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Interactions between Tradition and Modernism in Serbian Church Music of the 20th Century*

Interakcije med tradicijo in modernizmom v srbski cerkveni glasbi 20. stoletja

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IZVLEČEK

Sestavek se ukvarja z vprašanjem »zmernega« oziroma »ublaženega« modernizma v odnosu do srbske cerkvene glasbe 20. stoletja, pri čemer prihaja do zaključka, da njegov vpliv – v dialogu s pravoslavno duhovnostjo in pomisleki, ki zadevajo liturgično umetnost – ni bil samo pozitiven, ampak je še daleč, da bi bil izčrpan.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the question of 'moderate' or 'moderated' modernism in relation to 20th-century Serbian Church music, concluding that its influence in dialogue regarding with Orthodox spirituality and concerns with liturgical art was not only positive but is far from being exhausted.

Modernisms

The cultural historian Peter Gay has written: "The one thing that all modernists had indisputably in common was the conviction that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar, the rare to the ordinary, the experimental to the routine."¹

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¹ Peter Gay, *Modernism* (London: Heinemann, 2007), p. 2.

If one may take this observation as being true – and Peter Gay’s investigation into the phenomenon of modernism certainly, and perhaps predictably, supports this view, how could such an attitude be reconciled with any recourse on the part of artists to the millennial (or apparently millennial) traditions of the Orthodox Church and its artistic culture?² Max Paddison, in discussing Adorno, asks the same question in a more general way when he speaks of “the predicament faced by the artist caught between, on the one hand, the traditional demands of the art work for unity and integration (the harmonious relationship between part and whole) and, on the other hand, the loss of faith in any overarching unity on both individual and social levels in the face of the evident fragmentation of modern existence”.³

Adorno’s negative dialectics, in which thesis and antithesis occur without the “overarching unity” created by synthesis, would seem to exclude anything as profoundly engaged with synthesis – the “placing together” of the human person – as Orthodox theology, which is, of course, what the art of the Orthodox Church manifests. Any use of such a vocabulary within quotation marks, as it were, would seem to relativize, recontextualize and possibly ironize it, which at first sight seems more a post-modernist than a modernist proceeding. However, as the work of, for example, Ljubica Marić shows, the integration of such vocabularies is possible within a broadly modernist aesthetic.⁴ As a truly fruitful negative modernist example of such a procedure, one might cite the overt connections of Malevich’s famous black square with icon painting; as Jeremy Howard has noted, “[...] Malevich’s painted quadrilateral was not perfectly square. It related to the shape and function of Russo-Byzantine icons and simultaneously, through its negation of content and the internal relationships of its elements, was the most powerful generator of forms.”⁵ Vladimir Tatlin, the founder of constructivism (1885-1953), is another painter whose work has a strong connection with the art of the icon.⁶ The work of Oleg Tarasov on the role of the icon in the aesthetics of the Russian avant-garde is also singularly revelatory in this regard: he is more explicit than Howard in his commentary when he says that “[...] this inversion of the icon, as a result of which it appears in the ‘garment of new meaning’ implied on the surface a confirmation of Nietzschean ‘nothingness’ and the disappearance of the very horizon of meaning.”⁷

² For an examination of some aspects of this question with regard to Orthodox tradition, see Ivan Moody, “The Idea of Canonicity in Orthodox Liturgical Art,” *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Orthodox Liturgical Music* (Joensuu: ISOCM/University of Joensuu, 2009), p. 337–342.

³ Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1996), p. 52.

⁴ See Ivan Moody, “Aspects of Spirituality and Modernism in the Music of Ljubica Marić,” in Dejan Despić and Melita Milin, eds., *Spaces of Modernism: Ljubica Marić in Context*, Belgrade: SANU, 2010, p. 75–82.

