

UDK 78 Lebič

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THE MUSIC OF LOJZE LEBIČ

Lojze Lebič (*b* 1934) belongs to the same generation of composers as Srebotnjak, Stibilj, Petrič, Štuhec and Božič. His output in a traditional idiom is slight compared to that of the others, notably Petrič, whose pre-1961 works are substantial and numerous. Lebič's studies in archaeology, just as Stibilj's in psychology, tended to hold back his firm commitment to music. However, like Petrič and Jež, Lebič was very impressed by the activities of avant-garde composers, especially those in Poland. Happily, like both Petrič and Jež, he made no ill-considered or slavish adoption of Polish textural techniques.

Lebič has never been a prolific composer. In addition, he revises his works frequently and also used to spend a great deal of time performing music. His music shows considerable care over sonority, balance and detail, but not at the expense of structure. His early traditional music includes two sonatas, the first for violin and piano, and the second for clarinet and piano. His later works fall into three main categories: small-scale chamber works (one to four players), larger ensemble works (both works discussed here require nine players) and orchestral pieces, one with voices. The present study takes representative works to illustrate the techniques involved.

The Sonata for violin and piano of 1959 is a lively and well written work that today would be considered unexceptional. The layout of the three movements, Allegro, Adagio, Presto, even with their free internal plans, is traditional enough. The melodic lines are generally based on conjunct movement. The harmonic idiom owes a debt to tonality without following traditional tonal progressions: there are some triadic formations, but also much use of parallel chords, often in fourths. Rhythmically the work is full of varied, alert and vigorous writing that avoids the worst of unimaginative ostinato repetitions. The Sonata indicates a firm grasp of compositional procedures, without showing much originality. The Sonata for clarinet and piano of the following year presents much the same picture.

During the next few years, the composer's style underwent a considerable change. Like his colleagues, Lebič came under the influence of the new music that he had heard from all over

Europe, especially from Poland. The period up to 1965 was one of experiment for Lebič, but no works from this time are available, apart from those mentioned above.

The first of his chamber works that shows his break with tradition is *Meditacije za dva* ('Meditations for two') for viola and cello, which dates from 1965, but was revised extensively in 1972. Much of the work is restrained but has occasional dramatic outbursts. The work is written for the most part in short melodic phrases. The relationship between the two players varies considerably. In the first movement the viola leads for much of the time with occasional interjections and accompanying figures from the cello. There are occasional passages in which the notes of each part alternate (Ex.1a) and others with exact synchronization of beats (Ex.1b). In the second movement, this synchronization, although exact, does not show any metrical correspondence (Ex.2). Although there is no traditional ostinato as such, there are a few short passages that repeat certain figures *ad lib* (see Ex. 3). The note-formations are not serially conceived in any strict sense, but do sometimes use certain fixed note patterns (see the melodic shapes of Exx.2 and 3, where repetitions and reorderings are common). There is considerable use of microtones, especially in association with glissandos. Harmonically the work varies from the inexact relationships produced by freely coordinated lines to precisely notated chords (with no tonal associations), which act as points of focus rather than as indications of harmonic movement.

Ex. 1 (DSS 466, p. 5 line 1; p. 7 line 1)

a)

ca 1''
ca 2''
piz. mf f sf mf
piz. mp

b)

f assai 3 >

Ex. 2 (DSS 466, p. 8 line 2)

Musical score for Ex. 2, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music features a sequence of chords and melodic lines. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *f*, *p*, and *fp*. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, some with slurs and accents.

Ex. 3 (DSS 466, p. 9 line 1)

Musical score for Ex. 3, consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music features a sequence of chords and melodic lines. Dynamic markings include *f*. Performance instructions include "stringendo play in any sequence" and "ca 10''". The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, some with slurs and accents.

