

Danijela Špirić Beard and Ljerka V. Rasmussen, eds.

*Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music*

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*Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music* (edited by Danijela Špirić Beard and Ljerka Rasmussen) is a fascinating study of how popular music developed in post-World War II Yugoslavia, eventually reaching both unsurpassable popularity in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and critical acclaim in the West. Through the comprehensive discussion of all popular music trends in Yugoslavia – commercial pop (*zabavna*-pop), rock, punk, new wave, disco, folk (*narodna*), and neofolk (*novokomponovana*) – across all six socialist Yugoslav republics, the reader is given the engrossing socio-cultural and political history of the country, providing the audience with a much-needed and riveting context for understanding the formation and the eventual demise of Tito's Yugoslavia. As such, the book will appeal to the general and scholarly audience interested in the topics of Yugoslav culture, Cold War music studies, popular music, history and politics of Yugoslavia, music and nationalism, music and communism, music festivals as cultural diplomacy, and music and socialism, among many other subtopics. The book will hold a special place with “Yugoslavs” who still hold the image of Yugoslavia as an ideal, a phenomenon the authors refer to as Yugonostalgia – “a bittersweet yearning for the Yugoslav socialist past, and its utopian projection onto the unsatisfying present, following the conflicts of the 1990s and the unsteady transition from the socialist to a capitalist world” (p. 6).

As Beard and Rasmussen observe, the studies of popular music in Yugoslavia only emerged in post-Yugoslav era; that is, the scholarly community has largely ignored popular music as a legitimate field of study during the country's existence (p. 7). While there has been a recent resurgence in the scholarly interest of popular music in Yugoslavia, those books tend to address only specific regions, genres, or artists.<sup>1</sup> As such, *Made in Yugoslavia* is the first comprehensive

1 For instance, see Catherine Baker, *Sounds of the Borderland: Popular Music, War and Nationalism in Croatia Since 1991* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Uroš Čvoro, *Turbo-folk Music and Cultural Representations of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia* (London: Routledge, 2014); Lada Duraković and Andrea Matošević, eds., *Socijalizam na klupi: Jugoslavensko društvo očima postjugoslavenske humanistike* (Pula and Zagreb: Srednja Europa, CKPIS, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, and Sa(n)jam knjige u Istri, 2013); Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik, eds., *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2010); Dušan Vesić, *Magi – Kao da je bila nekad* (Belgrade: Laguna, 2018) and *Bunt dece socijalizma* (Belgrade: Laguna, 2020); Aleksandar Žikić, *Fatalni ringišpil: Hronika beogradskog rokenrola 1959–1979* (Belgrade: Geopoetika, 1999).

and full-length book rooted in ethnography, historiography, and analysis that takes a “pan-national approach” to examining the “cross-regional connections of popular music” in socialist Yugoslavia from the 1950s<sup>2</sup> through to 1990s (p. 8). Thus, one of the main objectives of the book is to bring to focus a long overdue scholarly study on Yugoslav dynamic and diverse popular music, and the impact on its considerable cultural legacy beyond the individual ethnonational perspectives of the successor states, which has not been addressed previously. Further, this book provides a valuable critical assessment of the socio-cultural impact of popular music in socialist Yugoslavia – its local artists and scenes and their pan-national impact – and examines Yugoslav popular music within its post-socialist context.

*Made in Yugoslavia* is divided into four parts: I. *Zabavna*-pop; II. Rock, Punk, and New Wave; III. *Narodna* (Folk) and Neofolk Music; and IV. The Politics of Popular Music Under Socialism. Preceding the first part is a Preface and an Introduction by the editors, Beard and Rasmussen, which present the overarching themes of the book and explain the need and purpose of this volume, as discussed above. Following Part IV, the book also contains a Coda (by Catherine Baker), which situates Yugoslav popular music within the contexts of global histories of the Cold War, and an Afterword section, which features an interview (by Vesna Zaimović) with Goran Bregović – Yugoslavia’s most internationally renowned musician and composer. Each of the four principal parts contains a contextualizing introduction by the editors, providing an overview of each sections’ main arguments and organization.

