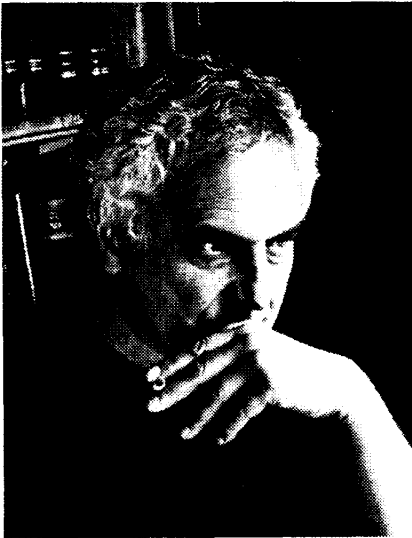

THE COMPOSER SPEAKS

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IN SEARCH FOR THE LOST INTIMACY The Interview with Composer Zoran Hristić



Zoran Hristić

Zoran Hristić was born in Belgrade on 30th July 1938. He graduated in composition in the class of Prof. Stanojlo Rajičić, and joined the Serbian “musical constellation” at the beginning of the 1960’s. As early as the 1950’s, his stylistic poetics were influenced by the European avant-garde which he became acquainted with in Milan. After the influence which the new Polish music exerted on Hristić’s creativity, he evolved towards his own tonal language, in which he used occasional elements of serial structure were used for composing specific, and even bizarre sound forms. His creativity developed along lines leading from an interest in smaller chamber forms to large stage and vocal-instrumental music works.

Hristić has been interested in the field of chamber music since 1961 when he composed *Sonata Viza* (student work for clarinet and piano). His chamber opus also includes: *Momenti u 12* (for bassoon and strings), *4 za E* (piano trio, performed at the Belgrade Music Festival in 1969, which won the prize for chamber music awarded by the Yugoslav Broadcasting Corporation), *Prazne žice pa punije* (dedicated to the Belgrade Chamber Orchestra), *La-gis* (for 14 instruments and two voices, dedicated to the *Nova muzika* ensemble), *Stvarnost* (string quartet, dedicated to the *Serbian String Quartet*), *U roku od 8* (for string chamber orchestra, composed for the 1977 Zagreb Music Biennial) and *Antikoncert* (for violin, synthesizer and symphony orchestra, premiered at the opening of the XII International Festival of Contemporary Music).

Vocal-instrumental works, thirteen of them of which we here mention only a few, are of great importance for the author's biography. *Rodoslov* (for 5 groups of 5 singers each, chatterboxes, *gusle* and chamber orchestra). It was first performed in Arandjelovac, at the *Mermer i zvuci* (*Marble and Sounds*) festival in 1972, with the *Collegium musicum* Choir. The same ensemble performed this composition at the Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS) in 1972. The *Collegium musicum* Choir was founded in the same year when the piece *Rodoslov* was written and dedicated to the choir. It is interesting that *Rodoslov*, also enriched by a visual dimension, crossed the boundary of an audio piece. The visualized version of the piece was directed by Slobodan Novaković who, together with Zoran Hristić, won the *Golden Harp* award for this piece at the television festival in Ireland in 1984. The piece *Korak*, the choreotrio to the verses written by Branko Miljković, was composed for 5 vocal soloists, children's choir, 2 mixed choirs, big symphony orchestra, folk and electronic instruments, 18 ballet dancers and folk ensemble. The piece was performed at the Sava Center big concert hall (directed by Milorad Mišković who was also the scenographer, with costumes designed by Milorad Tabački), in honor of the 21st General Conference of UNESCO. It was also performed at the opening of the 12th Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS). *Jugoslavika*, a big dance, was commissioned for the opening of the 1984 Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo, whereas *Zaveštanje* (*Bequest*, for cow horn, viola and big symphony orchestra) was premiered at the 1988 BEMUS festival.

