was whether I should deal with the past, present or future. Should I list the basic knowledge of the ups and downs of Slovenian musicology in the past decades? Should I try to outline its condition and hardships in the present? Or should I perhaps draw a visionary plan for its development in the future? The solution was clear. As a confident historian, I will try to talk about the present and the future by dealing with the past. I will try to remember where we come from, what we can use as a valuable endowment, as well as what we must discard as a dead weight that hinders us on the way to a fuller understanding of the Slovenian part of world music culture. I will try to assess what we can be proud of and what we should be ashamed of. I will try to think about how to proceed in order to give the taxpayers who pay us every month the best of what they do not even know they need.

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In 1919, less than a year after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the annexation of the territory of Carniola, Southern Styria and Prekmurje to the new Yugoslav state, the first university with Slovenian as the language of instruction was founded in Ljubljana. This event does not seem to have any special significance for the development of Slovenian musicology.
The new university had no faculty, department or chair dedicated to any of the branches of music research. One might therefore think that in observing the development of Slovenian musicology, it would be more appropriate to emphasise the year 1920, when the music school of the Music Society (Glasbena matica) was elevated to the Conservatory, thus becoming the starting point of tertiary music education in Slovenia.\(^1\) Or perhaps the year 1939, when the Conservatory was transformed into the first academy of music in today’s Slovenian territory.\(^2\) Music theory and music history were taught at both institutions, so this was also the beginning of higher education lectures in musicology.\(^3\) At the Faculty of Arts of the new university, art historians Josip Mantuani and Stanko Vurnik pointed out the need to establish a department dedicated to researching the history of music, music theory and music aesthetics. However, the efforts went no further than the additional C study direction, which came to life for a short time only in the war year of 1942.\(^4\)

In its beginnings, Slovenian musicology was largely divided between two poles, to which the institutional position also corresponded. On the one hand, there was the science of composition, that is, the theory of music, which observed music primarily from the point of view of the composer and was placed in the academic environment with several subjects at the Academy of Music. On the other hand, there was musical aesthetics, which was the science of reflection and evaluation from the point of view of the listener and had its focus at the Faculty of Arts. Music history was a kind of mediator between the two (since everything we can know is already a thing of the past). In observation of the music of the past, the results were rarely obtained in Slovenia by scientific methods and presented in relevant scientific publications. Efforts to treat the history of music scientifically were most often viewed as nit-picking of a few foreign-educated musicologists. In the scope outlined by Guido Adler in *Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft* (1885), musicology did not exist in Slovenia until the end of World War II.

The relationship between the two lines of music research was often determined by the education of researchers. If we compare the education and work of the first Slovenian musicologists of the twentieth century, we get surprising results. Despite the severe shortage of educated musicologists, both of the figures who gained doctorates in musicology in Vienna, who were – or at least could have been – in a position to know and implement the science of music in its entirety, devoted themself primarily to practical musical activity. Josip Čerin

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worked mainly as a conductor, while Anton Dolinar was a choirmaster and publicist. After studying composition with Alois Hába and musicology with Zdeněk Nejedly in Prague, the almost perfectly educated Radoslav Hrovatin devoted himself mainly to the research of Slovenian folk music.

Most of the original musicological research was thus contributed by experts who had an education in another humanities profession. Joseph Mantuani was a lawyer, art historian and archaeologist. He performed the most important part of his musicological work in his early Viennese period, mainly by publishing the collected works of Jacobus Gallus in the collection *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich.* Stanko Vurnik was also an art historian. In addition to his scientific and professional work in this field, he focused mainly on the aesthetics of music and music criticism. Although his writings attracted a great deal of attention from his contemporaries, he left few traces in Slovenian musicology. Davorin Beranič, who was a classical philologist, dealt mainly with musical ethnography, as did his professional colleague Marko Bajuk. The Italianist Stanko Škerlj and the Germanist Dušan Ludvik also touched on musical history topics with their research of Italian and German theatre in Ljubljana.

