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**DEJAN DESPIĆ AND “AHISTORICAL HISTORY”:
AN AUDITORY MOSAIC IN THE COMPOSITION
MINIATURES FOR FLOBARP TRIO FOR FLUTE,
OBOE, AND HARP**

Abstract: This paper analyses Dejan Despić's *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, linking it to Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman's use of the concept of “ahistorical history”. In these ten miniatures, Despić crafts an auditory mosaic by subtly compressing Baroque and Impressionistic stylistic references, reducing them to their archetypal essence. Unlike postmodernist citation, Despić synthesises elements into a fluid, functional whole, striving for conciseness and universal classicism. His elitist yet highly communicative approach positions him firmly within a contemporary context. The pastoral modus, a deep, atemporal quality of Despić's music, allows his “ahistorical history” to be understood as key to its relevant contribution and belonging to contemporary Serbian music.

Keywords: ahistorical history, auditory mosaic, neoclassicism, pastoral modus, Dejan Despić

Dejan Despić's *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio* for flute, oboe, and harp, Op. 206 (2009), are ten short pieces performed without a break. In this work, the composer successfully reduced each statement to its archetypal meaning,

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portraying ten typical scenes connected to the essential paradigm of overall Neoclassicism – the Baroque. A second significant reference is Debussy's Impressionism. Their interconnectedness, in this case, truly indicates that a sense of fluid, 'ahistorical' flow is created through the procession of stylistic allusions, rather than presenting historically-fixed scenes.

Despić presents stylistic allusions such that the degree of transformation, concerning any potential reference, is elevated to the level of archetext – the original, deepest layer of meaning signifying the situation itself. More specifically, through instrumental combinations, impressive dialogues, and overlapping parts, Despić imbues concise statements with deep layers of meaning that unfold sequentially, creating an auditory mosaic where stylistic references unite under the common umbrella of the pastoral modus. This pastoral modus does not represent programmatic content in the classical sense, but rather a deep sonic quality that stems from the chosen instrumentation (flute, oboe, harp) and Despić's specific treatment of harmony and melody. It permeates the entire work, acting as an atemporal backdrop that enables the coexistence of diverse stylistic elements. Thus, it could be said that these ten miniatures are a distinctive kind of condensed pattern in which the two aforementioned traditions are depicted in their very essence. Regarding genre classification, miniatures are quite common within Despić's *oeuvre*. Furthermore, it is not unusual for individual pieces from this composer's various opuses to last only a minute, which is roughly the duration of the individual pieces in the trio in question. In this regard, musicologist Branka Radović, speaking about the composition *Pastorala*, for solo oboe, Op. 64, from 1977, referred to the individual movements of this work as "miniminiatures", emphasising: "All miniminiatures are without inscribed bar lines, so the musical flow has no metrical or visual limitations, no boundaries delimiting time and space."¹

This compression of time and space, as Radović describes it, perfectly aligns with Despić's aesthetic, enabling him to capture the essence of stylistic allusions in concise forms. Through "miniminiatures", the composer demon-

¹ Branka Radović, "Tonski monolozi Dejana Despića", u: Miloš Zatkalik, Ana Stefanović (ur.), *U čast profesora Dejana Despića: povodom osamdesetog rođendana: radovi sa Osmog godišnjeg skupa Katedre za muzičku teoriju "Muzička teorija i analiza"*, Beograd, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 2010, 175 [Branka Radović, "Dejan Despić's Tonal Monologues", in: Miloš Zatkalik, Ana Stefanović (Eds), *In Honour of Professor Dejan Despić: On the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday: Papers from the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Department of Music Theory "Music Theory and Analysis"*].

strates the ability to abandon a linear historical narrative in favour of simultaneity and 'ahistorical' co-existence, which further underscores his specific contribution to music after 1945, especially within the context of postmodernist tendencies that, in turn, belong to a world with a significantly different view of contemporaneity stemming from a significantly different historical interpretation of the contemporary era. This composer's most well-known short forms, characterised by rapid shifts of stylistic references without extensive elaboration, include *Vinjete (Vignettes)* Op. 43a for solo piano from 1963 (the composition exists in seven different transcriptions), *Muzički rečnik (Musical Dictionary)* for solo piano Op. 71 from 1982, *Scarlattiana* Op. 80 for solo piano from 1984, *A cinque* Op. 115 for wind quintet from 1994, etc. Universal classicism is characterised by conciseness, uniformity, and a narrative that does not stand out overtly.² Broadly speaking, the chamber sound of these miniatures simultaneously points to gallant dance and Impressionist abstractions, all unified by a pastoral quality. This quality, due to the very instrumentation and Despić's treatment of sonority, emerges as a profound, atemporal characteristic.

