

Ivana Stefanovic

Ljubica Maric and Pavle Stefanovic

"What I think is more true than what I know" -- Ljubica Maric, Zapisi (1996-2000), published 15 March 2009, *Politika Literary Supplement*

A Vignette from Prote Mateje Street

In the course of the 1950s, Ljubica Maric would often drop in unannounced at the home of Pavle Stefanovic at 25, Prote Mateje Street. There, Ljubica and Pavle, a Maric and a Stefanovic, would sit talking for hours on end. On a Förster piano, Ljubica would play the still unfinished pages of Songs of Space, humming a little. Songs of Space impressed Pavle first with the choice of texts. The rhythm of the lyrics, the syllabic rhythmization, the sudden changes of tempo and meter -- all were endlessly repeated. Being a good actor, Pavle Stefanovic was an excellent reader of texts, his own and those of others. Ljubica's chosen texts from ancient tombstones he recited by rhythmizing and chanting them, almost singing out the long syllables and sharply truncating the short ones, to her strong approval. Pavle Stefanovic interpreted these verses with a vast empathy, seeking in the fragments of words human lives scattered across graveyards and the open spaces of the past. When the music came, everybody at home had already long learned the text by heart. Then, again, there came the endless conversations. Ljubica Maric was wont to say in her high-pitched voice: "Pavle, all the things that you can hear"! referring to his sensibility and "precognitive" ability to understand music structure in the early stages of its formation.

There is no record of Ljubica playing her other compositions to Pavle. Still, there is good reason to believe, in view of the period of its inception, that such a thing might have happened also in the case of the Byzantine Concerto.

In this way, in addition to being a friend and someone to talk to, Pavle became also a musical confidant, who felt strongly drawn into a composition(s), since he had been in attendance from its very beginning, its inception and birth.

Friendship and More

A philosopher and esthetician by training, author who wrote and published articles on all areas of art and most of all on music, Pavle Stefanovic (b. 1901, d. 1985) chose to represent contemporary, modernist trends in Serbian and Yugoslav art. In the years after World War II, the complex and unique artistic opus of Ljubica Maric was an embodiment of this esthetic belief and choice of Pavle Stefanovic. At the same time, Pavle and Ljubica maintained a close friendship for years. Whether their friendship was based and deepened on a closeness of views and appreciation of art or, conversely, whether their esthetic views were brought closer together by their friendship is neither here nor there. After all, personal relationships between people and respect for a person's work are not necessarily in a stable, permanent, and immutable correlation.

The acquaintanceship and friendship between Ljubica Maric and Pavle Stefanovic continued for several decades, but it had been particularly intensified in the 1963-1965

period. During that period, Pavle Stefanovic publicly, actively, and very intensively "lobbied" for conferring various social recognitions on Ljubica Maric. For him, this work was much more than a duty to a composer, even to a favorite composer, and much more than an obligation to the Composers Association (UKS), on whose behalf he often spoke. This was a question of esthetic victory (or, God forbid, defeat); it was a highly passionate battle for certain artistic principles, views, ideas, and ideals.

In addition to a not insignificant number of published texts, the legacy of Pavle Stefanovic contains also a number of jottings and unpublished material dedicated to Ljubica Maric. These unknown jottings and texts were mostly created in the course of the mid-1960s. A number of these jottings are working drafts, preparatory material whereby the author, typing on his typewriter, was in fact thinking, formulating, and reformulating esthetic and critical arguments about the work of composer Ljubica Maric. Her unique opus, especially her works such as *Songs of Space*, the *Byzantine Concerto*, and others, had made a deep incision in the existing practice of composing music. It was necessary to show why.

