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# A Fragment to the Genre of the Piano Piece\*: Its 'Real' Beginning in the Slovene Musical Literature?

Fragment k zvrsti klavirske miniature: njen 'pravi' začetek v slovenski glasbeni literaturi?

**Ključne besede:** slovenska glasba, klavirska miniatura, Janko Ravnik

**Keywords:** Slovene music, piano piece, Janko Ravnik

## IZVLEČEK

## ABSTRACT

Klavirski opus Janka Ravnika je kljub maloštevilnosti na svojevrsten način zaznamoval zgodovino slovenske klavirske glasbe. Zlasti z zgodnjimi klavirskimi deli je Ravnik odprl nove dimenzije slovenski klavirski tvornosti. Na vprašanje ali lahko o njegovih klavirskih delih govorimo kot o začetku klavirske miniature na Slovenskem skuša prispevek odgovoriti na dveh ravneh: na kompozicijsko-tehnični in recepcijski.

In spite of its small quantity, in its own way the piano opus of Janko Ravnik marked the history of Slovene piano music. Particularly with his early piano works, Ravnik opened up new dimensions in Slovene pianistic creativity. Addressing question as to whether we can speak of his piano compositions as the beginning of the piano piece in Slovenia, the present article seeks an answer on two levels: the compositional-technical and reception.

The title encapsulates the central issue of the present article, which was prompted by a consideration of the piano opus of Janko Ravnik and attempts to answer the question of whether was can speak of Ravnik's piano works as the real beginning of the piano miniature in the Slovene musical literature. In question are eleven<sup>1</sup> piano works, a strikingly small number, which came about individually in a period spanning six

\* Translation of the German word *Klavierstück*.

<sup>1</sup> The manuscript of eight piano works (*Čuteči duši*, *Preludij* previously *Dolcissimo*, *Moment*, *Večerna pesem* and *Nokturno* from 1913; *List v album*, *Valse melancholique*, *Grand valse caractéristique* and *Nokturno* from 1951) are stored in the Music Collection of the National and University Library in Ljubljana. The location of the manuscript of *Groteskna koračnica* (which, like *Nokturno*, was published by the Slovene Musical Journal/*Slovenska glasbena revija*), *Vzpon* (first published by the Slovene Composers Society) and the symphonic fable for piano, *Jugoslavija*, is today unknown.

decades of the 20th century: the first in 1911 and the last in 1971. Isolated works of this kind, of which there are altogether enough to fill one or two piano albums, are piano pieces. On the basis of the compositional-technical characteristics of the works and with the aid of their historical reception, as well as with reference to the state of piano music production in Slovenia up to 1914, the present article will attempt to come closer to an answer to the question posed in the title.

## Points of Departure

In treating Ravnik's piano works it is necessary to immediately point out the lack of clarity surrounding their actual number. In addition to information about the existing piano works, the Slovene Biographical Lexicon also makes reference to *Koncertna etuda* (Concert Etude),<sup>2</sup> a piano work mentioned only in the quoted source; a source which itself dates from 1920. Where this composition is to be found, and whether it actually exists at all, is today not entirely clear.<sup>3</sup> In the archive of the Slovene Biographical Lexicon, more precisely in the Ravnik file from which the information for the present article was drawn, there are no statements about this work whatsoever. Taking into account the surviving manuscripts, their printed versions and the presence of Ravnik's compositions in Slovene piano reproductions,<sup>4</sup> we can speak of an opus of eleven<sup>5</sup> piano works. On first view, the small number of these works raises doubts about the legacy, or rather about the possible existence of other piano works. However, if we consider the fact that the lists of Ravnik's works were most likely prepared in consultation with the composer any doubts about the accuracy of the list are unjustified. In order to better understand the composer's creative circumstances it is important to become familiar with his biographical details, which do not in fact place Ravnik's composition work in a central place. By education, Ravnik was a pianist and not a composer,<sup>6</sup> and his creative energy was primarily channelled towards pianism, and later towards dedicated pedagogical work at the Ljubljana Academy of Music. No less than by music, he was attracted by nature, the mountains, photography and film. Before accusing him of a lack of zeal or dedication<sup>7</sup> in the field of composing, one is compelled to take into account his non-musical biography and all of the outside circumstances that, so it seems, strongly influenced Ravnik's work interests. The question as to whether these interests influenced Ravnik's creative credo and the aesthetic form

<sup>2</sup> Cf: Ajlec, Rafael. 'Ravnik, Janko.' in: Gspan, Alfonz (ed.). *Slovenski biografski leksikon*, Third Edition, 1960-1971: 43-44.