Tonality and References

The aim of this article is to illustrate, through some representative examples, the connection between tonality and stylistic allusions, which is a logical procedure for instance when discussing Neoclassicism in the first half of the 20th century. From this perspective, Despić fits perfectly into such a conception.

² The conciseness of expression in Despić's work is typical, and the composer himself states the reasons for this: "Perhaps, however, as a general observation, a greater inclination towards smaller musical forms, and indeed smaller performing ensembles, right up to very numerous compositions for solo instruments, could be noted. Even works that, as a rule, have larger dimensions in musical literature – such as, for instance, those from the concertante genre – in my creations of that type are mostly more concise, usually reduced to a duration of ten to fifteen minutes. This tendency towards concise expression is also manifested, on the other hand, by a truly large number (already well over a hundred) of musical miniatures – lasting only a minute or two – in works for solo instruments, mostly for piano, but for almost all others too. I could discern various reasons for such a tendency, more psychological than musical. Above all, it is in my nature to shy away from, I might even say abhor, human garrulousness, verbosity without substance, and thus without real need. What needs to be said – when it needs to be – should, in my opinion, be stated concisely, clearly, and simply." Милош Јевтић, "Дејан Деспић", у: *Лейоша звука: разговори са музичарима*, књ. 8, Београд, Службени гласник, 2011, 478–79 [Miloš Jevtić, "Dejan Despić", in: *The Beauty of Sound: Conversations with Musicians*, Vol. 8, Belgrade, Službeni glasnik].

In the context of Neoclassicism, there is often discussion of the play of signifiers – the semiotic liberation of the original 'sign' from its full capacity when displaced from its original context. Understood in this way, Despić's signs truly are signifiers. The environment in which they exist is, nonetheless, post-avant-garde, even though this composer was not one to venture much into the avant-garde, nor could he be described as a typical postmodernist.³ In this regard, some fundamental characteristics of each of the ten miniatures will be enumerated.

Miniature 1 introduces a pentatonically conceived theme in the flute and oboe, with the accompaniment featuring alternating perfect fifths and thirds – a common combination in the music of the first half of the 20th century. The tonality is clearly marked as A minor. And already in the first piece, we find two clearly-established signifiers. One is Impressionist, the other diatonic; in conjunction with the consistently emphasised rhythm, it suggests a dance and leads the listener to the first half of the 18th century. Not only that, but in this way, Despić establishes trans-stylistic connections to the gallant style and its re-encoding in the late works of Claude Debussy. In one doctoral thesis dedicated to Debussy's late style, the following is cited as a fundamental basis of Debussy's language:

Musicians throughout the twentieth century have always acknowledged Debussy's contribution of a number of new techniques to compositional practice. Some of these techniques represent a fundamental shift in the nature of pitch organization. They include his much-celebrated whole-tone sonorities. Pentatonicism, parallelism, a 'non-teleological' or non-directional organization of harmony and a blurred relationship between structure and ornament, between chord-tones and non-harmonic tones.⁴

However, Debussy's late works show a clearer structure and a "cleaner" harmonic language, which Despić, as the author of numerous harmony textbooks, was very well-acquainted with. Precisely this syntactic clarity (the first miniature is structured as a period), rhythmic uniformity, and the fusion of two historical epochs point to the same clarity Despić described when discussing Debussy's late style:

However, it has already been mentioned that in his final years, this composer also showed a certain tendency to abandon that style, primarily by turning towards

³ An exception is the avant-garde excursion realised in the 1980 work *Concerto for Natasha*, for piano and orchestra, Op. 67.