These preserved jottings and texts, which are being mentioned here for the first time, were set in chronological order, creating a File on Ljubica Maric that comprises:

- texts written mostly on small format paper, on A4 sheets cut in half (hereinafter referred to as MF sheets), and which were not meant for publication;

- a *Report and Recommendation for a Correspondent Member of SANU*, written by Pavle Stefanovic on behalf of the Serbian Composers Association;

- several texts of argumentation for conferring various awards: the October Award and the Seventh of July Award. These texts date back to 1963, 1964, and 1965. There are several of these argumentations, that is, they were drafted in several versions of various lengths. These argumentations Stefanovic used to send out to a number of addresses: the Republic of Serbia Council on Culture, the Board of Directors of the Serbian Art Promotion Fund, the Seventh of July Award Commission, of which Stefanovic was a member at the time;

- this group includes also texts expounding on the award itself, the technology of decision-making, and the professional responsibility of the members of the jury;

- two personal letters from Pavle to Ljubica (carbon copies preserved);

- one short biography of Ljubica Maric as a document on a candidate for the award.

In all, the File on Ljubica Maric (which was not put together by Stefanovic himself) comprises 36 items.

Chronologically, the first text is a manuscript submitted to *Knjizevne Novine* and published on 23 December 1956, titled, *The Creative Accomplishment of Ljubica Maric*. The final text in the file is the Argumentation for the Seventh of July Award, which Ljubica Maric finally received after several tries. This text is dated 29 June 1965.

Pavle Stefanovic believed that social recognition of Ljubica Maric was of the utmost importance and in this there was a certain passion, even obsession with the wish that the author and her work should receive full social affirmation and recognition. This is why Stefanovic wrote his argumentations freely and voluntarily and, although mostly acting on behalf of such institutions as the Serbian Composers Association, it was basically he personally that strongly spearheaded the effort.

Academician

In his written legacy, first place chronologically belongs to an argumentation sent by Pavle Stefanovic to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). At its session on 3 June 1963, the UKS Board of Directors had unanimously decided to nominate Ljubica Maric for correspondent member of the academy; the writing of the argumentation was entrusted to Pavle Stefanovic. From a copy of the report (which is not dated, although the copy submitted to SANU was stamped 15 June 1963, reference number 15261) whereby UKS nominates Ljubica Maric for a correspondent member of SANU it is not clear who wrote the text, since it is signed by both the president and the vice president of UKS, Vasilije Mokranjac and Pavle Stefanovic, respectively. However, there can be no doubt that Pavle Stefanovic himself was the author -- not only because of the distinctive style or the fact that the text was typed on his own home typewriter, but also because he states so in so many words in a subsequent letter.

Road to Recognition

Another text of argumentation was submitted to the Council on Culture of the People's Republic of Serbia. First, the Serbian Composers Association had unanimously decided to nominate Ljubica Maric's Byzantine Concerto for the October Award. About this, Pavle wrote to Ljubica in a letter: "Since I submitted a recommendation on behalf of UKS two or three months ago for SANU to accept you as its member, the comrades at UKS wholeheartedly embraced my proposal that I should make the necessary adjustments to that earlier text and submit it as a new recommendation from UKS for the October Award." The recommendation for the award, the second October Award, was signed by the author himself, "musicologist and vice president of the Board of Directors" of the Association, Pavle Stefanovic; the text is dated 15-18 September 1963. Praising the great merit of the work itself, the recommendation speaks also about an "inspired and skillful study" by music conductor Oskar Danon, "excellently stylized interpretation" by pianist Jurica Muraj, and "the careful effort of all members of the Belgrade Philharmonic."

The award did not go to Ljubica Maric that year.

A few months later, on 15 June 1964, Pavle Stefanovic again wrote a recommendation in his own name, as "a music writer and man of letters," this time for the Seventh of July Award for Ljubica Maric, making several version of his recommendation. Thus, in the second version of the text, he addressed the Board of Directors of the Serbian Culture Promotion Fund; seven days later, on 21 June 1964, he wrote to the same fund a third version of the recommendation, this time in his capacity as a "member of the jury for conferring the Seventh of July Award for art for 1964."

Here, I stop the enumeration in order to take a look at another jotting from the file of Pavle Stefanovic on Ljubica Maric. This touching note on an MF sheet is entitled, Guilt.

