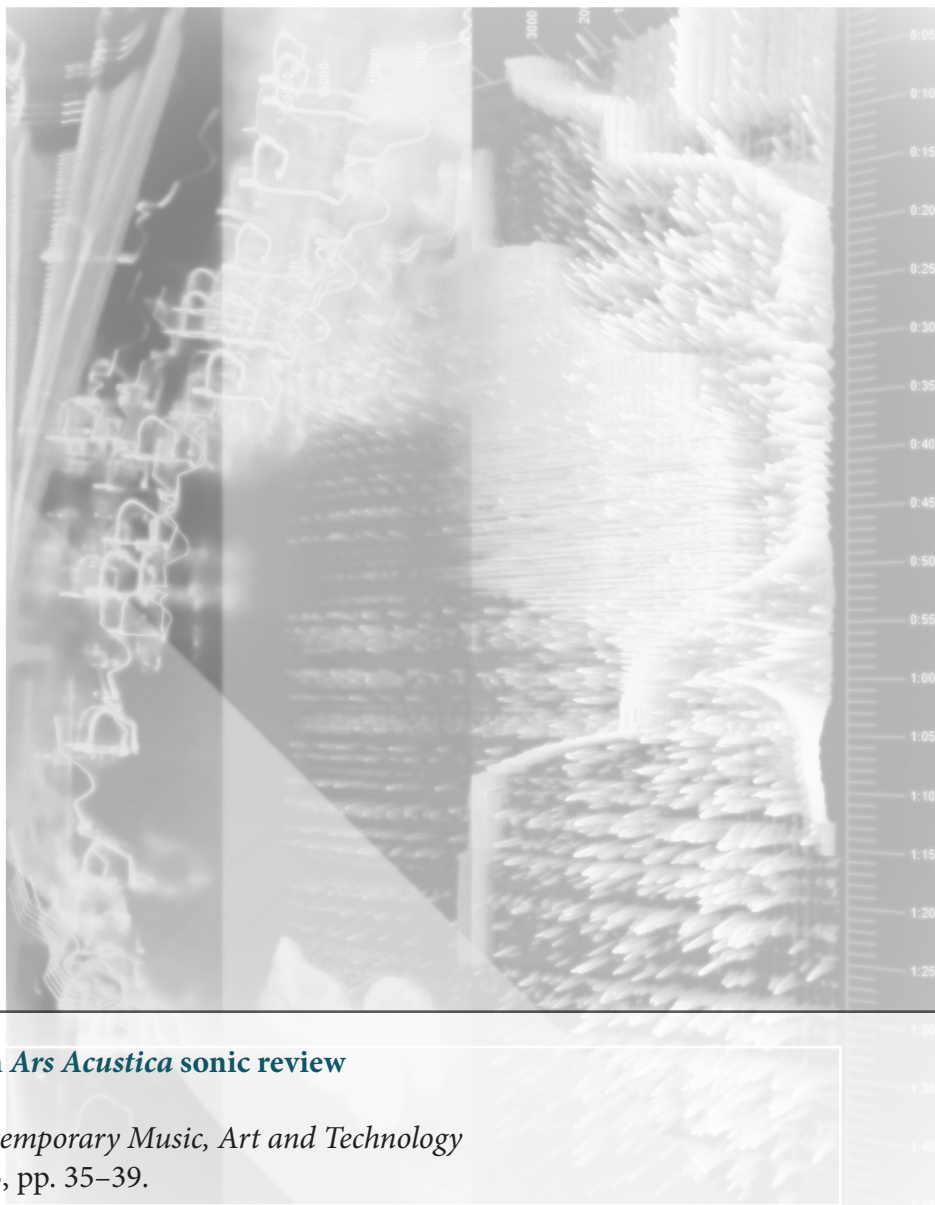


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Sounds of Changes: An Ars Acustica sonic review

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SOUNDS OF CHANGES

Ars Acustica review

The piece is available on the *Museum of the Nineties* website.

