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Embracing the Idea of the Essence of Human Freedom**

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REVISITING SONEMUS FEST 2023 – “PRO/AG/GRESSION”: EMBRACING THE IDEA OF THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN FREEDOM

Just like in preceding years, The Society of New Music Sarajevo – SONEMUS curated a range of meaningful music events this year, contributing to the vibrancy of the musical landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the enduring presence of contemporary music in the broader region. The festival took place at the University of Sarajevo – Academy of Music, from October 26th to November 1st, 2023. In addition to concert events, which will be discussed in more detail later in the text, the organizing team responsible for this year’s edition of the SONEMUS festival made efforts in arranging masterclasses, lectures, and public discussions.¹

This reflection provides a brief insight into the performed works, as it is possible to discern a clear conceptual thread common to the entire festival program. This revolves around the careful selection of works that interweave with the idea of this year’s festival edition, hence receiving special attention in the following paragraphs. A further reason for such an approach is that new insights

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1 All non-concert events took place starting from October 26th, following this schedule: Igor Lazić, horn player and professor at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, held a chamber music masterclass (October 29th). Ališer Sijarić, composer, artistic director of SONEMUS, and Dean of the University of Sarajevo – Academy of Music, held a lecture on the creative output of György Ligeti (October 30th). Christine Fischer, artistic director of Musik der Jahrhunderte Stuttgart, manager of the ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten and artistic director of the New Music Festival ECLAT, participated in a panel discussion on the topic “Current Phenomena in Contemporary Music Life” (October 31st). Bassoonist James Aylward held a workshop for composers (November 1st).

into music augment the understanding of the historical perspective of music in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially if considering the music of contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian composers. In lieu of a conventional review article or a review of concert-type events, which often includes all the information listed in the program booklet (composer biographies and/or self-reflections on their own music, performers, sometimes critical reviews relying on music interpretation), the author has chosen to describe the pure auditory experience of this year's SONEMUS festival program, i.e., the experience of what could be *read* from the music in real-time.



Figure 1. The poster for SONEMUS Fest 2023 – “PRO/AG/GRESSION” © Ajna Zlatar.

The focal point of the first concert event was the centenary celebration of one of the most significant figures in the 20th-century music, György Ligeti (1923-2006). To bridge the ‘haze’ in understanding musical trends, that very often occurs when broader audiences encounter contemporary artistic music, a public lecture on the specifics of compositional expressions of G. Ligeti was held as a kind of ‘guide to listening’. The lecturer was Ališer Sijarić, a composer, founder, and artistic director of the SONEMUS festival, as well as the Dean of the University of Sarajevo – Academy of Music. Moreover, with certain Ligeti pieces having their premiere live performances in Bosnia and Herzegovina – an undoubtedly captivating prospect for contemporary music enthusiasts – the program² also included works that, in a (non)direct manner, alluded to *Ligetiesque* qualities in music. These were compositions whose identical subtitles served as the programmatic title of the concert. One of them embodied the idea of micro-polyphonic ‘mechanical’ music for acoustic instruments – *Homo Ex Machina: Hommage à Ligeti* (2017) by Bosnian-Herzegovinian composer and flutist Hanan Hadžajlić (1991). Another work, *Hommage à Ligeti* from *Trois Hommages* (1984) by Georg Friedrich Haas (1953), written for two pianos in quarter-tone tuning, uniquely relies on microinterval and micropolyphonic principles that we recognize as Ligeti’s ‘trademark’ in the history of 20th-century music.



Figure 2. Zlatan Božuta performing *Hommage à Ligeti* by G. F. Haas (“Hommage à Ligeti”, October 30th) © Vanja Čerimagić.

2 The entire program of the “Hommage à Ligeti” concert (October 30th): G. Ligeti (1923-2006): *Musica ricercata* (1951-53), II *Mesto, rigido e cerimoniale*, Zlatan Božuta (piano). H. Hadžajlić (1991): *Homo Ex Machina: Hommage à Ligeti* (2016/17), Hanan Hadžajlić (flute), Armin Smriko (clarinet), Lorena Milina (violin), Zlatan Božuta (piano), Fuad Šetić (conductor). G. Ligeti: *Études for Piano* (1985-2001), V *Arc-en-ciel*, X *Der Zauberlehrling*, Ivan Galić (piano). G. Ligeti: *Trio for Violin, Horn, and Piano* (1982), I *Andantino con tenerezza*, II *Vivacissimo molto ritmico*, III *Alla marcia*, IV *Lamento. Adagio*, Violeta Smailović-Huart (violin), Igor Lazić (horn), Marko Bogdanović (piano). G. F. Haas: *Trois Hommages: Hommage à Ligeti* (1984), Zlatan Božuta (piano).