In Zoran Hristić's opus, stage music has featured since 1972 till today. A large number of works were composed in this period: *Kameleon*, the TV ballet (composed to the libretto and choreography by Ana Radošević, with Lidija Pilipenko dancing the solo part) was Zoran Hristić's first stage music work and an example of the composer's "getaway" from the classical orchestra instrumentation. The ballet *Darinkin dar* (*Darinka's Gift*) – with libretto by Božidar Božović, with Vera Kostić as choreographer and Lidija Pilipenko dancing the main role, was based on the true story about Darinka Radović. *Darinkin dar* was premiered in 1974 at the opening of the *Marble and Sounds* festival. In the same year, the piece had its Belgrade premiere at the opening of BEMUS. *Narcis* (the TV ballet composed to the libretto by Vuk Krnjević), was recorded and realized at the Music Workshop, and performed by the Contemporary Dance Studio from Zagreb with Ivanka Šerbedžija as choreographer. *Adam and Eve* is a ballet for electronic instruments. With the performance of this piece, the Sarajevo ballet ensemble marked the 30th anniversary of the choreographer, Slavko Pervan's work. The libretto was written by Josip Lešić, inspired by Miroslav Krleža's piece, *Legenda*. *Tašana* is Hristić's last work which has not yet been performed. *Tašana* was composed in 1992 at the initiative of the National Theatre in Belgrade. The author dedicated this ballet to his sister. Hristić turned Bora Stanković's novel of the same title into a music of symbols which is a stylistic combination of his pieces, *Darinkin Dar* and *Korak*.

Among radiophonic works, we single out as the most significant ones: *Boj* (*Battle*) which is Zoran Hristić's first radiophonic piece, composed as a commissioned work, a tribute to the battle of Kosovo, marking its 600th anniversary. The dif-

ference between this radiophonic piece and similar ones by other authors is in the fact that there is no improvisation in *Boj*. Slobodan Novaković gave the piece its visual dimension. *Pacolovac (The Rat-killer)* is a ballet dance inspired by Bogdan Kršić's graphics which, for many years, deal with the medieval legend and myth of the Rat-killer. This was Slavko Pervan's first choreography for a Belgrade theatre.

As one of the pioneers of applied music in our country, Hrstić largely contributed to the stage music (*Wozzek, Macbeth, Danton's Death, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Zona Zamfirova, Budilnik /Alarm Clock/, Ljudi sa četiri prsta /People with Four Fingers/, Puč /Coup/* and *Koštana* which was awarded the Sterija Prize in 1993), puppet theatre music (winning three prizes for stage music at the Serbian Puppet Theatre Festival), feature films (*Čovek iz hrastove šume /A Man from the Oak-tree Forest/, Vrhovi Zelengore /The Peaks of Mount Zelengora/, Horoscope, Hasanaginica, Lelejska gora, Derviš i smrt, Užička republika, Čuvar plaže u zimskom periodu /The Beach-guard in Winter/, and Pas koji je voleo vozove /The Dog which Liked Trains/*), and music for television series (*Ljubav ah ljubav /Love, oh Love/, Dimitrije Tucović, Svetozar Marković, Ni crno ni belo /Neither Black nor White/, Vaga za tačno merenje /Precise Weight Scale/, and S vanglom u svet /Going to the World Carrying a Round Dish/*). He was awarded two Golden Arena prizes for music.

*The motive for this conversation is your work **Sila krsta /The Power of the Cross/**, to mark the 800th anniversary of the Monastery of Chilandar. It is not a traditional Serbian church chant, but your personal view of Serbian spiritual life and the music within it. What is the reason for waiting over fifty years to introduce a spiritual composition in your opus?*

I did not have a large choral piece in my opus. I think that the human voice is the most beautiful instrument and perhaps that is why I have not touched it throughout all these years. I waited for the right time to come. One cannot sit down and write a choral piece. As a student, I was Bajšanski's assistant in leading the *Abrašević* Choir. It is only now that I realize how, in working together with that outstanding musician, a true choir conductor, I subconsciously learned much about a choir. That knowledge was preserved and inactive for years, only to come to the surface now.

