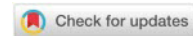


SERBIAN MUSIC CRITICISM OF THE INTERWAR PERIOD: TEXTS ABOUT MUSIC BY DANICA KRSTIĆ IN THE MAGAZINE MUZIČKI GLASNIK

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the texts of Danica Krstić (1873–1966) in the magazine *Muzički glasnik*, published in 1922 in Belgrade. Danica Krstić is known to the professional public as one of the first piano teachers at the Serbian Music School (from 1903 to 1940) and as the author of the first piano textbook in the Serbian language, *Piano School* (1911). However, few people know the fact that she was also a music critic in the magazine *Muzički glasnik*. Namely, she gave two critical reviews of the concerts of young pianists - Ćiril Ličar and Vera Lotar. In both articles, the author used the same method - it is an analytical presentation of the works that are in the repertoire, while the emphasis is on the performing skills of the mentioned artists. This fact is not surprising, given that the author was professionally oriented towards performing. The paper will also discuss the historical development and importance of music criticism in Serbia in the period between the two World Wars. The historical processes through which music criticism in our region went through, as well as the methods of changes in the critical model in the period between the two World Wars, will be pointed out. It will also be discussed about the magazine *Muzički glasnik* in the context of selected articles, but also the entire magazine as one of the most important in the domestic area in the mentioned time frame. The goal is to highlight the diverse professional involvement of Danica Krstić and her role in the process of developing musical culture and education in Belgrade and Serbia at the beginning of the 20th century. The paper uses the method of theoretical analysis as well as an analytical-musicological view of the concert life of the Serbian capital.

Keywords: music criticism, Danica Krstić, interwar period, *Muzički glasnik*.

Field: Social Sciences, and Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of art criticism is art itself, so in that sense, it is also considered a form of art. If we agree with Northrop Frye's thesis that criticism must exist because unlike art, it can "speak" (Frye, 1979), we come to the conclusion that art can show much but not necessarily say anything. Criticism thus serves as a bridge between the artist, their work, and the audience, and therefore the critic influences both the audience and the artist to the same extent.

At this point, it may be most appropriate to start a discourse on criticism by debating the definitions set by the aesthetician Miško Šuvaković in our context. The author considers criticism to be a second-degree (meta) discourse and as such promotes, explains, and interprets current artistic production. It is also perceived as evaluation, or the determination and differentiation of what is worthy from what is contrary to it, so it is essentially a presentation or assessment of an artistic or scientific work (Šuvaković, 2012: 396). However, criticism cannot, as emphasized, only highlight the negative or positive aspects of the object it studies. It must provide an evaluation of a particular work with a prior insight into what is good and bad, thus giving a true, objective judgment (Vojvodić, 2021).

On the other hand, criticism can be understood and explained in various ways - institutionally, outside the events it follows, where there is a clear distinction between critical discourse and artistic discourse, then as an integral part of artistic events in which the critic and the artist share the same ideas and become collaborators, and finally, it can be the initiator of defining and promoting the artist himself - the critic here is the author who 'creates' the artist (Ibid).

Criticism, although a separate field of literary science, music, visual, theatrical, or other art, also represents an artistic genre in which, alongside certain interpretive, synthetic-analytical principles, there is undoubtedly a creative charge of the critic's personality. Criticism is an activity that manifests itself both as an independent process and as part of broader social events. As emphasized, artistic criticism plays an important, sometimes decisive role in the development of artistic creation. It is an integral part of that creation, its companion, but also an important catalyst and force of its creation. Interpretations that suggest that criticism is entirely dependent on artistic creation, that it is solely and exclusively a link

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between the work and the audience, are unjustified. On the contrary, it is an expression of the creative act, and even a form of art itself. Criticism becomes art when it is in the service of a more expressive and bold creative freedom; when it fights against cultural backwardness, decadence, and dogmatism - in this case, when it is a weapon in the construction of (musical) culture.

The beginnings of Serbian music criticism are evident only in the 19th century, when concerts accompanied by written commentary on music, critics, and articles emerged. During the eighth and ninth decades of the 19th century, in an era of increasing professionalization of music, the number of writings by musicians and amateurs increased, and they were published in daily newspapers, various literary and music magazines, as well as in special editions. Also published were writings that represented short biographies of composers, texts about church and secular music, and various music-educational articles. Monuments of singing societies conceived within chronicles with musical chronicles also occupy a very important place.