<sup>3</sup> The work is given a title only, without a year of composition.

<sup>4</sup> Recordings of ten of the piano works (excluding the symphonic fable *Jugoslavija*) are stored in the music archive of RTV Slovenia. All ten were recorded by Zdenka Novak, while interpretations exist of some of the works by the composer himself, as well as by Milivoj Šurbek, Aci Bertoncej and Ingrid Silič.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the symphonic poem *Jugoslavija*, all of the piano works were published by the Editions of the Slovene Composers Society.

<sup>6</sup> In his article '*Janko Ravnik devetdesetletnik*' (Janko Ravnik: Ninety-Year-Old), Danilo Pokorn writes "Here it is surprising that he never actually studied composition. Vitezlav Novak himself was prepared to accept Ravnik in his class after hearing him play his own piano composition *Večerna pesem* at the entrance exam but the young student unfortunately could not bear the material burden of studying both the piano and composition at the Prague Conservatory." Cf: Delo, 7.5.1981: 9.

<sup>7</sup> Dedication in the sense of a more abundant musical opus, and not in the criteria of quality.

of his musical production – the possible ‘lack of interest’ in following or adopting the then new compositional tendencies – would undoubtedly be a valid topic for in-depth research on another occasion.

In researching Ravnik’s piano opus I was forced to make a periodisation of his piano compositions into two periods:<sup>8</sup> in the first period are the works composed between 1911 and 1921, while the second period embraces those composed after 1940 (until 1971, when the last work was written). In the latter, only three piano compositions were completed in the space of three decades of the 20th century.

Certain questions arise from the suggested periodisation: to what degree do the works of a certain period display common characteristics? What is the relationship between the characteristics of the works of the first and second periods? What is the composer’s aesthetic outlook, as partly indicated in the few sources of historical reception? What marks Ravnik’s piano poetics, his compositional style, and does a piano movement in itself bear witness to shifts in creative thinking? The question also arises as to how the piano opus was imbedded in the concurrent piano music production, or rather to what degree, if at all, the historical tendencies of piano music production were manifested in Ravnik’s pianistic art.

In seeking an answer to the question posed in the title of the present article, the following section will be limited to the compositions of the first period.

## Characteristics of the Musical Language

From the first period of pianistic creativity arise eight piano works: the first four were composed in 1911 and 1912, and were first published in *Novi Akordi*.<sup>9</sup> In 1916, Ravnik wrote the *Grande valse caractéristique* in Judenburg, four years later the symphonic fable *Jugoslavija*, and in 1912 *List v album* (A Page to the Album) and *Valse mélancholique*. With the exception of the symphonic fable *Jugoslavija*,<sup>10</sup> which in terms of both artistry and compositional construction does not count amongst the characteristic group of Ravnik’s piano works, we can place all of the compositions in the genre of the piano piece.

The common compositional-technical characteristics of the compositions of the first period could be summarised in the following points: (1) Ravnik employed a clear form, mainly a tripartite song form with repetition, as had been established from Schubert’s impromptu to Brahms’s later intermezzi. A binding formal framework was not avoided, as it served as a direct link with the past. (2) The traditional formal scheme is realised on the basis of tonal functional harmony, from which the composer skilfully deviates but never withdraws. (3) The use of symmetrical syntax is again manifest as a binding compositional principle, in which two-bar units prevail (rarer is the use of sentence syntax), and without which any kind of musical thought seems

<sup>8</sup> Researching the reception of Ravnik’s piano works led to the ascertainment that also Lipovšek used a similar periodisation for Ravnik’s piano works: Cf. Lipovšek, Marjan. ‘Kompozicioni stav Janka Ravnika’ (The Compositional Style of Janko Ravnik). *Zvuk* 117-118 (1971): 360-370.

<sup>9</sup> The Slovenian music magazine *Novi Akordi* (‘New Chords’) was published between 1901 and 1914.

