
VIEWS

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MUSIC FESTIVITIES OF NOVI SAD (NOMUS) IN 2015 AND SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

Living the practice of Attali's almost four decade old theory, in which the author points out that "music is that which first allowed learning something important about the contradictions of future societies" (Attali 2007: 25), is not easy. Today, it is accomplished in each individual performance / broadcast / speech about music, and especially in those music events in which all these aspects of art music's representations come together. Such a comprehensive reflection about the mentioned theory was offered by the most important festival of classical music in Novi Sad, the Music Festivities of Novi Sad (NOMUS), which was held from 21st April to 28th April, 2015. Under the slogan "Forty Years of NOMUS", the organizing team of this music gathering, Jeunesses Musicales of Novi Sad, headed by Milan Radulović, sought to adequately mark four decades since the first event which, with a few brief interruptions, took place, till today, as one of the, perhaps, most representative City of Culture events – in the manner the Novi Sad leadership eagerly promoted their *polis* in recent years. The concept of the eight festival evenings focused, unlike some earlier NOMUS events, primarily on orchestral sound, pulsating with a special dynamic that cul-

minated in – if we are guided by the need for modern spectacle – the Night Circus Recirquel. By the act of including circus arts in the NOMUS, the festival indeed confirmed the words of Secretary for Culture of the City of Novi Sad Vanja Vučenović, who, at the opening ceremony, pointed out that this festival would, to paraphrase, “provide something more than music”. Although it is not common for a festival that promotes the art of music to provide more than music itself, there is a clear tendency towards the affirmation of the Spectacle as such, which resonates with our usual daily-political culture. This message also pointed to the fact that today’s audience always needs “something more”, that “they cannot get enough of it”, and that the organizers of cultural events are working hard to meet this need by all means.

This year’s NOMUS included nine programs: the NOMUS Festival Orchestra performed the works of Beethoven (Ludwig van Beethoven), Mozart (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart) and Brahms (Johannes Brahms), led by conductor and pianist Lars Vogt; the Theatre of Novi Sad (Újvidéki Színház), in a co-production with NOMUS, prepared a musical “Spring Awakening”, based on Wedekind’s text (Frank Wedekind), written by Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater; the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, with conductor Eiji Oue and ’cellist Marc Coppey played compositions by Mahler (Gustav Mahler), Prokofiev and Dvořák; the National Endowment for the Art of Dance – Aja Jung, was to present the dance performance of *Prokleta avlija* [The Damned Yard], directed by Nebojša Bradić and composer Zoran Erić (the play was canceled due to the injury of a player, and later performed after the festival days); contemporary circus troupes from Hungary performed with the above mentioned Night Circus Recirquel; the Ensemble Muzsikás and Jandó Jenő contributed to fostering the world music genre, interpreting alternately Bartók’s (Bartók Béla) pieces, and Hungarian folk songs that resonated with the composer’s inspiration; flutist Emanuel Pahud and clarinetist Paul Meyer played with artists who are engaged in the Berlin Philharmonic, and for this occasion were called Strings of the Berlin Philharmonic; the Vojvodina Symphony Orchestra under the leadership of Berislav Skenderović performed a new *Concerto for Two Marimbas – Obsessions*, by author Nebojša Živković and performed by the marimba players – Irene Manolo and Holst Planets; the Vienna Chamber Orchestra with pianist Stefan Vladar interpreted compositions by Goldmark, Mozart and Brahms.

Observing the list and the works by this year’s performers at the NOMUS, it clear that the aspiration of the organizers was to satisfy the different tastes of the audience. However, the need for concerts with as many artists as possible and attractive, unusual performances – during the first and the last night the conductors were also pianists, resembling the musical practices of the 18th century – which indicates a market-oriented concept aimed at achieving maximum profits,

coupled with a desire at least to preserve the quality, as far as was possible in such a situation. In comparison with previous festivals, one can conclude that the festivals in the late nineties were organized mostly as a feast of chamber music, presenting a newborn child of culture that functioned like a “dinosaur at the zoo”. Namely, it is clear that at that time, NOMUS was a budget institution, whose life unfolded almost “beyond all the evil” market laws. Just a decade later, the dinosaur morphed into a company that functioned by means of projects and to some extent had only itself to rely on in order to exist. The Jeunesses Musicales of Novi Sad, as the organizer of NOMUS, completely mastered the technique of this “survival” in a way that could serve as an example for many other cultural institutions when coping with difficult times of transition, in which the struggle for resources has been merciless. In this sense, all the promotional activities undertaken by the Jeunesses Musicales of Novi Sad and organized in order to promote NOMUS, are noteworthy: from the program in the foundation of Ilija M. Kolarac in Belgrade, to promo concerts and performances at the Merkator Mall, and the Liman Market in Novi Sad. Undoubtedly, these steps into the (outdoor) urban space, an hour before the opening of NOMUS, when “sound installations” entitled “Nomus-ing: a remix of music reality” were blaring, represented a paradigm of promotional audacity and herald cultural cracks that are not yet clearly visible even to this day, except to those who are closely monitoring the tectonic disturbances in culture and are listening for what the era of the spectacle is bringing, so cataclysmically described by Guy Debord in his study *La société du spectacle* (1967).