In 1967 Lebič composed three *Impromptus* for piano, to which he added a fourth in 1974. The pieces show a clear concern for form that might not be expected from the title. As in *Meditacije za dva* the music is usually composed in short phrases with frequent pauses between them. The relationship between the various materials is always important. For example, in the first *Impromptu*, the first fragment is played with a *ritardando* the first time it appears and in the same way when it reappears in the middle of the fourth phrase, but then it is played *accelerando* when it forms part of the sixth phrase. The main material with which it is contrasted increases in complexity with the greater use of clusters produced with the elbows and forearms. Thus the contrast between the two lines of development of the materials is as important as that between the materials themselves. The same kind of contrast of material and its development takes place in the rest of the first piece and the next two, especially the latter part of the third which presents in collage fashion materials from all three *Impromptus*. This collage technique is also used in the later fourth *Impromptu*. Its title 'Circle' refers to the course that events follow around a central phrase taken from the first *Impromptu* (called 'x' here). In addition to this phrase, there are eight main materials (called A - H by the composer). Lebič notes certain orders in which the piece may be played: e.g. ABxC DxE FxGH; the same order but starting at any other point than A; or in an order decided upon and practised by the performer.

Lebič's next small chamber work, *Ekspresije* ('Expressions') for violin, cello and piano, was composed in 1968. He revised it in 1972, when among other things he reduced

the number of movements from three to two. As one might expect from the instrumentation, the work draws on the techniques both of *Meditacije za dva* for two string instruments and *Impromptus* for piano. *Ekspressije* is mostly based on disjointed melodic lines, both solo and in counterpoint (Ex.4a). There is as much use of melody and accompaniment as in *Meditacije* and a considerable increase in non-melodic textural writing (see Ex.4b, with its *ad lib* combinations of various formulae), and in passages in which melodic importance is greatly reduced. The two movements are planned in a free formal way with none of the literal recapitulations and repetitions found in the *Impromptus*.

Ex. 4 (DSS 465, p. 5 line 2; p. 8 line 3)

a.)

Vn. *pizz.*

Vc. *mp*

b.)

Vn. *pizz.* *arco* *ff* — repeat the formulas

Pf. *ff* — *p* irregularly

Vc. *pizz.* *batt. cop.* *batt. sulle corde* — repeat the formulas

ca 10"

In *Atelier* of 1973 for violin and piano, Lebič again used many of the techniques of his previous works, with a particularly vivid use of fragmentary materials on the violin. The relationship between the violin and piano is not normally evenly balanced. Both instruments play on their own for quite long durations. There is little use of the dialogue found in

Ekspresije and *Meditacije*, although the composer attempted one form of dialogue by the violinist with himself playing closely juxtaposed fragments at widely differing dynamic levels.

Lebič has composed two works for a large chamber ensemble, *kons (b)* of 1968 and *kons (a)* of 1970, for the Slavko Osterc Ensemble which specializes in such pieces. Both works are scored for nine players, *kons (b)* for three clarinets, string quartet, harp and percussion, and *kons (a)* for flute, clarinet, horn, violin, viola, cello, harp, piano and percussion. They show an extension of the techniques found in the works for smaller combinations.

Like those of the Impromptus for piano, the materials of *kons (b)* are clearly differentiated. For example, the first is predominantly harmonic, another is based on freely coordinated ostinatos, still another on repeated notes. In addition, Lebič distinguished these materials by instrumentation, keeping the different groups of instruments separate for much of the work. The harmonic aspect is important at the beginning in a series of overlapping held notes played by the clarinets (Ex. 5a). Note that here the long notes and the grace notes that precede them are all within a very narrow range. This is contrasted with overlapping ostinatos on the strings, mostly using descending chromatic movement. The harmonic material of Ex.5a is developed to include rapidly repeated notes with a general upward movement (Ex.5b), while the ostinato patterns of the strings are freely elaborated in a series of irregular patterns which create textures of detailed activity but little harmonic momentum. Trills and tremolos and fast irregular flourishes from the strings infiltrate the music. These kinds of developments form the main interest in the work. Later alterations to the original material include the addition to the long notes of Ex.5a key noises, free choice of notes, and very wide vibrato. There is little question of the composer producing effects for effect's sake. *kons (b)* is not a major work, but one which shows great attention to detail and unorthodox formal coherence.