In September, in the peace of the Monastery of Chilandar, I devoted myself to something different, something very personal, something I was brought up with in my family as a believer. Many circumstances should combine for a work to be successful. When I returned from Chilandar, I was lucky to be invited by the Director of the Kolarac Foundation's Music Center Vera Stojanović and Dragan Vukić. They proposed that I should compose a piece for the St. Simeon Academy, to be held on February 27th, when the Patriarch was to come and address the opening celebration in the Monastery of Chilandar. The text I was given was the prayer to St. Simeon, written in the 13th century by Teodosije from Chilandar. That is how

my search began, listening to music, repeated listening, recollections... I confined myself to two-months of isolation. I have never understood people who say: "Every day, at five o'clock in the afternoon, I sit down and compose." No! One is either literally shut in, or does not work at all. And while one composes, one does not think. It always took me a great deal of time to get prepared, and a short time to compose a piece. And that is the syndrome of movie and stage music – *if you cannot do it quickly, do not get involved in it.*

Being an individualist, I have always felt free. Maybe I even exaggerated in that freedom of mine, so that now when I recall certain events I feel a nostalgia... I feel sad because, in the end, a man must calm down a little. I did my best to compose music people will love. I experienced that during the performance of the *Power of Cross*. The Kolarac Foundation concert hall was packed, but that was another kind of audience; it was not like – *one knows who sits in the first row*. The Patriarch sat there. And the piece received an ovation. I realized that I had done something well.

*It has been a long road since your first composition in 1949 to the **Power of Cross**. When you look back, what does your beginning look like to you?*

The first piece I composed was *Igra za klavir /Dance for Piano/*. It was written in 1949, after I had seen a feature film about Chopin, which fascinated me. I showed the score to my professor Jela Kršić who encouraged me to continue composing. At the age of fifteen, I wrote *Toccata* which was awarded a prize at the students' competition. I submitted it anonymously so that no one would know that I was a high-school student. In the year that followed I was introduced to Professor Stanojlo Rajičić in whose class at the Academy of Music I began studying in 1957. Before the second year of my studies began, at the Adriatic coast I became acquainted with the Italian writer Elio Vittorini who invited me to come to Milan. (Otherwise, I recall those years as a complete information blockade). In Milan, I was taken to meet Castiglioni, who was, at that time, teaching composition at the *Giuseppe Verdi* Conservatory. He gradually introduced me to modern Italian music, Petrassi, Schoenberg's dodecaphony. I spent three months in Italy where my composition *Grimase /Grimaces/* was written, which I presented as an examination piece in the second year of music studies. Professor Rajičić and Vlastimir Peričić were astounded by my work, but, thanks to Ljubica Marić and Enriko Josif I received an excellent grade.

At that time the Belgrade School produced the largest number of talents. I recall the Annual Review of Contemporary Music in Opatija and the Zagreb Music Biennial at the time when I was a student. We truly had an advantage over the others. Regardless of the fact that, in a certain period, Zagreb experimented for the sake of experiment, we composed a different kind of music here. Among our composers, Vladan Radovanović was my model but, in respect of sensitivity, I was close to the Zagreb composers of my generation. Among them I have Detoni and Kuljerić in mind. Although we never established it, we were an informal group. It would be a mistake to say that I belong among my dear friends, such as Ozghian and

Maksimović... In the year 1961, I composed *Četiri nemira* /Four Restless Moments/ for forty string instruments and *Varijacije Bah Šenberg* and *Bi bap*, and in the year that followed I wrote the final examination piece, *Naslovi* /Titles/, which caused a great deal of fuss. The only support I received was from my mentor Vasilije Mokranjac. In order to achieve the sound, I had to study a new notation. No one wanted to perform my piece, so that I asked Milko Kelemen for assistance. Consequently, my work *Titles* was performed by the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir in Opatija. The works that followed were: piano trio *Četiri za E*, presenting four one-minute movements in a Webern-like pointillist manner, *Lagis* for voice and chamber orchestra, *Situacije* for string quartet, with a great deal of graphical structuring. I was enchanted by the Polish School from the time when I graduated until I composed *Darinkin dar*, and I fully demonstrated it in the piece *U roku od osam*.