More or less prominent composers and practical musicians also researched the musical past. Outstanding among them were lawyer and trained musician Vilko Ukmar, priest and cathedral regens chori Stanko Premrl, who collected a wealth of information about Slovenian church music and its creators, and composer Lucijan Marija Škerjanc, who wrote several important theoretical and biographical works. Composer Slavko Osterc briefly touched on music history with his scripts for lectures at the conservatory. France Marolt was a musical practitioner with an unsystematic musical education, who rose to become a leading Slovenian ethnomusicologist in the middle of the century.

Until the end of World War II, the scientific pursuit of music history consisted primarily of gathering information about the musical past. It took place rather unsystematically and often with more will than professional skills. The texts that emerged were rarely based on research and appropriate critical appraisal of primary sources. Possible syntheses and tertiary literature (e.g.,

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5 Ibid., 37–69.
6 Ibid., 72.
11 Slavko Osterc, tipkopis, [S. l.]: [s. a.], [1933].
articles in the *Slovenian Biographical Lexicon*\(^{12}\) were mostly based on newspaper articles, obituaries, oral tradition, personal inquiries, etc. Among them are exceptions, which are still indispensable today for the observation of certain areas and personalities. These include Škerjanc’s monographs on Emil Adamič, Gojmir Krek and Jurij Mihevec,\(^ {13}\) Škerlj’s works on Italian theatre, etc. These rare cases, however, did not have much impact on the general level of writing about music. The journalism and music publishing of the time reflect the weak musicological education of authors and editors, especially concerning older historical periods. A good example is an edition of the Music Society (Glasbena matica) publishing house from 1930 that presents two motets by Jacobus Gallus and is entitled: *Two Madrigals*.\(^ {14}\) The profession had no institutional support, with the exception of the establishment of the Folklore Institute in 1934, which emerged from the efforts of the Music Society.

After the Second World War, the development of Slovenian musicology was determined by Dragotin Cvetko.\(^ {15}\) Although he, too, began his academic career in another field – he was an expert in music pedagogy – his life work reveals a strong focus on establishing musicology in Slovenia as an integral part of the humanities. He began with the establishment of a scientific department at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana (1945), and by the end of the 1950s he had written a monumental synthetic review of the musical history of the Slovenian territory, which was unprecedented in Slovenian cultural history. At an astonishing pace, he published a series of monographs on individual historical periods of Slovenian music history, important composers and institutions. Last but not least, he began to present Slovenian musicology on a global level at scientific meetings and with articles in high-profile foreign journals, proceedings and other scientific publications.\(^ {16}\)

Cvetko also began to nurture a new generation of excellent young musicologists, who in the following decades carried out his ambitious plan for the institutional consolidation of the profession. One step in this process was the relocation of the Department of Musicology to the Faculty of Arts of the

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\(^{12}\) *Slovenski biografski leksikon* (Ljubljana, 1925–1991).

\(^{13}\) Lucijan M. Škerjanc, *Življenje in delo slovenskega skladatelja* (Ljubljana, 1937); Škerjanc, Gregor Gojmir Krek kot skladatelj (Ljubljana, 1943); Škerjanc, Jurij Mihevec: slovenski skladatelj in pianist (Ljubljana, 1957).


University of Ljubljana, thus finally realising the plan of Josip Mantuani from the first years of the existence of this institution. The move opened up opportunities for doctoral studies in musicology, which had not been possible at the Academy of Music, as well as facilitating interdisciplinary connections with other disciplines at the Faculty of Arts. The new Department of Musicology made an important contribution to strengthening the staffing of this science and its integration into the wider music culture. Its graduates and doctoral students continued their scientific and professional work as pedagogues in tertiary (Academy of Music in Ljubljana, Faculty of Education in Ljubljana and Maribor) and secondary general and professional education, as administrators of special music libraries and collections of cultural heritage related to music, as editors of radio and television programmes of RTV Ljubljana, as heads and employees of programme departments of cultural institutions dealing with performing music, as consultants and clerks for music in state and local administrative and governmental bodies, as well as elsewhere. In 1980, the Institute of Musicology was established within the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It focuses exclusively on research into the history of music in Slovenia, thus opening up opportunities for more extensive and time-consuming research.

