

Recent Slovene Music and its Interpreters

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“All the signs suggest that there is a renewed surge of enthusiasm for ensuring that a serious music culture is reinvigorated and grows.” I made this statement in the year 2000 and waited to see whether the Slovene musical culture that had been developing in the years since independence had expanded and flourished. I need not have worried. That it blossomed in the next two decades has been shown emphatically in the large number of outstanding works that have been composed that this expansion has taken place. Why it has happened is clear: it is because of the determination and enthusiasm of the composers, the attention and participation of the audiences and, above all, the high-level skills and application of the performers. This last point is probably the most important of all. It did not occur suddenly, but had been gradually nurtured over many years, especially since the 1960s. It has been the work of the ‘interpreters’, the performers, that have helped to make this happen.

1960–2000

Three important examples from many will illustrate the model for the period from 1960 until 1991, the year of independence. The first and one of the leaders in this activity was the violinist Igor Ozim (1931–2024)² whose

- 1 Niall O'Loughlin, *Novejša glasba v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2000), 327.
- 2 Igor Ozim died on 23 March 2024 in Salzburg. A tribute was published in *The Strad* (25 March 2024). See: Anon., “Obituary: Igor Ozim,” *The Strad*, March 25, 2024,

international reputation for performances of classic violin concertos became famous. While he was at home with the great romantic violin concertos of the past, he also became associated with new concertos from his own country. Typical Slovene works with orchestra performed and recorded by Ozim³ have been Uroš Krek's *Inventiones ferales* of 1963, Dane Škerl's *Violin Concerto* of 1983–84 and Janez Matičič's *Concerto for violin and orchestra* of 1967, Lucijan Marija Škerjanc's *Concerto* of 1944, Slavko Osterc's *Concerto for violin and seven instruments* of 1927–28 and Ivo Petrič's *Trois images* of 1973. In the first Krek developed his distinctive and powerful but discordant melodic lines in ways that Ozim was able to characterise effortlessly. Similarly he handled Škerl's concerto's sometimes playful virtuosity with its dark undertones in masterly fashion. Yet Ozim was also able bring life to Matičič's advanced style with similar conviction. In the same way he was able to project the Hindemithian style of Slavko Osterc's *Concerto* and the traditional romantic idiom of Škerjanc's *Concerto*. Perhaps his greatest achievement in setting a high standard for new Slovene pieces was the outstanding interpretation of Petrič's *Trois images*⁴ with its unorthodox form and exceptionally difficult modern techniques.

The second major interpreter of the period was the outstanding pianist Aci Bertoncelj (1939–2002), who could always be relied upon to perform difficult works completely convincingly. His solo part in Darijan Božič's *Elongacije*.⁵ for piano and ensemble, for example, showed flair and humour, a perfect role model for young players. The *Sonet za Acija* ('Sonnet for Aci') by Lojze Lebič is a generous tribute to the pianist's talent and Uroš Krek's terse and tricky *Sur une mélodie* of 1977 was dedicated to him. An outstanding recording by Bertoncelj of three of Matičič's Piano Studies, Škerjanc's *Nocturnes*, and Ramovš's *Sarkazmi* long ago set an inspirational and an aspirational standard.⁶ Of his many piano pupils one can single out the composer

<https://www.thestrاد.com/news/obituary-igor-ozim/17795.article>.

- 3 A recording of Igor Ozim playing these works was published by Društvo slovenskih skladateljev in 2009: Multiple authors, *Slovenski violinski koncerti / Slovene violin concertos*, Igor Ozim, Ars Slovenica, Društvo slovenskih skladateljev, Ed. DSS 200971, 2009, compact disc.
- 4 Ivo Petrič, *Trois images* (Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih skladateljev, Ed. DSS 530, 1974).
- 5 Darijan Božič, "Elongacije," track 4 on *Ensemble Slavko Osterc*, Aci Bertoncelj (piano) and Ensemble Slavko Osterc, conductor Ivo Petrič, Helidon Musica Slovenica FLP 10-007E, 1972, vinyl LP.
- 6 Janko Ravnik, Lucijan Marija Škerjanc, Primož Ramovš, Janez Matičič, *Musica Slovenica*, performed by Aci Bertoncelj (piano), Helidon Musica Slovenica FLP 10-009, 1974, vinyl LP.