⁵ Jeremy Howard, *op.cit.*, 218. Of his square, which was hung at the “0.10. The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings” in 1915 high up and diagonally across two walls, as though an icon in the “beautiful corner” of an Orthodox household, Malevich said, five years later, “I had an idea that were humanity to draw an image of the Divinity after its own image, perhaps the black square is the image of God as the essence of his perfection on a new path for today’s fresh beginning,” quoted in Arthur C. Danto, “Paint it black. Kazimir Malevich,” *The Nation*, August 18, 2003, available at <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20030818/danto>.

⁶ See, *inter alia*, Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art 1863-1922*, London: Thames and Hudson, revised Marian Burleigh-Motley (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), p. 168–169.

⁷ Oleg Tarasov, (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p. 376.

Stravinsky had already established the paradigm for the positive aspect of this paradox when he reverted to attendance at the services of the Russian Orthodox Church while in France after 1927. Of this, Gay has observed:

“This psychological turn of a modernist towards a lost emotional home should surprise only those who equate modernism with atheism. Religious belief and unbelief among modernists ranged across the widest possible spectrum, and was independent of their distance from conventionality in the arts.”

It does not follow, then, that Stravinsky abandoned originality while he searched, as he put it, for order.”⁸ Acknowledging the breadth of the spiritual spectrum of modernism (and, clearly, Malevich and Stravinsky stand at opposite ends of that spectrum) is obviously of vital importance.⁹ In the first place, it recognizes the non-monolithic nature of the idea of modernism itself, and, secondly, calls implicit attention to the fact that to question the possibility of diverse spiritual contributions to modernist thought would be as absurd as questioning the possibility of contributions of an emotional, linguistic or geographical order. It is here that the notion of “moderate” or “moderated” modernism comes into play.¹⁰ This term seems to have been first used by Adorno (“gemässigte Moderne”¹¹), inevitably pejoratively, but has since gained wider (and more positive) currency following its use by Hermann Danuser in his 1978 article “Tradition und Avantgarde nach 1950.”¹² It is a particularly useful term to describe a large amount of music written by composers who began their careers just after the Second World War and the wide acceptance of the more fundamental challenge to modernism known as post-modernism. (A challenge so successful that Taruskin was able to refer to Schnittke in 1993 as a “posteverythingist”.¹³)

The term is, further, exceptionally useful to describe most music written after the gradual desintegration of the Socialist Realist aesthetic, as Ivana Medić’s studies of the phenomenon in Russia and Serbia in particular have shown.¹⁴ The search on the part of Russian composers for a new orientation made necessary by Krushchev’s “Thaw” after 1953, for example, reflects once again what Peter Gay said of Stravinsky: “it does not follow, then, that Stravinsky abandoned originality while he searched, as he put it, for order.” It is equally clear that such searches for order were different for every composer. Medić

⁸ Gay, ., p. 262.

⁹ Even though Gay himself sarcastically undermines his objectivity in this matter by subsequently noting that “[Stravinsky] had grown uneasy about what had once been his supreme response to his passion for composition, his individualism. As he told a journalist not long after he had started putting icons on his piano: ‘Individualism in art, philosophy, and religion implies a state of revolt against God,’ and he had come to oppose this revolt.”, Gay, ., p. 262.

¹⁰ The present author follows Ivana Medić in her preference for the second of these terms: “(...) the adjective suggests that moderateness is in the very nature of the phenomenon, while the participle puts an emphasis on human agency.” (Ivana Medić, “The Ideology of Moderated Modernism in Serbian Musicology” 7 (2007): 280n.) Both terms have thus far been widely used as synonymous, however, and further discussion is clearly needed.

¹¹ Theodor Adorno, ., ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), especially “The Aging of New Music” and “On the Social Situation in Music”.

¹² In Reinhold Brinkmann, ed., ., Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Neue Musik und Musikerziehung Darmstadt, 19 (Mainz, 1978), p. 22–54.

¹³ R. Taruskin, “A Posteverythingist Booms,” New York Times (July 2, 1992).