The new institutional and staffing basis yielded obvious results. One by one, scientific texts filled the large gaps in our knowledge of the development of music culture in Slovenia. This knowledge was also appropriately represented in major world and Yugoslav lexicographic and bibliographic projects, such as The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, the encyclopaedia Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, the Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM), the Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale (RILM), etc. The first Slovenian music monument collection, Monumenta artis musicae Sloveniae, began to be published, and the compilation of a Slovenian music terminology dictionary was initiated.

The work continued until the beginning of the 1990s, which brought an important landmark in the development of Slovenian musicology. On the one hand, the turning point was caused by the political, economic and cultural upheaval of the time, which completely changed the circumstances of life, research and cultural activities in Slovenia. The explosive events coincided with a change of generations in Slovenian musicology, which took place in the mid-1990s. However, the new situation highlighted the key weaknesses of Slovenian musicology.

At the end of the twentieth century, Slovenian musicology was confronted with the legacy of its formation and development in the past century and a half. As was the case elsewhere in Europe, it was an expression of scientific interest in musical works of art, fuelled by the fascination of the upper social classes with music, often referred to as Kunstreligion. For many decades, their
interest was limited to the great monuments of music, which were elevated to the canon of the greatest achievements of human creativity.

On the other hand, the direction of musicology was influenced by the nationalist ideology that had grown out of the revolutionary movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and had anchored itself in the consciousness of Europeans of all classes to such an extent that its assumptions became a kind of self-evident fact. This ideology also determined observation of the art of music throughout Europe. However, although the nationalist bias was certainly present, scientific interest was still focused exclusively on important works of art; nationalism merely exaggerated the importance of those who belonged to the observer’s own national tradition. The dominant social groups of major European countries were able to hijack the identity and traditional symbolic toolbox of premodern political formations and apply them to the new nation states. The music of the French court thus smoothly became French national music, and the musical culture of the multiethnic aristocracy of the Habsburg monarchy became the basis for the tourist-promotional product “Musikland Österreich”.

In Slovenia, this process unfolded differently. The attempts of Slovenian-speaking Austrians in the middle of the nineteenth century to form a comparable symbolic and cultural-cohesive toolbox of the new nation on the basis of actual historical symbols and cultural elements failed repeatedly. They wanted to unite the parts of the historical lands lying on the southern edge of Austria, but each of these regions had its own historical identity, and they were connected only by the fact that part of their population used Slavic dialects for communication in everyday life. When Slovenian scholars – under political pressure and out of personal enthusiasm – frantically searched for traces of authentic Slovenian national culture, they came across traits that did not differ in any way from the culture of the German- or Italian-speaking inhabitants of the same lands.

On the other hand, the territory of the new nation, so optimistically delineated by Peter Kosler on his map of 1852 (unpublished until 1861), was only the fringe of a larger historical political unit known as Austria (Erbländer) and having its centre in Vienna. In this way, the cultural hinterland was cut off not only from its metropolitan centre, but also from most of the provincial centres (Graz, Klagenfurt, Trieste) that had been a source of higher culture and education for centuries. Any attempt to shape national culture under these assumptions was destined to end in a completely distorted cultural stratigraphy.

The main task of Slovenian music journalism and music historiography was to fill the gap between the historical reality and the nationalist reality. In their beginnings in the nineteenth century, they established the ideal of “Slovenian national music”, which promoted almost exclusively vocal music with lyrics in Slovenian, music that was popular in character and mostly totally lacking any
aesthetic value. Stylistic analysis quickly shows that this music does not differ significantly from music of similar functional musical genres (church music, choral music, dance music) in other parts of Austria. The same applies to the art music of Slovenian composers of that period, who differ from similar creations in the wider Middle-European area only in the language of the text used (e.g., solo songs) or by relying on well-known melodies of local “Slovenian national music”. All attempts to give music of more demanding genres (e.g., instrumental or theatre music) a more pronounced “Slovenian” musical character typically ended with the introduction of harmonic progressions and rhythmic patterns taken from other “Slavic” musical cultures. Despite the fact that compositions containing these musical elements would have sounded very exotic to the average Slovenian listener, their authors were nonetheless celebrated as creators of authentic “Slovenian national music”.