Tomaž Habe, and the conductor Simon Krečič who in recent years have done so much to promote the performances of new Slovene composition. Not only was he a role model for young pianists but he was also a wonderful interpreter of new music.

The third interpreter who consistently championed the cause of new Slovene music in the later 20th century was Ivo Petrić (1931–2018) who made possible so many new works as a sympathetic and skilled director of the Slavko Osterc Ensemble from 1962 to 1982. There were first performances and recordings of works by Primož Ramovš (*Enneafonia*, *Apel*), Jakob Jež (*Nomos*), Alojz Srebotnjak (*Microsongs*), Igor Štuhec (*Variacije*), Milan Stibilj (*Impresije*), Lojze Lebič (*kons (a)*, *kons (b)*), others and, of course, Petrić himself (*Elegie sur le nom de Carlos Salzedo*, *Croquis sonores*, *Jeux à trois* – *Jeux à quatre*, *Nuances en couleur*, *Divertimento za Slavka Osterca*, *Esquisses poétiques*, *Mozaiki*). We should not forget that Petrić was a composer-interpreter, and Janez Matičič (1926–2022) a pianist-composer.⁷ The trombonist-composer Vinko Globokar is happily still with us.

An important innovation in Slovene Music Days on 23 April 1996 was the introduction of the *Noč slovenskih skladateljev* (Night of Slovene Composers) which drew leading instrumentalists, singers and ensembles together to perform a large number of mostly new Slovene pieces to a very receptive audience.⁸ The nineteen works featured in the first concert included those by Uroš Rojko (*Ottoki* for wind quintet), Marko Mihevc (*Wind Quintet*), Janez Matičič (*Ondulacije* for string quartet), Larisa Vrhunc (*Dve ljudski temi* for violin and piano), Nenad First (*O mejah, ki so ostale*) and Tomaž Svete (*Piano Sonata*). With the high standard of performance and sympathetic audience, it set an excellent model to follow in subsequent seasons.

In addition, central to the performance of many of the important works are the excellent orchestras in Slovenia, especially the Slovenska filharmonija and RTV Slovenija Symphony Orchestra, as well as the orchestra of Maribor Opera who always seem to rise to the challenges presented to them by Slovene composers. Difficult new works by Slovene composers certainly will have encouraged others to rely on the orchestral players to do justice to their music. These would have included works by Milan Stibilj (*Orjana* for two string orchestras, *Elegija umirajočemu drevsu*, *Skladba* for piano and orchestra), Lojze Lebič (*November Songs*, *Glasba za orkester* –

7 See: Jurij Snoj. *Portret skladatelja Janeza Matičiča* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2012).

8 Hermina Kovačič, ed., *30 let Slovenskih glasbenih dnevov 1986–2015* (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 2015), 56–7.

Cantico I), Primož Ramovš (*Svobodni dialog*, *Koral in tocata*), Tomaž Svete (*L'amor sul mar*, *Concert de nuit*), Vinko Globokar (*Étude pour folklor II*, *Eisenberg*, *Labour*), Božidar Kos (Violin Concerto), Larisa Vrhunc (Concerto for violin, piano and orchestra), Alojz Srebotnjak (*Kraška suita*), Brina Jež Brezavšček (*Sonsong – Zvočne Varijacije*) and Uroš Rojko (*Evokacija*, *Tongenesi*). We must not ignore such outstanding conductors as Samo Hubad, Anton Nanut, Uroš Lajovic, Marko Letonja and others, who did so much to support the numerous then younger composers in the 20th century.