<sup>10</sup> *Jugoslavija* is occasional music in the character of a piano prelude, a kind of multi-part fantasy to the tune of “Bože spasi, bože hrani, našeg kralja i naš rod”, which also appears at the end of the music with the vocal entry. The work was published by Sokolski Savez SHS in 1920.

unrealisable – the two-bar nature of the melodic motives, which derive directly from the 19th century tradition, generally do not manifest more complex themes. (4) The presence of the idiomatic through the prism of virtuosity is, within the first group of works, reduced to the occasional use of recognisable clichés, mainly ascending and/or falling scale or chromatic passages which usually come about as a consequence of a musico-dramatic climax. The exception in this regard is *Valse caractéristique*, which is by far the most virtuosic composition of the first group of works. (5) The realisation of the harmonic texture undoubtedly represents the segment of the musical scheme in which Ravnik was the most far-reaching on the level of his own compositional creativity. He himself said, “A feature of my works is the harmonic basis, or rather the seeking of expression in the vertical music and the complete harmonic relations”.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the fact that Ravnik emphasised the vertical element of the musical flow, and for him this represented the most important part of his creative thinking in the final result, from an analytical point of view we have to conclude that in the works of the first period the composer achieved an expansion of the harmonic-tonal space in three ways: firstly, and most frequently, he relied on the use of strongly enriched, fertile harmony in the form of chords that, despite their functional ambiguity, tend towards a tonally-based dynamic. This kind of dynamic of the harmonic flow is often led by a motivic intensification (repetition or sequences). The second way of expanding the harmonic tonal space comes about as a result of concealed linear thinking (voice leading); Ravnik juxtaposes motivic working with the occasional use of a latent ostinato. The third method, noticeable only in the composition *Valse caractéristique*, appears in the form of a kind of incursion of the unexpected in the known; this kind of incursion, usually without a defined melody, is led by chromatic progressions, which in the latent polyphonisation of the texture produce tonally very ambiguous and undefined harmonic functions - chords that come about as a consequence of the voice leading.

These three methods are reinforced by the frequent use of the interval of a second, which appears in the construction of motivic formations, in the movement of chordal sequences, as well as being part of the harmonic voicings. It would be exaggerating to speak of this interval as the constructive cell of the compositions, but its use certainly strongly determines the loosening of the functionally defined harmonic texture. The salient presence of chromatically altered tones, which do not tend towards any kind of resolution but rather function as equal counterparts to the other tonal material, also marks the sonic image of Ravnik’s piano works.

The harmonic texture, whether as the interaction of melodic and latent harmonic horizontals or as a vertical ‘colour’ enrichment of concealed tonal chords, is the distinct feature that marks the fact of Ravnik’s poetics of the piano works of the first period.

## Comparative Analysis

It is more than obvious that in these compositions Ravnik follows in Chopin’s footsteps. Works like *Moment*, *Prelude*, *List v album*, as well as both of the waltzes are striking examples of evoking historical models. Five of the seven compositions of the first

<sup>11</sup> Rijavec, Andrej. *Slovenska glasbena dela*. Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije 1979: 254.

period hint at direct dialogue with the past, which enables the recognition of known models in Ravnik's 'new' harmonic dramaturgy.

Can we speak of compositional shifts of the piano poetic within the first period, that is, within one decade? We approach an answer on determining the presence of traces of Chopin and their possible transformation in the works of the first period. A comparative analysis of two of Ravnik's works with two of Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28, will attempt to demonstrate to what degree Chopin's compositional conceptual traits manifest themselves in Ravnik's pianistic creativity, and to what degree the composer transforms their semantics. The choice of the two Ravnik works is not arbitrary but rather derives from a chronological supposition: the comparative analysis will thus include the *Prelude* from 1912 (one of the first works of the period in question) and *List v album* from 1921 (one of the last works from the first creative period).

Ravnik's *Prelude* from 1912 is a 16-bar composition based on seven repetitions of the initial two bars. In the scheme of the characteristic two bar plan we recognise the melodic chordal relationship in which we follow the repeating descending quaver figures and in the chord the hexachords descending in seconds in quadruple motion (*Example 1*).

*Example 1.*

The melodic flow is imbedded in the chordal movement. The nature of the internal dynamic of the two-bar melody, with its falling direction, does not indicate a dynamic charge, but rather contains in its motive a dissolving function. If the musical action liberated all of the chromatically altered tones (the composition is in C major) the two-bar motive would gain a five-note chord or hexachord descending, which would create the relative minor (a five-note A minor chord). At its conclusion it would almost be difficult to speak of a cadence in the dominant-tonic sense, if anything it is a case of motivic retardation. In the continuation, the melodic motion of the two-bar motive retains the characteristic interval flow, and thus an unchanged apparent configuration. The structure of the accompanying chords in the following three repetitions is, if we disregard the chromatic alterations, initially the same, while the sixth and seventh repetitions (also the climax of the piece), in spite of the full chordal span, gain a harmonically purer configuration. The harmonic variability thus relies on the exchange of chromatically altered tones and creates an image of sonic shades of the expository material.