Ex. 5 (DSS 464-HG 975, p. 5 b. 1 - p. 6 b. 2; p. 13 b. 6-9)

a)

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff begins with a long note on a single line, with a grace note preceding it. The middle and bottom staves contain more complex rhythmic patterns with various note values and rests. Vertical dashed lines mark time intervals of 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 seconds. The key signature has one flat, and the time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be common time.

b)

kons (a) of 1970, while again being written for nine players, has the notable addition of poems and phonetic material drawn from the poetry of the Slovene, Srečko Kosovel. These phonetic sounds are spoken by the players themselves, who are also required to intone the poetry at approximate pitches as indicated by the composer. Instrumental techniques are similar to those of *kons (b)*. The first section of the work again relies on long notes, from the horn and cello, with occasional interjections from the rest of the ensemble. This and another passage in which the strings exploit numerous glissando combinations prepare the listener for the first entry of the phonetic sounds. These are combined with small fragments of melody or long notes from the instruments. In all cases the vocal sounds are reasonably audible, but they never dominate the textures. Lebič then produced an extended passage (score, pp.14-20) that is the most complex and extended in either of the two *kons* pieces. While the details of each of the parts (chords, short flourishes or more extended melody) are normally audible as separate entities, the total textural result is also important. Unlike Petrič, Lebič was less concerned to make any distinction between background and foreground, and this does result in a certain lack of direction in this passage. In this section there is considerable activity in the string and wind parts around single focal notes, a characteristic of both *kons* pieces, but little exact coordination between and synchronization of parts. The second half of the work (there are no specified formal divisions) has rhythmically free elements, including a fragmentary but notably melodic flute cadenza and an extended textural tutti. The latter is interrupted by strict rhythmic elements, most obviously a regular metronome beat, against which the other players 'fight'. The appearance of Kosovel's poetry, in varied and exaggerated intonation from the string and wind players, adds another element to this already complex situation. Suddenly the passage is stopped, in theatrical fashion, by the conductor blowing a referee's whistle. The Lento coda /score, pp.31-7) again exploits small intervals, including microtones, with occasional short texts added. The return to some of the techniques of the opening is convincingly handled, with no sense of an artificially constructed plan.

Lebič's orchestral output consists of five works: *Korant* and *Nicina* for full orchestra, *Sentence* for orchestra and two pianos, *Glasovi* ('Voices') for percussion, strings and other plucked string instruments and the cantata for mezzosoprano and orchestra *Požgana trava* ('Burnt Grass'). Of these, *Korant*,

Požgana trava and *Glasovi*, which have been published, are examined here.

Požgana trava of 1965 was the composer's first major work. It is a setting, in four parts, of the bizarre and impressionistic poem of the same title by the Slovene, Dane Zajc. The composer's response to the words was twofold. He produced a fairly straightforward and singable vocal line that only occasionally uses speaking or *Sprechstimme*, and in his orchestral writing he used a wide variety of techniques to match this response. This variety did, however, produce some stylistic problems.

The vocal line of the opening (Ex.6a) has typically smooth movement, with mostly small intervals. Even in later passages where the part is more rhythmically animated (Ex.6b), large leaps are exceptional and used with obvious deliberation. Lebič's music does not use any strict serial procedures here, but the melodic lines tend to keep all the twelve notes in use in most passages. Note-repetition is encountered fairly often, a feature particularly noticeable in recitative-like passages.

Ex. 6 (DSS 338, p.1; p. 9 b. 3 - p.10 b. 3)

a) *p* *tempo* *pp*

Tvoj glas bo sa - mo - ten ka — kor pol - no —
 čni čas, ko za - drh — ti — jo tra - ve
 b) glas mr — tvih bo lo - vil
 s ko — šče - ni - mi ro - ka - mi tvoj hrepene - či klic

There are some stylistic inconsistencies. Lebič notated most of the work with normal barring, often in crotchet beats. However, in some passages he tried to break away from a metrical rigidity by introducing some parts in free rhythms which contradict the barring. In the last pages there are unambiguous references to chords in the key of E major, but equally Lebič used harmonic progressions that are so complex that any harmonic analysis in traditional terms is pointless. This is very clear in the string chorale which appears at the beginning of the third movement 'Ujeti volk' (pp. 30-33 in the published score).