Music criticism had one of the prominent positions in the *Srpski knizevni glasnik* [Serbian Literary Herald], and there could be found critical reviews of concerts, opera and ballet performances, as well as discussions on certain problematic themes predominantly written by music professionals and academically educated musicians. One of the most significant music critics of this journal was Miloje Milojević, who proved himself as an author whose critiques in the historical context continue the path of music critics of the 19th century, but surpass them in expertise and analytical approach. His critiques, especially those produced before 1914, represent a certain measure of the value of good or bad performance and creativity, even "a kind of regulator in the multitude of evaluations of the musicians of that time." (Pejović, 1994: 140)

Starting from the first decade of the last century, more intense currents and achievements in Serbian music can be traced through critiques and reviews written by composers Božidar Joksimović (1869–1955) and Petar Krstić (1877–1957), as well as the younger composer generation Petar Konjović (1883–1970), Miloje Milojević (1884–1946), and Stevan Hristić (1885–1958). While Hristić rarely wrote in newspapers and magazines later on, Milojević and Konjović, each in their own way, grew into music writers with distinct literary qualities, broad perspectives, and unique stylistic characteristics. For this reason, musicologist Stana Đurić Klajn emphasizes the parallel between their contributions to Serbian music and musicography: "just as their sound creations mark the beginning of our music of a more modern direction and European level, so their literary achievements laid the first foundations of our modern music criticism, essays, and musicology." (Đurić-Klajn, 1981: 195)

After the First World War and the unification of the South Slavic countries, cultural conditions in leading cultural centers gradually began to change. The young generation of artists directed their efforts towards the renewal of cultural life, which experienced a stagnation during the war years. A characteristic feature was turning towards Europe, emphasizing the awareness of the need for presence in the general cultural community, and highlighting the aspiration to establish and maintain pace with contemporary artistic trends. Music criticism, like visual arts, in the early twenties of the 20th century, gradually but increasingly shifted into the hands of professional authors whose aim was to convey their acquired knowledge into writings. In addition to professional musicians, music criticism was also written by writers such as Isidora Sekulić, Stanislav Vinaver, Todor Manojlović, aestheticians like Pavle Stefanović, and others.

The domestic music critiques and essays between the two World Wars cannot be studied without understanding those that originated in the preceding period. Namely, the most important starting point, the necessity of creation under the influence of folk melodies, was accepted by the interwar critics, although there was a gradual departure from it, especially starting from the 1930s. The old critical tradition, music-educational texts, propaganda articles, portraits, and obituaries of prominent authors were also adopted. Additionally, writings were published on anniversaries, celebrations of institutions, bibliographic contributions, as well as studies on church and secular music. The goal of the critics was to present their opinions on works and their interpretations, but also to educate the music audience. What sets the criticism of the third decade of the 20th century apart from that which preceded it is a developed sense for the new and modern, as well as "an awareness of stimulating those forces that strive for the opening of broader cultural horizons." (Denegri, 1967:42) Moreover, their level of knowledge acquired in major European centers was at an admirable level, thus surpassing the amateurish way of thinking that was characteristic of the majority of writings from the previous period.

Between the two World Wars, the art of the 19th century still lived on in the works of composers and critics of the older generation such as Josif Marinković, Stanislav Binički, Petar Krstić, and Kosta P. Manojlović, so the interwar musical heritage also implied romantic national foundations, while simultaneously being nourished by more contemporary, modern currents. Literary critics who began their activities even before the First World War have their counterparts in more traditionally oriented music

critics, but in terms of value within Serbian literary criticism and essay writing, they are incomparably higher. Considerable importance for music was given to discussions on the national style. Many Serbian music authors, especially Konjović, Manojlović, and most notably Milojević, accepted this style in their writings. The national style theme was present in the interwar period in visual art criticism as well, which, like music criticism, underwent a transition from description to literary form, as previously mentioned.

2. DANICA KRSTIĆ AND THE MAGAZINE MUZIČKI GLASNIK

Danica Krstić (Vienna, 1873 - Belgrade, 1966) was one of the first piano pedagogues at the Serbian Music School in Belgrade and the “author of the first piano textbook in the Serbian language, printed under the title *School for Piano* (1911)” (Ilić, Kovač, 2022: 411). Unfortunately, as one of the pedagogical pioneers who approached the issue of pianist education “in an exceptionally original and profound manner (...) as evidenced by preserved or published programmatic, methodological, and critical writings” (Savković, 2021: 53), Danica Krstić is not sufficiently known today. Additionally, her textbook *School for Piano* is not used within contemporary piano pedagogy, nor is its content studied as “recommended literature for the subject *Methodology of Piano Teaching*, attended by students of undergraduate academic piano studies” (Ilić, 2020: 401). Even concerning Danica Krstić’s artistic activity, there is not much information in scholarly publications, although she was an active concert performer and a “representative of the Viennese piano school” (Ilić, 2022: 153). She performed at numerous concerts and motivated many students to follow her path. Together, they revived the works of great composers, which was always a significant event for music schools in Belgrade (Kolundžija, 2023).

