

Lucijan Marija Škerjanc: Critic of the *Jutro* newspaper from 1927 to 1942¹

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Lucijan Marija Škerjanc (1900–1973) was one of the most active writers of music criticism and essays in the history of Slovene music, with a career that ran from the end of the First World War until the early 1970s. His name brings up more than 700 hits in the Digital Library of the National and University Library in Ljubljana.² I should mention that he also published outside Slovenia and wrote numerous accompanying texts for concerts that have not been digitised and are not covered by the present paper.³ The focus of attention here will be on the period 1927–1942, when Škerjanc published the bulk of his critical writings in the Ljubljana newspaper *Jutro*. He focused above all on instrumental, vocal and vocal-instrumental concerts, while, with a few rare exceptions, opera and operetta performances were not the object of his professional attention, perhaps because musical events of this type were covered by other writers such as Stanko Vurnik, Slavko Osterc and Vilko Ukmar, among others.

Škerjanc's musical career began with family and church singing and the old upright piano he received as a present on his twelfth birthday. His curi-

- 1 This paper is part of Slovenian Research Agency programme P6-0376, Theatrical and Interdisciplinary Artistic Research.
- 2 Thanks are due to my colleague Zoran Krstulović who kindly drew my attention to the sheer number of reviews written by Škerjanc and to the fact that the dLib.si website of the National and University Library does not cover all of his critical writings.
- 3 Cf. Tatjana Kralj, ed., *Stoletnica rojstva L. M. Škerjanca* (Ljubljana: Fundacija Lucijana Marije Škerjanca, Ustanova za ohranjanje kulturne dediščine, 2000), 78–88.

osity and erudition marked him out as an unusual character even as a student at the lower gymnasium. The piano and his first steps towards composition became his passion. His first piano teachers included Anton Ravnik, Jaroslava Chlumecki and Dana Koblar, while his music theory teachers included the composers Stanko Premrl and Anton Lajovic.⁴ We learn from Škerjanc's biographical writings that the teacher who had the greatest influence on him was Anton Lajovic. A thoughtful student with many interests, from 1913 onwards he cut his journalistic teeth writing for the progressive student publication *Mi gremo naprej* ("Onwards") at the First State Gymnasium in Ljubljana, while his enthusiasm for composition and his musical abilities were confirmed by the art songs he wrote while still at school. The years of his adolescence and youth were often painful because of illness among his closest family members and frequent financial hardship. At the age of sixteen he lost his grandmother and his father, Max Kramer, who had hitherto supported the family, and was compelled to go out to work. He passed the school-leaving examination in 1918 as an external student, one of a group whose progressive ideas meant that they were not permitted to study for the *matura* exam in the usual way.⁵ On the advice of Anton Lajovic, he accepted a position as a répétiteur of the Ljubljana Opera Ballet when the opera house reopened after the First World War, although this was not a role to which he was drawn. In 1919 he enrolled at the University of Ljubljana to study law but abandoned this plan after a few semesters. The following year he enrolled at the Conservatoire in Prague and then, two years later, at the Academy of Music in Vienna. In Vienna he studied composition formally with Joseph Marx while also studying piano privately with Anton Trost, a teacher at the private music school founded by Eduard Horák (active from 1914 until 1939). He completed the first phase of his studies in Vienna in 1924 before pursuing further studies at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. He later studied with the famous conductor Felix Weingartner in Basel. His last diploma, in conducting, bears the date 1939.⁶ The newspaper *Jutro* reports that L. M. Škerjanc was awarded a doctorate by the Schola Cantorum in Paris on 11 June 1939, having submitted a dissertation on the composer Jurij Mihevc, with particular emphasis on composition and musical aesthetics.⁷

4 Jože Sivec, "Škerjanc, Lucijan Marija (1900–1973)," *Slovenska biografija* (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU, 2013), <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi652648/>.

5 Kralj, *Stoletnica rojstva L. M. Škerjanca*, 4.

6 Darja Koter, *Slovenska glasba 1918–1991* (Ljubljana: Beletrina, 2012), 99–100.

7 O. A., "Kulturni pregled. Francosko-jugoslovanski glasbeni stiki," *Jutro* 20, no. 138 (17 June 1939): 7, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-C3GCF1MR>.