From the very beginning, the research of music in Slovenia took place in the grip of this hopeless cultural and political task, which few researchers managed to escape. In the intensified political and ideological upheavals that engulfed the territory of today’s Slovenia in the twentieth century, there was even less room for ideologically unencumbered music research. In the strained interethnic relations of the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to doubt nationalist ideology was no less than national treason. The Great War was followed by a deepening of the nationalist rampage, which was reflected differently in different parts of “Slovenia”, located between three states. In the Yugoslav and Italian parts, attempts were made to annihilate the cultural heritage of the Austrian past. This included cultural genocide: in the Yugoslav part on the German-speaking population, in the Italian part on the German- and Slovenian-speaking population. Something similar happened to the Slovenian-speaking population in the Austrian part. Attempts at Yugoslav unitarism were hampered only by the firm nationalist stance of the Slovenian right-wing party, who dominated Slovenian politics.

During this time, a nationalistically biased “interpretation model” was formed in Slovenian musicology. Most twentieth-century Slovenian musicological literature is based on this model, and due to a certain epistemological inertia, it still occasionally influences contemporary musicological literature on the history of Slovenian music. It is essentially based on the Blut und Boden ideology, which was widely established in Central Europe. The “Slovenianness” of Slovenian music is supposed to derive from the ancestral (Blut) and cultural (Boden) connection of its creators with the Slovenian nation. This connection is so mystical, deep and innate that it does not allow or require more detailed rational justification. Due to its unfoundedness, it is impossible to refute. At the same time, it opens up a wide field for the completely arbitrary inclusion of historical figures, institutions, creations and events in the historical narrative.
The consequences for the history of music in Slovenia are profound. As a rule, outlines of “Slovenian” music history include periods in which the object that defines them – i.e., “Slovenianness” or the Slovenian nation – did not even exist. They tacitly ignore the fact that other population groups with their own identities existed in this territory during the periods under consideration, e.g., the Carantans, Carniolans, Styrians, etc., later forming the provincial identities of the historical lands.

Another important tool of nationalist historiography is the distinctly arbitrary selection of the individuals, ensembles and institutions of musical life in the observed territory that deserve inclusion in the historical narrative about “Slovenian music”. Thus, on the one hand, the central figures of Slovenian music include many immigrant musicians who only superficially integrated into Slovenian culture (e.g., Gašper Mašek, Anton Foerster), while, on the other hand, those who did not join the Slovenian nationalist movement (e.g., Hans Gerstner) are selectively excluded. Among those born in Slovenia, some who never learned to write Slovenian properly due to their secondary education in German are acceptable (e.g., Risto Savin), while others are not for this very reason (e.g., Hugo Wolf). Some are expelled from the national canon (e.g., Franc Pollini) due to their efforts to succeed in major music centres abroad, while others are not (e.g., Josip Ipavec). The situation is similar with institutions. The Academia philharmonicorum is an important milestone in the history of Slovenian music, but the Philharmonische Gesellschaft is not, despite the fact that the members of both institutions used Slovenian to the same extent as the enthusiastic supporters of the Slovenian nationalistic movement who visited the events of the Narodna čitalnica (Slovenian National Reading Room) in Ljubljana. The latter was characterised in 1870 by the satirical newspaper Brencelj (Horsefly) as: “Reading Room. A meeting place of uncivility, boors, upstarts and Slovenian nationalistic zealots. On top of that, a place where German is especially spoken.”

The self-evident nature of nationalist optics did not change even after World War II. In the humanities, the Soviet model of ethnographic orientation prevailed for some time, providing an excellent basis for the development of cultural-historical sciences, including musicology. The declared adherence to historical materialism did not obscure the prevalence of nationalism, which gained further institutional support in academies of science and arts and in the ranks of Slovenian intellectuals of all political orientations.

The first step away from nationalistic music historiography was made by Dragotin Cvetko. In his works, his narrative is still anachronistically limited by the borders of the modern Slovenian state, and the musicians and institutions mentioned are divided into the categories “Slovenian”, “German” and “Italian”,

17 Jakob Alešovec, *Brencelj v koledarjevi obleki* (Ljubljana, 1870), 66.
which were non-existent in their time. The story of “Slovenian music” is still in the centre of his interest, but it is nevertheless supplemented with information about many hitherto overlooked musicians and institutions. Musicologists from the ranks of Cvetko’s students, such as Jože Sivec, Andrej Rijavec, Janez Höfler and Jurij Snoj, applied the same methodology in their studies of special topics or narrower historical reviews.