⁴ Rebecca Leydon, *Narrative Strategies and Debussy's Late Style*, unpublished master's thesis, Toronto, University of Toronto, 1997, 8.

forms of absolute music. These include 12 Études for piano, in two volumes (1915), then three compositions for two pianos titled 'En blanc et noir' (1915), as well as three sonatas: for cello and piano (1915), for flute, viola, and harp (1915), and for violin and piano (1917) – his last work (from an unfulfilled concept of six sonatas for various instruments). The harmonic language of these works, of course, did not abandon the achievements of Impressionism, but the renunciation of 'tone painting' in favor of abstract music, and thus a firmer, purely musical form, understandably also led to a certain purification, and to some extent, a simplification of that language.⁵

Example 1: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 1, mm. 1–6.

The musical score is for three instruments: Flute, Oboe, and Harp. It is in 2/4 time with a tempo marking of ♩ = 100. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score consists of six measures. The Flute part begins in measure 1 with a piano (p) dynamic. The Oboe part enters in measure 5 with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The Harp part begins in measure 1 with a piano (p) dynamic. Triplet markings are present in measures 5 and 6 for the Flute, Oboe, and Harp parts. The piece ends in measure 6 with a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic.

In *Miniature 2*, a basic contrast of relative tonalities is established, as is common for a Baroque suite – C major with modulations to keys related by fifths. The gigue rhythm, doublings in thirds, and basic imitation all point to High Baroque dances. In this miniature, Despić is neoclassical to the level of stylistic homage, as the characteristic and “Mediterranean” movements of parallel thirds and sixths, in the combination of oboe and flute, unequivocally sound pastoral. This pastoral dimension, emphasized by soft legato phrases and fluid instrumental dialogues, acts as a natural ambiance where Baroque and Impressionist references merge, creating a sense of timelessness. Again, we

⁵ Dejan Despić, *Harmonija sa harmonskom analizom*, 3. izdanje, Beograd, Udruženje kompozitora Srbije, 1994, 141 [Dejan Despić, *Harmony With Harmonic Analysis*, 3rd edition, Belgrade, Composers Association of Serbia].

see a dual stylistic allusion at play, so we could probably say that Despić is not as explicit as, for example, Respighi in his three suites, *Antiche arie e danze* (1917, 1923, and 1931) – who, incidentally, used direct musical quotations from the 16th and 17th centuries. Despić’s specific Neoclassicism, expressed in numerous works such as the wind quintet *A cinque*, is characterised by what we might call “pure music”, with an insistence on transparent texture and a pastoral and idyllic atmosphere.⁶ For instance, the balance between the flute and oboe, which appears after polyphonic interweavings with the harp, creates the impression that the two woodwind instruments are in fact one.

Example 2: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 2, mm. 1–4.

The musical score is for three instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Harp (Hp.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 92. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The Flute part starts with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a melodic line. The Oboe part enters in the second measure with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a similar melodic line. The Harp part enters in the third measure with a forte (f) dynamic and plays a chordal accompaniment. The score is written in 3/8 time.

⁶ The wind quintet *A cinque* is deliberately mentioned here as it is one of this composer’s more frequently performed works. Musicologist Stefan Cvetković, speaking about it, highlights similar qualities that will also be emphasised in relation to the work in question: the *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*. For example, he notes the composer’s significant strategy, which leads us to speak of “pure music”, linked to motivic work: “The principles of Despić’s creation, based on the primacy of compositional-technical skill as a means of achieving perfection of musical expression, are already evident in the particular attention he pays to detail, in the meticulous refinement of motivic cells and the firm, logically founded development of musical ideas, which at every possible moment are truly realised and seem like the only possible compositional solution attained.” Stefan Cvetković, “Dejan Despić, *A Cinque* – Op. 115, muzika za duvački kvintet”, u: Zorica Premate (ur.), *Novi zvučni prostori: tribine: zbornik*, Beograd, JMU Radio-televizija Srbije, 2019, 186 [Stefan Cvetković, “Dejan Despić *A Cinque* – op. 115, for Woodwind Quintet”, in: Zorica Premate (Ed.), *New Sound Spaces: Forums: Collected Papers*, Belgrade, Radio Television of Serbia].

Miniature 3 brings a return to an Impressionist atmosphere, aided by the use of the whole-tone scale and, at times, the formation of whole-tone dominants. The whole-tone theme in the harp (a descending progression from D to G-flat over a sustained C pedal) repeats five times in each bar. Then, in bar 7 of this small, 13-bar piece, the pentatonic theme shifts to the flute part. The ending on the tonic of a pastoral F major with an added sixth effectively imitates Debussy's characteristic style. This very tonality, with its specific harmonic coloring, emphasizes a carefree and idyllic character, deepening the sensation of "frozen time".