When I speak of my life, I can by no means separate it from the way I lived. I never gave up anything good or vital for the sake of music. It somehow ran parallel. Sometimes a year went by and I did not write a single note. Life gave me a great gift of perception which I subsequently turned into music. One should be communicative and in a permanent search, because penicillin was also discovered by accident. A man must always be on the move and must not miss anything. Such curiosity results in strange situations and happy moments. That is how I came across the chatterbox for my piece *Rodoslov* and said: "Well, this is the only sound that can be incorporated in the first part of *Rodoslov*!" This is my manner of living and composing, or not composing and sitting in barrooms, which is also very important in one's life, particularly in Serbia. And I never met my colleagues there., so I used to associate with another kind of people. How can one be a musician and not know what a barroom is? In fact, in my young days I sat there with a musician, but that was Vlasta Peričić, and it meant a lot to me. To be lucky enough to associate with Vlastimir Peričić is very important. He was my university, Vasilije Mokranjac, Mića Popović, Dragutin Gostuški, Enriko Josif, Zuko Džumhur... That was more exciting and beneficial than the knowledge offered to me in the Academy of Music syllabus.

But, let us go back to *Rodoslov*. In the year 1972, this piece was the beginning of something that culminated in the works *Boj* and *Zaveštanje*. Until 1982, my life was solely devoted to composing as a free-lance artist. I wrote many pieces for outdoor spaces, the sound of which is not easy to master. There were three compositions which were the most difficult to write in my life. I composed them under great pressure, great personal and artistic responsibility. They were *Školski čas* /A School Class/ in Kragujevac in 1973, *Darinkin dar* in 1974, and the big dance, *Jugoslavika*, for the opening of the 1984 Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo. They were all works of a large structure, but they were important for me because they had been commissioned.

Most of your works were commissioned. Did their quality suffer for that reason?

I was not the first to write commissioned music. It was already done by Handel, not to mention Bach and Mozart. Commissions are opposed by those who have never been commissioned to write a piece of music. For a professional, a commission is a kind of big obligation. Until 1982, in this country I had the status of a free-lance artist, this meaning that the quality of my work dictated the quality of my standard of living. But, in most cases commissions coincided with my desire to do something and they, literally, financially stimulated me to work. Sponsorship in art is something quite normal and it does not influence the quality of the work itself. It is true that I wrote some works which, perhaps, I would not have done otherwise, but it was a matter of survival. I recall a drastic example of such a commission. It was a piece commissioned by the Sava Center and UNESCO in the eighties when I composed the piece *Korak*. Eighteen years later I can say that, back in 1980, my colleagues did not realise that I was doing something for them too. That was the first piece of artistic music that was presented at a big press conference, the first big piece of its kind that was performed at the Sava Center concert hall and, in a way, conquered it. Instead of giving their support, I was brutally attacked by my colleagues, both men and women, who at that time did not even realise that they were directly interfering in my survival. They were ready to finish me off completely. And what we did at the time, and they condemned back in 1980, is nowadays in everyday practice, organising promotions, for example.

I think that stage music is the crown of your opus. What is your opinion about it?

My love for the stage was born at the time when my father took me to the theatre for the first time. Stage music is, in the proper sense of the term, searching for a sound. For me, that sound was a challenge throughout my whole life. A sound, a sound and only sound, and how to achieve it and find ever stranger combinations so as to achieve something that has never been heard before. A great deal of the stage music that I have written, for me was always a wonderful test-field for sound research. In a scene, sound is equal to a costume or light, it has to be found! The search for that sound always gave me great pleasure. I devoted a long period, almost ten years, exclusively to stage music and I gradually became a master of orchestration because everything gradually became clear to me.

I experienced your creativity as a series of kaleidoscope pictures, which are always different, but are composed of the same details. Are leitmotifs and fixed orchestral sections, interwoven like a stylistic thread throughout your stage music opus, the key to your stage music?

In my opinion, a writer writes one book all his life, and the composer writes one kind of music too. Someone writes it at the very beginning and stops, like Carl Orff did, or the composer of the music in the feature film *The Third Man*. Well, not

everyone can be Rossini or Greta Garbo. I would like to be like them, to simply stop. The only thing that I will always have for certain is stage music.

Many composers write for themselves. Is music, in your opinion, a communication or the intimate?

There is something that used to confuse me when I was a young man, a student. I was surrounded by wonderful teachers, but it seems to me that their viewpoint was: *It is important to write music for oneself*. I never accepted such a stand and I think that you are deceived by every artist, of any kind, who does not care about communication and influence. Art is, in fact, a kind of influence exerted on the surroundings: a spiritual influence, very important and strong. When I was a student, there were many people at the Academy of Music who would say: "Composing is a kind of intimacy. When you write a piece, you should put it in a drawer." Writing music in such a way has a specific purpose because, at a certain moment, however, the piece is taken out of the drawer. For example, to win an award, or be used for becoming an academician, etc. Such things very often happen in our milieu. That composers' drawer is used for acquiring false statuses. Because status is something quite different and is acquired in a different way.