¹⁴ See Medić, op. cit., and, by the same author, “Moderated Modernism in Russian Music after 1953,” in ., ed. Melita Milin and Dejan Despić (Belgrade, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2008), p. 195–204, as well as Vesna Mikić, “Aspects of (Moderate) Modernism in the Serbian Music of the 1950s,” in *ibid.*, 187–194. For a broad survey of contemporary music in Bulgaria, up to and including the phenomenon of post-modernism, see Maria Kostakeva, “À la recherche de l’identité perdue,” in Georges Kokkonis, ed., ., Études Balkaniques 13 (2006, Paris: de Boccard), p. 107–126.

provides a possible list of types of moderated modernism, including neo-romanticism and neo-expressionism; the last item in this list is “neo-religious/mystical wave”,¹⁵ though she does not, for reasons of space, analyse this category.

Mention has already been made of Ljubica Marić; her synthetic approach, absorbing into a “moderated” modern vocabulary elements of the Serbian Octoechos, certainly fits such a category; one might add to the list the Russian composers Galina Ustvolskaya and Sofia Gubaidulina.

It is clear, then, that the various manifestations of modernism as they affected countries, or composers from countries, of Orthodox tradition, were the result of a reaction to the modernist agenda – again I call attention to Gay’s noting of the “conviction that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar, the rare to the ordinary, the experimental to the routine” – that included an artistic stance that had room for both the innovations of the modernist agenda and the historical, aesthetic and spiritual weight of an inherited religious tradition – indeed, various religious traditions. Such a combination, “moderated” though its modernistic component might seem to be, in the context of Orthodox religious tradition especially, given its adherence to the idea of creativity informed by tradition (or, more frequently, Tradition), was to prove fertile ground. It is necessary to go no further than the Byzantinisms in the (Latin-texted) *Symphony of Psalms* by Stravinsky to be afforded a glimpse of the rich possibilities offered by such an approach.

Modernism and Church Music in Serbia

To turn more specifically to Serbia, one must inevitably begin with Stevan Mokranjac (1856-1914). If one may broadly divide the liturgical works of Mokranjac into three categories, following those of Bogdan Đaković (artistic arrangements of Serbian chant, simple arrangements for regular liturgical use and original composition)¹⁶, those of his successors blur these divisions rather more. In truth, Mokranjac was able to effect his quiet revolution because he was simultaneously interested in the idea of Serbian liturgical tradition¹⁷ and the kind of wider (though scarcely thorough-going modernist) musical environment that was provided by his studies with Rheinberger, Parisotti and Reinecke, in Munich, Rome and Leipzig respectively; he retained “the original spirit of the chant while placing it, aesthetically speaking, within new musical surroundings.”¹⁸ The results of this fusion of aesthetic ideals may be readily seen even in simple works such as his harmonization of the troparion for the Nativity, in which he exploits the melodic characteristics of Tone 4 in his – by traditional western tonal standards – characteristically waywardly chromatic harmony.

¹⁵ Medić, “Moderated Modernism...,” p. 198.

¹⁶ These categories are itemized in Bogdan Đaković, “Serbian Orthodox Choral Music in the First Half of the 20th Century,” *The Traditions of Orthodox Music: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Orthodox Church Music* (Joensuu: University of Joensuu/ISOCM), p. 174.

¹⁷ Witness his enormously influential *Osmoglasnik* (Ст. Ст. Мокрањац, Осмогласник, београд: Српска Православна Црква, 1997. (четврто издање))

¹⁸ Đaković, “Serbian Orthodox Choral Music in the First Half of the 20th Century,” in *The Traditions of Orthodox Music: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Orthodox Church Music* (Joensuu: University of Joensuu/ISOCM, 2007), p. 173.

