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## **RENAISSANCE MUSIC IN SERBIA**

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During the course of my continuing research into the music of Serbia, it was drawn to my attention by my friend and colleague Professor Bogdan Djaković that there were, in a certain choral archive in Belgrade, a number of adaptations of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Latin motets, with adaptations of the texts in Slavonic. Though intrigued, I was unable actually to pursue this enquiry until some years later, and should like to record here my gratitude to the present Director of the First Belgrade Choral Society, Svetlana Vilić, who generously granted me access to the archive and dispensed of her time in order to further my investigations. The scores in question include both sacred and secular music by composers including Marenzio and Monteverdi and, in particular, Palestrina. Their inclusion in the repertoire of the Society was the result of the training and initiative of the composer and conductor Kosta P. Manojlović. What is interesting about this, apart from the fact that the liturgical works are part of the western tradition, is the fact that they were provided with Slavonic singing translations. In this paper I will discuss these works and the impact that Manojlović's interest in his repertoire had on the subsequent development of contemporary church music in Serbia.

### **KOSTA P. MANOJLOVIĆ**

Firstly, I will give a brief outline of the biography of Kosta P. Manojlović. He was a true renaissance man. Born in Krnjevo in 1890, he was not only a composer, conductor, teacher and musicologist, but he had a sound education in theology, graduating from the St Sava Seminary in 1910. He subsequently studied under the doyen of Serbian composers, Stevan Mokranjac, and also worked as a teacher, in Čuprija and Belgrade. In 1912 he was given a scholarship in order to further his studies in Moscow and Munich, though these studies were intermittent because of the two Balkan Wars (1912 and 1913). He took part in the Serbian army's retreat through Albania in 1915, and was one of the soldiers subsequently stationed on Corfu, where he founded a military choir. In the following year he continued his studies in Oxford, returning to Serbia in 1919, where he endeavoured to perpetuate the legacy of Mokranjac through his involvement with choral societies in Serbia, and,

indeed, Yugoslavia, but especially through his work as conductor of the Beogradsko pevačko društvo [Belgrade Choral Society].<sup>1</sup>

At Oxford, Manojlović became a member of the Oxford Bach Choir, directed by one of his lecturers, Percy Hugh Allen, and thus continued and deepened his interest in pre-classical music initiated during his studies in Germany in 1913-14, where he had worked with Friedrich Klosé on counterpoint and the performance of Bach with Eugen Schmitz.<sup>2</sup> His final B.Mus exercise (dedicated to Allen) was a setting of Psalm 137, *Na rjekah vavilonskih*, as a cantata scored for solo baritone, mixed choir and orchestra, and the thorough-going imitative choral writing shows just how much he had absorbed from the renaissance and baroque music he experienced as a performer during his Oxford years:

Musical Example 1: Kosta P. Manojlović, *Na rekama vavilonskih* (excerpt)<sup>3</sup>

Bach's music became a feature of Manojlović's repertoire; in 1937 he was responsible for a performance of the *Christmas Oratorio* with the Mokranjac Choral Society (which he had founded), the Orchestra of Radio Belgrade and soloists, which was broadcast, and which must have been no small undertaking given the scant knowledge of this repertoire (and above all appropriate performance practice) at that time in Serbia,<sup>4</sup>

1 Renamed as the Prvo beogradsko pevačko društvo [First Belgrade Choral Society] in 1923.

2 See Jelena Milojković-Djurić, "Kosta P. Manojlović u međuratnom razvoju muzičke kulture", in Vlastimir Peričić, ed., *U spomen Koste P. Manojlovića kompozitora i etnomuzikologa*, Zbornik radova, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti (Beograd, 1988), 38.

3 In the absence of access to the full score, this excerpt is taken from the detailed discussion of the cantata by Ana Stefanović in Vlastimir Peričić, ed., *U spomen Koste P. Manojlovića kompozitora i etnomuzikologa*, Zbornik radova, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti (Beograd, 1988), 270.