Example 3: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 3, mm. 1–3.

The musical score for Miniature 3, mm. 1–3, is written for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Harp (Hp.). The time signature is 5/4, and the tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. The Flute part begins in measure 2 with a melodic line marked *mp*. The Oboe part begins in measure 1 with a melodic line marked *p*, then *mp* in measure 3, and includes a triplet in measure 3. The Harp part features a descending whole-tone scale in the right hand, marked *p* and *poco a poco crescendo*, and a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand.

The sharp rhythm in three-four time of *Miniature 4* could suggest flamenco. This is further evoked by 'Spanish turns' – such as the descending upper tetrachord of D Dorian on F with upper auxiliary notes – or an Andalusian cadence with a Phrygian dominant at the end of a phrase. These elements might allude to Debussy and could also be attributed to his late compositional phase:

However, it has already been mentioned that unlike Ravel, this composer, in his final years, obtained the main sources for that veiled evocation from a constant seduction by the feminine (Eros that could range from the profane to the sacred, from the human to the mystical, as *Pelléas and Mélisande* and *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* astonishingly demonstrate), from French musical past (*Hommage à Rameau*), from Pre-Raphaelitism (*La demoiselle élue*), from the ancient Greek world (*Chansons de Bilitis*, *Sirènes*, *Syrinx*), from Oriental art (*the Quartet*), from poetry (the numerous songs), from a child's gaze – that of his own daughter –

(*Children’s Corner, The Toy Box*), from nature itself (*Nuages, La mer*), and from an imagined Spain.⁷

Example 4: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 4, mm. 1–8.

The musical score for Miniature 4, mm. 1–8, is written for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Harp (Hp.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 116. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into two systems. The first system (mm. 1–4) features the Flute playing a melodic line with a *mp* dynamic, followed by a crescendo to *mf* with triplet figures. The Oboe is silent in the first three measures and enters in measure 4 with a *mf* dynamic. The Harp provides a steady accompaniment with a *mf* dynamic. The second system (mm. 5–8) shows the Flute with a *poco f* dynamic and a trill in measure 7. The Oboe has a *poco f* dynamic and triplet figures. The Harp has a *f* dynamic in measure 7. The piece concludes with a double bar line in measure 8.

The central *Miniature 5*, right from the start, points to chromatic potential in the flute and oboe parts, alluding to expanded late-Romantic tonality. The entire chromatic movement is underscored by the Mixolydian scale move-

⁷ It is a well-known fact that Debussy was inspired by Spain in several of his works. These include *Ibéria Suite* from *Images pour orchestra*, *La Soirée dans Grenade* from the piano cycle *Estampes*, and two preludes: *Sérénade interrompue* from the first book of preludes for piano, and *La puerta del Vino* from the second book of preludes for piano. Mario Piscoya, “España en la música de Claude Debussy”, *Lienzo*, 20, 2017, 240.

ment in C, so the chromatic notes can be considered non-chordal. Much like the Baroque concertante style, which features a dialogue between two parts (flute and oboe), there is a rapid alternation of close tonal centers, most easily identified by the movement of the bass instrument, the harp: C Mixolydian, A Phrygian or Lydian, D Phrygian or a combination of major and minor, B-flat major, G minor, F Mixolydian, D Phrygian, and C major. It should be noted that the list of modes and tonal genres could be expanded, as it is difficult to distinguish between non-chordal and chordal tones. If we wanted to title this lively dance, another gigue in 6/8, it might be “chromaticism versus diatonicism”, where diatonicism “wins” at the very end of the miniature, confirming Despić’s inclination toward establishing a tonal center and clarity even within dissonant sonic landscapes.

Example 5: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 5, mm. 1–8.