As a collection, the four sections address main popular musical genres and local scenes in Yugoslavia on equal terms and across all six post-Yugoslav wars republican borders. While the music-making in all six republics is examined in the book, the discussion of the music scene is brief and the book misses an opportunity to shine a light on popular music culture in Kosovo – a rather unique disputed territory south of Serbia, a partially-recognized state whose popular music scene remains mainly overlooked in scholarly works. Despite this small caveat, the book is a wealth of information on a rich diversity of topics and methodologies, with authors ranging from academics and music journalists to music artists, from all different regions of former Yugoslavia. Just to name a few, some of the topics and subtopics that emerge within the volume’s twenty chapters are: a feminist re-evaluation of a neofolk Yugoslav (and Balkan) mega-star, Lepa Brena; the phenomenon of the band Bijelo Dugme

2 Even though Beard and Rasmussen specify that the book is a study of popular music in Yugoslavia from 1950 through the late 1980s, I would argue that the 1950s are not explored in as much detail as the music of the other decades, likely due to the fact that Yugoslav pop music scene did not develop its identifying voice during this decade, but rather copied and adopted popular Western European genres, such as Italian *canzone*, French *chanson*, German *schlager*, Russian *romansa*, and American crooners.

and its pioneering “shepherd rock” – a unique blend of Western hard rock and recognizable Yugoslav folk patterns; the importance of visual avant-garde and modernist art on the album covers during the explosion of Yugoslav new wave in the early 1980s; the aesthetic of the 1980s music videos and their impact on reception of popular music in Yugoslavia; music festivals and its impact on region’s tourism; and music and politics, such as an interrogation of rock music as a reaction against and support for Yugoslav socialist message, and the duality and complexity of understanding Yugoslav politics with the propagated message of unity and self-governance, against the rising nationalism and desire not to be governed by a central authority. Thus, the authors in this collection directly confront and dissect intricate questions of artistic freedom, government control, and nationalism in socialist Yugoslavia.

Part I, *Zabavna*-pop, as collective, examines the institutional and aesthetic foundations for the development and rise of Yugoslav mainstream popular (*zabavna*) music, and how it intersected with other popular music genres. This section comprises four chapters: “Networking *Zabavna Muzika*: Singers, Festivals, and *Estrada*” by Jelena Arnautović; “Melodies from the Adriatic’: Mediterranean Influence in *Zabavna* Music Festivals of the 1950s and 1960s” by Anita Buhin; “The Sarajevo Pop-Rock Scene: Music from Yugoslav Crossroads” by Zaimović; and “Yugoslav Film and Popular Culture: Arsen Dedić’s Songs in Films” by Irena Paulus. This section poses perhaps the most intriguing question in the book: how could Yugoslavia, a communist state, create such a robust, dynamic, and thriving commercial music industry and embrace Western market principles, when such an approach was in opposition with the communist ideology and state socialism (p. 13)? These opening four chapters begin the process of answering this perplexing phenomenon – Yugoslavia’s unique position as the only communist Eastern European country not to be a part of the Eastern Bloc with its unsovereign status as a self-managed socialist country allowed and enabled its openness, receptiveness to, and adaptation of the cultural and social events of the Western countries into its own.

Part II, Rock, Punk, New Wave, raises an even more thought-provoking question: how did rock, and especially punk and new wave music genres, which arose as a reaction against the government systems across the West, explode in Yugoslavia as state-sponsored genres of music? The rise in popularity of punk and new wave in Yugoslavia, with its fresh and original experimental expression, were critically acclaimed even in the West,<sup>3</sup> and Jugoton became the largest East European recording label outside the USSR (p. 75). Consequently,

3 For instance, a rock journalist Chris Bohn for *NME* reviewed the album *Paket aranžman* (1981) – a new wave compilation album featuring three bands from Belgrade: Šarlo akrobata, Električni orgazam, and Idoli. Considered to be one of the most important, innovative, and influential records produced by Jugoton in Yugoslavia, Bohn praised the album’s originality and commended its social critique. Chris Bohn, “Other Voices,” *NME* (8 August 1981), 28.

it was a state-sponsored label Jugoton, which embraced new wave artists, that played a crucial and direct role in propelling the genre into the mainstream. Thanks to the exceptionally vigorous journalism on popular music and culture produced in Yugoslavia, the authors in this section create a fascinating historiography of popular music. Section II features five exceptional chapters: “Belgrade Rock Experience: From Sixties Innocence to Eighties Relevance” by Aleksandar Žikić; “Jugoton: From State Recording Giant to Alternative Producer of Yugoslav New Wave” by Branko Kostelnik; “Absolutely Yours’: Yugoslav Disco Under Late Socialism” by Marko Zubak; “The Aesthetics of Music Videos in Yugoslav Rock Music: Josipa Lisac, EKV, Rambo Amadeus” by Ivana Medić; and “Bijelo Dugme: The Politics of Remembrance Within the Post-Yugoslav Popular Music Scene” by Ana Petrov. In addition to the fascinating topics featured in each of these chapters, it is particularly noteworthy that the authors examine the themes previously overlooked by scholars. For instance, Medić illustrates how music videos in Yugoslavia progressed from “simple black-and-white clips with limited narrative” of the 1960s and 1970s to “experimental short films that offered layers of musical meanings and challenged audience reception of pop-rock music” in the 1980s (p. 108). Petrov offers a critical analysis of the importance of Bijelo dugme’s aesthetic of combining Western hard rock with folk motives in creating a unique Yugoslav sound that was no longer a derivative of Anglo-American aesthetic but rather “an authentic local response” to rock (p. 111). Zubak’s chapter is significant in that it presents a scholarly analysis of disco music, a genre that has been generally overlooked not only by Yugoslav scholars, but music academics, in general. Anticipating the book’s wide appeal to the readership outside of the region, Kostelnik includes a “Punk and New Wave Essential Albums” list (pp. 81–84), which is an invaluable resource for anyone wishing to further explore and listen to the remarkable music made in Yugoslavia during the 1980s.