Chopin's Prelude No. 20 in C minor, Op. 28, is based on a musical idea repeated three times, built on the corresponding relationship of two two-bar motives (*Example 2*).



Example 2.

Their correspondence propagates both on the melodic and harmonic levels and thus creates the dynamic charge of the musical narrative. We also recognise the correspondence in the relation of the first and the subsequent (varied repeated) musical ideas, with which the dimension of the musical dynamic is expanded. Chopin increases the internal charge of the sentence with a sliding chromatic descent, which finally fulfils the demand of the internal dynamic and its relation tension-resolution. There is some use of harmonic variability but it is subordinate to the internal dynamic of the musical flow, and thus does not overshadow the meaning of the nature of the melodic idea.

A comparative analysis shows that Ravnik's formal framework is based on Chopin's Prelude but a difference arises in the meaning and narrative of the form-giving units: Chopin's two-bar motive is propagated on the internal dynamic of the melodic-harmonic charge, whereas in Ravnik's two-bar motive that function is liberated. The repetition of the narrative in Chopin creates the dramaturgical dimension of the extended arch; in Ravnik, each repetition of the two-bar motive contains a sonic nuance of the initial idea, liberated both in the micro and macro scheme of the musical dynamic charge. If in Chopin we can speak of a sonic event which grows towards a climax and settles in its resolution, then in Ravnik it is appropriate to conceive of an event whose narrative is not goal-oriented as in Chopin but rather relies on a sonic nuance of the musical moment. Chopin's formal model serves Ravnik as a binding formal framework with which he emphasises the direct dialogue with the past (most likely due to a desire or demand for comprehensibility) and although he uses similar musical syntax (melodic-chordal structure, second progressions in the left hand) in doing so the goal-oriented musical event is redeemed, becoming a musical state. In Ravnik, the tendency of the sonic event which embraces the beginning, climax, resolution and conclusion denies the tendency of the sonic state based on colour shades of repeating elements. The comparative analysis shows that in the *Prelude* of 1912 Ravnik evokes a historical model but transforms its semantics. With this understanding it is also possible to explain Kogoj's idea that "Ravnik is, however, far from imitating anyone or anything",<sup>12</sup> which identifies in Ravnik's poetics the otherness of the recognisable.

Ravnik's work from 1921, *List v album*, also hints at certain of Chopin's compositional characteristics evident in his Prelude No. 4 in E minor, Op. 28. Chopin's Prelude is a 25-bar composition in two sections, of which the second is a varied repeat of the first. The musical dramaturgy of the Prelude is centred around gradually descending harmonies and slow intervallic shifts in the melody (also descending) which are fused

<sup>12</sup> Kogoj, Marij. 'O nekaterih glasbenih izdajah' ('About Some Musical Publications'). *Dom in svet* 35 (1922): 240.

with the harmonic flow, demonstrating right to the reprise the unbroken narrative of the musical idea (*Example 3*).

*Example 3.*

The harmonic rhythm is established in one long arch, guided by a continuous, descending chromatic movement which concludes only when it arrives at the dominant. The dynamic of the musical flow is realised by this harmonic motion, which, with its gradual, sliding descent, creates the dramatic charge of the musical material, and whose resolution Chopin prolongs right up to the cadence. It would be theoretically possible to attempt to functionally determine the harmony, and yet its sense subordinates the conceptual plan of the musical dramaturgical realisation.

In his *List v album*, Ravnik realises a two-part form as in Chopin's Prelude No. 4, except that he adds a few additional bars which could be functionally defined as a coda. That which directly forces a comparison with the Chopin Prelude in question is the descending movement in seconds and the unbroken narrative of the melodic idea (*Example 4*) in the continuation (bars 3-8).