Mokranjac, of course, built on the work of Kornelije Stanković (1831-1865), and, while none of his reforming ideas will be unfamiliar to scholars of the history of western Latin-rite chant, it is perhaps worth mentioning in this context his experiences at the St Sava Seminary in Belgrade, where chant was “learnt by heart, which allowed the better singers greater artistic individuality and explains why there are so many variations to the same melody and why this chanting was often modified and then restored again.”¹⁹ He espoused, in fact, what is now considered the dangerous ideal of “editorial purity”²⁰, but this equipped him with the detailed knowledge of the Serbian tone system that would enable him to take an artistic path of confidence and singular artistic originality. Stanković, himself a codifier, had not gone nearly so far.

Later composers such as Petar Konjović (1883-1970), Stevan Hristić (1885-1958) and Miloje Milojević (1884-1946) benefited hugely from the research and compositional activity of both Stanković and Mokranjac. While the dramatic dynamic and rhythmic effects and elaborate harmonies in works by Konjović such as *Tebe odejušćagošja*²¹ suggest the choral concertos of Bortnyansky, his settings of *Blagoobraznij Josif* and *Mironosicam ženam*²² are eminently practical liturgical pieces, quoting the chant consistently in the upper voice. An example of a “compromise” between both styles (that is, the first category in Đaković’s classification) would be his harmonization of the ninth ode of the canon for the Nativity of Christ (*Irmos na Božič*)²³, which achieves an elegant fusion of the modal characteristics of the chant and a frequently unpredictable harmonic language. Konjović showed his credentials as a “moderated modernist” in no uncertain terms in his orchestral work: the ritualistic folk primitivism of *Kestenova gora* and *Čočečka igra*, from the symphonic triptych of 1938, bear ample witness to this. As Nadežda Mosusova has noted, “The modernism of Serbian musicians did not threaten tradition, i.e., the general European tradition of classical music, because the Serbian tradition in art music before and after the First World War was new, and tradition in the performing arts slight and negligible”.²⁴

It is obvious that, especially when the composition of church music begins to overlap with that of concert music, the satisfactory performance of the former depends on musicians of “concert” standard. Such performances were not consistently possible, and with some notable exceptions, such as the *Opelo* (1915) by Stevan Hristić, and a few elaborate settings of the Liturgy, such as that written in 1931 by Marko Tajčević (1900-1984) – and, as the end of a line, those from 1925 by Milenko Živković (1901-1964) and 1938 by Milivoje Crvčanin (1892-1978) may be considered as fireworks of unimaginable proportions²⁵ – the musical horizons of those composers in Serbia interested in choral

¹⁹ К. Манојловић. Споменица Стевану Ст. Мокрањцу, Државна штампарија. Београд 1923; реприт издање, Неротин, 1988. Quotation translated by Vijišlav Ilić, Foreword to *Стеван Стојановић Мокрањец: Духовна Музика III*, Том 6, Belgrade: Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids. Beograd Nota. (Knjaževac: House for Music Editions, 1996).

²⁰ П. Коњовић, Стеван Мокрањец, Београд: Полит, 1956, реприт издање, Матица Српска, Нови Сад, 1984. Quoted in English translation in Ilić, *ibid.*, xi.

²¹ Petar Konjović, *Muzika Duhovna* (Zagreb: Zdanje i Naklada Cirilo-Methodskog Vjesnika, 1938), p. 58–66.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 85, 86.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 88–93.

²⁴ Nadežda Mosusova, “Modernism in Serbian-Yugoslav Music”, in *Rethinking Musical Modernism*, ed. Melita Milin and Dejan Despić, (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2008), p. 119.

²⁵ See Bogdan Đaković, “The Modern Traditionalist Milivoje M. Crvčanin (1892-1978),” in *Composing and Chanting in the Orthodox Church: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Orthodox Church Music* (Joensuu: University of Joensuu/

music became gradually less defined by the parameters of contemporary church singing, though it is important to note that the production of church music in Serbia up to the beginning of the Second World War far outweighed that of Russia after the drastic political and culture rupture brought about by the events of 1917.²⁶