Part III, *Narodna* (Folk) and Neofolk Music, provides a provocative analysis of identity politics of popular music in Yugoslavia. Namely, as the political divisiveness between Serbs and Croats grew in the 1980s (following Tito’s death in 1980), which ultimately resulted in a civil war, the political and ideological clash was also reflected in the regions’ music division of folk versus pop/rock, or as the editors put it, “the alleged clash between Eastern (Ottoman) and Western (European) civilizations” (p. 121). That is, by the late 1980s, as the fight for republics’ independence from Serbia’s stronghold strengthened, neofolk music became largely associated with the rising tide of Serbian nationalism, whereas Croatia’s link to and continued acceptance of Western pop culture (rock, punk, and new wave music genres) stood in direct opposition to Serbia’s neofolk and thus Serbia’s nationalism. Serfimovska further explores how Macedonian musical nationalism was fostered in the context of socialist Yugoslavia by connecting it to a Slavic political history, to create a uniquely Macedonian cultural

association (p. 43). Thus, this section illustrates how Yugoslav republics used music as a tool to form their political and cultural identity amid the rise in nationalism. These topics unfold in four extraordinary chapters: “*Starogradska muzika: An Ethnography of Musical Nostalgia*” by Marija Dumnić Vilotijević; “‘My Juga, My Dearest Flower’: The Yugoslav Legacy of Newly Composed Folk Music Revisited” by Iva Nenić; “Music in Macedonia: At the Source of Yugoslavia’s Balkans” by Velika Stojkova Serafimovska; and “Fantasy, Sexuality, and Yugoslavism in Lepa Brena’s Music” by Zlatan Delić.

Part IV, *The Politics of Popular Music Under Socialism*, offers an “insider understanding” of Yugoslav music and politics (p. 163). The authors in this section address the difficult questions of national politics, identity, political control, and the “complex challenges they posed within the socialist system” (p. 163), and it is through these compelling chapters on music and politics that the reader will also understand the fall and disintegration of Yugoslavia following the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. This section features five outstanding chapters: “Yugoslavia in the Eurovision Song Contest” by Dean Vuletić; “‘Rocking the Party Line’: The Yugoslav Festival of Patriotic and Revolutionary Song and the Polemics of ‘Soc-Pop’ in the 1970s” by Beard; “‘Comrades, We Don’t Believe You!’ Or, Do We Just Want to Dance With You?: The Slovenian Punk Subculture in Socialist Yugoslavia” by Gregor Tomc; “Music Labor, Class, and Socialist Entrepreneurship: Yugoslav Self-Management Revisited” by Ana Hofman; and “Music for the ‘Youth Day Central Ceremony’ after Tito: Deritualization and Other Indices of Yugoslav Decline” by Naila Ceribašić and Jelka Vukobratović.

*Made in Yugoslavia: Studies in Popular Music* is an extraordinary intellectual discourse on popular music created in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a newly formed post-World War II socialist and communist country that managed to stay independent from both Eastern and Western Blocs. The book’s topics and subtopics examined in this volume are rich and diverse, unable to be justly unpacked within the scope of this brief review. In simple terms, the book’s main approach may be summarized as a comprehensive and thoroughly-researched first scholarly study of Yugoslav popular music that brings together a cross-generational and multidisciplinary team of authors who deal with different genres and regions. It presents a historiographical and ethnographical chronological study of the popular music genres in Yugoslavia from the 1950s through to 1991. Through the analysis of music and local music scenes across the six republics of Yugoslavia, the readers will gain much more than just an appreciation for Yugoslav popular music – they will understand how Yugoslavia’s cultural and political circumstances, combined with its economic imperatives of self-managed socialism, generated a thriving popular music culture in the country, distancing Yugoslavia from the Eastern Bloc and distinguishing it as the most progressive and liberal communist state in Eastern Europe. The

authors argue that Yugoslavia achieved this international image by producing a form of “homegrown” popular music that embodied “the idealized concept of popular culture at home” (p. 13). With its fascinating and visually-stunning archival documents, photographs, snapshots from music events, as well as engaging interviews and an intellectually alluring narrative, *Made in Yugoslavia* not only delivers on its promise, but it denotes an important historic document of a vibrant, influential, and memorable music scene of a country that tragically no longer exists.

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