*Example 4.*

The chromatic descending motion appears in the first two bars, but is only hinted at, as within the form-giving cell it returns to the initial height. Such 'back and forth' motion is also present in the melody of the first two bars, behind which is hidden a dis-

figured gesture of tension and resolution, the latter manifesting itself only at the conclusion of the first section. The continuation of the first two bars is its direct repetition, which develops into a six-bar sentence. The characteristic chromatic movement in the lower voice withdraws the tonal definition of the already functionally nebulous harmonies. In its establishment and sequencing (the inner voices and the bass motion) we could recognise the latent presence of the initial motion in seconds. The melody of the first two bars, with its not so narrow ambit, becomes in the six-bar phrase the bearer of the musical event and, just as in Chopin, demonstrates the unbroken narrative of the idea.

If in Chopin the central driving force of the musical dramaturgy is the harmonic flow, without which the melody that is an outgrowth of this flow loses its meaning, in Ravnik this is realised in a somewhat different way: it seems that the melodic flow of the highest voice is the bearer of the musical event, and this is supported by the harmonic motion. The latter is realised, or rather oscillates, between two moments: the dynamic and the static. The dynamic relates to the nebulous functionality, which attempts to inject dynamism into the musical flow, whereas the static moment is linked to the chromatic alterations and to some of the functionally unresolved harmonies, which seek to become the coloured backdrop of the melodic idea.

Just as in the first instance, Ravnik again evokes a historical model in the second example, although here the harmonic dramaturgy of the first two bars does not congeal into a sonically nuanced version of the known, as was evident in the *Prelude* from 1912, but rather contains a hidden tendency towards a tonal-functional drama. The composition *List v album* also realises an oscillation between static and dynamic moments, which in their very nature are closer to the traditional model rather than distanced from it.

Comparison of the two Ravnik compositions shows that the type of compositional thinking within the first creative period, spanning a decade, did not change. A loosening of the tonal-functional relationships allowed Ravnik to transform the narrative of the musical thought, and with this the oscillation between the dynamic and static scheme of the musical phrase, although the boundaries of this kind of thinking are never breached.

## **An Observation on the State of Piano Music Production in Slovenia Until 1914**

The musicological research<sup>13</sup> undertaken thus far already provides sufficiently clear evidence of the state of Slovene instrumental music of the past, especially of the period at the beginning of the 20th century, and thus it is not necessary to emphasise that at the turn of the century it is difficult to speak of 'the emancipation of the instru-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rijavec, Andrej. Ibid. Bedina, Katarina. 'Sonata: fenomen oblike v glasbi in slovenska tvornost za klavir' (The Sonata: the Phenomenon of Form in Music and Slovene Creativity for the Piano). Ljubljana: Slovenska matica 1989. Lipovšek, Marjan. 'Slovenska klavirska glasba' (Slovene Piano Music). *Muzikološki zbornik* 2 (1966). Bevc, Cvetka. 'Katakližma avantgarde med socrealističnim normativizmom in nacionalno bitnostjo slovenske glasbe' (The Cataclysm of the Avant-Garde between Socialist Normativeness and the National Being of Slovene Music). *Muzikološki zbornik* 24 (1988).



mental identity of structure'.<sup>14</sup> If this came about (in terms of piano music) with the activity of *Novi akordi*, we then ask ourselves which of the piano poetics in the piano reproduction of the time stands out as the most salient. Amongst the most numerous piano works published in *Novi akordi* are most certainly the compositions of Gojmir Krek, which apparently satisfy the criteria of 'non-traditional music that is compositionally-technically flawless',<sup>15</sup> something the editor himself strove for. Even on a superficial examination of Krek's piano works it soon becomes clear that we are dealing with clear, simple constructions, which, however one views them, never stray from occasionally still classical, but largely romantic musical thinking. The tonal presence is binding both in the melodic and harmonic segments; melody moves within a narrow band of expressive possibilities; the composer does not renounce contrast, which remains more an indicated than experienced emotion. In contrast to the lyrical there are witty and scintillating musical ideas, often also full of character, which sometimes seem more suitable to the composer's strictly conceptual stance.<sup>16</sup> Like Ravnik, Krek evokes historical models, but his way of working with them remains on the level of borrowing from the known. Thus it becomes clear that in comparison to Ravnik's works of the same time, Krek's piano compositions primarily satisfy the criteria of the pragmatic and the didactic rather than the level of realising pure aesthetic function, which Ravnik's piano poetics certainly approach, or rather express.