Škerjanc developed an interest in journalism and criticism in his secondary school days and was already publishing in as early as 1917 (when he was just sixteen). Initially in the magazines *Cerkveni glasbenik* ("The church musician"), *Dom in svet* ("Home and world") and *Ljubljanski zvon* ("The Ljubljana bell"), then in the daily newspaper *Jutro* ("Morning"). He also published occasionally in *Zbori* ("Choirs"), *Slovenski narod* ("The Slovene nation") and *Odmevi* ("Echoes"). The last of these was a literary and cultural magazine that appeared quarterly between 1929 and 1933 and consisted of short pieces, essays, and poems by literary figures, some well-known and others more obscure, and contributions on culture from other writers. Other publications in which Škerjanc published articles and reflections included a supplement to the *Jutro* newspaper called *Življenje in svet* ("Life and the world") that was dedicated to scientific and, occasionally, musical topics. In 1934 he also appeared as a critic in *Naš val* ("Our wave"), a weekly magazine dedicated to radio, theatre and cinema that was published between 1934 and 1940. It consisted of commentary on programmes and performances on Radio Ljubljana and on theatrical and cinema presentations. Škerjanc's legacy of critical writings is dominated by reviews of concerts by local and foreign performers, while he also wrote reviews of published music, obituaries and other pieces on current developments in musical creation and performance in Slovenia.

During the Second World War, when concerts were rare, with the exception of public productions by the students of the Academy of Music, he did not publish at all. He resumed his work as a music writer after the war, although in somewhat different contexts from before. Between 1946 and 1948 he contributed programme notes for operas in *Gledališki list Opera SNG Ljubljana* ("Theatrical gazette of the SNT [Slovene National Theatre] Opera Ljubljana"). In subsequent years his journalistic work was more diverse. He wrote reviews of concerts, for the most part in *Ljudska pravica* ("The people's justice"), but also in *Slovenski poročevalec* ("The Slovene reporter"), *Ljubljanski dnevnik* ("The Ljubljana daily") and *Naša sodobnost* ("Our modern age"). Beginning in 1962, he wrote about current events in *Naši razgledi* ("Our views"). In 1965 he started writing for *Delo* ("Labour"). He also published reviews of music publications, pieces introducing Slovene and foreign composers past and present, reflections on music criticism and its constructiveness, comments on concert seasons, and so on. From 1951 to 1972 he mainly dedicated himself to writing accompanying texts for the programmes of concerts by the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra, of

which he was also the conductor between 1950 and 1955. In 1965 he became the concert critic of the *Delo* newspaper, where he remained a regular collaborator. His last article appeared just three days before his death.

The present paper focuses on the period in which he wrote for *Jutro*. Published between 1920 and 1945, *Jutro* was the principal Slovene newspaper for business, education and politics in the interwar period and was highly regarded for the quality of its journalism. As a collaborator of *Jutro*, Škerjanc published around 240 critical articles between 1927 and 1942. Most of these appeared in the main newspaper in the *Kulturni pregled* ("Cultural review") column, while some are found in the Monday supplement *Ponedeljek* ("Monday"). He also published in another supplement, *Življenje in svet* ("Life and the world"), for the most part sketches and essays on great composers such as Wagner, Haydn, Handel, and Bach.

Škerjanc began collaborating regularly with *Jutro* in January 1927. For the first two years he only published a modest number of reviews, around eight or nine a year, while between 1929 and 1938 he published between 20 and 25 reviews annually, which meant that he was reviewing the majority of concerts at the Philharmonic Hall and the Union Hall. He also introduced and commented on new musical compositions that appeared in various publications, in this way keeping the reading public informed of current developments in this field. Towards the end of his time at *Jutro*, between 1939 and 1941, he only published eight or nine reviews. His last review appeared in 1942, the only one he published that year. The years in which he published most prolifically stand as a remarkable chronological overview of the concert calendar and of general cultural life in Ljubljana in the period between the wars and in the first years of the occupation of the city, when concert activities came to an almost entire halt. If his early critical publications up to 1926 tended to be short pieces written in an elegant, elevated, even somewhat poetic style (though he was also capable of being quite severe and uncompromising towards individual performers), over time he developed into a refined connoisseur of critical thought with a great sense of professional responsibility.

