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**Recycling Postmodernism. Trendsetters, Trends and *Pandora*,
Double Concerto for Viola, Cello and Chamber Orchestra (2022) by Lazar Đorđević**

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RECYCLING POSTMODERNISM. TRENDSETTERS, TRENDS AND PANDORA, DOUBLE CONCERTO FOR VIOLA, CELLO AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA (2022) BY LAZAR ĐORĐEVIĆ¹

Abstract: *Pandora*, a double concerto for viola, cello and chamber orchestra was written by Lazar Đorđević (b. 1992) as the final work for his DMus degree, and premiered on 2 February 2022 in Belgrade. *Pandora* draws many parallels with the works by Đorđević's supervisor, Zoran Erić (b. 1950), one of the most prominent Serbian postmodern composers; yet, Đorđević's own "postmodernism" is very different from that of his predecessors. *Pandora* thus provides an opportunity to rethink various tendencies and trends among the Serbian composers of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, which have left an imprint on the youngest generation, including the several interchanging "cycles" (or circles) of avant-garde and postmodernism. Has *Pandora*, with its sonic qualities and experimental drive, escaped the trends or actually reinforced them?

Keywords: avant-garde, postmodernism, sonic experiments, *Pandora*, double concerto, Lazar Đorđević.

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Introduction

Lazar Đorđević was born in Kragujevac in 1992. Having completed secondary education in his hometown, he studied composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade with Prof. Zoran Erić. Đorđević completed his BMus and MMus degrees in 2014 and 2015 respectively and continued towards a doctorate in composition (DMus). He is a teaching assistant at the Department of Composition of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. *Pandora*, a double concerto for viola, cello and orchestra was written as the final work for his doctoral-artistic project. The concerto was premiered in the Russian Cultural Centre in Belgrade on 2 February 2022, and performed by eminent Serbian musicians: Saša Mirković (viola), Pavle Popović (cello), and ensemble *Metamorphosis* led by conductor Ivan Marković. Upon hearing this piece for the first time, during the extraordinary successful premiere, my thoughts were immediately drawn towards situating this piece within the (relatively) recent tendencies of Serbian contemporary music. In the written part of his doctoral artistic project, Đorđević has asserted that he was inspired by spectralism (fr. *musique spectrale*), more precisely, the works of Gérard Grisey (1946–1998), Tristan Murail (b. 1947) and Claude Vivier (1948–1983) (Đorđević 2022, 31), to embark on exploring harmonics and creating chords and micro-motivic entities based on frequencies derived from them (or “sonic qualities”). Yet a great amount of what I would designate as “Serbian postmodernist legacy” is present in *Pandora*, both at its formal and conceptual levels. *Pandora* does, in fact, sound like a postmodern piece, in the way postmodernism was defined in Serbian musicology (which we will discuss below). Đorđević’s affinity for spectralism actually conforms to the “mainstream” postmodern compositional methodology,² but at the same time reveals the composer’s desire to escape it. In order to determine the stylistic profile of Lazar Đorđević’s *Pandora*, I will first overview various tendencies in Serbian music since the 1960s onwards, relying on selected musicological interpretations of Serbian music, which were often revised and reconsidered.

Over the past five to six decades, several trends have been identified in Serbian music; however, the same or similar tendencies have often been differently named or renamed — starting from the avant-garde and post-avant-garde, to post-avant-garde within postmodernism, and so on. Regardless of how they were labelled, these trends were transmitted from older to younger generations of composers, thus making Serbian music increasingly stale and predictable. In that environment, which, frankly speaking, has more-or-less survived until the

2 For the definition of “postmodern compositional methodology” see: Veselinović-Hofman 1997 and 2007.

present day, Đorđević composed *Pandora*. Therefore, I am asking myself (and the rest of our academic community): is it possible for our young composers to free themselves from the “postmodern” trends and discover a different compositional method? Furthermore, by trying to reinterpret trends identifiable among the teachers at the Department of Composition of the Belgrade Faculty of Music, which were a great influence on Đorđević, I will also try to revise my own knowledge of these trends, acquired simultaneously with Đorđević’s, but at the Department of Musicology. By doing this, I will also assess the teaching methods at the Faculty of Music over the past few decades.