Blame and Merit

I am making this short and extremely private text public solely in order to show how important to Pavle Stefanovic it was that the award should go to Ljubica Maric:

"If the award does not go to Ljubica Maric, the blame will be mine," he begins his note of 23 June 1964. The award would not go to Ljubica "if (he, Pavle) should be unable to make a calm presentation of strong and honestly unbiased arguments so as to convince them (the other members of the Commission) of the truth of my claim." He goes on to speak about the position and sensibility of music in general and adds, "a more difficult appreciation of (this) music is the fault not only of composers, but also of critics and writers of analyses and commentaries. And so, for this same reason, if I fail on this occasion, the blame will be nobody else's but mine."

In view of these sentiments, Pavle Stefanovic had reason to feel guilty again in the year 1964. Ljubica did not win the Seventh of July Award for 1964, just as she had not won the October Award the year before.

Almost exactly one year later, on 13 June 1965, Pavle wrote a recommendation for an award once again, this time as an "appointed member of the Seventh of July Award Commission." He turned in only his third draft of the text of the recommendation and each draft contained new and richer arguments. It is to be supposed that a fourth draft might also have been written (otherwise it would be difficult to explain why the third draft was preserved both as the original and as a carbon copy), but it was certainly the last one to be preserved. In the course of the 1960s, Pavle Stefanovic did not use the cut-paste technique, so that each text was new and different and the arguments refreshed, at least stylistically.

The last paragraph of the Argumentation, version three, reads:

"Because of this (potentially) profound contemplativeness in the linguistically complex tonal structures of Ljubica Maric; because of the epic breath amid bold and modern combinatorial intertwinement of the means of expression; because of this kind of (illegible) historicity in the symbolism of the musical material (which is a profound philosophy of history rather than a sequence of sound images from history and about history); finally, because of the deep roots of this music in her native soil, I propose Ljubica Maric for this year's Seventh of July Award for art." The same sentence continues in a somewhat dramatically underlined tone: "...Asking the members of the Commission to remember the words of Julius Caesar: 'Videant consules ne quid red publicum demerimenti capiat,' since we on this jury, being the 'consuls' of artistic creation in this Republic, are in a position to make sure that it (the Republic) should not suffer the loss that it would suffer if we overlooked the profoundly philosophical and poetic meaning and message of the musical opus of composer Ljubica Maric."

Pavle Stefanovic kept note in the form of a diary of the June meetings of the Seventh of July Award Commission in the year 1964, monitored the trend of the majority opinion, made notes on the nominated candidates, thought, and polemicized with those that held different views and ideas, seeking reasons for some actions, and writing about praises sung to Ljubica by Shostakovich while on a visit to the Composers Association. Further, he analyzed the mediocre in art ("apprentices and trainees") and in this context discussed the above-average qualities of Ljubica Maric. All this he did only for his own

satisfaction, in his own notebook, which relied on the discretion of his desk drawer which I am hereby partially violating.

The text in the file that chronologically follows this represents a "summation of the award (won!)" and is dated 29 June 1965. On a separate MF sheet, Pavle Stefanovic notes down his observations about the voting method, "on grown men always having something of children inside them and being inclined to play games." However, in the end, the "consuls" caused no losses to be sustained and Ljubica Maric, after three years of effort, received the Seventh of July Award, so that Pavle Stefanovic no longer had any reason to feel guilty, but deserving!

On the back of one MF sheet is handwritten: 3 July at 12 o'clock, award presentation at the Assembly of Serbia.

On the Exceptionality of the Exceptional

In an MF-size text entitled, "Wherein Lies the Exceptional Artistic Value of the Creation of Ljubica Maric," Pavle Stefanovic enumerates seven points of one of his analyses of the composer's opus. We may regard this analysis as the core, the foundation on which are based all other texts, analyses, argumentations, and summations. Here are the points in question:

1. The "personal creative style" of Ljubica Maric is "objectivistically distant, anti-romantic, Homer-like in its love for the truth." (Here, in parentheses, he quotes Huxley's essay on Tragedy and the Whole Truth and Roland Barthes's text Writing Degree Zero).