In the context of the escalating monotony in reproduction and the prevalence of ‘non-problematic solutions,’ the program of the second festival evening critically examined the musical expression ‘beyond’ the ego in the form of a concert performance. The program itself, titled “Alter Ego”, offered the opportunity to experience musical works that, each in its unique way, explore various aspects of duality in (non)musical content.³ The first piece with such aesthetic orientation was *Alter Ego* (2001) by Georges Aperghis (1945), where the artistic intent behind the form infused with theatrical elements can be interpreted as an exploration of the dichotomous relationship between the human voice and the saxophone, turning the performer into a ‘wordless singer’. The bassoonist James Aylward addressed the performative question of the *supernatural/transhuman* in contemporary music by presenting an altered version of the duet by Hanan Hadžajlić, titled *Concerto TransH(You)Man* (2017), originally composed for clarinet and bass drum. Establishing a connection between the human-per-



Figure 3. Belma Šarančić and Tamara Arsovski performing *De l'épaisseur* by P. Leroux (“Alter Ego”, October 31st) © Vanja Čerimagić.

3 The entire program of the “Alter Ego” concert (October 31st): G. Aperghis (1945): *Alter Ego* (2001), Rijad Šarić (tenor saxophone). H. Hadžajlić (1991): *Concerto TransH(You)Man* (2016/17), I *Brain Building* (Quartet), II *Artificial Breathing*, III *Fear Transplantation: Code Generator*, James Aylward (bassoon and bass drum). P. Leroux (1959): *De l'épaisseur* (1998), Tamara Arsovski (violin), Belma Alić (cello), Belma Šarančić (accordion). M. Jarrell (1958): *Assonance* (1983), Armin Smriko (clarinet). A. Sijarić (1969): *Le vent aux Anches B* (2013/2023), Rijad Šarić (soprano saxophone), Belma Šarančić (accordion). S. Odeh-Tamimi (1970): *Tslalim* (2007), Belma Šarančić (accordion).

former and the instrument, Hadžajlić uniquely discovered unconventional ways to encode the *supernatural* in music, bringing the bassoonist in a state of complex thought with intricate reflexive demands, thus creating a unique fusion of man and machine within one organism – the performer of the piece.

The work *De l'épaisseur* (1998) by Philippe Leroux (1959) embodies duality as a sonorous cluster entity, essentially crafted from interconnecting 'two musics'. The first (strings) explores temporal concepts in music through a continuous deceleration of repeating patterns, while the second (accordion) focuses on the density and richness of a timbre. Duality in *Assonance* (1983), a composition by Michael Jarrell (1958), can be perceptually understood as 'multiplicity in oneness', implying that one instrument gesturally behaves like multiple instruments. Consequently, it is possible to aurally track two musical threads: the circular one, which after a certain period returns to the beginning, and the progressive one guided toward the resolution of the musical idea. *Le vent aux Anches B* (2013) is a modified version of Ališer Sijarić's (1969) composition of the same name, originally written for oboe and accordion. Sijarić's composition stands out due to a long-term process in which duality manifests in a conceptual two-plane structure. The first plane encompasses an abstract, micro-varying progression in shaping tonal elements, culminating in reaching the extreme tonal possibilities in each instrument. The second plane emerges through the interchange of musical parameters (rhythm becomes melody and *vice versa*). This demands that the listener in a very suggestive and nuanced manner becomes acutely aware of the evolving process(es) during the auditory experience of the music. Finally, a distinct duality in the program of the second festival evening is found in the piece *Tslalim* (2007) by Palestinian composer Samir Odeh-Tamimi (1970). This type of duality arose from a simultaneous sense of the East and West in the composer's (sub)consciousness – not necessarily a sense that unites, but rather a sense that there is a way to achieve cultural connection through understanding, and precisely the kind that reminds each of us that *political* does not always necessarily mean *conflicting*. So, we could comprehend the conceptual guiding principle of the work as pendulum swung between meditation reminiscent similar to the musical practices of Sufi Islam and aggressive outbursts of anger and noise, sonically articulated in the form of clusters, whose inspiration undoubtedly lies in the 20th-century Western musical thought.

The final concert event of SONEMUS Fest, driven by the aspiration for freedom and progress, took place under the symbolic program title – "Progression"⁴ In search of the universal essence of freedom in music, the event focused on

4 The entire program of the "Progression" concert (November 1st): D. Rešidbegović (1975): *Wreesky III* (2016), Hanan Hadžajlić (flute and processors). A. Kleinlosen (1987): *Jazz: Fetzen* (2016/18), James Aylward (bassoon). Impro Ensemble MAS: *S p a C E t t e r n s* (2023), *Impro Concept 33* (2023), *Musica ricercata 100 – Hommage à Ligeti* (2023), *Progression* (2023).

musical improvisation, representing something liberated from conventions in musical thought, as well as written compositions within the realm of electroacoustic music. The composition by Dino Rešidbegović (1975), titled *Wreesky III* (2016) for flute and analog signal processors, was the first performed piece that evening. Perceptual engagement with Rešidbegović's work suggests a connection between the musical text and certain principles of mechanical language (the composer has been known to use Morse code as a universal language on several occasions), which a listener could consciously recognize as the rhythmic structure of the composition. On the other hand, such a universal principle of activity between two languages – mechanical and musical – can be experienced or interpreted as the basis for *ad hoc* improvisation through active listening. In this regard, the improvisational aspects of *Wreesky* primarily concerns the performer's individuality, ultimately serving as a *distillation* of complex interpretive demands within the composition. In such a context, the concept, as well as the experience of the *electroacoustic* within the mechanical structure, can feel entirely organic for a listener, as the sonic outcome of the piece is essentially woven through the homogenous sound of the flute and processors.



