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Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Martinez, Odaline de la. 1977. 'Review of Zagreb Music Biennale, Yugoslavia'. *Contact*, 17. pp. 38. ISSN 0308-5066.

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The Zagreb Biennale is probably one of Eastern Europe's most successful attempts at Cultural Interchange with the rest of the world. This year's festival, the ninth, consisted not only of seven days devoted entirely to the performance of contemporary music, but also included a symposium on 'New Unknown Music', films, TV and video programmes every day and exhibits such as John Lifton's Green Music and Peter Vogel's *Musical-Cybernetic Environments*. From the outset it was obvious that the festival had not just been 'thrown together' in the last six months, but was the culmination of many months of planning and organisation.

The first day began with a morning concert by the mixed choir of the Ivan Goran Kovačić Student Society and consisting entirely of Yugoslav works. The outstanding piece here was *Kolo Bola* ('Round of Pain') by Stanko Horvat which, based on a poem by Mak Dizdar, was a wonderful mixture of folk and avantgarde techniques producing effective and moving results. On the same day the Opera Company of the Croatian National Theatre presented *Moć Vrline* ('The Power of Virtue'), a stage work with music by Igor Kuljerić and a libretto by Dejan Miladinović, who also directed. The idea of the piece, taken from the novella *Statuette* by Mirko Božić, is that man cannot live alone, cut off from the rest of the world, but that he should join in actively and not go about concerned only with his own problems. The libretto presents the novella's original material intact but in a different sequence, beginning at the end of the story. Unfortunately the music did not equal the story in dramatic power, and as a result I found myself more interested in the stage action.

The second day was slightly more international than the first. In the morning we heard the world premiere of a *Symphony* by Silvio Foretic (a Yugoslav living in Germany) which turned out to be a piece of music-theatre. It was performed by the composer himself at an upright piano and aided by various microphones which amplified his voice as well as multifarious effects from the piano's inside, and was based on the amusing notion of a composer waking up and setting out to write an orchestral piece, but after much consideration throwing down his pen and returning to bed. The early evening saw some excellent dancing from the Festival Dance Ensemble in *Pan*, a series of 'dance tableaux' by Natko Devčić. In the evening the North German Radio Choir of Hamburg under Helmut Franz gave German and Yugoslav works. The singers were outstanding both in their accuracy of pitch and their ability to act. Probably the most interesting work in their programme was *Suci* ('Judges') by Milko Kelemen, Ligeti-like in its build-up of clusters juxtaposed with rhythmic sections. The overall effect was exciting and the length 'just right'. Also performed were two works by Stockhausen, the first part of *Atmangibt das Leben doch erst das Singen gibt die Gestalt* ('Breathing gives life but only song gives form') and a section of *Sing ich für dich, singst du für mich* ('I sing for you, you sing for me'), the latter receiving its world premiere. Although excellently performed, neither of these proved outstanding. There was also a very amusing piece called *Für Stimmen . . . missa est (Madrasha 2¹⁵)* by Dieter Schnebel and a very boring one called *Requiem Hashshirim* by Giuseppe Sinopoli.

The third day was largely devoted to John Cage and Mauricio Kagel. In the late afternoon the English pianist John Tilbury gave a complete performance of Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano. This, I felt, was very flat, since insufficient contrast was created between the movements: tempi were too similar and the poetic quality of several pieces was altogether lacking. The performance was preceded by a public demonstration of preparing the piano: an excellent idea. In the evening came one of the highlights of the festival with a whole concert devoted to some of Kagel's music-theatre pieces presented by the Oper der Stadt Köln, including *Kontra-Danse*, a 'ballet for non-dancers', *Recitativarie* for singing harpsichord player, *Camera Obscura*, a 'chromatic game with light sources' and *Kantrimusik*, a 'pastorale in pictures'. All the works were marvellously funny and very cleverly conceived. Apart from a slight problem with falling scenery in *Kantrimusik*, the performances went like clockwork.¹