Drawing on a range of relevant models, he developed his own methodology of critical writing and adopted a format that he continued to use until the end of his collaboration with *Jutro*. As a musician of broad education and a frequenter of concerts in major centres such as Prague, Vienna and Paris, where he had been a student and where he returned in later years, he was well acquainted with the mission of the critic and aware of his

responsibility to audience and performers alike. Every one of his articles on a musical event represents an important document of the social and cultural life of the urban environment in which he lived. His writings demonstrate his solid grounding in his subject, something that gave his reflections a particular depth, while his reviews also reveal his personal views of the programme being presented and of the artistic potential of the performers. Criticism is, in fact, also a reflection of the critic's personality, of the criteria they have formed and of their authority in a given environment. Regarding the personal note as an essential element of every review, Škerjanc wrote:

In the end every public work is subject to public judgement – a judgement which, unfortunately, can and must be exercised by one person alone. And that one is always – thank God – subjective.⁸

Another important element when it comes to evaluating Škerjanc's writings or responses to musical events is continuity – the confirmation that their author was a regular follower of musical life in Ljubljana in various venues with a clear sense of what was happening on the Slovene, Yugoslav and international concert scenes. He followed solo, chamber and orchestral concerts, the concert programme of Radio Ljubljana, operatic performances and, last but not least, music publishing, which enabled him, as a critic, to give a judgement that was as real and impartial as possible. We see that he was capable of giving due consideration to the numerous factors that influence the concert life of a given social milieu. When evaluating the quality of events, he took into account the opportunities for musical education in the Slovene context, the general cultural level of Slovene society, the artistic level of concert performances, the international comparability of performers and concert programmes, and the expectations of the audience – both experts and the general public. He was well aware that it is the critic's duty to draw attention to an event, to introduce the performer, the programme and the composers concerned, and to say something about the artistic level of the event, but he also knew that the critic must be consistent and sincere. As one of the most active critics of the twentieth century in Slovenia, he helped to spread awareness that musical events are open to public judgement, although this should be the judgement of individuals with the necessary competence. Although with few exceptions Škerjanc's reviews do not consist of extensive analyses of concerts, he was capable of conveying in a concise manner all the essential elements expect-

8 L. M. Š. [Lucijan Marija Škerjanc], "Nova muzika št. 3," *Jutro* 9, no. 170 (22 July 1928): 10, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-KI2ADXYF>.

ed by the professional and lay public. In them, he shows the right amount of knowledge, expresses himself in understandable and terminologically appropriate language, and at the same time maintains his professionalism with well-argued comments that offer the reader a broader insight into musical art, its content and its interpretation. Despite their concise nature, Škerjanc's critical writings are complementary accounts of musical life, art and performance and a record of the reactions of the public (and the critic) to artistic achievements. Daily newspapers such as *Jutro* did not publish really in-depth texts with reflections on artistic events. Cultural reviews were a part of the newspaper's desire to be topical and relevant in a range of fields, from politics and the economy to culture.

Škerjanc's critical writings in the period in question usually include a presentation of the performers and their credentials, including their formal training and their artistic achievements to date. He explains to what extent an individual concert was interesting to the general public, highlights premiere performances of individual compositions in Ljubljana, and offers expert comments on the cogency of the concert programme. Quite a number of his reviews mention the reaction of the audience, although it is apparent from his comments that he did not have a very high opinion of Ljubljana audiences. He considered them to be too traditional and unwilling to accept innovation with an open mind and accused them of unfairly giving performers a cool reception and responding to them in an uninformed, even condescending manner. His comments on concert programmes reveal his broad erudition and his knowledge of the Slovene and international musical repertoire. He does not omit to give his views on the originality of the programme and on the suitability of the order in which the individual works are performed. He also comments on the quality and suitability of the programme, considers the extent to which a Ljubljana audience – expert or otherwise – might have found it interesting and, above all, focuses on the technical and artistic qualities of the performers, while also pointing out their shortcomings. He is always respectful towards the performers and is restrained in his choice of words even when giving a negative assessment.