Even if *Požgana trava* does have some stylistic inconsistencies, it is vividly and imaginatively written. The stylistic consistency and formal discipline that are the marks of his mature work are much more in evidence in *Korant* of 1969. *Korant* is a single-movement work of about ten minutes' duration for a large orchestra which includes a full array of percussion.

The title refers to an odd and mysterious mask from Prekmurje (Slovenia). Under this mask man changes, to live out his nature, unknown and unrecognizable, in ritual gestures and jumps.

The score is prefaced by lines by the poet Edvard Kocbek on the same theme. In an earlier work based on the same subject, Matija Bravničar allowed folk elements to dominate his musical thinking. In his *Korant*, Lebič made only two moves in this direction: he has some passages of fairly regular metrical accents (these sound like ritualistic drumming) and some melodic groups of notes derived from a Slovenian folksong. In other respects *Korant* uses new compositional and instrumental techniques. The great advance on *Požgana trava* is the convincing adaptation of the possibly anachronistic elements to new techniques, and the strong formal plan that has some similarity to that of *kons (b)* of 1968.

The formal plan of *Korant* is straightforward: a slow atmospheric introduction (score pp. 5-9), a vigorous and strongly rhythmic section of great power and vitality (pp.9-24), a slow section of mainly harmonic interest (pp.25-32), a fast scherzo-like section, again strongly rhythmic (pp.33-42), and a slow coda that combines a number of slow-moving permutations of a Slovenian folksong (pp.43-51). The regular rhythmic patterns referred to earlier are found in the fast sections. In the first they appear briefly in combination with irregular rhythms, but in the second fast section they are used in an extended passage mostly for percussion (pp. 39-41). Here a regular crotchet beat, subdivided into two, three or four, is written in bars of two, three, four or five beats. The Slovenian folk-song that Lebič derived his motives from is not identified in the score, but at the slow tempo used, its rhythmic identity is completely lost and its melodic form is only vaguely discernible. The complex textures employed further militate against recognition.

This lack of melodic interest is a characteristic of the whole work, whose effect is mainly harmonic, rhythmic and formal. Lebič often, as in *kons (a)* and *kons (b)*, builds up his chords from notes within a narrow pitch range (see Ex.5). In *Korant* there is little sense of chord progression; instead Lebič favoured the use of repetitions of the same chord. Forward movement is created more by rhythmic means, including changing multi-layered ostinato patterns frequently (of course, this could almost be considered a form of harmonic progression).

The most striking feature of *Glasovi* ('Voices') of 1973-74 is the orchestration. Instead of the full orchestra of *Korant*, Lebič used a large string orchestra, together with a group of other stringed instruments, harp, piano, harpsichord, guitar and mandolin, and a large battery of percussion. This proved no limitation to the composer who handled this unusual orchestration with considerable subtlety and variety. The music is again predominantly non-melodic, even more so than *Korant*, but on the other hand does not make a great feature of textures whose details are not discernible as such. The work plays continuously, as does *Korant*, but the various sections are not distinguished so much by tempo as by certain technical features which predominate at any one time.

The opening sections present the materials. The first section (score pp.1-5) features short-lived groupings of sounds that consist of little flourishes, rapid repetitions of notes, trills and wider-spaced alternations of two notes. These

are normally based around plucked chords. The change in the manner of bowed string playing from short tremolos to long sustained notes as part of a cluster built up from the bass marks the first main contrast. The other instruments introduce little arpeggio-like flourishes around the beginnings of notes and chords. The appearance of short, sharp sounds (drums and plucked strings) to a string texture of glissandos moving at different times and in different directions brings in two more elements. The final element that Lebič introduced to *Glasovi* was the only really melodic one of the whole work: fast, scurrying figures from a group of solo strings, accompanied by glissando string textures. The rest of the work blends, contrasts, juxtaposes and develops these elements in an imaginative way that is tedious to describe but straightforward to understand. The processes have an exemplary formal clarity.