The musical score is for Miniature 5, measures 1 through 8, in 6/8 time with a tempo marking of ♩ = 168. The instrumentation consists of Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Harp (Hp.). The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1–4) shows the Flute and Oboe playing a melodic line with chromaticism, marked *f sempre*. The Harp provides a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass register. The second system (measures 5–8) continues the melodic dialogue between the Flute and Oboe, with the Harp providing a more active accompaniment in both registers. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

Miniature 6 features the uniform motion of a perfect fifth within A Aeolian, which could evoke a slow, ancient Attic dance in triple metre, similar to Debussy's *Danseuses de Delphes* from his first book of preludes. The chromaticism on the dominant of F major once again highlights the basic diatonic-chromatic opposition, pointing to a Debussyan pastoral sphere. The fluid texture and delicate harmonies at this point contribute to a sense of idyll and peace, characteristic of the pastoral. The halt on the Phrygian note B-flat in the harp, followed by a fermata, is highly indicative. This moment actually reveals the true meaning of the Phrygian turn, one that is not constrained by the framework of major-minor tonality.

Example 6: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 6, mm. 1–5.

Fl. $\text{♩} = 72$

Ob. $\text{poco } f$

Hp. mf $\text{poco } f$

Example 7: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 7, mm. 1–4.

Fl. $\text{♩} = 108$ f

Ob. f

Hp. f

Miniature 7 is a motoric, concertante-like dance movement in A Aeolian that often touches on C major, and its liveliness points to a bourrée.

Miniature 8 is a passacaglia with a characteristically Baroque theme. It contains an ascending minor sixth leap (C-A flat-G) in C minor, which irresistibly points to the beginning of J. S. Bach's "passacaglia of passacaglias" in the same key. This is followed by a leap to the leading tone, after which the lowered second, dominant, and raised fourth tones unfold. The passacaglia is a Baroque form, but also a modernist obsession: from Webern's *Passacaglia* Op. 1, through Schoenberg's passacaglia *Nacht* from *Pierrot Lunaire*, or Hindemith's song *Die Darstellung Mariä im Tempel* from the cycle *Das Marienleben*, and even to Ljubica Marić and her *Passacaglia for Orchestra*, this form has served for identity plays with a theme.

Example 8: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 8, mm. 1–4.

The musical score for Miniature 8, measures 1–4, is written for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), and Harp (Hp.). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 60. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The Flute part begins with a half rest, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note B-flat4, all marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The Oboe part has half rests in measures 1, 2, and 3, and a half note G4 in measure 4. The Harp part begins with a half rest, followed by a half note G3, a quarter note A3, and a half note B-flat3, all marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The score is written on three staves, with the Flute and Oboe staves at the top and the Harp staff at the bottom.

The rhythmic configuration in *Miniature 9* points to a Baroque French overture, presented here in a bright C major tonality. The middle section is built on a major-minor contrast, utilizing the Phrygian mode and partial chromaticism, concluding with the use of the upper tetrachord of the Aeolian mode (an allusion to a Phrygian cadence, though it could not be strictly named as such). An allusion to Romanticism is also possible, for example, at the moment when the meter changes from 3/4 to 4/4. Instead of a diatonic context, scale movements occur within C Phrygian minor, with a chromatic alteration of E to E-flat.

Example 9: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 9, mm. 1–6.

Fl. $\text{♩} = 118$
 Ob. f
 Hp. $\text{♩} = 118$
 f
 $pium f$

In *Miniature 10*, the mixed 5/8 rhythm completely deviates from the meter of all previous miniatures. A characteristic suspension-like leading tone figure (F-sharp-G-F-E-flat), followed by an ascending minor sixth leap (D-B-flat-A), and the intermingling of G major and minor (with the use of the Phrygian mode), hint at a lamenting context of sensibility. This could be linked to High Baroque, for instance, as the technique of imitation points to it, but also to universal Romanticism in general.

Despić's “Ahistorical History” and the Specificity of Narrative Time

At the beginning of this discussion, I introduce Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman's thesis on “ahistorical history”. An elucidation of this thesis, applied to Despić's composition, could point to the essence of the trans-stylistic connections achieved in this work. She discusses this concept in relation to Milan Mihajlović's composition *Silenzio* (1996), which rightly raises the question of its applicability, as this Serbian composer belongs to a significantly different milieu than Despić – a postmodernist one.

As Veselinović-Hofman defined it:

Ahistorical history refers to all those phenomena that suggest a high degree of coexistence of different artistic materials in a composition. Among these phenomena are: ahistorical creative reception of music (aimed at establishing a higher degree of functionality than historical temporality), ‘a universe without the universal’ (which implies the coexistence of different ‘history-deprived pro-

Example 10: Dejan Despić, *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio*, Miniature 10, mm. 1–8.