## Ravnik's Piano Works and their Reception by the Slovene Professional Audience

To what extent the results of the comparative analysis approach the state of the historical reception of Ravnik's piano creativity of the first period, and through whose conception we can view its reception at all – through the prism of Krek's modernist vision or through the critical magnifying glass of the historical musical avant-garde, which was manifest in Slovenia first with Kogoj's works and then a decade later with Slavko Osterc as the central figure – will be addressed in the second section of the article.

Krek's reception of Ravnik's piano works could be characterised as 'surpassing expectations'. This eminent figure of Slovene music's *Novi akordi* accompanied all four of Ravnik's existing compositions published in the review with envious commentaries, sometimes enhanced by brief analyses. A selection of short quotations, such as "the material shows that the composer digs deep",<sup>17</sup> "today everyone tells us that Ravnik's Moment is one of the most felicitous, deepest and most perfect results of our piano literature to date",<sup>18</sup> "we are thus only fulfilling our obligation by giving, as much as we are able, this vast, promising talent a special and great opportunity to appear in our pages",<sup>19</sup> indicate a new, professional approach to the piano work, specif-

<sup>14</sup> Bevc, Cvetka. Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cf: Cvetko, Dragotin. 'Vloga Gojmira Kreka v razvoju novejše slovenske glasbe' (The Role of Gojmir Krek in the Development of New Slovene Music). Ljubljana SAZU, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> In: Lah, Špela. 'Kompozicijski stavek klavirskih skladb Gojmira Kreka' (The Compositional Phrase in the Piano Music of Gojmir Krek), diploma thesis, Musicology Department, University of Ljubljana, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Krek, Gojmir. 'Naše skladbe' (Our Compositions). *Novi akordi* 3-4, 12 (1913): 36.

<sup>18</sup> Krek, Gojmir. 'Naše skladbe.' *Novi akordi* 1-2, 11 (1912): 12.

<sup>19</sup> Krek, Gojmir. 'Naše skladbe.' *Novi akordi* 3, 11 (1912): 3.

ically to the position Ravnik's piano works assumed in *Novi akordi*. Marjan Kozina is of the same opinion, writing that "few amongst us devote themselves to the study of music, and no one has borne such fine fruit at such a young age as Ravnik".<sup>20</sup> To these assertions was later added the more potent and better argued contribution of Marjan Lipovšek, who, from today's perspective, wrote the most relevant texts dealing with Ravnik's musical opus. Although Kogoj did not write about Ravnik's piano works, he did touch upon his songs, in which he recognised "an unalterable will to expression".<sup>21</sup> He concluded that although Ravnik was far from imitating anyone or anything he still "has not purified his personal expression".<sup>22</sup> Kogoj did, however, acknowledge Ravnik's "individual moments", in which "the effect was more powerful than average",<sup>23</sup> but he failed to engage with the aesthetic effect of Ravnik's works. Could Kogoj's thoughts about Ravnik's songs collection *Segudille* be transferred to the piano music of the first period? Could we also here speak of "an unalterable will to expression", to which, reading between the lines, Kogoj actually attributes a somewhat negative connotation? (It is known that in a series of statements Kogoj espoused the necessity to "once and for all bring an end to impressionism and romanticism".<sup>24</sup>) From the point of view of the Slovene musical avant-garde the significance of Ravnik's piano works (of the first period) was more of a marginal nature. From the point of view of the 'modernists', however, these works represent the foundation of Slovene piano music reproduction. These two views are, in spite of their apparently contradictory positions, actually two sides of the same coin, depending on our perspective. Furthermore, they are both legitimate, as is demonstrated by the convictions of the later Slovene professional audience, who were divided into two camps in terms of the reception, understanding and valuation of Ravnik's (piano) works. The first, represented by Marjan Lipovšek – author of an article about Slovene piano music<sup>25</sup> and most loyal commentator and advocator of Ravnik's art – treated the piano opus as a closed musical system, distinct from any kind of potential comparison with the compositional streams of the time. The hermetic nature of his analyses relies on exposing the significance of Ravnik's early piano creativity<sup>26</sup> and on observation of certain compositional features in the chronological cross section.<sup>27</sup> Lipovšek points out specific aspects of Ravnik's piano poetics but he does not place them in a broader compositional context. The second group, who by its very nature locates the thought in the imaginary line of compositional development, and for whom historical contextualisation is an imperative, recognises in Ravnik's early works "a considered and highly professional musical product" that is "of an artistic and his-

<sup>20</sup> Kozina, Marjan. 'Koncerti.' *Novi akordi* 1-2, 12 (1913): 11.

