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**Book Review: Milan Milojković, *Digitalna tehnologija u srpskoj umetničkoj muzici*
[Digital Technology in Serbian Art Music]**

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Milan Milojković

**DIGITALNA TEHNOLOGIJA U SRPSKOJ
UMETNIČKOJ MUZICI**

[DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN SERBIAN ART MUSIC]¹

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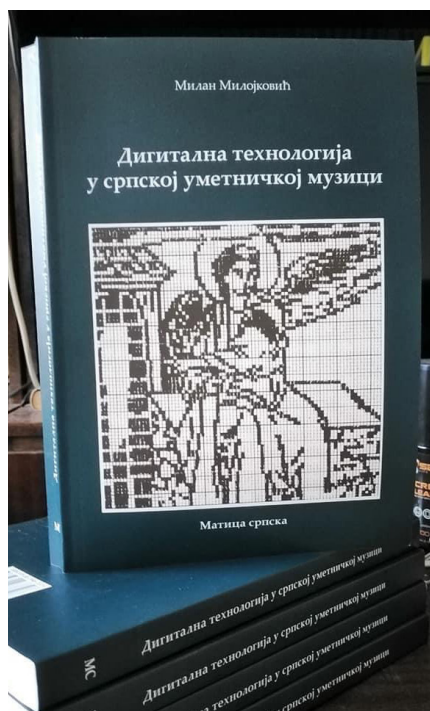
In the first words of the book *Digital Technology in Serbian Art Music*, authored by Milan Milojković in 2020, the reader is explained the author's reason and motivation for extensive research. In this regard, in the following lines, there is a review of an extremely important publication when it comes to understanding (or introducing) the issue of electroacoustic music by composers of Serbian origin; but the book is written in such a way that the applied methodology and results are, to some extent, quite universal, and as such are applicable to a similar context of a wider area of states created by the geopolitical disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY).

Taking into account the daily widespread use of digital technology (in a sense broader than just PCs), in one way or another, Milojković emphasizes the importance of clarifying the 'music-technology' dichotomy, as well as the need to historize the development of technology within the activities of Serbian composers. At this point, it should be noted that Milojković's process of historization in a very detailed sense takes place in conjunction with a comparative prism in regards to the world's technological and musical aspirations (the historical ones as well as the contemporary ones). With this in mind, Milojković

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1 Milojković's book is written in Serbian language, so the original title of the book is *Дигитална технологија у српској уметничкој музици*.

divided the book into eight thematic chapters (including the same number of non-thematic ones) which he himself, obviously, considers extremely important. Speaking from a certain objective, reviewing distance, it is noticeable that the reason for such a structural organization of ‘thematic fields’ ultimately served to understand the research topic, which is as interesting as it is complex, especially for musicologists – specialists in this field – working in the constituent states of the former SFRY.



Looking from a broader perspective, it is noticeable that the authors of almost all books that problematize similar topics start from general views and principles that define (digital) technology in music, which is justified, since we are talking about a large number of specifics that ‘accompany’ the term and the notion of technology in music. Obviously, there is a good enough reason for that. Most of these ‘technological’ things simply cannot be culturally well-known, so they need to be recontextualized over and over again, depending on the researcher’s field and topic of interest, as well as the limitations within which certain phenomena need to be explained, as in Milojković’s book. So, Milojković also worked according to the same principle; starting from the general points of view and principles that

define (digital) technology in a broader sense (one would say in everyday user experience), the author gradually leads us to the backbone of his research. Starting from the chapter “Technological and Aesthetic Coordinates of the Broader Musical Context of Electroacoustic Music and Computer Music as Its Subtype”, and through the establishment of an operational platform for the definition of computer music, the notion of computing in music, and music engineering, the author in a very practical way runs his thesis through a ‘series’ of (post)modernisms (e.g. analog modernism I, digital postmodernism III, hybrid systems etc.), and ultimately brings us to the core.