2. Ljubica Maric lives in a "contemplative climate of spirit and alertness of mind" and "transposes into tonal pictures those objective laws of the world (universe, nature, society, man) uncovered by centuries (1) of experience of nations, ... as well as (2) research ... of dynamic modern sciences (astronomy, biochemistry, nuclear physics, sociology, psychology, cybernetics)" and (3) "philosophical thought of our time."

3. He points out as an exceptional value the composer's attitude to the "eternal enigma of the concepts of space and time," that is, the philosophical aspect of her work.

4. He regards and emphasizes anti-sentimentality as exceptional -- the fact that "Ljubica Maric is always looking to the ultimate and enduring questions of the world." Her "most intimate zone of personal sensibility is nourished by questions of transience, microcosmic and macrocosmic infinity, just as the sentimental life of other composers is nourished by so-called commonplaces of man's sentimentality."

5. Ljubica Maric's music "is never programmatic," although "it remains closely linked to the realities of life and the experiences of all people."

6. The "superior observational peace" in the opus of Ljubica Maric puts her work on a "higher plane of humanism" and "transcends the so-called Faustian man." Here, Pavle Stefanovic quotes Dante, who strolls at Virgil's side through the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, "strolls understanding everything and empathizing, but not identifying with anybody's tragedy or happiness.")

7. Pavle Stefanovic regards as a special achievement the fact that Ljubica Maric, "relying on the old baroque forms and the old modal scales of the Serbian variant of Oktoih, established a modern musical language in terms of character and spirit."

In the text of the "Second" Summation, the "excellence and expressiveness of the opus of Ljubica Maric" appears in a 6-point definition of the "musical and technical foundation" of the opus. The first point is about the select melodic lines of sustained, almost ascetic character; point two refers to musical and dramatic functional rhythmicity; number three is given over to consequent accordances derived from select scales; number four is about the application of polyphony; number five is timberization as an equal additional component with the other means of expression; and number six is about a formal whole being conditional upon the proportions of the expressive elements of a work.

The basic view whereby Pavle Stefanovic explains the excellence of Ljubica Maric's opus is that "the developmental line of composer Ljubica Maric has moved, stylistically and spiritually, within the confines of progressive trends in European music between the wars."

The quality of being "rooted in her native soil," which is emphasized especially as a virtue, the link to the Oktoih, to the past, to the heritage of folk and epic art, is underlined by Stefanovic in the following way: "Ljubica Maric's respect for and tribute to the father of Serbian music is touching in its nobility. This year 1964 is a jubilee year for Mokranjac -- the 50th anniversary of his death (just as this is the year of the 100th anniversary of the death of Vuk Karadzic and also the 400th anniversary of the birth of Galileo Galilei and William Shakespeare -- with whom this composer is in very lively spiritual contact...)"

One MF sheet says: "Vuk preserved folk poetry, Mokranjac collected and processed, harmonized, which is to say musically and linguistically modernized and internationalized, folk songs. The award to Ljubica Maric in the jubilee year of Stevan Mokranjac ... (would be) a tribute to Mokranjac himself."

In another place on an MF sheet, in a text he titled, "Necessary Comparisons," Stefanovic compares Ljubica Maric with various figures in both Serbian and world culture. Her artistic achievement, according to Stefanovic, is comparable to that of Ivo Andric, Mihajlo Lalic, Njegos, and, especially, Lubarda (he particularly points out in this context the epic painting The Battle of Kosovo). Further on, he compares the achievement of Ljubica Maric's opus to that of Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. He makes the comparisons for his satisfaction alone and in this way clarifies concepts, classifies the results of the artistic creation of Serbian artists irrespective of their chosen medium of artistic expression or area of art. Testing and straining the comparative string to great tension, but doing so in the silence of his study and without any notion that it might ever see the light of day, he says:

"We do not have a historical novel of such power as the collection of cantatas and symphonies of Ljubica Maric based on the modal scales of the Oktoih. We do not have, either, such a thinker and essayist whose philosophical and historical experiments would bear comparison with the cognitive potential and tonality of Songs of Space and Pasa Calle." He adds: "Perhaps the one with the greatest similarity with Ljubica in this sphere is Miodrag Pavlovic."