With the later rediscovery of the earliest strata of Serbian church music (principally through the work of Dimitrije Stefanović²⁷), its continuation in a number of publications²⁸, the republication of the work of such practical church musicians as Barački²⁹ and the attempt to contextualize Serbian chant in the work of younger scholars³⁰, the aesthetic initiative, so to speak, might seem to have left the realm of contemporary composition. Such is not entirely the case, as the work of younger composers such as Jasmina Mina Mitrušić (b. 1963) and Milorad Marinković (b. 1976) and the continuing commissioning tradition of the Serbian Church Choral Society of Pančevo prove – these include the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts by Dimitrije Golemović (b. 1954), *Tebje Boga hvalim* by Rajko Maksimović (b. 1935) and the work of Svetislav Božić (b. 1954) – but it is also true that these concerns are far from central to Serbian musical life as a whole. While the work of Mokranjac, informed as it was by his own interest in the monophonic tradition of the Serbian Church, might seem to be a basis for further work in this direction and while the venerable status of Mokranjac within Serbia (as a composer of “art music”, a category that happened to include church music) provides its own self-perpetuating mythology, the continuation of what he began has, in fact, not happened. This is in part because Mokranjac himself was the victim of his own myth, and his work has become a kind of museum piece (though I would not wish to imply that his work was a museum piece entirely without future life, as the lush textures of Hristić’s Liturgy for Male Voice Choir, from 1937, or the positively Straussian ambience of Milojević’s Solemn Liturgy [*Svečana Liturgija*], op.50, from the same year, show), and in part, obviously, because of the political confusion that ensued in the former Yugoslavia after his death. As was the case in Soviet Russia therefore, a newly-invigorated tradition was terminated: the picking-up of the pieces continues still.

This termination of a tradition, and the attempts at restarting it, were, in their turn, bound up with the question of what ensued, in terms of a reaction to the previous German hegemony, in Eastern Europe after the First World War. Jim Samson has written of this process that “The major impetus for this came from Russia, whose significance for East Central Europe increased at the turn of the century. Russia

ISOCM, 2009), p. 191–198. Ивана Перковић-Радак, “Црквена Музика”, in *Историја Српске музике* (Београд: Завод за Уџбенике, 2007), p. 328 and Đaković, Bogdan. “Rediscovering a Serbian national style: Problems in sacred architecture, church art and church music in the late 1930s: The case of the Orthodox choral music of Milenko Živković (1901–1964).” *Church, State and Nation in Orthodox Church Music: Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Orthodox Church Music*. Joensuu: University of Joensuu/ISOCM, forthcoming 2010.

²⁶ Đaković, “Serbian Orthodox Choral Music,” p. 179 ff.

²⁷ Notably Стара Српска Музика, Београд: Музиколошки Институт, Српске Академије Хаука и Уметности, 1975.

²⁸ For example, Даница Петровић, Хиландарски Ктитори у Православном Појању, Београд: Музиколошки Институт, Српске Академије Хаука и Уметности, 1999.

²⁹ For example, the newly redacted version of Српско Народно Црквено Пјање: Божич, Велики Петак, Ускр, Крагујевац: Келенић, 2000.

³⁰ The work of Sara Peno on the traditions of Hilandar is of particular relevance here, notably “Хиландарске Појачке Пизнице: Викентије Хиландарац, Нови Сад: АртПринт, 2003 and “The Liturgical Typikon as a Source for Mediaeval Chanting Practice, *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Orthodox Liturgical Music* (Joensuu: University of Joensuu/ISOCM, 2009), p. 203–211.

preserved a genuine independence from Austro-German styles in the 19th century, and her achievement foreshadowed – in a precise technical way – the new tonal languages developed in the early 20th century.”³¹ Remote though this may seem from the concerns of composer of church music, this search for “new tonal languages” – so important an aspect of modernism – had a great deal to do with the work of such figures as Konjović, Tajčević and Crvčanin, all three of whom took the composition of liturgical music seriously.