Answering the question whether he is in love with his paintings, a French painter said: "It is not true! I am in love with the act of painting." The same stands for me. I enjoy writing music, and I am not in love with my works at all; on the contrary, when I finish writing them, I no longer consider them my own but give them away and that is when my "joint life" with them ends. They go away and I no longer take care of them. Just as one does with a child when it grows up and leads a new life.

Can music be a means for manipulating masses of people?

Yes, it can be a powerful means of manipulation. I strongly believe that nothing can present one people's situation so dramatically as music can. One cannot run away from music. The whole planet is enveloped in music today. One takes a look at a painting and goes away, one reads a book and puts it away. When music is used for manipulation, one hears it through a closed window, in a street, in a car, an aeroplane, everywhere. It follows you like the Big Brother from Orwell's book, entitled *1984*.

I used to say to the people who work on the radio and television: "Watch out, we hold a bomb in our hands. We can do whatever we want." When the extreme invasion of turbo-folk music occurred in the 1991–1993 period, it was not accidental because, in my opinion, when music is linked to the center of power, then it is not the musical taste of the people, but an imposed view of the world. No one stood up to defend art at that time. And, because no one stood up, the field was not ploughed and the weeds grew. They were springing up! And this could be used for any purpose. Speaking of the use of music, the best marches, pertaining to

artistic music, were composed when Hitler was in power. From the time of the liberation onwards, my generation was brought up listening to mass songs, without any opportunity to listen to Mokranjac's *Liturgy*. It was all a manipulation!

Musicologists write about music, but they make an effort to make their texts incomprehensible. I do not quite understand what their purpose is!

How would you determine the co-ordinates of Serbian contemporary music?

Let us get back to the sixties when there was a group of painters called *Medijala*. This was a group of artists who were determined to realize their specific credo and left significant marks on the art of the sixties. Musicians never established anything similar, but rather became members of clans in order to defend their personal interests (awarding prizes to one another), i.e. to have the illusion of being "in power" in musical life. Of course, the influence of such groups could not be compared to that of the *Decembarska grupa* or *Medijala*. It was power, in a certain sense, because a clan, by its nature, will attempt to "rule". But, I do not recognise the authority of someone in power. I only recognise the power of an authority. It is most regrettable that clans also include talented people who, in my opinion, undermine their authority by being members of the clan. Because, the path taken to reach a goal can invalidate the work they have created by using their talent. I am sincerely amazed at what they do, but I do not hold it against them because I find it very amusing!

Is ethno-sound a future direction of music and what is the general trend of 21st century music?

I recall my professor Rajičić who was capable of revealing everything to you in a single sentence. He said: "You know, Hristić, it seems to me that you are not cut out for this avant-garde and dodecaphony. In your soul, you are a man from the Balkans. Do not deal with that, because everything that sounds melodious is closer to you." That is what he more or less wanted to tell me. And he was right. Those were great professors!

One can notice that, today, ethno-music rules the world, but not ethno-music in its original form. It is the peasant-musical fantasy that has been raised to a higher civilizational level. I was lucky that I set out in that direction already in my pieces *Rodoslov* and *Zaveštanje*, including the piece *Homolje*, which I did in London. It will soon be presented in Belgrade too.

I think that I always "made" music sincerely, but it is only now that it has reached its peaks. It is because I am indeed cut out for it. One's music reflects one's origin. That is what the Poles did. Why did the Polish School conquer the world? They introduced soul into modern music. There is no music without soul. Well, the time has come that I, as one of the first avant-gardists, say that too. It is human after all. It is human to change.

In my opinion, the world has turned to its roots. The planet has begun getting old. The world has gone into the 21st century, but now it wants to see what it is, where it came from. It is digging out its past. It is a kind of musical archaeology that has led to the blooming of ethno-music. It's like when you reach a certain age and become interested in your roots, your family. Then you understand why you are such a person. It is the search for a lost intimacy.

(Translated by Vesna Korić)