Figure 4. Hanan Hadžajlić performing *Wreesky III* by D. Rešidbegović (“Progression”, November 1st) © Vanja Čerimagić.

Another piece within the domain of electroacoustics is *Jazz: Fetzen* (2018) for bassoon and tape (the original version includes a non-standard ensemble and various types of live electronic elements) by composer Adrian Kleinlosen (1987). Noticing the constant modulations within the intricate metric network, an experienced listener will most likely be able to assume that Kleinlosen's work is an artistic research in the field of algorithmic composition, which in this case resonates in the very structure of the piece. A variety of idioms or musical models found in jazz music predominantly occur at the concept level, but also in the form of occasional subtle outbursts within the musical text. The original version of the composition was written for bassoon, prepared piano, DJ controllers, double bass, drum set, and electronics. The composer's note in the program booklet mentions that the complexity of the ensemble in the newer version of the piece is attempted to be compensated through the electronic layer. The *Jazz: Fetzen* fundamentally explores various morphological characteristics within the bassoon's sound spectrum and establishes a relationship with the electronic layer through several formal parts of the composition. Despite the exceptional and superb interpretation by the bassoonist's side, if the newer version of the work is observed as a unique electroacoustic *organism* realized through loudspeakers, on a purely perceptive level we may encounter (potential) divergences in the sound texture. The reason for this is likely the composer's effort to replace ensemble layer with electronics, which has been a challenging compositional endeavor for decades now, even on the conceptual level. Consequently, the envisioned sonic result becomes inconsistently realized or completely unrealized, somewhat disturbed in the homogeneity of the sound spectrum, as the composer treats the electronic layer based on parametric dealing with acoustic instruments. Therefore, the unity of the electroacoustic *organism* does not function, or in other words – the instrument and the tape relate to completely different individual essence, placing a listener in a state of hearing/listening to two mutually incompatible 'musics'.



Figure 5. James Aylward performing *Jazz:Fetzen* by A. Kleinlosen (“Progression”, November 1st) © Vanja Čerimagić.

The concluding segments of the “Progression” concert featured performances by the Impro Ensemble MAS⁵ (2018) in several configurations, depending on the needs of the improvisational plan. Navigating the realm between interpretation and improvisation, the ensemble evidently seeks to discover a universal musical essence – one that is accessible to anyone actively engaged in the listening process on the spot. In the performances of the Impro Ensemble MAS, a more experienced listener will discern aspects such as micropolyphony, diverse forms of variation, principles based on a ‘music as a process’, and more, all enhanced by the idea of the spatial disposition of instruments. However, if we were to assess this type of improvised music in that manner, it would be challenging to define it as a purely improvisational. Hence, the music of the Impro Ensemble MAS always maintains just enough micropolyphony, variations, procedural elements, and more. It is certainly not necessary to analyze or describe an improvised work more precisely, as the author contends that the true significance of musical improvisation takes its full meaning only in the real time of performance, seeking later validation within a dialogic framework at the expense of this monologue text.



Figure 6. Mirza Gološ performing with Impro Ensemble MAS (“Progression”, November 1st) © Vanja Čerimagić.

5 The Impro Ensemble MAS at the “Progression” concert included: Hanan Hadžajlić (flute), Aras Samardžija (clarinet), James Aylward (bassoon), Mirza Sijerčić, Rijad Šarić (saxophone), Emili Mišić, Teo Udović (percussion), Tea Stanković (guitar), Mirza Gološ, Zlatan Božuta (piano), Alex Mateescu (violin), Arijan Radoja, Selma Sulejmanagić, Alja Šabanović (viola), Fuad Šetić (conductor).

The review aims to provide a deeper musicological insight into the auditory reception of the performed works on the spot, with particular attention focused on the performances of works by contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian composers. In this way, everyone who experiences an encounter with contemporary artistic music for the first time lays a certain foundation, facilitates aurally access to it, or at least gives suggestions for a more conscious approach to listening based on their own experience in the search for freedom. The SONEMUS Festival is always a perfect opportunity for the sonic realization of contemporary concert-type music with diverse international music, encompassing both recent and less recent music. Thus, I would venture to say that the SONEMUS Festival is traditionally organized as a festival of 'exclusivity, freedom, and hope' for anyone finding any kind of interest in such music, and especially for musicologists with an interest in artistic music in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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