Fl. mf

Ob. mf

Hp. mf

Fl. f

Ob. f

Hp. *poco f* f

grams'), quotation and self-quotation, intertextuality, meta-musical references, eclecticism, etc.⁸

It should be noted that the author considered these statements in the context of the transition from visual to auditory, with a particular focus on the score and stylistic context. In Mihajlović's case, such a consideration is undoubt-

⁸ Мирјана Веселиновић-Хофман, "На стазама транзиције: од ока до 'уха нашег мишљења' музике", *Нови Звук – Интернационални часопис за музику*, 31, I/2008, 71 [Mirjana Veselinović Hofman, "On the Paths of Transition: From the Eye to the 'Ear of Our Thinking' of Music", *New Sound – International Journal for Music*].

edly applicable; a fleeting glance at the *Silenzio* score reveals a Monteverdian-Rachmaninovian mosaic structure. Mihajlović's ahistoricity is therefore visible and explicit, woven into the very graphic design of the work, which also makes it a visually recognisable collage of styles.

Crafting Ahistorical History: Despić's Auditory Integration of Styles

However, Despić's score does not possess that kind of graphic expressivity in terms of direct stylistic quotations. What is visually discernible in his score is precisely what the analysis of the miniatures discusses: motivic uniformity, rhythmic-metrical stability, and unequivocally expressed diatonic-harmonic relationships. These elements, in turn, lead us in two clearly-defined directions: towards the dances and melodies of the first half of the 18th century, and towards the Debussyian atmosphere at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is neither accidental nor mere eclecticism; rather, it indicates the specific way in which Despić constructs his musical narrative.

At this point, we arrive at a crucial observation, for what we might call meaning or narrative in Despić's work is not the result of a mere succession of representational indicators, but rather stems from a deep-seated integration that can be explained by a deeper interpretation of narrative time. As Kramer explains:

In Western culture, narrative time was until very recently the principal medium in which experience could advance from happenstance to coherence, from the merely contingent to the meaningful. A chronicle of events is not a narrative. To form a narrative one has to add meaning to sequence. But the meaning cannot simply be grafted on; it has to be worked in. This is the process that in its unfolding creates narrative time. It is a process that itself takes time. It works by deferral and indirection. Its end – and it does not end when the story does – is not to fix a meaning but to make meaning available to those who have followed closely. Or listened closely: for the prototypical narrative situation is established between one who speaks and those who listen. Narrative time is implicit in interlocutory structures of address. It is originally auditory time, and its effects touch on those of music.⁹

Kramer's understanding of narrative time as an auditory experience, where meaning is not imposed but rather embedded and developed through the process of listening, is perfectly applicable to Despić's composition. His "ahis-

⁹ Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting Music*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011, 207.

torical history” is not about quoting historical fragments (which is Mihajlović’s approach), but about creating a coherent sonic universe in which elements from different epochs do not clash, but rather coexist in a way that is functional for the composition, and not necessarily historically linear. He creates musical “programs deprived of history” (according to Veselinović-Hofman) through integration and synthesis, rather than through clear fragmentation and collage. Therefore, it is not an audial-visual mosaic, but exclusively an auditory mosaic in which different stylistic references interpenetrate.

Despić’s Neoclassicism in a Contemporary Context

It is fair then to ask how Despić differs from 20th century neoclassicists, particularly those of the first half, and by what quality he could be connected to the contemporary context. What Despić and 20th-century Neoclassicism certainly have in common is the strategy of “compressing” stylistic references, which leads to the merging of incongruous elements into a single whole, or, as that strategy was previously defined, “elements that appear diachronically in earlier works (for example, two third-chords in a functional relationship to each other) are compressed into a synchronous sound in a new work”.¹⁰ In this way, a fluidity of stylistic indications is created, without contrasting, dissonant conflicts of historical musical references. Despić’s diatonic precision and rhythmic-metrical stability are Neoclassical elements, but the way they meet and intertwine with the Debussyian atmosphere and chromatic potential certainly transcends a mere act of restoration. He not only evokes but also synthesises these disparate elements into a new, functional whole in a very clear, universally classical manner, which indeed represents his aesthetic credo:

When it comes to conciseness and clarity, that is truly a significant characteristic of my music. These are precisely the elements of classicism and the characteristics of my music in that regard. (...) This is a principle that I subconsciously absorbed, and it probably suited my nature. Otherwise, I abhor, as I say, musical verbosity,

¹⁰ Срђан Тепарић, *Ресемантизација тоналности у првој половини XX века: (1917–1945)*, Београд, Факултет музичке уметности, 2020, 114–115 [Srđan Teparić, *Resemantisation of Tonality in the First Half of the 20th Century: (1917–1945)*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music]. Note: The term ‘compression’ is taken from Joseph N. Straus. Cf. Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*, Cambridge, MA – London, England, Harvard University Press, 1990, 17. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674436336>

as indeed human verbosity, which necessarily leads to empty talk on a musical level, so that is truly an important characteristic.¹¹

It is quite evident that the composer does not use explicit quotation in the way some postmodernists do (like the aforementioned Milan Mihajlović, whose "ahistorical history" is often visually discernible in the score itself through direct collages). The coexistence of styles (Baroque and Impressionism) in the case of this author could not be considered close to the postmodern understanding of history as a collection of fragments that can be recontextualized. The auditory mosaic in which stylistic references subtly interpenetrate and do not explicitly clash ultimately points to the classical in the general sense of the word, about which the composer himself testified when it comes to his music in general. To even consider his music as postmodern classicism, it would need another stylistic layer – perhaps (though not necessarily) something pointing to the popular in a contemporary sense. This is simply absent here, and in that sense, Despić is indeed an elitist, about which he himself spoke:

I also assume that music – like any art – is created for an audience it addresses, and that only such music has some meaning. This, of course, does not mean that one should pander to the taste of the audience, especially the so-called 'broad' audience (which, after all, is not interested in true art, but is satisfied with all kinds of kitsch). We are talking, therefore, about a sufficiently educated audience, as a relatively narrow, elite category of society, and in that sense, artistic music is, necessarily, an elitist art — which I by no means understand in a negative sense, as elitism has been criticised!¹²

What definitively connects Despić to contemporary Serbian music and thus to the present moment is the pastoral as an overarching framework within which Baroque dances and Impressionist frozenness of time are compressed. Its subtle, atemporal presence within the work, manifested through the sonorities of the instruments, modality, and harmonic colors, is crucial for understanding Despić's "ahistorical history".¹³ Through the fusion of different

¹¹ Zorica Premate, "Razgovor sa Dejanom Despićem", u: Zorica Premate (ur.), *Novi zvučni prostori: tribine: zbornik*, op. cit., 194 [Zorica Premate, "A Conversation with Dejan Despić", in: Zorica Premate (Ed.), *New Sound Spaces: Forums: Collected Papers*].

¹² Јевтић, op. cit., 467 [Jevtić, op. cit.].

¹³ In this sense, Despić, in an interview with Zorica Premate, recounted an anecdote that clearly illustrates the distinction between modernists and composers whose work extended into the 21st century, where they sought to achieve communication with the audi-

epochs and their reduction to archetypal expressions, Despić's music achieves an atemporal quality, a universality of frozen history, an ahistorical history! It is precisely in a composition like this trio that there is a transcendence of specific historical frameworks, offering a universal musical experience that is relevant to a contemporary audience.¹⁴

Speaking about the treatment of the pastoral in contemporary Serbian music, I conclude that its specificity today is that it is woven into the collective deep structure:

The pastoral as a basic mode of expression no longer represents a stage for ceremonial events as it was in the case in the 18th century, nor is it a metaphor for man's battle with the forces of this and the other world, as was the case in the 19th century. The moment Stravinsky, in the composition *The Rite of Spring*, awakened the deepest, pagan nature of man, which is believed to have been covered by the sediment of reason and enlightenment, it seems that the pastoral itself was placed within those frameworks from which analytical psychology sought explanations

ence and performers, which could not exactly be said for 20th century composers: "In connection with this, I would recall a peculiar anecdote, precisely when the quintet *A cinque* was performed on one occasion, I think it was at the Đuro Salaj Hall. Petar Bergamo, a colleague close in generation, was there, and I told him, casually, that I had heard and was pleased that the performers liked to play this quintet, and Bergamo said: 'That would worry me.' So, for someone to be worried that musicians, for whom a work was written, like to play it – that is, to say the least, a bizarre viewpoint". Premate, op. cit., 195.