Trends and Trendsetters (or, defining avant-garde and postmodernism in Serbia)

The generation born in the early 1990s, to which both Lazar Đorđević and I belong, was taught to think of the 1960s as some heroic, mythical time, when Serbian music experienced the so-called “Second Avant-Garde Wave”.³ By 1969, the year of publishing the iconic lexicon *Muzički stvaraoci u Srbiji* [Music Creators in Serbia] by Vlastimir Peričić (1927–2000)⁴ and his associates, the avant-garde (and all other styles and trends) were only observed and described through the author’s positivist analytical methodology. Peričić’s review article “Tendencije razvoja srpske muzike posle 1945. godine” [Tendencies of the Development of Serbian Music after 1945], published posthumously (Peričić 2000), contains valuable information on Serbian music in the second half of the 20th century, but, again, mainly normative data on movements and trends in Serbian music. Such a non-committal, non-interpretive approach to writing on musical styles was very typical of Peričić and other writers of his generation — who were mainly educated as composers, not musicologists.

The first “trendsetter” who defined the avant-garde movements was Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, an actual musicologist. Her writings have been widely regarded as pioneering works, and future generations of musicologists were taught her theories as a “mandatory” framework through which contemporary music was interpreted. Hers was the first comprehensive study of avant-garde movements in Serbian music, which appeared in 1983: it was a revised version of

3 This designation corresponds to the “First Avant-Garde Wave” from the 1930s. Many authors have written about these “two avant-gardes”, but their interpretations vary: cf. Veselinović 1983, Peričić 2000, Milanović 2001, Marinković 2007, Veselinović-Hofman 2007, Masnikosa 2007, Popović Mladenović 2007, Tomašević 2009.

4 Vlastimir Peričić (1927–2000) was a Serbian composer, music theorist, professor of Yugoslav Music History at the Music Academy/Faculty of Music in Belgrade, and a corresponding member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Veselinović-Hofman's PhD dissertation, entitled *Stvaralačka prisutnost evropske avangarde u nas* [A Creative Presence of European Avant-garde in Our Country] (Veselinović 1983). By distinguishing between the avant-garde movements in music on the one hand, and avant-garde movements in literature and visual arts on the other, Veselinović developed her theory of musical avant-garde in central Europe (mainly around the 'axis' Schoenberg–Stockhausen), avant-garde tendencies in Polish and Hungarian music (Penderecki, Lutosławski, Ligeti), and France (from Debussy and Satie to Messiaen) (Veselinović 1983, 132–152). The main chapter is, of course, dedicated to Serbian avant-garde composers – from the representatives of the “First Avant-Garde Wave”, via defining neoclassicism of the 1950s as avant-garde (in comparison to the socialist realism of the post-war period), to the avant-garde tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s (the “Second Avant-Garde Wave”).

The “Second Avant-Garde Wave” of the 1960s was primarily marked by reflections on the works of Polish and Hungarian avant-garde composers – Penderecki, Lutosławski and Ligeti. The protagonists of the avant-garde in Serbia were: Petar Bergamo (1930–2022, a Croatian composer who studied in Belgrade and later taught at the Faculty of Music), Petar Osgchian (1932–1979), Zoran Hristić (1938–2019), Rajko Maksimović (b. 1935), and Vladan Radovanović (b. 1932) (Veselinović 1983, 354–386).⁵ Among these composers, Radovanović was the most curious about avant-garde possibilities (starting from 1956); around that time he also started exploring the concept of *sintezijska umetnost* [Art Synthesis], although he labelled it as such much later (cf. Janković 2003). According to Veselinović-Hofman, Radovanović's works inspired the so-called *Nova generacija* [New Generation] group, better known by their latter name, OPUS 4. Members of the group, which was active since the early 1970s, devoted themselves to musical minimalism and stood up against the academic, predominant-ly neoclassical norms (Veselinović 1983, 386–392.)