<sup>21</sup> Kogoj, Marij. 'O nekaterih glasbenih izdajah' (About Some Musical Publications). *Dom in svet* 35 (1922): 240.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Cf.: Cvetko, Dragotin. *Anton Lajovic*. Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga 1987.

<sup>25</sup> Cf: Lipovšek, Marjan. '*Slovenska klavirska glasba*' (Slovene Piano Music). *Muzikološki zbornik* 2 (1966): 65-76.

<sup>26</sup> "Only then did the first truly important works appear on the Slovene music scene; works that today are vital and current, and for that time were extraordinarily new and courageous. They were the compositions of Janko Ravnik." In: Lipovšek, Marjan. Ibid.: 70.

<sup>27</sup> Cf.: Lipovšek, Marjan: '*Ob 60-letnici Janka Ravnika*' (On the Sixtieth Birthday of Janko Ravnik). *Slovenska glasbena revija* 1 (1951/52): 12-15. The same: '*Sedamdesetogodišnjica Janka Ravnika*' (The Seventieth Birthday of Janko Ravnik). *Zvuk* 49/50 (1961): 524-526. The same: '*Kompozicioni stav Janka Ravnika*' (The Compositional Style of Janko Ravnik). *Zvuk* 117/118 (1971): 360-370.

torical, as well as developmental value [...] as they represent the first Slovene compositions worthy of the concert stage. Their broad-ranging pianistic approach immediately expunges the earlier, all too salon-drawing room approach".<sup>28</sup> However, in the continuation Ravnik's piano music<sup>29</sup> is identified in the case of the two waltzes as "backward looking".<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

Through Lipovšek's prism we could then speak of Ravnik as a progressive modernist<sup>31</sup> whose poetics consistently preserve his expression, which in turn is realised in its most perfected form. Most likely any thought of some kind of crystallised poetic of the piano works of the first period would be more than eloquent. Rijavec's locating of works in a historical context and his aesthetic of concealed romanticism displace the modernism so sought after in the Slovene musical space. Both receptions of his work in fact bear witness to a romantic aesthetic, which, in the light of the more progressive poetics, they attempt to characterise as modernism. Does the externally acting progressiveness dissolve into an internally acting regression? Can we even speak of a dissolution, or perhaps first of a realised artistic conviction? The composer's own words may bring us closer to an answer: "In both my creative and interpretative work I was driven and strengthened by a special force. In the end, I have sought beauty in music. I have sought a new harmonic path, new timbral expression, architectonic roundedness, mood painting; I have sought human emotion".<sup>32</sup>

Undoubtedly the aesthetic of beauty is, in fact, the category that regulates Ravnik's piano music (of the first period). And this is the very factor that prompts the composer's lack of interest in breaking the link with the past. As a student of the Prague Conservatory, there is no doubt that Ravnik was familiar with the tendencies of European music at the turn of the century, but only those tendencies that were in line with his artistic perspective were allowed to infiltrate his poetic. A commitment to the tonal system, albeit with sometimes extremely loose functional relations, showed itself to be the only possibility of musical thought. Thus the composer entered Slovene piano music production with a well-formed attitude to his own artistic desire, which was undisturbed by the progressive or, for him, alternative compositional tendencies of the time.

If we wanted to see a catching up of the historical moment in Ravnik's first piano works, we would, in spite of their loosened tonal-functional phrases, categorically remove their right to self-defence and consign them to the drawer of the eternal backwardness in the history of Slovene music. Although through the lens of today's criti-

<sup>28</sup> Rijavec, Andrej. *Slovenska glasbena dela* (Slovene Musical Works). Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije 1979, 254.

<sup>29</sup> Considered up to the last piano works of the first creative period.

<sup>30</sup> Cf.: Rijavec, Andrej. '*K vprašanju slovenskosti Slovenske instrumentalne glasbe*' (The Question of the Sloveneness of Slovene Instrumental Music). *Muzikološki zbornik* 15 (1979): 8. Bevc, Cvetka. '*Katakliizma avantgarde med socrealističnim normativizmom in nacionalno bitnostjo slovenske glasbe*' (The Cataclysm of the Avant-Garde between Socialist Normativeness and the National Being of Slovene Music). *Muzikološki zbornik* 24 (1988): 72.