4 More on the composer's engagement with early music may be found in Predrag Đoković, "Kosta P. Manojlović and Early Music: Echoes of the "Elizabethen Fever" in Serbia, in Vesna Peno, Ivana Vesić and Aleksandar Vasić, eds., *Kosta P. Manojlović (1890-1949) and the Idea of Slavic and Balkan Cultural Unification*

and the choir was also of sufficient level to perform a work as complex as Taneyev's cantata *John of Damascus*.<sup>5</sup> The performance of the *Christmas Oratorio* was given in Serbian; as was common at that time in Great Britain, works with German texts were given in translation, and Manojlović seems to have followed this path, inviting the composer Stanislav Binički to undertake the task.

### CHORAL SOCIETIES IN SERBIA

Secondly, a word should be said about the institution of the choral society in Serbia.<sup>6</sup> These came about during the course of the nineteenth century, that of Pančevo, founded in 1838 being the oldest, and the Belgrade Society the next oldest. These Societies sang (and sing) not only Serbian and other Orthodox church music, but classics from the Western choral repertoire, and were fundamental in the establishment of a solid choral tradition in Serbia, a tradition that became renowned not only within Serbia but abroad; the Stanković Music Society, for example, included in its repertoire Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and toured Czechoslovakia, Romania, France, Bulgaria and Hungary, and the Obilić Academic Singing Society gave the premières in Belgrade not only of contemporary works such as Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1933), but music as venerable as Mozart's Coronation Mass (1926).

The Belgrade Singing Society was founded in January 1853 by the music theorist Milan Milovuk, and was later conducted by Mokranjac, and subsequently by many prominent Serbian composers and conductors. Its role in Manojlović's career was of great importance, providing him as it did with a vehicle with which to consolidate Serbian and Slavic choral repertoire in general and also to experiment with Western early music, as I have mentioned previously.

### THE WORK OF MANOJLOVIĆ IN SERBIA

In many ways, the high point of Manojlović's work with the First Belgrade Choral Society would seem to have been what is generally recognized as the first performance in Yugoslavia (and certainly in Serbia) of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* in 1925, which the critic Jovan Zorko saw as a new departure in Serbian singing tradition.<sup>7</sup> There was also a well-received concert including English

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(Belgrade: SASA, 2017), 185–198 and, especially, in Предраг Ђоковић, *Утицај европског покрета за рану музику на исбођачку праксу у Србији* (Докторска дисертација, Универзитет уметности у Београду, Београд 2016). I am grateful to Professor Ђоковић for providing me with a copy of his pioneering doctoral thesis.

5 See Jelena Milojković-Djurić, *Tradition and Avant-Garde. The Arts in Serbian Culture between the Two World Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 38–40 for discussion of this period of the composer's life.

6 There is an increasing literature concerning Serbian choral societies, including Миховил Томандл, *Споменица Панчевачког Спрског Црквеног певачког друштва: 1838-1938*, repr. with introduction by Vera Carina (Београд: Пропец, 2008) and Јелена Виденовић и Бранислав Тикић, *120 Година Црквено-певачкадружина "Бранко"* (Ниш: Саборни црам Свете Тројице, 2008); little material is available in English on this subject, but of interest are the section dealing with choral music in Katarina Tomašević, "Musical Life in Serbia in the First Half of the 20th Century" in Katy Romanou, ed., *Serbian & Greek Art Music* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2009), 42-45 of 34-53, the detailed history of one of the most emblematic of these, the Singing Society of Pančevo, in Vera Carina, "The Serbian Church Singing Society of Pančevo as part of Serbian Culture", in Ivan Moody and Maria Takala-Roszczenko, eds., *Church, State and Nation in Orthodox Church Music. Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Orthodox Church Music, 8-14 June 2009* (Joensuu: ISOCM, 2010), 242-253 and Biljana Milanović, ed., *Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856-1914). The Belgrade Choral Society Foreign Concert Tours* (Belgrade: SASA/SMS, 2014).