Veselinović also included three (then young) composers among the avant-gardists: her husband Srđan Hofman (1944–2021), Vlastimir Trajković (1947–2017) and Ivana Stefanović (b. 1948), but for different reasons. Hofman's works were described as avant-garde due to their (not always strict) application of serialist and aleatoric methods of composing; Trajković's works of the 1970s were avant-garde due to the “prolongation of time” and application of Messiaen's compositional techniques (sonority, modes, rhythmical patterns, etc.);⁶ whereas Stefanović introduced a lyrical sentiment into her serialist/electronic pieces (Veselinović 1983, 392–406.) Veselinović's selection of avant-gardists also included

5 For more information about avant-garde movements in Serbian music in the late 1950s and early 1960s see: Milin 1998.

6 Trajković was a student of Messiaen, albeit unofficially and only for a short period of time: cf. Janković-Beguš 2022.

‘aleatoric composers’ Vitomir Trifunović (1916–2007), Slobodan Atanacković (b. 1937) and Vuk Kulenović (1946–2017); ‘contemporary-archaic composers’ Rajko Maksimović, Vuk Kulenović and Ludmila Frajt (1919–1999); composers of electronic music, Vladan Radovanović, Josip Kalčić (1902–1995), Ludmila Frajt and Miloš Petrović (1952–2010) (Veselinović 1983, 407). Veselinović introduced the term *avangarda lokalnog tipa* [local avant-garde] to refer to the avant-gardes taking place outside of their primary geographical and temporal “centres” (Veselinović 1983, 33), thus legitimising all Serbian avant-garde endeavours, especially throughout 1970s.

However, already in 1984, Veselinović revised her assessment and described the aforementioned 1970s avant-garde reflections as post-avant-garde, because they embodied a compromise between avant-garde and tradition:

There is something awkward in that alliance between an avant-garde artist and a fashion designer, joined together in the figure of a former avant-gardist. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the self-confidence of an avant-garde arbitrator as a characteristic of the former, and a lack of concern for the destructive attitude towards the tradition of the latter, reach a settlement. The compromise that succeeded after avant-garde art is grotesque, but still welcome; paradoxical, yet healing. This situation found its strongest impulse precisely within the auspices of the avant-garde, as a consequence of its involvement with tradition. (Veselinović 1984, 5)

Within one year, Veselinović-Hofman contradicted herself: the 1970s avant-garde became post-avant-garde. Ever since, the “actual” Serbian avant-garde was “limited” to the active composers and their works from the 1960s, whereas everything created from the 1970s onwards got the prefix “post-” (see: Veselinović-Hofman 2007).

So, with her 1984 article Veselinović acknowledged the new tendencies in European music of the 1970s, starting from the new simplicity of Penderecki, which was embraced by the likes of Osghian, Berislav Popović (1931–2002), Trifunović, Hofman, et al. However, in 1990, Veselinović-Hofman revised her assessment again, labelling them as postmodernists:

The definition of post-modernism is too extensive for a thorough explanation in this paper. The term is used here to indicate musical trends which occurred chronologically from the beginning of the nineteenth [sic!] seventies to the present day – that is, from the time of the most recent musical avant-garde. Post-modernism includes not only post-avant-garde trends, but also all other musical activity taking place in this period. Post-avant-garde in this context, refers to music by composers who were directly involved in the avant-garde movement of the 1960s (Veselinović-Hofman 1990, 133.)

Thus, the post-avant-garde trends of the 1970s (or the ‘avant-garde-in-decline’?) became a faction within postmodernism. Veselinović-Hofman took this a step further with her 1997 monograph *Fragmenti o muzičkoj postmoderni* [Fragments on Musical Postmodernity]. The focus of the book is the notion of avant-garde and its relation to tradition. The four fractions of postmodernism – the affirmative-compromising (self)critique of avant-garde, the radical-negative (self)critique of avant-garde, the non-avant-garde (i.e., neoclassical) music and its gradual transition to postmodernism, and a soft plurality of postmodernism – describe the various relationships between avant-garde and tradition (Veselinović-Hofman 1997, 51–132). The list of postmodernists is mostly the same as those previously considered post-avant-gardists of the 1970s, but with added younger composers, born in the 1950s up to 1970 (Goran Kapetanović, 1969–2014, Miloš Zatkalik, b. 1959, Zoran Erić, b. 1950, Tatjana Milošević, b. 1970).