I will now offer some examples of Škerjanc's critical writings that clearly illustrate his views on the role of criticism, its content and the attitude of the critic towards performers and audience. He was as attentive to young performers as he was to established musicians and he afforded the same attention to solo, chamber, choral and symphonic concerts. This is demonstrated by his review of a concert by the young Triestine pianist Karmela

Kosovel, the sister of the great Slovene poet Srečko Kosovel, which included the following comment:

Beethoven's works demand the greatest immersion. On this occasion Beethoven was represented by his rather popular and insignificant Rondo in G major and an *Écossaise*; two soft and delicate little pieces that also seemed to me to be somewhat unimaginatively and perfunctorily performed, with the result that despite the absolutely impeccable technical skill (which the pianist manifests to an impressively high degree), little remained of the poetic charm that is all the more necessary when performing what – if I may say so – are actually rather banal compositions.⁹

Škerjanc frequently spoke scathingly of works by the great composers and labelled them inferior or unsuitable for the modern age. An example of this is his review of a concert by the then extremely famous Ševčík Quartet, which had performed all over Europe and garnered excellent reviews. Following a concert by the Quartet in 1927, which was not its first appearance in Ljubljana, Škerjanc wrote:

The evening was dedicated to Beethoven. Notwithstanding the reverence I feel towards this musical genius, I cannot help feeling that he belongs more to the past century than to this. The content of his string quartets and other compositions is very unmodern and expressed with means that no longer say what they did a hundred years ago and thus can no longer generate the same enthusiasm. A series of special Beethoven concerts is planned for this year [the centenary of Beethoven's death], despite the fact that there is no essential connection between us and Beethoven, and perhaps some modern music in between would do us more good. [...] the concert concludes with Beethoven's last and most mature chamber work, the String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131. This last work is thoroughly modern in places and is still quite interesting today.¹⁰

A month later came the main commemoration of the centenary of Beethoven's death: a performance of his 9th Symphony by the leading Lju-

9 L. M. Š., "Koncert pianistke Karmele Kosovelove v Ljubljani," *Jutro* 8, no. 8 (11 January 1927): 4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-U8N6UATH>. It should be noted that he somewhat banally characterised Beethoven's *Écossaise* as a dance piece of folk origin. Škerjanc frequently spoke scathingly of works by the great composers and labelled them inferior.

10 L. M. Š., "Koncert Ševčikovega kvarteta v Ljubljani," *Jutro* 8, no. 40 (16 February 1927): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-4D1R4XFW>.

bljana ensembles of the day. The first concert was performed by the choir of the Glasbena Matica and the chorus of the Ljubljana Opera, directed by Matej Hubad, a symphony orchestra consisting of members of various instrumental groups, and prominent soloists from the National Theatre in Ljubljana. The ensemble was led by the director and artistic director of the Ljubljana Opera, Mirko Polič. Before the concert in a full-to-capacity Union Hall, the expectant audience was addressed by Josip Mantuani, a figure of considerable note and a musicologist with wide-ranging interests, on the importance of Beethoven and his works. While Škerjanc praised the performers, he had harsh words to say about Polič's interpretation and about the sense, or otherwise, of performing older musical works:

*"I cannot agree with Mr Polič's interpretation: it was too modern, perhaps even a little theatrical, and too little grounded in the spirit of Beethoven and his age."*¹¹ The conductor's approach to the symphony evidently irritated him enough to prompt an additional comment the following day:

It seems necessary to me to emphasise at the outset that I do not consider any musical work to be 'eternal', as people are wont to call major works of the musical repertoire. For this reason, I cannot agree with the claim of the introductory speaker [Josip Mantuani] that in music Beethoven is, for the whole world, what Prešeren, say, is in our literature. I believe that the expressive possibilities of the poet are, from the outset, provided by the language in which he expresses himself, and that this matter is more or less constant. [...] Music, like no other art, is closely tied to the period in which it is written and is only understood in relation to that period. The expressive possibilities of music are so variable that over time they become incomprehensible. [...] I therefore believe that Beethoven's 'immortal' Ninth is mortal, and that what was gigantic a hundred and more years ago is today only understandable with regard to Beethoven's era and surroundings. [...] What I mean to say is that Beethoven's work cannot have the true effect of an emotive work of art on a historically unprepared listener and that every modern, temporarily emotional interpretation of his works is misguided. [...] Even Beethoven has his faults and it is high time that we abandoned the popular schoolroom assertion of his infallibility. His symphony is unquestionably the greatest symphonic work from the start of the past century; it is not, however, to be considered a model and an example worthy of imitation, since this would be to direct our gaze backwards. I therefore believe that it was pointless to invest so much effort and work into