Solo vocal interpreters in the second half of the 20th century were particularly active in the field of *Lieder*. There was a substantial body of songs with piano accompaniment from which performers were able to construct concert programmes. The older songs by such composers as Benjamin Ipavec were supplemented by those of numerous composers, notably Lucijan Marija Škerjanc, whose nine volumes of *Lieder* made possible recitals that were satisfying and complete in themselves. With this corpus of songs there was not the incentive to be so adventurous in their choice of music with its consequent effect on new vocal students and of course on composers. There were the small collections of less traditional songs by Marij Kogoj (1892–1956) and Slavko Osterc (1895–1941) that were attempted by a few specialists, but they were the exceptions. A smaller number of new more advanced solo songs with piano were composed by Jakob Jež, Lojze Lebič, Pavel Šivic and Marjan Lipovšek. The use of solo voices with orchestra was not frequently encountered; Lojze Lebič's cantata *Požgana trava* of 1965 and his *Novembrske pesmi* of 1981–82 were exceptional examples. Choral works by Lebič were encouraged by his own activities as a conductor who knew exactly what would be effective in a choral context. Also prominent in fairly traditional choral works was Jakob Jež, with three important works which benefitted from the strong choral achievements of Lebič, *Do fraig amors* (1968), *Brižinski spomeniki* (1970–71) and *Pogled zvezd* (1973). The interpreters of Lebič's works, for example, showed what was now possible.

The position of new opera was quite modest. The performances of Kogoj's *Črne maske*⁹ were normally considered exceptional, as singers were usually involved in techniques demanded by 19th century operatic style.

9 Slavko Osterc, "Marij Kogoj Črne maske," *Ljubljanski zvon* (1929): 380–2; Marij Kogoj, *Črne maske* ['Die schwarze Masken'], ed. Uroš Lajovic (Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih skladateljev, Ed. DSS 1980, 2012), full score: Ed. DSS 1980, vocal score: Ed. DSS 1980a; Marij Kogoj, *Črne maske*, RTV Ljubljana Chamber Choir, RTV Symphony Orchestra, choir master Lojze Lebič, conductor Samo Hubad, recorded 1970, Helidon Musica Slovenica, 1991, audio CD.

Osterc's operas were virtually unknown in the period after the Second World War. Those by Kozina (*Ekvinokcij*)¹⁰ and Danilo Švara (*Cleopatra*, *Slovo od mladosti*, *Ocean*) were less demanding technically, with the vocal techniques required not being especially advanced. The only exception to these composers was Pavel Šivic whose *Corteso va vrnitev*¹¹ of 1971 made some challenging moves for the performers, but performances were rare partly because of the lack of skilled vocal performers. This situation was going to change dramatically as Slovenia moved into the 21st century.

2000–2024

As we move into the 21st century the question that had to be asked at the time was whether the outstanding achievements of the previous fifty years would be maintained. It is heartening to say that the *political* continuity that was apparent in Slovenia was mirrored in the *musical* sphere. Not only that but there has been such a torrent of good new music that it is almost impossible to keep track of everything. For someone who lives outside this environment it is doubly difficult, but at the same time one can more easily take a wider perspective on the achievements of Slovene musicians. As examples of this process, a personal selection of typical interpreters will be made, solo instrumentalists or singers, with or without accompaniment, chamber ensembles, orchestras, conductors, choirs, those working on operas and other theatrical works. In many cases these performers have inspired the composers to write pieces especially for them, and it is the composers who then produce the music. This process is really important for composers using the most advanced techniques and methods. They could now almost take for granted the necessary performing skills.

Interpreters who are most closely involved with composers tend to be individual instrumentalists and singers, often associated with a keyboard player (mostly a pianist). Because as in earlier years it would be impossible to give details of every relationship involved, a careful selection has been made to indicate the trend. Taking solo string instrumentalists, it is clear that the violinists Dejan Bravničar (1937–2018), Tomaž Lorenz (1944–2016) and Janez Podlesek (b1981) were or are all important in stimulating and

10 Marjan Kozina, *Ekvinokcij*, score (Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih skladateljev, Ed. DSS 738, Act 1: 1998, Act 2: 2006).

11 Pavel Šivic, "Corteso va vrnitev," track 1 on CD 1 and 2 on *Pavel Šivic*, Choir and orchestra of the SNG Ljubljana, conductor Ciril Cvetko, recorded 1976, Ars Slovenica, Društvo slovenskih skladateljev, Ed. DSS 999020, 1999, compact disc.

encouraging new music. Bravničar naturally included works by his father Matija Bravničar in his programmes and recordings, in addition to his outstanding performances of the famous concertos of Western Europe. Lorenz was more familiar with modernists' works, for example, the six brilliant miniatures of *Invisibilia* of Lojze Lebič. More adventurous works were tackled by Janez Podlesek, notably two by Nina Šenk (Violin Concerto No.1, *Into the Shades*).