The fourth day was the real reason for my trip to Zagreb. The Belgrade Chamber Orchestra under Uroš Lajović played a series of works by various composers including one of mine. One that interested me particularly was *Pranam I* for voice, tape and ensemble by Giacinto Scelsi. Michyko Hirayama (soprano) proved a wonderful interpreter of Scelsi's music: her marvellous range and her uncanny ability to create unusual vocal sounds charmed the audience. Later on that day the world premiere of Vinko Globokar's *Carrousel*, with libretto by Eduardo Sanguinetti, was given by the Ensemble Musique Vivante from Paris and some Yugoslav musicians. The performance took place in the large Zagreb Sports Centre, and the audience was able to walk around the stage during the piece. It was, to say the least, an unusual spectacle. The work 'burst', as it were, when some of the audience sounds recorded at the beginning of the performance were played back as part of the 'happening', which eventually finished with a short play parodying a beauty contest. My last impressions were of the singers walking among the audience and singing into the spectators' faces . . .

The fifth day was entitled 'Non Stop Gratis — Non Stop Gratis — Non Stop'. Music began in the morning with Globokar's *Laboratory I, 1977* (played, as were *Laboratory II* and *III*, by members of the

Ensemble Musique Vivante), followed by the Zagreb Wind Quintet which in turn was followed by a multimedia work by Hans Otte called *What is the difference between you and me?* This last proved to be utterly boring, but it was soon followed by a more interesting concert of mainly French music by the Ensemble Musique Vivante under Diego Masson, in which the best work was *Ricercare* by the young composer Andre Bon. But there was, of course, more music to come. The St. Sophie Chamber Ensemble for Contemporary Music from Skopje performed two Yugoslav works and one by the Australian David Ahern, and finally the Ljubljana Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra under the American conductor Richard Dufallo gave a concert which ended with *Mirage* by the American composer Jacob Druckman.

The sixth day again began with Globokar, this time his *Laboratory II*, which proved to be much the same as *Laboratory I*. In the late afternoon the Ars Nova Ensemble of Cluj from Rumania gave a concert of Rumanian and Yugoslav pieces, the most interesting of which were Miriam Marbe's *La parabole du grenier* and Anatol Vieru's *Mosaïques pour trois percussions*. The latter created an exciting sound world through the use of soft and rhythmic percussion. In the early evening I attended a concert of electronic music realised at the Radio Belgrade Electronic Music Studio. Of the five works played, the best was Ludmila Frajt's *Nocturno Belgrade*, an evocative piece of gentle night sounds.

Finally on the sixth day came an evening of compositions by Luigi Nono, the whole concert consisting of works which were permeated with communist propaganda of one sort or another. It began with a tape piece entitled *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* ('Remember what they did to you in Auschwitz'), which as far as I was concerned was the only worthwhile work in the programme. The pieces in the rest of the concert were so overpowered by aimless emotionalism that halfway through I began to get angry with the composer for trying to tamper with my feelings. For me the worst aspect was his use of many Cuban poems and Cuban phrases, not in the sense in which they were originally meant, but used in his own manner. It was almost as if he was working against the very power of the words he was using, and I could not understand how, if he actually felt the force and meaning behind the Cuban material, he could treat it so lightly and carelessly. And then, of course, he tried to give his material more 'meaning' by shrouding it in a cheap emotionalism, unforgivable in a composer of his stature.

Of the seventh day I'm not prepared to write, since I had to take an afternoon plane back to London. I did, however, catch Globokar's *Laboratory III* (his major work *Concerto Grosso (1969-1977)* was played that evening) and had a quick last look at the Lifton and Vogel exhibits.

On the whole, the Zagreb Biennale was for me a very exciting experience: after all, it's no small feat to organise successfully a whole week crammed with contemporary music. There are, however, two small criticisms I should like to make. First, it should be possible for composers to hear their own work rehearsed several times before the performance. (I know that in my own case I didn't hear my piece *until* the performance.) And secondly, I think that the festival should make an attempt to play a few more women composers. This I think it can do without lowering standards. May I suggest Betsy Jolas, Elisabeth Lutyens, Thea Musgrave . . .

NOTE:

¹For a detailed discussion, of *Kantrimusik* see Glyn Perrin, 'Mauricio Kagel', *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-77), pp.13-16. (Ed.)