11 L. M. Š., "Beethovnova IX. Simfonija v Ljubljani," *Jutro* 8, no. 60 (11 March 1927): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-BVR65K4V>.

this undoubtedly great, yet – for the age we live in and for us in particular – less important work, when so many composers at home and abroad have to content themselves with promises of performances and assurances of goodwill.¹²

Škerjanc's comment on the anachronistic quality of Beethoven's music is certainly surprising, all the more so since he was a man of broad education who rarely interwove the modern compositional techniques of his day into his own works. He is, in fact, a composer whose works are largely in the romantic-impressionist style. It should be remembered, however, that in 1926 and 1927, in other words exactly in the period in which this review was written, he did immerse himself for a brief time in the expressionist style and atonality of Schoenberg's oeuvre and composed a number of works in this spirit, although in his own style. Notable among them is his First Violin Concerto, a single-movement work that is based on atonality without ever entirely abandoning a tonal centre.¹³ We should also remember that at the time of writing the above review he was 27 years old, had completed his study of composition in Vienna and had so far proved himself as a composer with art songs written in the romantic-impressionist style. He did not start composing instrumental works until the 1930s, and in them he distanced himself from contemporary trends in the belief that expressionism of Schoenberg's type was "*too intellectual and insufficiently primally musical, elemental.*"¹⁴ His opinion of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, performed in Ljubljana in 1933, was very different:

All of Beethoven's works up to this point were merely a kind of spring-board for this masterwork, with which the composer actually concludes his exploration of hitherto unknown musical landscapes. The Ninth Symphony, which came after the Mass, is of a more retrospective character and completes his life's work.¹⁵

From 1925 until the start of the Second World War, with the exception of a short interruption while he was studying with the conductor Felix

12 M. Škerjanc, "Dodatek h kritiki o Beethovnovi IX. Simfoniji," *Jutro* 8, no. 61 (12 March 1927): 3–4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-U4G5Z74P>.

13 Matjaž Barbo, "Prvi koncert za violino in orkester (1927) L. M. Škerjanca," in *Glasba, poezija – ton, beseda: koncerti, simpozij, spremljevalne prireditve* [Slovenski glasbeni dnevi 2000], ed. Primož Kuret (Ljubljana: Festival, 2001), 37–42.

14 Boris Grabnar, "L. M. Škerjanc o svoji glasbi," *Tedenska tribuna* 8, no. 50 (14 December 1960): 6, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-MLYRYJLE>.

15 L. M. Š., "Beethoven, Missa solemnis," *Jutro* 14, no. 81 (6 April 1933): 3–4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-AD2XTFZQ>.

Weingartner in Basel, Škerjanc was the conductor of the Glasbena Matica Orchestral Society in Ljubljana. This was a relatively modest, non-professional ensemble consisting mainly of string players and supplemented by students from the conservatoire. The ensemble performed works suitable for its instrumentation and level of skill, for the most part drawn from the classical repertoire, and works by current Slovene composers, which did not yet include pieces incorporating the latest compositional trends being followed in Europe at that time. Occasionally it would perform larger-scale orchestral works, for which it would have to engage members of the Ljubljana Opera Orchestra and the band of the Drava Division.¹⁶ Škerjanc himself composed a number of works for string ensemble which he then performed with the Orchestral Society. These works did not go beyond his traditional compositional technique, which was typically a blend of romantic, impressionist and more modern compositional characteristics, and except in a few rare instances – as already mentioned – never overstepping the boundaries of tonality.