Clarinetists have been prominent in recent years in encouraging composers. Dušan Sodja and Tatjana Kaučič as a clarinet-piano duo called *ClariPiano* have embraced a wide range of suitable works from the clarinet repertoire and attracted a number of new works with their excellent playing, notably by Uroš Krek (*Sonatina*, *Sarabanda za Natašo*), Ivo Petrić (*Jesenska srečanja*), Primož Ramovš (*D-S*), Nenad Firšt (*Dnevnik*, *Souvenir* 99), Jaka Pucihar (*Sonata No.2*) and Lojze Lebič (*Spomin – Reminiscence*).¹² Another clarinetist, Jože Kotar, has, as a soloist or a member of an ensemble or orchestra, taken part in nearly 200 new works by Slovene composers, including the virtuoso concerto by Vito Žuraj. A recital in 2014 in Ljubljana (13 March) of the first performances of Slovene music given by Kotar consisted of works by Vitja Avsec (*Koncertantni utrip*), Dušan Bavdek (*Geste mrtvega časa*), Nenad Firšt (*Atelje*), Pavel Mihelčič (*Črno ogledalo*), Marijan Mlakar (*Metulj*) and Črt Sojar Voglar (*Kristali*).¹³ Subsequently Kotar and his excellent pianist Luca Ferrini recorded the works from this recital, adding pieces by Igor Štuhec, Tomaž Habe, Zlatan Vauda and Samo Vremšak.¹⁴ All of this is a great tribute by composers to his skills and superb technique, to say nothing of his contributions as principal clarinetist of the Slovenska filharmonija for twelve years and of the RTV Symphony Orchestra more recently. The third clarinet player of especial note is the composer-clarinetist Uroš Rojko, who inspires his own works as well as those of others. Outstanding is Rojko's two-clarinet concerto *Koncertant(n)i K(o-j)u-je-jo* of 2004–5. It is noteworthy that one of the clarinetists in the first performance on 14 March 2014 and in the DSS recording was in fact Jože Kotar. Rojko's own performing talent can be heard in Lojze Lebič's *Duettino* for clarinet and guitar and in various of his own works.

12 The CD entitled *Srečanja* (Ljubljana: Audio Rode, CIK CD-001, 2004) includes the *Sonatina* and *Sarabanda za Natašo* by Uroš Krek, *Jesenske srečanja* by Ivo Petrić, *D-S* by Primož Ramovš, *Dnevnik* by Nenad Firšt and *Sonata No.2* by Jaka Pucihar.

13 Kovačič, *30 let Slovenskih glasbenih dnevo*, 169.

14 Performances of these works are recorded on the CD entitled *Kristali – Crystals* (Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih skladateljev, Ed. DSS 2017/112, 2017).

For brass instruments one can point to the recent achievements and examples of three players: the trumpeter Franc Kosem, the horn player Boštjan Lipovšek and the trombonist Vinko Globokar. In addition to the standard trumpet repertory, Kosem has been responsible for the first performances of numerous works of Slovene composers such as Dušan Bavdek's *Teman spomin* ('Dark Memory'), Pavel Mihelčič's *Škorpion* and Nina Šenk's *Odsevi* ('Reflections'). Lipovšek has been associated with the performances and recording of numerous difficult and advanced pieces by Lojze Lebič (*In voce cornus*), Vito Žuraj (*Want to practise*) and Larisa Vrhunc (*Nekoč podnevi, ko se je znočilo ...*). Globokar's contribution has relied less in recent years on his incredible trombone technique, but as an interpreter-conductor of his own music.