The content can be accessed via [this link](#) or QR code below:

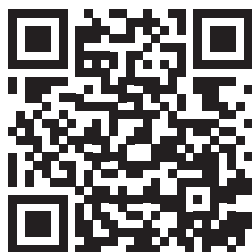


Photo by Gavriilo Andrić.

Student protests. Serbia, December 6, 2024 – June 28, 2025

Authors: Ivana Stefanović and Ana Kotevska

Duration: 16:25

Sound design: Zoran Jerković

Private production “Samizdat”

Completed on August 25, 2025.

The documentary materials used were recorded on private mobile phones, obtained via social media, or taken from publicly available media outlets.

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SOUNDS OF CHANGES

An *Ars Acustica* sonic review

Sounds of Changes, a co-authored *Ars Acustica*¹ spatio-temporal experiment, was conducted during the summer of 2025 in improvised studio conditions, after months of active participation in the Student Protest in Belgrade and intensive monitoring, listening to and contemplating their empowerment, spread, unexpected mobility around Serbia and Europe, the wondrous power of transformation and creative, rapid responses to new situations, all from the perspective of acoustic emanations and the documentary, “ethnographic” recording and collection thereof. It goes without saying that, conditionally speaking, the following *comments* should in no way be perceived as instructions for listening, but rather as a collection of basic information and self-reflections related to the creation of *Sounds of Changes*.

After a months-long preparation phase, which Ivana Stefanović and I went through mainly individually, with occasional meetings and frequent exchanges of opinions and materials, we decided to undertake composing – in the sense of trying to put together and compress an imaginary sound portrait of the Student Protest, keeping in mind the announced theme of the new edition of the *INSAM Journal*. Whether from personal “archives” in our cellphones or through downloads from the internet, we let about a hundred “examples” pass through our hands and ears in order to choose forty which were given the status of sound objects and acoustic events. When making the selection, we were simultaneously guided by personal perceptions of their symbolic meanings at the time when they unfolded, assessments of expressive capacity which has not been called into question by the time that has passed, as well as by inherent acoustic and

¹ Out of the multiple applicable terms (radiophony, radio art, radiophonic music...), we opted for the term *Ars Acustica* seeing as new technologies and platforms do not consider solely the radio a medium of transmission.

music values. As composer, Ivana defined the potential order of the chosen elements and thus the general dramaturgy of the future whole; Zoran Jerković critically listened to them, tonally leveled them and provided them sonic cohabitation, whereas I, from the perspective of a musicologist, suggested certain limitations for the overly expansive field of association that was opening up before us, the project title, and experiment² as the possible subgenre. We went into the editing process in the last days of August, with prepared material and the decision to rely only on the documentary material from the exterior, recorded between December 6, 2024 and June 28, 2025 – the period during which the protests could truly be described as student-led. We chose without discussion just one student protest matrix, taking the civil, ideological, activist position of the rebelling part of Serbia and thereby excluded “the others,” the opposed side of the incumbent authorities, even though we had at our disposal recorded moments of “incursion,” clashes between the two sides and their trying to shout each other down. *The others* are represented by just one acoustic event which turned into a collective experience when on March 15, 2025, at a megaprotest in Belgrade, a yet unidentified sonic weapon was used during a 16-minute silent tribute. The studio simulation of a “sonic cannon” (Earshot.ngo) we used is the only “intruder” in the documentary material and, at the same time, the only symbolic representative of the invisible *others*.

For the sake of keeping track more easily, three elliptical verbal fragments taken out of an impassable forest of signals and cries (*Pumpaj! / Pump it!*), slogans (*Ruke su vam krvave! / Your hands are bloody!*), directive communication in moments of crisis (*Ne trčite! / Don't run!*), and innumerable speeches which marked the breadth of the students' field of knowledge and inventiveness, at the same time emitting a considerable expressive, rhythmic and dynamic potential, deserve to be commented on separately. We perceived these three verbal messages, three female voices – enigmatic, unfinished and eclectic yet deadly, flowing among the mythical, archaic, symbolic, philosophical and technological linguistic spheres – launched at the right time, as representative moments for the power and chronology of a generational rebellion.