He was convinced that Slovene musical creativity, despite its numerical disadvantage, could hold its head up in culturally more developed contexts. This was also a view he advocated publicly in a heated discussion with the composer Anton Lajovic, who was of the opinion that the music of such a small nation as Slovenia did not have wider prospects. In a 1928 piece on the latest issue of *Nova muzika* (“The new music”), a review edited by Emil Adamič that covered themes from the wider European context, he wrote:

I believe that civilised nations do not generally consider artists to be representatives of nations and that the success of a composer is his own personal success, regardless of what nation he belongs to, unless he is merely a collector of folk songs. [...] We cannot expect to one day ‘conquer’ other nations with our musical culture; it is merely a matter of carving out a little space for ourselves, perhaps at the very back. As one of the Europe’s least populous nations, we will never be able to compete with others in terms of quantity, but the quality of an individual composer is not, I believe, dependent on the nation or country he belongs to.¹⁷

We have already mentioned that Škerjanc did not think much of some of the Ljubljana musical public, which he believed to be unsophisticated

16 For more on the activity of the Orchestral Society, see: Andreja Pernuš, “Ustanovitev in delovanje Orkestralnega društva Glasbene matice v Ljubljani od leta 1919 do 1945” (Master Thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2009).

17 L. M. Š., “Nova muzika št. 3,” 10.

and unable to tell good from bad. In this regard, following a 1928 concert by the Berlin Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ernst Kunwald (1868–1939), he wrote that a good part of the Ljubljana audience was convinced it was listening to the famous Berlin Philharmonic, and although the concert programme was adapted to the so-called popular concerts with which the orchestra was touring Yugoslavia, the conductor could be accused of “*the vices and habits of the temperamental and affected old-style kapellmeisters from the era of Austrian and German military orchestras*.”¹⁸ Regarding the error of the audience, he writes:

This blunder was also fatal for that section of the audience which, while it is accustomed to observing our home-grown musical endeavours with a critical eye, on this occasion succumbed to euphoric adoration of a company [the Berlin Philharmonic] which it had never had the opportunity to experience at close quarters.¹⁹

It is also worth mentioning Škerjanc's reaction to a concert by the Music Teachers' Choir, which was considered an excellent vocal ensemble and one of the leading performers of new works by Slovene composers, something greatly appreciated by Škerjanc. He wrote:

[T]hat this is the only choir in the country today that is willing to tackle the most challenging and least gratifying choral works and does so very successfully. [...] Particularly interesting was Kogoj's highly complicated song *Vrabci in strašilo* ['The sparrows and the scarecrow'], in which the choir was able to demonstrate its great musical intelligence, since this unusual, inventive piece contains difficulties that are practically insurmountable.²⁰

As a connoisseur of art song, Škerjanc was well equipped to review the performance by the famed Slovene opera and concert singer Pavla Lovše, who in 1929, on her return from a tour of the United States of America, appeared in front of a Ljubljana audience with a programme of American songs. While Škerjanc's review praised the singer's remarkable artistic qualities, he was less forgiving about the programme, which consisted of established works from the American concert stage:

18 L. M. Š., “Koncert Berlinskega simfoničnega orkestra,” *Jutro* 9, no. 226 (26 September 1928): 7, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-KH5AGXAN>.

19 Ibid.

20 L. M. Š., “Koncert pevskega zbora učiteljstva UJU v Ljubljani,” *Jutro* 10, no. 8 (9 January 1929): 3–4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-8VAZ2NXV>.

[T]hese are songs that can give the listener a fairly good idea of the calibre of art music in this English-speaking nation, which is currently at about the same level that Volarič, Foerster, etc., were at in this country some time ago, only that the songs are more refined and have a better technical foundation. Light melodies that are easy to understand and somewhat banal and cheap, harmonies that are unoriginal and unexciting: the prototype of placid, pre-war bourgeois life. [...] In this country we are indeed already far beyond this type of sentimentality.²¹

Let us now look at Škerjanc's comment on a concert evening dedicated to the chamber music of Slavko Osterc, which Škerjanc considered, in the first place, a courageous act, since this type of public exposure was not yet common among Slovene composers:

In this regard, Slavko Osterc has taken the courageous step forward from conventionality and it is to be hoped that his example (of which I would like to see a continuation) will also encourage others.²²

He was also full of praise for Osterc's compositions and the performances of the young musicians, writing:

His *Štiri šaljivke* ["Four humorous songs"] for voice and two clarinets are successful little compositions in which Osterc's special talent for the grotesque and caricature, something we have already seen in his one-act *Iz komične opere* ["From the comic opera"], is particularly evident. The most successful part of the evening was the cycle of four settings of poems by Gradnik for voice and string quartet. This combination (masterfully presented in recent times by A. Schoenberg) is a particularly felicitous one, in that the voice takes on much more warmth than when accompanied by the piano. The compositions themselves represent for me the highlight of the evening and of Osterc's oeuvre to date, at least that part of it with which I am familiar. The composer has found here a technique that combines theoretical advances with depth and warmth of expression – two elements which Osterc (perhaps deliberately) is otherwise eliminating from his composition.²³

Having completed the secondary level at the Prague Conservatoire, Slavko Osterc was in this period already working as a teacher at the State

21 L. M. Š., "Koncert ge. Pavle Lovšetove v Ljubljani," *Jutro* 10, no. 108 (10 May 1929): 5, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-UKI7KJWM>.

22 L. M. Š., "Osterčev komorni večer v Ljubljani," *Jutro* 11, no. 35 (12 February 1930): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-QYD9MKTT>.

23 Ibid.

Conservatoire in Ljubljana. He was a great opponent of romanticism and sentimentality and an ardent advocate of new music, expressionism, neo-classicism and Hába's quarter-tone compositional technique. Although Škerjanc spoke in positive terms about Osterc's work in the review just quoted, his opinion changed in the years that followed and the two became great enemies.

The year 1935 was marked by the 250th anniversaries of the births of two musical giants, Bach and Handel. In contrast to his reaction to the Beethoven centenary some years before, Škerjanc responded to these commemorations with great respect for the two baroque masters. Regarding the importance of Handel, he wrote:

His greatest monument is the one he erected himself through his life's work, which consists of an enormous number of compositions of all the genres customary in his day. While he may not have been the pioneer of a new musical age, he was a giant and an undisputed master of the baroque era. His works will live on for as long as the world is peopled by civilised nations.²⁴

The year 1934 saw the foundation of the Ljubljana Philharmonic Orchestra, the culmination of years of effort in this direction. An amalgamation of the Ljubljana Opera Orchestra, the orchestra of the Glasbena Matica Orchestral Society and the orchestra of the State Conservatoire, the new symphony orchestra set itself the goal of giving three major concerts a year, at which it would perform works from the international repertoire alongside works by Slovene composers, under the baton of eminent guest conductors. The guest conductor in the orchestra's first year was the Czech maestro Václav Talich (1883–1961), who had been the first conductor of the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra in the early years of the century, while in 1935 Ljubljana's new orchestra was conducted by the French maestro Rhené-Baton (1879–1940). Škerjanc was enthusiastic about the latter and full of praise for the efforts of the performers, who in his view exceeded all expectations. Confidently predicting that the orchestra would go on to even better things in the future, he hailed the decision to found the ensemble and wrote:

The performance of the young Philharmonic Orchestra was a successful demonstration of the ambition, hard work and artistic enthusiasm that characterises this young company, which has been entrusted with the task of filling such a sensitive gap in our musical life. Two concerts

24 L. M. Š., "Ob 250 letnici G. F. Haendla," *Jutro* 16, no. 45 (23 February 1935): 3–4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-EI1EDNGJ>.

a year under a chosen conductor may not be much, but it is therefore all the more welcome. [...] The development of our musical culture continues its slow and steady journey and the members of the Philharmonic will introduce the Slovene audience to important works of the symphonic repertoire which they would otherwise never have the opportunity to hear in Ljubljana.²⁵

Guest performances by leading conductors and orchestras served as an encouragement to local musicians to tackle major projects themselves. One such project was the performance of Handel's *Messiah* in 1935. Once again, practically all the musicians in Ljubljana, including the finest instrumentalists, solo singers, and choral singers, joined forces for the performance. The ensemble was conducted by the Catholic priest, composer and musicologist Anton Dolinar, a graduate of the University of Vienna's Faculty of Philosophy, where he studied under the renowned musicologist Guido Adler, receiving his doctorate in 1927 and later dedicating himself to musical aesthetics. Škerjanc praised the performance of the *Messiah* as an outstanding achievement by local musicians and highlighted the need for more thorough training for Slovene choir directors and conductors.²⁶

Following a concert by the four Slovene "modernists", as Danilo Švara, Slavko Osterc and the latter's pupils Franc Šturm and Bogo Leskovic were known, Škerjanc offered the most positive criticism of Osterc's works and labelled him the most technically proficient. Taking a lead from then current literature, he described Švara's compositions as atonal works with the characteristics of Schoenberg's school, which had already had its day, and emphasised that the new music was no longer satisfied with the intervallic relationships between the individual tones of the dodecaphonic system, as the simple instruction of the atonal composers would have it, and that composers were "*instead seeking different, ethical forces in music*"²⁷ – although Škerjanc did not expand further on this topic.