7 Jovan Zorko, "Missa Papae Marcelli od Palestrine", in *Srpski književni glasnik* XV/5, 384-387, apud Ђоковић, "Kosta P. Manojlović and Early Music...", 189.

madrigals in 1927, which was repeated two years later, and, as General Secretary of the Južnoslovenski pevački savez (the South-Slavic Choral Union) from 1924-32, he organized concerts by a number of English choirs in Zagreb and Belgrade in 1930.<sup>8</sup>

The archive of the Society clearly shows the influence of Manojlović's years at Oxford, containing, in addition to the repertoire one might expect by Serbian composers (especially Mokranjac and a substantial number of pieces of his own authorship), Russians such as Tchaikovsky and Grechaninov and works by composers such as Dvořák, Liszt and Schumann, Anglican church music by Geoffrey Shaw and Charles Wood, and some twenty works from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Those I was able to locate in the Society's archive are as follows:

Two motets by Palestrina, *Exaudi Domine* and *Ego sum panis vivus*;

One motet by Lassus, *Iniquos odio habui*;

One motet by Clemens non Papa, *Erravi sicut ovis*;

One motet by Robert White, *O Praise God in His Holiness*.

In addition, there are a number of secular works:

Two canzonettas by Palestrina, *Da così dotta man'* and *Ahi, che quest' occhi miei*;

Two madrigals by Monteverdi, *Quel augellin che canta* and *Ah! Dolente partita*;

One madrigal by Wilbye, *Adieu Sweet Amaryllis*;

*Lullaby* by William Byrd.

The archive's catalogue shows that there are also works by John Bull, Giovanni Croce, a further motet by Clemens non Papa (*Tristitia obsedit me*), two further madrigals by Monteverdi, Morley's setting of words from the Song of Songs *O Amica mea*, Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*, a madrigal by Francis Pilkington, and a work by Purcell. These I was not able to locate, and indeed not all of them are immediately identifiable from the entries in the catalogue, but with the exception of the other motet by Clemens, it proved possible to find all the sacred music which had initially awoken my interest.

These scores were prepared by the choir's copyist, Stevan Klokić, from whose dating of the scores one may see that this repertoire was in use from the late 1920s to 1931, in other words, throughout the tenure of Manojlović. 1931 was the year in which he felt obliged to resign as the conductor of the choir, but the foundation of the new Pevačko društvo "Mokranjac" (the Mokranjac Choral Society) enabled Manojlović to continue his work and even to perform Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, as mentioned above.

As far as the renaissance motets were concerned, Manojlović's procedure was to choose works with texts taken from the Scriptures so that translations into Slavonic would be readily available; settings of texts unique to the Roman rite would have presented a far greater challenge. Palestrina's four-part setting of *Exaudi Domine*, a text used in the Latin rite for the dedication of a church, comes from his *Motecta festorum totius anni liber primus*, published in Venice by Antonio Gardano in 1564.

8 Doković, "Kosta P. Manojlović and Early Music...", 192.





*vocibus modulatorum secundum volumen*, by Adrian Le Roy & Robert Ballard in Paris in 1565. There is a second part to this work, *Declinate a me*, but Manojlović chose to adapt only the first. Also from Psalm 118 (verse 176) is the text of *Erravi sicut ovis* by Clemens non Papa, a responsory verse sung at second Vespers on the First Sunday of Lent.

The challenge of adapting an elaborate polyphonic work original written in Latin to Slavonic might be thought to be considerable, but Manojlović achieves the transition in all cases with great elegance. In all these cases, the syllable count in the Latin and Slavonic texts is almost identical, and the editions are underlaid with both. Thus, *Exaudi Domine* has 60 syllables, while its Slavonic version, *Uslīši Gospodi*, has 57. *Ego sum panis vivus* 52 syllables in Latin, while the Slavonic version, *Az jest hleb životni*, has 41. *Iniquos odio habui* by Lassus has 39 syllables in Latin and 40 in Slavonic, as *Zakono prestupnija voznenavidjeh*, while Clemens's *Erravi sicut ovis* has 32 in its Latin version and exactly the same number in Slavonic, as *Zabludih jako ovča*.