The pianist Nina Prešiček has a phenomenal technique that is displayed in her recording entitled *A Breath of Time*,¹⁵ in which older pieces by Lebič, Matičič and Štuhec are placed beside works by Mauricio Kagel and John Cage. Her technique was shown to great advantage in a recital in the Mini teater in Ljubljana on 16 April 2018 in first performances by Slovene composers who were responding to her abilities. In the same way as in the recording she included new works by Slovene composers Gregor Pirš (*Suite-Tissue*), Nina Šenk (*Circles*) and Larisa Vrhunc (*Za Nino*) significantly alongside works by Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Klavierstück IX*) and Luigi Nono (*... sofferte onde serene ...*), as well as the 50-year-old *Sonata 74* by Igor Štuhec which did not sound out of place.¹⁶

A very important development for solo performers was the increase in opportunities for performance. The concerts arranged as part of the Slovenian Music Days events in the late 20th century were excellent. The continuation of the 'Night of Slovenian Music' greatly expanded the scope of small scale music, especially in the years 2000–2004. During these years some 90 pieces were performed, with 200 solo performers and a number of chamber ensembles. The range and scope of these concerts at the Slovenian Music Days was enormous, with opportunities for the interpreters to gain valuable experience in a wide variety of musical styles and techniques. They were of course also a showcase for the very varied talent of Slovene composers. This included notable works by Nenad Firšt, Dušan Bavdek, Marko Mihevc, Pavel Mihelčič, Tomaž Svete, Tomaž Habe, Bor Turel, Lojze Lebič,

15 Nina Prešiček (piano), *Vdih časa / A Breath of Time*, RTVSLO, 111297, 2009, compact disc.

16 Živa Steiner et al, *Slovenski glasbeni dnevi 33 let Glasbe – Slovenian Music Days 33 years of Music* (Ljubljana: Festival, 2018), 26–8.

Maks Strmčnik, Uroš Rojko, Larisa Vrhunc, Vito Žuraj, Brina Jež Brezavšček and many others. Reinforcing this activity over the year were the regular recitals by the composers' association, Društvo slovenskih skladateljev [The Society of Slovene Composers], in their delightful recital room. As these were modestly planned, their aim was to focus on a small number of players.

The founding of the Slavko Osterc Ensemble under Ivo Petrić in the 1960s was of great importance in promoting and encouraging the creation of new works for chamber ensembles. The flexibility of this group was invaluable for composers as that they did not feel obliged to write for a prescribed combination of players. With the new century it was important for the development of new ensemble works that a comparable group existed. The Slavko Osterc Ensemble was reborn in the year 2000 under the direction of the American-born Steven Loy. With the foundation of the ensemble MD7 in 2002 by the composer Pavel Mihelčič, there was further opportunity to compose for a group that specialised in performing new works, rather than assembling various *ad hoc* ensembles to perform new, differently scored works. The conductor Steven Loy was appointed to be the permanent conductor. Works by Slovene composers, many first performances, were performed together with those by other contemporary composers. In the years 2002–2006 Slovene works included, for example, music by Ivo Petrić (*Danubian Septet*, *Metamorphoses concertantes*), Jani Golob (*Gymnopedie 2*, *Ivana*, *Invokacija*), Črt Sojar Voglar (*The Angel of Love*), Pavel Mihelčič (*Sensibile*, *Film*, *Strunam*), Bojana Šaljić Podešva (*Kalejdoskop*), Nina Šenk (*Trois couleurs*), Marko Mihevc (*Kodeks*), and Nenad Firšt (*V tistem trenutku postanka*).

In the years that followed, the ensemble performed many new Slovene works showing that it was an effective platform for performances, especially of new works, notably with such impressive works as Tomaž Habe's *The Nightingale and the Rose* and Lojze Lebič's *Barvni krog* ('Colour Circle'). Other smaller ensembles have been assembled to perform and record such works as the delicate and adventurous miniatures by Brina Jež Brezavšček and the exotic, fascinating and interestingly titled works by Neville Hall.

One very important group which was the inspiration for many advanced new works was the wind quintet *Slowind*. Their willingness and that of their associates and colleagues to undertake the performance of difficult new works and the ability to master the enormous difficulties involved marks them out as the leading group in this field. Founded as long

ago as 1987 they have a firmly established reputation for presenting difficult contemporary music. It would be impossible in a few words to do anything like justice to their enormous contribution to the development of new Slovene music by means of the Slowind Festival. Not only did they commission and perform some of the most advanced Slovene music, but also a large range of music of cutting-edge modernism from many other countries, mostly in Europe, in performances of the highest standard. Foreign composers represented included Iannis Xenakis, Gerard Grisey, Brian Ferneyhough, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Mathias Pintscher, Elliott Carter and Rebecca Saunders. Their choice of Slovene works for the Slowind Festival of 2018 is very notable: Vinko Globokar (*Bouquet de paramètres sauvages*), Lojze Lebič (*Dogodki II*), Nina Šenk (*Scratch, In the Absence, Gvaš/Gouache*), Vito Žuraj (*Contour*) and Urška Pompe (*almost a loneliness*). This was the last festival hosted by Slowind. In her farewell essay Nina Šenk said:

Weighty programmes, each time surprising and convincing and never placed within the safe framework of established repertoire guidelines, were year after year an important beacon for everyone who got to know the festival.¹⁷

The organisation and programmes were now operated under the title of *Ljubljana New Music Forum* (LJNMF) by four musicians, the Slovene composers Larisa Vrhunc and Nina Šenk, the Slovene musicologist Gregor Pompe and the American conductor Steven Loy. The aims were exactly the same as those of Slowind. Larisa Vrhunc made this very clear when recently referring to Slowind:

They were the ones to guarantee the best performances of the new pieces, they were always cautious in commissioning from interesting composers from different generations (and genders) and also programme either good new pieces by foreign composers or older pieces that had never been played in Slovenia but were crucial for the development of music after 1900.¹⁸

In the years 2020–23 new Slovene works performed included those by Petra Strahovnik (*Bistro - Essence*), Vinko Globokar (*?Corporel*), Neville Hall (*et j'entendis des voix, the flames rise to fade in green air*), Urška Pompe (*fingers of rain*), Matej Bonin (*Impetus, Hipno za dva, Impulses V*),

17 Nina Šenk, in *20th Festival Slowind 2018* [accompanying booklet] (Ljubljana: Slowind, 2018), 3, <https://slowind.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Slowind2018-Knjizica-06T.pdf>.

18 Larisa Vrhunc, personal communication, 3 March 2024.

Gregor Pirš (*Suite – Tissue*), Tadeja Vulc (*Razpoke časa*), Uroš Rojko (*Neofonia, ...für eine Piccolospielerin...*, *Odekanje časa IV*, *Try holding your breath*), Nina Šenk (*My Letters*), Alenja Pivko Knežević (*Odmev – Echo*), Tomaž Grum (*Moja želja, tvoj ukaz, Abuse me gently*), Vito Žuraj (*Tension tenderly, Framed*) and Larisa Vrhunc (*Drobtine časa, Zamrznitve*).

In any discussion and presentation of Slovene music one must pay tribute to the outstanding contribution to its development, by the Slovenska filharmonija and RTV Symphony Orchestra, particularly during the last two decades. They were and still are regular performers at the annual Slovene Music Days, tackling difficult works with the greatest confidence and precision. They also regularly include Slovene works in their normal concert seasons. Without these orchestras and their special skills in tackling difficult modern works we probably would not be witnessing numerous new works by leading composers as well as significant works repeated from earlier years: Lojze Lebič (*Miti in apokrifi, Glasba – Koncert za violončelo, Musica concertata*), Ivo Petrić (*Slika Doriana Graya II*), Uroš Rojko (*Dih ranjenega časa, Tongenesis, Concerto fluido*), Nenad Firšt (*Lovci sanj*), Vinko Globokar (*Eisenberg, Les chemins de la liberté, Sternbild der Grenze, Angel zgodovine*), Janez Matičič (*Cello Concerto and Violin Concerto No.1*), Igor Štuhec (*Nekropola*), Tomaž Habe (*Horn Concerto, Trombone Concerto*), Urška Pompe (*Saxophone Concerto*), Larisa Vrhunc (*Med prsti zven podobe II, Tako tiho, Vedno znova*), Tomaž Svete (*L'amor sul mar*), Vito Žuraj (*Tiebreak, Runabout, Changeover*). It is this reliable orchestral ability that must have encouraged many Slovene composers to spend long hours composing large orchestral scores. It is also worthy of comment that there is a wide range of conductors (some not Slovene at all) involved in the performance and interpretation of new Slovene works. Their contribution has been very significant.