The first (*The sun started shining for us on December 6!*), spoken at a protest at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, figuratively speaks of dawn, of the birth of hope for a new day and a new beginning. The second (*So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves*) from the Gospel of Matthew (10:16) suggests ways to achieve a balance between maturity and kindness and has a wide intergenerational – albeit local – range of meanings, given that it simultaneously recalls the words of the late Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Pavle and the eponymous book by Serbian philosopher, writer and psychotherapist Vladeta Jerotić (2017). The last verbal, pre-recorded message, which the students played at the end of the mass protest in Slavija Square on June 28 and whereby they gave citizens the “green light” and urged them to take freedom into their own hands, in addition to a “traffic light,” gained its full meaning two days later on the offi-

² At first I was considering “očerak,” “a Russian term referring to a genre of narrative prose in which the plot is based on a true event and real people, while treatment aims for artistic creation” (*Rečnik književnih termina* 1992, 541).

cial Student Protest Instagram page: "The green light is not a sign to head into a charge, or for violence. It is not a light for war. It is not for revenge. It is a light for the future."

The months-long protests against the current corrupt government have, by changing society as a whole, also transformed the established soundscapes of urban units in Serbia, thanks primarily to the creativity, unpredictability, and mobility of the rebel students, but also of rebel citizens. Therefore, our "experiment" on the (in many ways) unique and long-lasting Student Protest, conducted in the days of their transformation into a civil uprising and of the first clear signs of recognition coming from the European Union, cannot be classified under established and familiar radiophonic formats. Innovative sonic breakthroughs, noise and commemorative silence do not easily fit into a soundscape or soundwalk, in the sense that shaped these subgenres of *Ars Acustica* in the mid-1980s, especially their refined, often poetic and static individualized experimental soundprints of cities in Klaus Schöning's *Metropolis* series (Kotevska 2015). With a dose of caution, I say that with *Sounds of Changes* we attempted to compress the hypersonic energy that brings life back to squares and streets rather than "blocking" them, alternating noise, silence and an eclectic musical repertoire and particularly the awakened choirs across the country (Kotevska 2025); to suggest their movement and detect changes in space and time, emphasize the enormous (and not always harmless) power of nonverbal communication to connect, mobilize, wake up and unite individuals of different ideological orientation on the emotional, identity and ideological plane. This time spontaneously, without any force or imposed canons! Possibly the best testament to that is the poem *Serbia* by Oskar Davičo, in an expressive and subversive performance by a "mumbling choir," which stood out as a necessary link in forming the chain or procession of awakened choirs.

Or, as better phrased by Jonathan Sterne, founder of the Sound Studies at McGill University in Montreal: sound offers ways of alternative access to the main problems raised by reflecting on the humanistic and social scene, it reaches culture, power... dealing from its own perspective with big historical, philosophical and political questions (Sterne 2015).

As it usually goes, already on the first day of editing the initial questions and dilemmas faded away, the pressure of the outside world vanished, bias and activism retreated before the laws of sound composing... They were replaced by a shared focus on the forty chosen sound fragments, the forming of microstructures, their logical joining into sonic events, the simultaneity and layering of voices, the search for the right measure and the right place for islands of silence, the contrasting of sound planes, climaxes, care for proportions, duration and whole of the form... with a constant exchange of opinions. Listening, checking, correcting, leveling the visible layers, and again listening with former and present "ears."

During our ten or so working days for the 16:25 minutes of *Sounds of Changes*, an atmosphere typical of past individual and joint recordings on Radio Belgrade was created. A discreet homage to the now non-existent Studio 10 and to Radio Belgrade's *Sound Workshop* formed more than four decades ago.

Translated by Tijana Cvetković

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