The music that Lebič composed during the years 1976 to 1979 is no less accomplished. Five published works date from these years. Three solo instrumental works, *Sonet* for piano (1976), *Chalumeau* for clarinet (1977) and *Okus po času, ki beži* ('A Taste of Times Fleeting Away') for organ (1978), explore some of the new instrumental techniques. On a broader canvas the Quartet for percussion (1979) has similar aims for a wider range of instruments, but also includes spoken parts. The most substantial work, the 15-minute *Tangam* for chamber orchestra of 1977, is a richly varied piece which, although having a firm structural basis, allows much flexibility in the order and choice of certain materials. Indeed, what characterises the works as a group is the flexibility allowed in performance.

The exposition of contrasting materials in *Sonet* is typical of the composer. Single notes are sometimes built up into sustained chords. These are contrasted with faster moving successions of chords, usually changing around a pivotal note, and various flourishes. A short interlude with obvious thematic connections leads into two 'Commentaries', the second of which is interrupted by three 'Interpolations', which act as a form of development. At this point the performer is given the choice of completing the work as notated or of improvising on material of Commentary II in the manner of the interpolations.

The freedom offered to the performer of *Chalumeau* is of a different order. The piece is almost entirely spatially notated and designed to be played in strict chronological sequence. Like many similar works for solo instrument, e.g. the *Sequenza* pieces by Luciano Berio and the solo items from Vinko Globokar's *Laboratorium*, it employs such new techniques as multiple sonorities, various tonguing methods, and the use of quasi-musical noises. In a cadenza-like passage towards the end the player is instructed to explore 'all possibilities of the instrument in all registers, aggressively'. This is a brief passage of improvisation within limits defined by graphic notation, a common enough procedure in new music, though not commonly found in Lebič's music.

Traditional and graphic notations are much more liberally combined in the organ piece *Okus po času, ki beži*. Detailed recoding or improvisation within microstructures is expected of the performer, although as in *Chalumeau* this does not affect the overall large-scale structure. The use of graphic notation is greatly expanded to indicate the playing of 'tiny, transparent, inarticulate sounds/clusters', 'whistle-sounds', and other variations of tone quality. The

improvisations at the end of the piece, including fragments of plainsong, a passage in the style of Perotin, and another in the key of D minor, introduce a new dimension to Lebič's music. The clash of styles provides a vividly bizarre ending, especially as the organist is instructed to play the flexatone at full volume on three short phrases before the music is suddenly cut by two loud but short organ chords.

The parodistic and ironic juxtapositions of the coda of the organ work do something to prepare us for the imaginative writing of the Quartet for percussion. A precedent for this work could be sought in Milan Stibilj's *Épervier de ta faiblesse*, *Domine* of 1964 and some passages have a passing resemblance to parts of Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel*. Yet neither of these works can be usefully compared to the *tour-de-force* that is Lebič's Quartet. In it the four players use a wide variety of instruments, and are treated equally, having a broadly similar collection of instruments. This allows 'tutti' passages in which all or most of the players perform exactly the same music and other passages with separate parts but of uniform tone-colour. This is by no means a rigid formula, as Lebič explores numerous solo and accompanimental relationships throughout the piece. At numerous points in the score the players are also given spoken or whispered parts. These are integrated into the musical structure in much the same way as phonetic sounds appear in Lebič's *kons (a)* of 1970. The notation sometimes requires exact pitches. This is particularly notable in a passage (pp.8-11 in the published score), in which the marimbaphone and vibraphone are pitted against two quartets of approximately tuned flower pots (already used two years earlier with great subtlety in *Tangram*). On the other hand Lebič extended his use of the free choice of pitches within defined visual contours, as well as improvisations of various types. The greatest freedom for the performers is exercised in a passage (fig.18 on p.14), in which the players interpret four shapes, independently of each other, in hushed speech accompanied by drumheads being scratched and hit with the nails.