Robert White's *O Praise God in His Holiness* is a more curious case. This work, a setting of words from Psalm 150, is preserved in BM Additional Mss 30480-4 (the institution which holds this manuscript is charmingly described in the transcription as the "British Museum"), and is underlaid in Manojlović's version with Slavonic text only. One is led to surmise from this that while singers in Serbia were clearly perfectly competent in Latin, English was thought at that time to be beyond them. The fact that the two secular songs by Palestrina retained their Italian texts suggests both that Italian was considered easier to pronounce by Serbs and also that finding a suitable translation would have presented considerable difficulties. However, the fact that Monteverdi's *Quel augellin che canta* and *Ah! Dolente partita* are provided with singing translations in the Serbian language rather goes against such a supposition.

The Serbian version of the Byrd *Lullaby*, a consort song, is perhaps not so extraordinary in this context, given that poetry intended to help babies fall asleep tends to be broadly similar the world over; nevertheless, the context of the original – a lament for the massacre of the innocents under King Herod – is entirely missing.

It is not easy to overestimate Manojlović's enterprise in choosing this repertoire, or his skill in adapting it. The texts in Slavonic give rise to a very different vocal colour from the Latin originals, but Manojlović was extremely skilful in adhering closely to the character of the original versions, in terms both of the positioning of the text and the use of melisma. Far from being merely an eccentric experiment, his interest in this music, foreign by nationality, language and rite, provided him with a stimulus as a composer that was unique in Serbia during this period. Like his teacher Mokranjac, he was able to absorb techniques and approaches from foreign repertoires, and to adapt and import them, as both composer and conductor, in his quest to raise the quality of the music performed in written in his own country.

His graduation cantata, *Na reka vavilonskih*, already shows what Manojlović was capable of, as does his later *Sticheron for the Serbian Saints (Stihira srpskim svetiteljima)*, written in 1943 and making uniquely thorough use of counterpoint and fugue, but both works are intentionally monumental: the composer's true legacy was much more diverse than these fireworks might suggest. He left, firstly, a lasting impression on Serbian choral culture, both sacred and secular, through his work as a conductor, organizer and administrator of choirs, by means of the introduction of Western repertoire and the continuation of Mokranjac's work of

constructing a choral tradition that would be authentically Serbian but build upon the techniques learnt abroad; similarly, his legacy as a composer would bring together a profound knowledge of the Serbian chant tradition, again based on the work of Mokranjac, and an indisputable technical competence: it is enough to look at a simple setting such as the apolytikion for Pentecost to see the way in which he respects the rhythmic flow of the text and at the same time manages to make a contrapuntal setting of a standard Serbian chant:

**Тропар на Духове**

Коста П. Манојловић

СОПРАН  
АЛТ  
ТЕНОР  
БАС

Бла - го - сло - вен је - си Хри - сте Бо - же наш, и - же  
Бла - го - сло - вен је - си Хри - сте Бо - же наш, и - же  
Бла - го - сло - вен је - си Хри - сте Бо - же наш, и - же

5  
пре - му - дри лов - ци јав - љеј низ - пос - лав им Ду - ха Свја -  
пре - му - дри лов - ци јав - љеј низ - пос - лав им Ду - ха Свја -  
пре - му - дри лов - ци јав - љеј низ - пос - лав им ду - ха Свја -

10  
та - го и тје - ми у - лов - љеј все - љен - ну - ју,  
та - го и тје - ми у - лов - љеј все - љен - ну - ју,  
та - го и тје - ми у - лов - љеј все - љен - ну - ју,

14  
Че - ло - вје - ко - љуб - че, сла - ва Те - бје.  
Че - ло - вје - ко - љуб - че, сла - ва Те - бје.  
Че - ло - вје - ко - љуб - че, сла - ва Те - бје.

Musical Example 3: Kosta P. Manojlović, *Tropar na Duhove*.

Manojlović was both highly gifted and an eminently practical musician. His transposition of the sound world of both the renaissance motet and the liturgical music of Bach into a Serbian context, as part of the great modernist project that went hand-in-hand, as elsewhere in the Balkans, with the establishment and consolidation of the new nation-state, was truly a remarkable achievement.

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