Another turn in Veselinović-Hofman’s definition of the avant-garde in Serbia took place in 2002, with her text “Teze za reinterpretaciju jugoslovenske muzičke avangarde” [Theses for the Reinterpretation of Yugoslav Musical Avant-Garde], where she stated that “music knows, at the end, only one undeniable historical avant-garde, embodied in John Cage’s work 4’43” for...” (Veselinović-Hofman 2002, 21).⁷ In this article Veselinović-Hofman articulated three avant-gardes: avant-garde in literature, visual and performing arts (historical avant-garde); avant-garde music; and Serbian (local) avant-garde.⁸

The hypothesis in the form of questions follows: if avant-garde is directly linked to the critique of institutions (see: Birger 1998), which never happened in its most extreme way in Serbian music,⁹ and if the compositional techniques were reflections on avant-garde movements, was there ever Serbian avant-garde music? Is post-1945 musical avant-garde in Serbia reduced to the works of Vladan Radovanović (see: Medić 2019), minimalist, yet aggressively critical group OPUS 4, gathered around Students’ Cultural Centre in Belgrade (see: Tošić 2001) and experimental works of Ernő Király (1919–2007, see: Milojković et al. 2021)? Revising my own insights, I declare: If the defining feature of the avant-garde is the critique of society, and its cultural and artistic institutions, to the annoyance of conservative critics, then the answers to the two questions are – yes, there was Serbian avant-garde after World War II, and yes, it has to

7 The notion of historical avant-garde should be considered in Bürger’s sense of that term (see: Birger 1998).

8 This was discussed and summarised in Bojana Rasovanović’s article “Contemporary Musicology in a Neither/Nor State. Challenging the Status of Music(ologic)al Periphery” (Radovanović 2021).

9 The majority of composers worked either at the Academy of Music, later Faculty of Music in Belgrade, or at Radio Belgrade – there was no critique of or separation from mainstream institutions.

be reduced to the aforementioned composers. Everyone else, within the period from 1960 to the present day, represents some sort of (moderated) modernism or postmodernism.

Pandora had kept her box well, someone else opened it

Lazar Đorđević's hometown, Kragujevac is the main centre of accordion performance in Serbia and also the first town in Serbia where it was possible to study accordion on a high education level – initially within the separate unit of the Faculty of Music, and later at the Music Department of the Philological-Artistic Faculty (FILUM) of the University of Kragujevac. Therefore, Đorđević quickly found his niche and became one of the most prominent Serbian composers for accordion, writing several standout pieces such as *Memoria in aeterna*, a concerto for accordion and orchestra (2017),¹⁰ *I once heard, somewhere...* for clarinet, accordion and string quartet (2016), and *Lunar dust* for accordion solo (2021). On the other hand, Đorđević's interest in string instruments is likely related to the existence of a great number of excellent performers, who originated from the School for Musical Talents in Čuprija (a town in central Serbia, near Kragujevac). Both soloists who played at the premiere of *Pandora*, the acclaimed violist Saša Mirković, nowadays a Full Professor at the FILUM, and the young cellist Pavle Popović, were also educated in Čuprija. Lazar Đorđević himself said that *Pandora*, along with his pieces that preceded it (*Quasi Sonata* for cello, 2017, *D-Madness* for viola and fifteen strings, 2019, and *Paradox* subtitled “duo for viola solo”, 2019), is a result of his long-term interest in the sonic possibilities of string instruments (Đorđević 2022, 2.) This fascination with string instruments can also be regarded as the “legacy” of his composition teacher Zoran Erić and his notable works for strings: *Off* for contrabass and strings (1982), *Cartoon* for strings and harpsichord ad libitum (1984), *Talea Konzertstück* for violin and strings (1989), and *Helium in a Small Box – Images of Chaos III*, for violin and strings (1991).¹¹

Ever since he started writing concertos for various instruments, Đorđević was fascinated with solo cadences. Although the composer experimented with the genre and form of a concerto, in *Pandora*, the treatment of the orchestral parts (reduced to 27 individual parts – treated almost as solo parts), the timbral and technical varieties and possibilities, microtonality, the individuality of instruments and full orchestral sound, as well as an implementation of new

10 It was performed alongside *Pandora* in February 2022, by Darko Dimitrijević as a soloist on the accordion, the ensemble Metamorfosis and conductor Ivan Marković.