The Jeunesses Musicales of Novi Sad has been working on updating the content of NOMUS for many years. This is evidenced by an electronic publication (DVD) entitled *Nomus 40 – One More Reason*, which was an integral part of the program booklet in which the author Danijela Kličković presented a detailed retrospective of the festival, a sort of historical record with some statistical data. Thus, one learns that in four decades, the Festivities collaborated with 111 institutions, with 20 media partners, more than 50 associates, marked 46 anniversaries in honor of authors, writers or important historical dates, held 35 premier works, “won” the use of 15 concert spaces (in Novi Sad, and Belgrade), that 41 orchestras gave performances, and that it featured 31 choirs, 81 chamber ensembles, 74 conductors, 128 pianists in solo recitals, 52 violinists, 8 violists, 19 cellists, 2 double basses, 42 artists on various wind instruments, 90 solo singers, 7 percussionists, 3 organists, 5 guitarists and one performer on the accordion, harp and harpsichord, as well as 11 actors. And a great deal of other information (such as, for example, the number of countries where the artists came from), contributed to a clear picture of the activity of NOMUS in its perennial continuity. The sensational and distinctly partisan tone of this publica-

tion, on the one hand affirmatively “defended“ the “colors” of the institution it represented, and, on the other, was quite in line with the current methods in which the different media address the public, placing the emphasis on numbers worthy of admiration, shocking data and suchlike, in the first place. The absence of a careful scientific apparatus that would undoubtedly be conducive to this publication being “identified” as a monograph corresponds to the present trend of there being no need to actually bring things to a qualitative, and not merely a quantitative result. These are symptoms which, for various reasons – the first of them being the lack of financial resources and planning years in advance – can be observed in creating the concept of the music festivals in this region. From the viewpoint of the electronic publications by Danijela Klicković it can be concluded that every event, even NOMUS, “has periods of fluctuation (...) and that the innovation of these events by means of a new program content, as well as the steady improvement of the overall quality of services related to the holding of this event, contributes to its attractiveness in a longer period “(Olga Hadžić, Željko Bjelajac 2006: 264).

That something “happened” to NOMUS was noticed at the turn of the century. Entering the new millennium for NOMUS meant entering a period of innovation in which, apart from the “official” concert program, significant attention was paid to including side events, intended to bring the very process of producing the music closer to the audience, to incite a kind of “NOMUS atmosphere” even outside the concerts. In that sense, master-class artists, workshops and lectures on the management of musical events, exhibitions of art works thematically related to the festival, screenings of musical films, a printed newsletter (which began at the end of the previous century) and the like were organized. Besides, the music program of the festival in recent years was enriched with some key “supports” such as the inclusion of musicals (in cooperation with the Novi Sad Theatre, the Madlenianum, the Terazije Theatre, etc.), with the premiere performance at least of one piece (by a local author), and the presentation of diverse musical stage and theatrical projects / performances (Nagy József and his settings, modern ballet, etc.). All this points to a carefully planned tension in the unfolding of a prominent celebration of primarily classical music. A certain “cultural” compromise and the pseudo-musical events, such as this year’s Nomus-ing and Circus, demonstrate that this process tended to be exaggerated or went a step in the wrong direction. One does not need to be an idealist and believe that the organizers of NOMUS would create a festival, to paraphrase Debord, “with the deliberate intention of harming the society of the spectacle” (Debord 2013: 3), seeing that it exists as a result of that society, but to expect resistance to the hectic need to be “modern” at all costs or to impose satisfying the taste of the audience as a priority, should not be a utopian idea of the ideal-

ists, because it does not involve one of “the festivals of art music”, but the *only one* in a town of that reputation and renown; it is a bastion, perhaps the last bastion of classical music in our region. Right at the opening it was proved that to be “modern” sometimes can be counterproductive, because the sound decor before the opening itself took place was nothing more than a triggered Attali-like noise that thundered menacingly over a beautifully conceived musical gathering. That the DJs Aleksandar Mladenović, Nenad Sevo and Kristian Al Droubi were, by any chance, “nomus-ing” with art music, and even modern classical music – and there is indeed a vast field of available artifacts – it would have emerged that the idea, not simply raw and unprocessed, would have been fulfilled. Thus, the theme was a failure, and communication among the spectators, recognized for their appreciation of NOMUS was completely impossible. The aesthetics of pubs, discos and cafes deafeningly resounded to the very doors of the synagogue, the only space in Novi Sad that figures as a concert hall.