With more recent attempts at the absorption (or perhaps, in this context, “acculturation” would be a better word) of the history of chant into the realm of ethnomusicology, notably the work of Peter Jeffery,³² a composer such as Konjović could potentially be seen not only as nationalist, but a pioneer in his combination of a “new tonal language” with a language ethnically distinct – church music, in fact, seen as an “imaginary folklore”.³³ Even more so might this be said of the Živković of the *Byzantine Liturgy* for male voices of 1935, a work that looks towards Byzantium for its “imaginary folklore” and includes the quotation of two chant melodies, setting it within a highly adventurous harmonic context. The envisioning of church music as imaginary folklore has, of course, enormous implications for the composer of liturgical music, especially as regards the status of any chant he may be quoting and the consequent validation of his own work.³⁴ It brings with it, in fact, an entire set of conceptual values, those not of modernism, but of post-modernism in the broadest sense. The question for the composer therefore becomes: how to reconcile the urgent need for liturgical music of high quality with, firstly, the inherited traditions of the Church, and, secondly, the need for self-affirmation as a composer in a world in which all repertoires are perceived as being within quotation marks?

For Stanković and Mokranjac, these questions had not arisen. While their work with those inherited repertoires of chant – repertoires that certainly at the time had no quotation marks around them – formed, so to speak, a culture, the modern acculturation of that same culture was foreshadowed in the music of such composers as Konjović. While he provided no easy answer to the problem, his distance from both Stanković and Mokranjac, in the sense that he was not an “ethnographer” (that is, not a collector of the “imaginary folklore” of church music), and his creative employment of that same “folklore”, though without embracing the radical stance of Živković, make him a figure of enormous significance, and – who knows? – a possible model for future generations of composers.

³¹ Jim Samson, “Modernism in the Music of East Central Europe,” *Music in the World of Ideas*, ed. Helen Geyer, Maciej Jablonski and Steszewski (Poznan, 2001), p. 312.

³² See, *inter alia*, Jeffery, Peter. *Re-envisioning Past Musical Cultures: Ethnomusicology in the Study of Gregorian Chant*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

³³ I am grateful to Bogan Đaković for his specific application of this term, articulated, following Bartók, in his paper “The symbolic meaning of imaginary church folklore in the Orthodox choral music of Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998),” given at the symposium Schnittke: Between Two Worlds, Goldsmiths College, University of London, November 21, 2009.

³⁴ For further discussion, see Ivan Moody, “The Idea of Canonicity in Orthodox Liturgical Art,” *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Orthodox Liturgical Music* (Joensuu: University of Joensuu/ISOCM, 2009), p. 337-342.

POVZETEK

Medtem ko je bilo vprašanje modernizma in njegove »moderacije« (t. j. »ublaženega modernizma«, kakor ga je v terminologijo uvedel Hermann Danuser, sledeč Adornovi zaničevalni rabi) v kontekstu srbske glasbe v zadnjem času predmet precejšnje znanstvene pozornosti, je bilo kaj malo slednje, še zlasti izven Srbije, posvečeno zelo bogatemu ustvarjanju na področju cerkvene glasbe v 20. stoletju.

To je v glavnem pripisati neskladju med tradicijama pravoslavne cerkvene umetnosti in modernističnih programov. In vendar del, ki so jih ustvarila Petar Konjović (1883–1970), Stevan Hristić (1885–1958)

na tem področju, pri čemer sta bila globoko privržena tradiciji, ki sta jo bila utemeljila Korne-
lije Stanković (1831–1865) in Stevan Mokranjac (1856–1914), nikakor ni mogoče ločiti od njune koncertantne glasbe, ki v veliki meri sodi v kategorijo »ublaženega modernizma«, medtem ko je delo Ljubice Marić prelilo tonalne osnove srbske cerkvene glasbe, to je *Osmoglasnik*, v opus, ki je izrazito moderen.

Članek skuša te in take pristope umestiti v srbski kontekst, a tudi širše, v dialog med modernizmom in pravoslavno duhovnostjo. Pri tem upošteva in razpravlja o vključenosti obojega pri skladateljih cerkvene glasbe v današnji Srbiji.