11 For more information about Erić's works see: Premate 1984, Trajković 1989, Nikolić 2007, Novaković 2017.

sonic solutions are explored within orchestra with all the standard instrument groups, yet featuring non-standard employment of instruments (Đorđević 2022, 3). Alongside the soloists, the ensemble consists of I flute/piccolo, II flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano, alto and tenor saxophones, horn, trumpet, trombone, percussion (marimba, kettle-drums, bass drum, gong, cymbal, woodblocks, triangle, rattle), and strings.

Regarding the formal analysis, Đorđević proposed a set of “fields” (*polja*). Inside of each field, there are parts and sections. In the ensuing analysis I will highlight the qualities of each field.

Field I, mm. 1–94

Starting from the opening measures, Đorđević presents his sonic arsenal. A short cluster-like formation (measure 1) quickly unites around the tone C (in different octaves), which, as Đorđević claims, is one of the fundamental pitches of this double concerto. Starting from m. 2, a set of “sonic variations” on the tone c1 appears, both in woodwinds and solo parts. These “sonic variations” quickly expand into a vibrating, rhythmically fluid colour-changing cluster, with surfacing tremolos in the solo parts. Starting from m. 25, a different, micropolyphonic cluster appears. This formation is enriched with strong, almost dance-like impulses, embodied in accentuated chords in brass, percussion, II violins and violas. As the section progresses, the orchestral parts are “silenced down”, and turned into a mechanical rhythm machine (m. 39). This contrasts and thus emphasises the permanently changing virtuoso sonic qualities of the soloists. At m. 58 the rhythmically fluid cluster, surfacing through the solo parts, finally returns, and through this orchestral texture the first field ends at m. 94.

Solo cadence No. 1 – viola, m. 95 (ad libitum, senza misura)

This first solo cadence summarises the sonic qualities of the various techniques employed in the solo viola part: tremolos performed in different dynamics and bow positions, glissandos, trills, etc.

Field II, mm. 96–229

Characterised by development, field II consists of combining the two cluster types from Field I. Starting from m. 197, by extracting several micro-motivic excerpts, Đorđević creates an almost post-minimalist texture by repeating/varying them melodically.¹² This becomes the feature of the solo viola part at m. 220. Other parts are eliminated one by one, or continue to play high-pitched “noises”.

12 Post-minimalist in this case refers to the repetition of fragments or micro-motivic entities, but without any sort of reduction.

Field III, mm. 230–379

The “second development” of the concerto is based on the repetitiveness of micro-motivic entities within a cluster. This is a result of providing more of a dance-like vertical accent and impulses which gradually dominate the cluster-based horizontal flow.

Solo cadence No. 2 – cello, m. 380 (ad libitum, senza misura)

Similarly, to the first cadence for viola, the second cadence summarises techniques of various sonic effects on the cello.

Field IV, mm. 380–518

Closing the developmental “arch” started in Field II, Đorđević emphasises the repetitive features of micro-motivic entities. Each micro-motive or sonic quality embodying a certain technique is submerged into a post-minimalist fragment repetition, but through ever-changing sonic qualities (that is, different techniques.)

Coda & double cadence, mm. 518–553

This Coda summarises micro-motivic entities, the possibilities to create a cluster or a post-minimalist repetitive texture, as well as sonic possibilities and performance technique possibilities. One could call it an apotheosis of sound.

Did Pandora Manage to Close the Box? Did the Cycles of (Post) Avant-Gardes/Postmodernisms End?