A new form of spectacle penetrated the sphere of NOMUS in the form of the Night Circus. The enthusiastic cheers of the audience proved that the spectacle was the oxygen of every modern festival. It “presents itself as a vast and inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. Its only message is ‘what is seen is good; what is good is seen’ (Debord, 2003: 10). Regardless of the pretext that stunning acrobatics were performed to the original music of Sarik Péter and Terjék Gábor, this happening had absolutely nothing to do with the “mission” of NOMUS which, apart from entertaining, has the task of “educating”.¹ The very public reaction proved that the spectacle really “serves as a mirror – what it reflects is a dramatization of illusory escapes from a universal autism” (Debord, 2003: 71). However, the concept of the Circus, and even the concept of Nomus-ing did not compromise the essential concept of the festival, even from the point

¹ In this regard, Bourdieu points out that “the pursuit of cultural practice varies as a cultural practice and that ‘cultural need’ increases if it is being met, where the absence of cultural practices is followed by the lack of awareness of this absence, and since in this case such an intention can be realized as soon as it occurs, we can rightly conclude that it exists only if it is being realized. What is rare, are not objects, but rather an initiative for them to be used, the ‘cultural need’ is rare, which, unlike ‘primary needs’, is the product of education: from all this it follows that inequality in relation to cultural assets is only a form of inequality compared to a school that creates a ‘cultural need’; providing the means to meet it “(Bourdieu 1978: 10). Although this primarily refers to the level of education, or the need for culture is proportional to the education of the individual, and that it grows along with the level of that education, schools can be understood as any institution that provides adequate support for education, which “refines the spirit” and takes care of it. Hence, NOMUS can be understood as an institution which is a kind of school with a clear mission and purpose to educate, maintain and attract the audience to participate in the consumption of predominantly classical music.

of view of criticism of the spectacle. The spectacle, which, for example, was created by Nebojša Živković in his concert *Obsessions*, reconciles the cataclysmic attitudes of Debord, with the affirmative attitudes of the theory of the spectacle that Alessandro Baricco defends in his study of *Hegel's spirit and cows from Wisconsin* (2006). Very seriously considering the future of contemporary art music, the author advocates the spectacle as the last straw, already heralded even by Mahler and Puccini (Giacomo Puccini). The enchanting visual impression of Živković's work thus paradoxically combines the theory of Debord and Baricco, because, on the one hand, it embodies the idea of creating the spectacle as an end in itself, as well as the thesis that today it is more important "to look like", than "to have" (and much less "to be") (Debord, 2003: 64), and on the other, it confirms that today "the duty of the artwork is to find the shape, material and language which will express the wishes and expectations of the audience" (Baricco 2006: 76).

After these "case studies" which were part of the program of NOMUS 2015, one can establish that there is no clear demarcation line which will confine what belongs to the spectacle and what it is that resists it, but it is worth, always before converting every idea into action, especially if it is the affirmation of the (artistic) music in question, reflecting on the antagonisms upon which good and evil rest in culture. Because, if we bear in mind that culture has good and evil in itself (Beljanski 2011), and that it cannot be presented in the singular, and certainly not in the positive singular, and that ultimately one can say that it is "something highly personal" (Beljanski 2011), that positive or negative signs in a culture depend exclusively on the positions of those who posit them, and finally, that serving "good" culture is significantly harder than the other – Radomir Konstantinović highlights the infantilistic resistance (of the grass roots) to all things that are "harder" and "different" – the careful consideration itself of everything said so far, hones the idea and guides it, cultivates it (if it is not counterproductive to use this term at this point), shapes it and forms it in the direction of a prudent contribution to culture as a product.

This discussion of the spectacle will conclude with a reference to the antispectacle as its logical antipode. Two months after NOMUS, the Jeunesses Musicales of Novi Sad, organized a concert with Stefan Milenković and Edin Karamazov. Even the mention of these two names from the world of art music in show business, on the one hand, and pop in the broadest sense, on the other, as well as their desire to research the terra incognita where genres meet, promised a spectacle, not so much with the prefix "mega" in terms of the number of performers, but in terms of an unusual combination and promising content. And as we already mentioned before, that the spectacle represents the thesis "what is good is seen, what is seen is good", here, the result of the concert was the abso-

lutely autistic acceptance of anything that was served to the audience.² In fact, nobody publicly stated that the concert was an extremely uncivil attempt to sell a virtually unprepared program (colloquially known as “a gig”) to the audience, along with the absurdities that cropped up with the artists’ “educationally” addressing the audience, filing their nails on the podium, scattering photocopied sheets of notes on the stage (the wind blew in the middle of the performance since it was an open air concert), starting a composition again and again, three times, and rude allusions to the fees the artists received for their fiasco. Admirers (especially the organizers) of NOMUS, who do not have a critical attitude towards this festival, and who were present at this concert and found justification for this “happening” have a serious problem with their determination to “work on themselves”. It is a diagnosis, and the therapy is to constantly review one’s attitudes, weigh between good quality and its opposite, maintain one’s critical thinking, and not drown in the general attitude of the crowd. Especially when it comes to art music itself.

Translated by the author

² It may be particularly noted in the criticism of B. Hlozan “The Music Mosaic in the Wind”, which was printed on the occasion of this concert in the Dnevnik daily newspaper on 30th June, 2015.