Another new development that helped to enrich the Slovene repertoire was the creation of smaller groups from the orchestras, particularly the Slovenska filhamonija. The 20-year-old Komorni godalni orkester Slovenske filharmonije (Slovene Philharmonic String Chamber Orchestra) has performed and recorded new works by Lojze Lebič (*Per archi – Za godala*), Nina Šenk (*Chant, Concerto grosso*), and Nenad Firšt (*Tolmuni*), all in superb performances. Another group which has produced two collections of recordings and a wide range of public concerts not only in Slovenia but also across Europe is the Komorni orkester solistov DSS (KOS). One notes works performed and recorded by Marko Mihevc (the founder

and director), Črt Sojar Voglar (*Komorni koncert*), Igor Štuhec (*Iz domačega perivoja*), Jani Golob (*Tri bagatele*), Marjan Šijanec (*Butterflies* for chamber orchestra), Peter Šavli (*Latino Suite*), Nenad Firšt (*Letters* for violin and orchestra) and Ivo Petrić (*Fantasia concertante*). Most of these works would not have been written were it not for the presence of the orchestra and its willingness to undertake their performance.

Solo vocal interpreters continued to expand their recitals, while still cultivating the *Lieder* model. A particularly notable event was the solo song concert to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the Ljubljana Glasbena matica in 2019. The solo songs of Marij Kogoj are now becoming part of the normal repertory as sung especially by Barbara Jernejčič, both in concerts and on recordings. She also helped to revive interest in solo vocal works with ensemble from the 20th century: *VI pesem iz cikla Blaznost Gregorja Strniše* by Darijan Božič, *Odsevi Hajamovih stihov* by Jakob Jež, and *Microsongs* by Alojz Srebotnjak. Solo song recitals gained a much higher profile with a wide range of works often including new works demanding some of the newer techniques and styles. In a concert in the 2010 Music Days, a wide range of new Slovene songs was performed by three leading singers: Barbara Kozelj, Phyllis Ferwerda and Matjaž Robavs that showed new techniques in songs by Vladimir Hrovat, Andrej Misson, Jakob Jež, Lojze Lebič, Tomaž Habe, Peter Šavli, Jani Golob, Ljubo Rančigaj and Igor Štuhec. The result is that composers used new techniques and adventurous forms more and more.

With a large number of choirs in Slovenia, it is hardly surprising that there has been good progress in choral singing. While in the 21st century there have been many new instrumental Slovene works performed at the DSS recitals and the Nights of Slovene Music during the Slovene Music Days, choral music has also been generously programmed in the latter festival. New music is not so evident here, as it is sometimes interleaved with traditional and classic items. Choral music by Uroš Krek, Primož Ramovš, Pavle Merkù, Lojze Lebič and Aldo Kumar has been discreetly fitted in with more traditional works. While older Slovene music was never neglected, gradually more adventurous music began to be performed with various specialist choirs, for example, the excellent Mešani pevski zbor Obala under Ambrož Čopi and the Slovenski komorni zbor under Mirko Cuderman presented this mixture of music, as did the Ljubljana Opera Choir. Slovenski komorni zbor conducted by Martina Batič have included more recent works by Habe, Voglar, Avsec, Nana Forte, Peter Šavli, while Zbor KGB

have also added more recent works to their programmes. The celebration of the centenary of Glasbena matica 2019 in Ljubljana naturally included a broad conspectus of choral music from the last 100 years.

While Slovene opera in the 20th century was important, it was on a relatively modest scale. During the first quarter of the 21st century, it expanded considerably. In many ways it was the result of improving numbers of good local singers, but also an increasing interest among the public in new works. The leading Slovene operatic composer is undoubtedly Tomaž Svete. Among his numerous operas is *Kriton*; first performed in Austria and recorded there, it then received an excellent concert performance in 2003 in Ljubljana with local performers. With fine Slovene performers directed by the conductor Simon Krečič, Svete's setting of *Antigona* (Dominik Smole's reworking of *Antigone* by Sophocles) made a very deep impression at its performance in Ljubljana in 2018. The chamber opera *King David* by Uroš Rojko with guest performers from Germany was similarly effective in 2010. The opera *Marpurgi* by Nina Šenk of 2019, again conducted by Simon Krečič was outstanding, not least because of the contribution from the fine musicians taking part. The cooperation with performers is spelled out very clearly by the composer:

During the composing process, I worked closely with the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor, especially with the artistic director Simon Krečič. It was in the interest of both that the opera be successfully performed within the capabilities that the opera house could offer. This meant a detailed examination of the qualities and weaknesses of each singer, the range of voice, experience with contemporary music literature, a precise selection of available instruments, taking into account the experience of musicians from the orchestra who would perform the opera, and the experience and capabilities of the opera choir. Let me say here that I find close cooperation very effective and important in the implementation of such extensive projects.¹⁹

In a similar way to opera, in musical-theatrical works a high degree of cooperation and coordination is necessary. While in the 20th century such works as Globokar's *Les émigrés* and some of the more extravagant works of Darijan Božič were relatively rare, this kind of multi-media creation is also encountered in Slovenia in the 21st century. Because performers do not

19 Nina Šenk, "Marpurgi – pristop k ustvarjanju nove slovenske opere," in *Nastopna predavanja 2019 in 2021*, eds. Peter Štih et al. (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 2023), 153–73.

have a long tradition of working in these types of works, cooperation between performers and composers or authors is absolutely essential. Two works of this kind are Globokar's *Angel zgodovine* (completed in 2004) and *Zamrznitve* or *Freezing* by Larisa Vrhunc (2022) with spoken texts by Mira Mihelič. The latter work is described as *bralno-vizualno-koncertni dogodek* ('reading-visual-concert event') thus emphasising the different dimensions. The composer writes:

On Slowind's last event [18 November 2022], they allowed me to do a multi-media event where I could work with electronics, video, sculpture, literature, big ensemble ... I could tell a complete story.²⁰

Performers and composer are working in complete harmony.

This short and necessarily selective survey should make it clear that while the achievements of advanced Slovene music in the 20th century were very impressive indeed, in the first quarter of the 21st century their number increased considerably without any sacrifice of their quality. A large measure of the success has been due to the abilities of the performers and the positive effect on the creativity of the composers.

Appendix

The UHO Society was founded at the end of 2019. The idea of a new society emerged when it was announced that the long-standing Slowind Festival was to cease, thus giving rise to an urgent need to continue the tradition of performing the most contemporary music in Slovenia. Since contemporary music, like early music, seems more demanding in terms of reception, there is a need to organise its presentation as carefully and comprehensively as possible. At the same time, the notion of the contemporary at the moment opens up a broad range of musical diversity. The UHO Society seeks to present the most contemporary composed music, to fill the reception gaps in the presentation of music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and to build bridges with all of the creative potential in a widely diversified musical map.

On a voluntary basis, the UHO Music Society brings together musicians, musicologists, music educators and music lovers who want to contribute to the development, presentation and better understanding of classical music, with an emphasis on contemporary music. The purpose of the association is to connect music creators and performers as well as legal entities

20 Larisa Vrhunc, personal communication, 3 March 2024.

operating in the field of music, to provide a public platform for obtaining non-profit funding for the organisation of music events, and to ensure a diverse creative and performance offer in the field of contemporary music. The society has therefore established the goals of encouraging the creation of new musical works; opening up a plural range of various creative approaches to contemporary music; connecting musicians in permanent instrumental, vocal and vocal-instrumental ensembles; increasing discursiveness with regard to contemporary music; and encouraging the flow of information between foreign and domestic musical creativity.

The society seeks to achieve these goals by organising concerts and festivals of music of various periods and genres, with a particular emphasis on contemporary musical creativity; by cooperating with organisations and institutions that deal with music in any way; by informing the Slovenian public about problems and progress in the field of contemporary music; by maintaining contacts with related organisations abroad; by issuing publications in the field of art, music and musicology; by translating professional literature and other texts; by organising professional conferences and presentations related to music; by publishing musical works in various media; by organising and preparing musical and related events; by cooperation with top performers (domestic and foreign) in projects in the field of music; by commissioning new works by Slovenian and foreign composers; by professional evaluations of music projects (concerts, magazines, festivals, seminars, etc.); by addressing current issues related to Slovenian music; by connecting with related societies and institutions in Slovenia and around the world; by preparing publications and articles in areas related to the activities of the society; and by passing information on Slovenian musical activity to interested organisations from abroad.

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