The nationalist historiography of the twentieth century is the greatest burden that Slovenian musicology has been trying to cast aside over the last two decades. Attention has increasingly shifted to exploring those musicians and institutions that remained on the fringes of interest in the twentieth century. New insights have been contributed by many researchers, such as Metoda Kokole, Matjaž Barbo, Leon Stefanija, Gregor Pompe, Jernej Weiss, Maruša Zupančič, Katarina Šter and many others. In the coming years, musicology will have to continue this effort to observe the musical past of the territory of today’s Slovenia as objectively and comprehensively as possible. In so doing, it will have to build on the groundbreaking achievements of other humanities, especially historiography. It will have to start observing historical phenomena in their own historical context. This will necessarily require expanding the perspective to political-economic-information hubs beyond national borders and a different acceptance of the diglossic character of this territory over the past centuries. Musicology will have to write new music histories with colleagues from neighbouring countries, e.g., individual Austrian historical lands, Venetian Istria, individual dioceses, religious provinces, Austrian military music, etc.

The history of music of the Slovenian national movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be only one segment – and perhaps not the most important and influential segment – in this spectrum. In so doing, we will have to be aware of the specific position of the territory of today’s Slovenia in individual time periods, its connection with respective political-economic-information centres, the coexistence of intertwined linguistic communities and identities, etc. Only in this way will we be able to put the shallow politically motivated utilitarian historiography of the past behind us, and slowly achieve a deeper understanding of the musical culture in this part of Europe. A territory located at one of the crossroads of Europe, devoid of big centres, but not very far from the sources of knowledge and markets for human skill and ingenuity. Only in this way will we be able to find out how it became, as Kurt Blaukopf said, “Provinz mit Niveau”.  

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POVZETEK

**Raziskovanje glasbe na Slovenskem – sto let pozneje**

Pred sto leti je bila v Ljubljani ustanovljena univerza, s čimer je bil storjen ključen korak k dokončanju večdesetletnih prizadevanj za vzpostavitev stratigrafsko celovite nacionalne kulture na ozemlju slovensko govorčene Avstrije. Čeprav na novi ustanovi ni bilo katedre za raziskovanje glasbe in je ta veja znanosti še vedno ostajala brez institucionalne podlage za svoj razvoj, je prav ta, najzgodnejši čas oblikovanja slovenske humanistike postavil temelje, na katerih se je muzikologija začela razvijati desetletja zatem.

Vse do danes je bila zaznamovana s številnimi notranjimi in zunanjimi vzgibi, ki so onemogočali uravnotežen in avtonomen razvoj. V času med obema vojnama je bil ključen
nacionalizem, ki je bil skupen tako klerikalnemu kot liberalnemu političnemu taboru in ki je prinesel predvsem protiavstrijsko in protinemško usmerjanje glasbene zgodovine. Njegovo delo je v času po drugi svetovni vojni nadaljeval nacionalno-socialistični diskurz, ki se je lepo prilegal nenavadni kulturni stratigrafiji slovenskega ozemlja v preteklih stoletjih in grozil, da bo izrinil v ozadje zanimanje za glasbeno kulturo preteklih družbenih elit.

Čeprav se je začela slovenska muzikologija že v sedemdesetih letih izvijati iz primeža nacionalistične ideologije, je še vedno zaznamovana z dediščino prejšnjega stoletja. Obračun z njo je naloga, s katero se ukvarja zadnji dve desetletji in jo bo morala dokončati v prihodnosti. Pri tem se bo morala opreti na ideje in metodološke rešitve, ki so jih razvile druge humanistične znanosti. Hkrati pa mora biti pozorna na znamenja časov. Ti včasih grozijo s ponavljanjem starih napak, včasih pa prinašajo nove ideološke aksiome, ki bodo zastrirali objektivni pogled na glasbeno kulturo Slovenije v preteklosti.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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O AVTORJU