In this paper, we will focus on Danica Krstić’s activity in the magazine *Muzički glasnik*. The magazine was published only in 1922, and Danica Krstić was the author of music critiques in its two issues, No. 2 and No. 8. By examining the content of these articles, we will see her critical review of the concerts of two young pianists, Ćiril Licar and Vera Lotar. Additionally, attention will be drawn to the reaction of the Belgrade audience during piano concerts in a period significant for the development of artistic life in Belgrade. As noted by musicologist Aleksandar Vasić, the activity of all educated musicians who wrote for the *Music Herald* in 1922 was intended for “raising the cultural level of our environment but also for the development of art itself” (Vasić, 2009: 98).

The first music magazine launched in Belgrade after the First World War was “*Muzički Glasnik*” (*Music Herald*). The owner of this magazine was Kosta M. Bojković. The magazine was published from January to December 1922, with Petar Krstić serving as the chief editor (Vasić, 2009). The editorial board served as a link between two Serbian generations, the older (now the oldest) including B. Joksimović, Vi. Đorđević, P. Krstić, J. Zorka, and the younger (then) including S. Hristić and K. Manojlović (Đurić-Klajn, 1956). Besides the members of the editorial board, contributors to the “*Glasnik*” included Stanislav Binički, Cvetko Manojlović, Danica P. Krstić, Jovan Urban, and others (Vasić: 2009). “*Muzički Glasnik*” represented a certain program. It emphasized musical folklore, national musical heritage, and the struggle for a better position for music and musicians in the new state community (Vasić, 2009: 110).

According to Đurić-Klajn, the content of the *Muzički Glasnik* was more significant in terms of bibliography and music history than in literal-artistic terms” (1956: 85). Considering this stance, the articles presented in the following work will be approached analytically. The aim is to examine the tendency of Danica Krstić as a music critic, educator, and pianist, who belonged to the intellectual and artistic elite of Belgrade in the first half of the 20th century.

The first article to be presented is found in the “*Muzički Glasnik*” issue number 2, on page number 8. It is a text about the concert of twenty-eight-year-old Slovenian pianist Ćirilo Licar, a graduate student of the Prague Conservatory. Ćirilo Licar later became known to the wider public as a member of the teaching staff of the piano department of the Music Academy and the Secondary Music School at the Music Academy in Belgrade and the Secondary School at the Music Academy in Zagreb (<https://www.fmu.bg.ac.rs/o-fakultetu/istorijat/> viewed on 29/06/2023).

On January 17th of this year, Ćirilo Licar, already a well-known piano virtuoso in Belgrade, held a concert in the “Stanković” hall. The pianist, who performed pieces from his diverse program with clear technique and artistic flair, was greeted enthusiastically, unfortunately by a very small audience. His musical interpretation of Czech compositions demonstrates seriousness and deep understanding in the style of these works. Similarly, in his performances of Beethoven and Chopin, he achieved undeniable success with his temperament and virtuosic technique. Responding to the audience’s demand for more, the pianist added several more pieces, and both Suk and Chopin were received with the greatest enthusiasm, especially from the Belgrade musical youth, who comprised the

majority of the audience.

D.P.K. (Source: Musicological Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, "Muzički Glasnik", issue 2, page 8.)

In Danica Krstić's description of Ćirilo Lichar's concert, she highlighted the composers whose works were on the program. Ludwig van Beethoven, (Frederic Chopin, and Josef Suk were mentioned, with Suk representing one of the Czech composers whose works were performed that evening. Although the titles of the compositions performed by pianist Ćirilo Lichar were not mentioned in this article, they may be found in the *Letopis muzickog zivota* [Chronicle of Music Life] in Belgrade from 1840 to 1941 (Hereinafter: *Letopis.*), provided by Slobodan Turlakov (1994), who presented the complete program for the concert. From the *Letopis*, we learn that the concert was originally scheduled for January 18th but was held a day earlier due to a change in date. The performed pieces included Händel-Liszt's Sarabande and Chaconne (the specific composition title was not provided), Beethoven's Sonata Op. 78, Smetana's Polka in F major, Novak's Songs in the Night, Debussy's Evening in Granada, a piece by Cyril Meir Scott (the specific title was not given), Chopin's Scherzo in B minor, and a movement from Suk's Suite Spring (Turlakov, 1994). This concert was announced in the magazine *Politika* on January 14, 1922, and reviews about it were written by "Milojević, Concert of Ćirilo Lichar, *Politika*, Jan 18, 1922, p. 4; Vinaver, Recital by Mr. Lichar, *Misao*, vol. 3, no. 8, from Feb 1, 1922, pp. 223/224" (Turlakov, 1994: 91).