¹⁴ This refers to the thesis on "new sensibility" in Serbian music, presented in the monograph *Style – History, Emotion*: "The posed thesis on new sensibility in Serbian music has been re-examined through selected works by Božidar Obradinović (*Dream, Light, Movement*), Svetlana Savić (*Sonnets*), Tatjana Milošević (*Whilst Thinking of You*), Milorad Marinković (*Little Opera* and *Christmas Kontakion*) and Đuro Živković (*Unceasing Prayers*). Starting from the fact that the sharp edge of critical reference to the past in the art of modernism and postmodernism has already worn off, and that models of the past appear as they are in the contemporary moment, I believed that lyricism in the context of contemporary Serbian music could actually be characterized as 'new'. The uniqueness of sensibility in the mentioned period is the fact that it is always expressed through the pastoral mode. Thus, the different poetics of the aforementioned composers are methodologically placed on the same level according to the fact that the archetype of the pastoral in each of the selected works is expressed in different ways, but that it is common, not only to the corpus of selected examples, but also to a whole range of contemporary Serbian compositions." Srđan Teparić, *Stil – istorija, emocija*, Beograd, Čigoja štampa – Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 2024, 10 [Srđan Teparić, *Style – History, Emotion*, Belgrade, Čigoja štampa – Faculty of Music].

for the structure of human behaviour. Modernity based on the primordial, original, can no longer shock today, and it seems that a century of experience illuminating this archetrait has led to it being there, as a kind of constant onto which decentralised references, already repeated countless times throughout history, are grafted.¹⁵

The decentralisation mentioned in this quote actually speaks of the liberation of a reference from the baggage of meaning it carries through centuries. Thus, it is logical to speak of the archetypal qualities of Despić's music, in which the pastoral is interwoven as an ahistorical history, a deeply-rooted characteristic that has neither a historical beginning nor a historical end. Such universality is elitist, but at the same time it is deeply humane and therefore communicative. Whether Despić's music foreshadows a time when a "pure" psychological feeling would be the basic stylistic feature of an era remains to be seen.

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Summary

This paper thoroughly examines Dejan Despić's *Miniatures for Flobarp Trio* for flute, oboe, and harp, Op. 206 (2009), a collection of ten short, continuously performed pieces. The central argument explores this work through Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman's concept of "ahistorical history". Despić masterfully distills archetypal meanings from stylistic expressions, notably from the Baroque and Debussy's Impressionism. Instead of a linear historical progression, these distinct stylistic allusions create a fluid, ahistorical flow, moving beyond fixed historical scenes.

Despić refines these stylistic allusions to an archetypal level, reaching beyond surface references to a primordial layer of meaning. Through intricate instrumental interplay and overlapping lines, he imbues concise statements with profound semantic depth, forming an auditory mosaic where stylistic elements converge under the unifying theme of the pastoral modus. This implies the miniatures are condensed patterns embodying the essence of both Baroque and Impressionist traditions. The paper highlights that such brevity is a hallmark of Despić's work, with many pieces lasting less than a minute, echoing concepts like "miniminiatures" due to their tem-

poral and spatial compression. This compression perfectly aligns with Despić's aesthetic, allowing him to achieve the essence of stylistic allusions concisely, demonstrating his ability to transcend linear historical narratives for simultaneity and ahistorical coexistence.

The analysis delves into the harmonic and melodic features of each miniature, illustrating how Despić integrates diverse elements like Impressionist pentatonicism, Baroque dance forms, and even flamenco rhythms. Crucially, it distinguishes Despić's subtle, auditory integration of styles from the explicit, often visual, postmodernist collage. His approach, rooted in compression of stylistic references, fosters a seamless flow without dissonant historical clashes. Despić's commitment to conciseness and communicability defines his universal classicism, positioning him as an "elitist" in the best sense – creating art for a discerning audience. Ultimately, the pastoral modus acts as the overarching framework, within which Baroque dances and Impressionist "frozen time" are compressed. This reveals Despić's ahistorical history as a profound, atemporal contribution highly relevant to contemporary Serbian music, suggesting an era where pure psychological sensation could become the defining stylistic trait.