Here, Pavle Stefanovic is particularly bearing in mind the words of Ljubica Maric herself, who says: "Past and future, by touching, create at one and the same time the most real and the most deceptive part of time that we call the present." This philosophical view, the rapprochement of past and future, of the eternal and the contemporary, which produces a fruitful creative hybridity, this artistic duality is the foundation on which is

based Pavle Stefanovic's profound conviction of the exceptionality of the opus of Ljubica Maric and the exceptionality of herself as a person, regarding her as "a progressive contemporary intellectual in the purest sense of the word."

And finally, here is a comprehensive description of Ljubica Maric, almost an apologia:

"When in this bracken of craftsmen, apprentices, and trainees there appeared Ljubica Maric, a person of a vast expanse of spirit, over-endowed with perceptions, person whose versatile perceptions of the world (by senses, mind, intuition, and imaginative visions) gush and flow from the depths of her lucid being in all directions, through all sorts of activities, we should have stepped back, amazed, before this miracle, we should have given thanks to providence humbly, on our bended knees, for giving us this gift of the existence, being, and appearance of Ljubica Maric among us. This wonderful versatile, radiant, emanating personality, rich in the perception of the world (universe, nature, man, and herself in the world), casually and without pretension, in the night hours of repose, play, entertainment, and lightheartedness -- writes words in ink, some metaphors, sentences, short and concise poems; or draws in an ordinary fountain pen on sheets from an ordinary notebook some lines, circles, human figures, creatures of the imagination; or makes collages, pasting into the pages of an album cuttings from newspapers, whose distribution and mutual association into which she forces and combines them attain a quite different meaning (just like words with their special semantics, when we compose them and weld them together into a higher unity, into poetic figures); or composes music, writing the notes of her auditive vision, transposing into musical performances her spiritual perception of the world.

"She is without a doubt the only person that I have ever regarded as a genius: a person that draws impressions and knowledge from all over the place and who transposes her perceptions into creations of her imagination that make use of several different means of expression: writing, drawing, painting, and composing"!

Mother

As one can see, Pavle Stefanovic, both in his private notations and public texts, completely ignores Ljubica Maric's gender. She is "a person," "an artist," "a genius," never a woman. But there is one person that to him is a woman, "proud mother," the "eternal woman," and the "solid caryatid of Serbianism." This woman is Ljubica Maric's mother

To Pavle, she is a person that he always speaks about. Thus, in both of his two letters that have survived to this day, he never fails to mention Mother Katarina. "I cannot at this time forget your proud mother, that solid caryatid of Serbianism as a part of mankind, the eternal woman of the Maric clan, the miracle of unity of womb and spirit, the wonder of stout erectness and firmness that brought you into this world and (illegible) the fever of beauty (...) -- endowed you."

Ljubica's Fire Tongues

The apartment at 25, Prote Mateje Street gives out on Njegoseva Street. At this particular point in time, the apartment is not an apartment. It is better described as part

of an apartment, because it is split among three families. Among a mixture of a multitude of stuff, along with furniture from a variety of the family's periods, there is a simple black wood-burning stove. On this stove one cooks lunch, heats water, bakes biscuits; and next to it is a wicker basket containing logs and the occasional newspaper deposited there by Father after reading it to light a fire with.

On these logs, on this newspaper, in this wicker basket, there is a pair of small black fire tongs. They are used to prod the fire to life. Ljubica wants to show me something. She draws a string through the eye of the fire tongs, presses both ends of the string to her ears, gently taps the slowly swinging fire tongs against the metal body of the stove, and her face quickly overspreads with a special and somewhat rascally expression. And then, after she has already suggested to me that this is about something special, she hands over to me this homemade installation, puts into my hands the ends of the string from which the fire tongs are suspended, and tells me to do as she has done. I gently swing the fire tongs; I have already pressed the ends of the string to my ears -- and from them I hear bells, bells, bells...

Translation
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