The next article is found in the magazine "Muzički glasnik," issue number 5, page 8. Danica Krstić wrote a critique of the concert performed by the young twenty-one-year-old Italian pianist Vera Lotar, a student of Alfred Cortot and a student at the Vienna Conservatory. Vera Lotar (later married as Vera Lotar-Shevchenko) performed mostly in Russia, where she was a soloist with the Novosibirsk State Philharmonic (http://www.lotar-shevchenko.ru/en/lothar_shevchenko/biography/ viewed on 29/06/2023).

Vera Lotar performed on March 27th this year at the "Stanković" hall with such artistic perfection, which is surprising for such a young individual, as this modest artist. Her colossal natural technique, full of temperament, complete confidence in nuances ranging from the softest pianissimo to the loudest forte, and so forth, were outstanding. In the continuation of her studies, especially considering the calmer interpretation of classical pieces and a more economical use of the pedal, Vera Lotar will undoubtedly become one of the foremost piano virtuosos. Unfortunately, as almost always in Belgrade, this concert, when a concert truly deserves the name in the true sense of the word, was poorly attended.

D.P.K. (Source: Musicological Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, "Muzički Glasnik", issue 5, page 8.)

Despite Danica Krstić clearly stating in her text that the pianist truly deserves the title of virtuoso, in her article about Vera Lotar, she did not highlight the composers or the pieces that were performed. According to the Chronicle, Vera Lotar actually held her concert on March 29th instead of March 27th, as stated in Danica Krstić's article (the reason for the discrepancy in the concert date remained unknown). According to Turlakov, the program performed by Vera Lotar consisted of works by Bach-Busoni, Beethoven's Sonata in C major Op. 53, Chopin's Ballade in G minor, Etudes, Berceuse, Scherzo in B minor, and Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody (without specified number) (Turlakov, 1994). In further description in the *Letopis*, it was not mentioned which other daily newspapers or monthly magazines wrote about this concert.

Aside from the mentioned articles, in the journal "Muzički Glasnik" issue 7, the name of Danica Krstić is mentioned within an announcement. Specifically, within the section for Advertisements, there is a report on the activities of the Music School in Belgrade, where it is noted that in 1922, Ljubica Natošević, a piano student in Danica Krstić's class, successfully completed her education: "(...) Ljubica Natošević (piano, class of Ms. Danica Krstić) has completed her education with excellent success, and she has been recognized for her artistic maturity." (Source: Musicological Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, "Muzički Glasnik", issue 7, page 6.)

In her critical review, Danica Krstić also mentioned the concert audience, whom she characterized as the young Belgrade population, full of understanding and support for piano soloists. She did not omit the observation about the small number of attendees, which, in her opinion, should have been higher when considering the concerts of the presented piano virtuosos. Unfortunately, even today in Serbia, when serious music performers are on stage, concert halls are often half-empty. Exceptions occur when artists with successful international careers perform, although even in those cases, the audience turnout is often lower than expected. Until today, nothing significant has changed regarding the relationship between artistic performance and classical music enthusiasts, even though Danica Krstić's observation was made more than a century ago. The number of attendees at serious music concerts is small, even though the artistic levels of performers are generally high and of high quality.

3. CONCLUSION

Judging from Danica Krstić's two music analysis essays published in Muzički Glasnik, it can be deduced that her goal was not to get thoroughly entrenched in the field of music criticism. In addition to her active pedagogical work and concert performances, her skillful handling of the roles of professional consultant, music critic, and positively inclined analyst of the piano concerts held in Belgrade in 1922 offers insight into a professional breadth and the courage to venture into the literary, music-critical field. Her criticisms are completely well-meaning, focusing solely on the best musical and pianistic qualities of the pianists that are being featured. Alongside the notably positive evaluations, Danica Krstić also foresaw successful piano careers for these musicians, from the standpoint of an experienced connoisseur of musical artistry and pianism, a prediction that came true subsequently. Considering that, as mentioned, Danica Krstić's presence in Muzički Glasnik was tied to articles about two piano concerts in Belgrade, it represents exceptional value. Its significance lies in illustrating a versatile professional artistic activity and contribution to the broader artistic community of the newly formed civil society in Serbia.

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