Škerjanc's critical writings in *Jutro* offer more than just comments on the credentials of performers, concert programmes and the success of performances. They are also an important contribution to our knowledge in that they help complete our picture of the concert scene in Ljubljana in the

25 L. M. Š., "Dirigent Rhené-Baton v Ljubljani," *Jutro* 16, no. 76 (31 March 1935): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-G2804H3X>.

26 L. M. Š., "Händlov Mesija," *Jutro* 16, no. 129 (5 June 1935): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-GG7U18L2>.

27 L. M. Š., "Slovenska moderna glasba," *Jutro* 16, no. 264 (14 November 1935): 3, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-NVZ2IFF6>.

period in question. With his critical ear, he informed and educated audiences, both professional and amateur, and, through the application of his own aesthetic and professional criteria, helped shape public attitudes towards artistic creativity and performance.

I would like to end by mentioning Škerjanc's published letters from Paris, where he spent several months at the end of 1936 and the beginning of the following year. He attended numerous concerts during his stay and duly informed the readers of *Jutro* about them, focusing on the performers, the programme and the response of the audience, and comparing all this to the musical life of Ljubljana. His reports reveal that not everything was first rate even in Paris, although the programmes of concerts in the French capital were incomparably weightier and more modern than those in Ljubljana.²⁸ Škerjanc's "Third Letter from Paris", containing as it does a triumphant report of numerous performances of his own compositions in Paris concert venues and on the radio, is particularly interesting. He is at pains to point out that he himself would be appearing alongside his Parisian colleagues, as pianist (he was known to be a good pianist). He notes, somewhat sarcastically and cynically, that all these events "*will only interest a handful of my friends who have dared to defend my views despite cruel pressure from all sides [...]*".²⁹ We know that there were quite a number of disagreements between Škerjanc and other Slovene musicians. Aspects of his criticism and certain other characteristics had made Škerjanc a rather unpopular figure and he frequently engaged in heated public discussions in which he used harsh and even insulting language.

He ends this letter, after giving a long list of performances of his works, with a triumphant fling at his enemies:

Is this enough? Here is something else for those who will understand: I have been elected – the first Slovene to be so honoured – to the 'Société française de musicologie', whose publications are a model of modern essayistic and aesthetic musical style, as a corresponding member, on the strength of my submitted lectures on the French and Yugoslav musical repertoires.³⁰

28 L. M. Š., "Glasbeno pismo iz Pariza," *Jutro* 17, no. 297 (23 December 1936): 7, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-QCTTC6FC>.

29 L. M. Š., "Tretje pariško pismo," *Jutro* 18, no. 15 (19 January 1937): 7, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-oFJLTNEW>.

30 Ibid.

Lucijan Marija Škerjanc concluded his collaboration with *Jutro* with one of his longest and most in-depth pieces from the entire pre-war period: a review of Verdi's Requiem performed by Ljubljana's foremost soloists, choral singers and orchestral musicians in honour of the recently deceased Slovene politician and patron of culture Anton Korošec. Škerjanc's review of Verdi's masterpiece confirms his broad erudition, his rich journalistic experience and his excellent knowledge of the artistic potential and abilities of the Slovene musicians of the period. He described it as a unique high point among concerts in pre-war Ljubljana and expressed the hope that more concerts of this calibre could be expected in the future.³¹ Little did he know that this would be the last major concert before the start of the Second World War, something symbolically predicted by the title of the work.

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- 31 L. M. Š., "Verdijev 'Requiem'," *Jutro* 22, no. 31 (6 February 1941): 3–4, <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:doc-CARWGGFS>.

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