Furthermore, the author treats ‘all that is global’ in a historically and culturally impressive direction in terms of ‘domestic product’ – a production of computers in Serbia, which started really early compared to the rest of the world, where the first mainframe computer in Serbia was the ‘Digital electronic computer CER’ [*Cifarski elektronski računar*, orig.] from 1960. This is mostly interesting for the reason given by the author, i.e., that the Serbian production of

computers in a certain period lagged little or not at all in relation to world's technological trends. However, market inaccessibility for the 'ordinary' computer user, economic hardship, and optimization shortcomings of Serbian digital machines simply did not meet the needs of composers at the time. Following the further historical course, Milojković connects the institutionalized beginnings of music engineering in Serbia with Radio Belgrade's Electronic Studio [*Elektronski studio Trećeg programa Radio Beograda*, 1972], on which this chapter is actually based. In doing so, the author pays attention to the digital segments of the famous hybrid synthesizer 'Synthi 100', also focusing on the importance of this synthesizer in the then circumstances (1970s in Yugoslavia). In addition, among a number of composers who were visiting the Studio at the time, the compositional and research work and importance of Paul Pignon as one of the first engineers in the aforementioned studio are highlighted. It is expedient to say that Radio Belgrade's Electronic Studio got its first computer in the second half of the 1980s. However, based on numerous analyses of the music of domestic composers of that time, the author sees its full 'creative' potential in a somewhat later postmodernist context. The sudden expansion of digital technology in Serbian artistic music resulted in the founding of the Recording studio of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade [*Tonski studio FMU*] in 1986. This initiative is attributed to Srđan Hofman and Zoran Erić, composers whose work marks the beginning of a period in the history of Serbian electroacoustic music that Milojković mainly calls the 'studio production era', in which specifics of Serbian electroacoustic music 'drowned' in the virtual world. Also, the development of music engineering was completely different compared to those already mentioned, and as such provided a platform for the emergence of 'live electronics' in Serbia, which is a truly contemporary exclusivity on the artistic music scene. In the last chapter, "A New Generation – Digital Natives Meeting the Canon", Milojković essentially describes the 'naturalness' in the perception of technology in the works of composers who began acting on the artistic scene in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. Judging by the research results in this chapter, it is clear that the digital natives, by integrating computers into compositional processes, were able to understand a wide range of ways of composing computer music, from standard operations and virtual tape manipulations, through complex computing, all the way to setting up generic algorithms to accomplish a unique musical work.

After completing the review form at the expense of explaining the content of the book *Digital Technology in Serbian Art Music*, it is very important to conclude that this book is, due to the way it is written, exceptional cultural and musicological heritage for musical expertise and science. Despite the title, which is somewhat local in nature (but, if we move away from superficial simplicity, then that is not really the case), Milan Milojković's book is of exceptional value

for music scholars from the South Slavic-speaking area. This view is particularly justified if we take into account that studies dealing with the 'technology-music' dichotomy in these geographical areas exist in very modest numbers. It should be noted that, mainly through Milojković's process of historicizing computer music in Serbia, several composers came to the fore, whose work, probably due to the lack of adequate tools, methods or interests of other fellow musicologists, went beyond the scope of musicological work in Serbia. The author sporadically deals with such examples on several occasions throughout the book. The analyses that Milojković did for the purpose of writing this book go beyond the pure user experience of computing and enter the domain of specialized musicology of electroacoustic, and especially computer music. Thus, Milojković does not link the importance and exclusivity of technology only to the work of composers, but directs the reader to the path of musicology (quite expectedly, the computer musicology). Finally, I would like to point out the author's comprehension of bad experiences regarding the state of (non) unification of hardware in Radio Belgrade's Electronic Studio found itself through several generations. Accordingly, I would paraphrase the words in which the author warns of awareness of technology and the need to develop strategies that would serve the purpose of preserving digital hardware and software, as well as archiving digital records (complete musical works, individual programs, sequences, sample libraries, etc.) to some alternative medium.

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