Pandora’s inclination towards spectralism, that is, experimenting with various sonic qualities – at least as an idea applied in the concerto – represents a step forward in Serbian art music, having in mind that not many composers dealt with it. Alongside this step forward, some postmodernist features as described by Veselinović-Hofman remained: clusters are not just sound masses. They have gone through the postmodern transformation, with the appearance of micro-motivic entities, but also through the employment of various sonic (instead of melodic) qualities. Had there been no microtonality and derivation of chords and micro-motivic entities from the aliquot row, the piece would have remained completely in the postmodern realm. It is worth noting that the clusters are almost always precisely written in the score (excluding glissandos, and sings for playing the highest possible note), which in itself is probably a result of the composer’s thinking about sonic/post-minimalist cluster transformations.

The postmodern/post-minimalist tendencies of *Pandora* are nevertheless strongly audible and visible – one cannot (at least I could not) shake the feeling

that *Pandora* is, in its conception, form, and structure somewhat familiar. Truth be said, one can hardly escape one's roots and the surroundings – and this is something that can be said for many composers and musicologists in Serbia. To break the cycle traditionally taught at the Faculty of Music, Đorđević explored various performance techniques for the purpose of achieving different sonic qualities. A modification of cluster sound is, at the same time out of fashion and a 'must-have'. A suggestive title (*Pandora* here, apparently has a sonic box opened), and its reference to 'opening' tones and their harmonics (meticulously calculated up to the harmonic No. 32) used for chords and micro-motivic entities, should (or, should it?) be replaced suggestive and intuitive composing. We are still in a never-ending cycle trying to find a way out. We are being told what to accept (in both art, and humanities wise) as new, trendy, or correct. *Pandora* stands on some sort of border of potential possibilities, deeply rooted in post-modern trends, which are themselves rooted in avant-garde trends – reflection after reflection on something that happened sometime in the past (but we do not know which exact past). In the context (and micro-contexts) of contemporary Serbian music, this was almost inevitable. Yet, *Pandora* tries to look forward, as if being drawn back. One should keep looking for answers – exploring all types of music worldwide, as much as possible – and step bravely into the new sound realms.

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**PERMANENTNO KRUŽENJE POSTMODERNIZMA. TRENDOVI, TRENDSETERI
I PANDORA, DVOSTRUKI KONCERT ZA VIOLU, VIOLONČELO I OKRESTAR
LAZARA ĐORĐEVIĆA**

(rezime)

Nešto više od poslednjih pet decenija, u srpskoj muzici uočljivi su pojedini trendovi koji su vremenom menjali svoja imena. Počev od avangarde i postavangarde, do postavangarde u okviru postmodernizma, identični trendovi prenosili su se od originalnih aktera (kompozitora) na mlađe kompozitorske generacije. Kako se ispostavlja, avangarda od koje je sve počelo, a koja je u velikoj meri bila refleksija na ostvarenja kompozitora takozvane „poljske škole“, letimično i principa serijalne muzike, počela je da upija elemente tradicije u sebe (profilisanje tradicionalne fakture – teme, harmonije, forme i tako dalje), postavši postavangarda. Ubrzo potom, postavangarda je, usled različitih izvora kompozitorske inspiracije (avangardne i tradicionalne) postala deo veće formacije, muzičke postmoderne.

U takvoj sferi, koja, može se slobodno reći, traje i do danas, iako je već više puta među filozofima, teoretičarima umetnosti, pa i muzikolozima, postavljena teza o kraju postmoderne, nastala je i kompozicija *Pandora*, dvostruki koncert za violu i violončelo (2022) Lazara Đorđevića. Stoga, problematizovali smo pitanje: Da li je moguće izaći iz postmodernističkog kruženja i pronaći drugačiju stvaralačku logiku? Dvostruki koncert Lazara Đorđevića, kao jedan od mogućih izlaza, sadrži istraživanje zvučne boje. Istovremeno, autor teksta sporadično revidira i svoje muzikološko znanje, pokušavajući da, ako ništa drugo, redefiniše sopstveni balast naučnog nasleđa.

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