<sup>31</sup> Lipovšek, Marjan. '*Kompozicioni stav Janka Ravnika*' (The Compositional Style of Janko Ravnik). *Zvuk* 117/118 (1971): 360.

<sup>32</sup> Ravnik, Janko. '*Ustvarjalne dileme*' (Creative Dilemmas). *Naši razgledi* 3 (1968): 74.

cism, derived from an unavoidable contextualisation, such an action may seem legitimate, we would thus adopt a rather unjust position to Ravnik's piano opus. It is certain that with these works Ravnik, for the first time in the history of Slovene music, withdraws from the artistic concept of 'understandable engagement'<sup>33</sup> and national idiomaticalness in favour of the realisation of pure aesthetic function. And how should we understand his view on the past? As a revival of the mentality of bygone bourgeois times, which "had never been realised in Slovenia"<sup>34</sup> – an internal imperative for exposing the historical memory in the area of the Slovene piano piece – or as aesthetically the only acceptable possibility? Most likely it is a combination of both.

## POVZETEK

V naslovu zajeta problematika prispevka, ki jo odpira razmislek o klavirskem opusu Janka Ravnika, skuša odgovoriti na vprašanje, ali lahko o Ravnikovih klavirskih delih govorimo kot o pravem začetku klavirske miniature v slovenski glasbeni literaturi. Gre za enajst klavirskih skladb, izstopajoče majhno število del, ki so nastajala posamično v šestih desetletjih 20. stol. (prva skladba 1911, zadnja 1971). Tovrstni osamenci, ki bi lahko po številu skupaj sestavljali eno ali pa dve klavirski zbirki, so po značaju klavirske miniature. Pričujoči prispevek se tako na ravni kompozicijsko-tehničnih lastnosti del – z opombo k stanju klavirske produkcije na Slovenskem do leta 1914, kot na ravni zgodovine recepcije, skuša približati odgovoru na v naslovu zastavljeno vprašanje. Analiza obeh ravni se omeji na dela prvega ustvarjalnega obdobja, osem skladb nastalih v času med 1911 in 1921.

Prvi del prispevka označi skupne kompozicijsko-tehnične lastnosti skladb in poda ugotovitev, da je v uresničitvi harmonskega stavka Ravnik segel najdlje. Čeprav je skladatelj izpostavil vertikalno prvino glasbenega poteka in mu je ta v končnem rezultatu predstavljala najpomembnejši del njegovega ustvarjalnega mišljenja, pa z analitičnim pregledom klavir-

skih del prvega obdobja moremo ugotoviti, da širjenje harmonsko-tonalnega prostora dosega skladatelj na več načinov.

Pri pregledu Ravnikovih klavirskih miniaturnost postane očitno, da se skladatelj sprehaja po Chopinovi sledi: pet od sedem skladb prvega obdobja namiguje na neposreden dialog s preteklostjo, ki omogoča prepoznavanje znanih vzorcev v Ravnikovi 'novi' harmonski dramaturgiji. Primerjalna analiza dveh Ravnikovih del z dvema Chopinovima preludijema op. 28 skuša pokazati, v koliki meri se Chopinove kompozicijske idejne poteze manifestirajo v Ravnikovi klavirski ustvarjalnosti in v koliki meri Ravnik predruža njihovo semantičnost. Drugi del prispevka skuša odgovoriti na vprašanje, v kolikšni meri se rezultati primerjalne analize približujejo stanju zgodovine recepcije Ravnikove klavirske tvornosti. Iz analize recepcije slovenske strokovne javnosti je mogoče izluščiti dva načina sprejemanja: prvi obravnava Ravnikov klavirski opus kot zaprt glasbeni sistem izločen iz vsakega konteksta morebitne primerjave s sočasnimi kompozicijskimi tokovi, drugi pa svojo misel vpenja v imaginarno premico kompozicijskega razvoja in mu je zgodovinska kontekstualizacija nujno vodilo. Obe recepciji pravzaprav pričata o romantični estetiki, ki v Ravnikovi klavirski poetiki uresničuje raven udejanjanja čiste estetske funkcije.

<sup>33</sup> Adorno, Theodor Wiesendgrund. Uvod v sociologijo glasbe (Introduction to the Sociology of Music). Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije 1986: 216.

<sup>34</sup> Rijavec, Andrej. *Slovenska glasbena dela* (Slovene Musical Works). Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije 1979, 254.