The idea of freedom in performance is interpreted differently in the most substantial work of this group, *Tangram* for chamber orchestra. A tangram is a puzzle of Chinese origin in which the player makes different configurations using all of the seven geometric shapes. This idea is treated with great freedom by Lebič. While the composer cast most of his work in his normal, freely developing but strictly notated manner, he introduced a long passage (pp.21-28 in the published score), in which the musical shapes (the tangrams) are 'fitted together' in performance. These, designated TAN I, II, III 'represent independent structures to be compiled at the conductor's will' (score, p.21). The composer provided the materials, but the coordination, synchronization and, to a certain extent, the dynamics are left to be determined by the conductor. Most of the remainder of the score is carefully designed to contrast various parameters, either simultaneously or successively. The final pages of *Tangram*, however, provide another opportunity for flexibility. Lebič notated all the materials, including a piece of Mozartian parody, but allowed much free coordination. This irregularity and rhythmic freedom is contrasted directly with the regular rhythmic structures played by the three sets of four tuned flower pots. The work as a

whole gives evidence not only of the composer's fertile imagination, but also his ability to give his performers some scope for creativity while still retaining his firm but subtle structural grasp.

Lebič has not been a prolific composer, but has worked carefully with his resources in a meticulous way, revising his work on a number of occasions. He has never used new techniques just to be in fashion, but with constant attention to producing exactly calculated effects. Thus he has not embraced serial techniques nor the simple block textures or ostinatos of, say, Penderecki. His use of melodic lines has been sparing in his orchestral works, although freely developing lines appear often in the chamber pieces. There is always structural interest in Lebič's music, and not just the use of sounds for their immediate effect.

POVZETEK

Lojze Lebič (1934) je eden izmed vodilnih slovenskih skladateljev svoje generacije. Čeprav je napisal nekaj del v tradicionalnem stilu, si je s kompozicijsko zrelostjo osvojil novo teksturalno tehniko. S skupino skladb, kot so Meditacije za dva, Ekspresije, Atelier in Impromptus za klavir, si je utrdil zmožnost tekočega in učinkovitega komponiranja v melodično-teksturalnem stilu svojih sodobnikov. V večjih ansambelskih skladbah, kons (b) in kons (a), je komponiral bolj v zvočnih blokih, a z manj zanimanja za posamezne glasove, s tehniko, ki jo je prenesel na orkestralna dela Korant in Glasovi. Obe deli odsevata močno, obenem pa voljno oblikovno kontrolo. Podobno kot v komornih delih Požgana trava vsebuje jasno izoblikovane melodične linije in to ne samo v solističnem vokalnem partu, pri čemer pa s harmonskimi in ritmičnimi značilnostmi kaže na svoj prehodni značaj. Od kompozicije Impromptu št. 4 (1974) dalje daje Lebič izvajalcu svoje glasbe večjo svobodo. V treh solističnih delih, Sonet, Chalumeau in Okus po času, ki beži, uporablja improvizacijo in svobodno interpretacijo grafične notacije. Elementi parodije se pojavljajo v zadnji med temi skladbami. Kvartet za tolkala razširja uporabo grafične notacije in, kot v kons (a), od izvajalcev zahteva, da govorijo fonetične zvoke, ki so integrirani v glasbeno strukturo. Tangram za komorni orkester predstavlja uspešno kombinacijo elementov, ki naj jih organizira dirigent (tangrame namreč), in drugega gradiva, ki ostaja pod strogo kontrolo skladatelja. Celotna forma je pozorno usklajena. Lebičeva glasba odseva rahločutno ravnovesje med novim in nepreiskkušenim ter starim in uspešnim kakor tudi med željo za elegantnimi zvoki in potrebo po trdni oblikovni disciplini.