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On the Paths of Béla Bartók's Modernism Followers and Companions: Josip Slavenski and Marko Tajčević

Na sledi sledilcem in sopotnikom modernizma Béle Bartóka: Josip Slavenski in Marko Tajčević

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IZVLEČEK

Poglavitni namen tega prispevka je ponovna preučitev modalnosti vpliva skladatelja Béle Bartóka v prvi polovici 20. stoletja na najbolj razširjen, »nacionalno usmerjen slog« v nekdanji Jugoslaviji, pri čemer sta obravnava dva Bartókova mlajša sopotnika – skladatelja Josip Slavenski (1896–1955) in Marko Tajčević (1900–1984), pomembna predstavnika evropskega medvojnega glasbenega modernizma.

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to re-examine the modalities of Béla Bartók's influence as a composer during the first half of the 20th century to the main, dominantly "nationally oriented style" in the former Yugoslavia, focusing on two of Bartók's somewhat younger contemporaries – the composers Josip Slavenski (1896–1955) and Marko Tajčević (1900–1984), prominent representatives of European interwar musical modernism.

On the paths of Béla Bartók's modernism Followers and companions: Josip Slavenski and Marko Tajčević¹

*To be able to work, one must have a zest for life,
i.e. a keen interest in the living universe.
One has to be filled with enthusiasm
for the Trinity of Nature, Art and Science.*

Bartók Béla

There is no doubt that the development of art music and music scholarship, particularly ethnomusicological, in the former Yugoslavia(s),² were strongly marked by the echoes of the complete activities and creative achievements of Béla Bartók (1881–1945). The main aim of this paper is to re-examine and discuss the modalities of Bartók's influence as a composer during the first half of the 20th century, focusing on two of Bartók's somewhat younger contemporaries – the composers Josip Slavenski (1896–1955) and Marko Tajčević (1900–1984).³ Their creative contributions to the dominant, nationally orientated stream in interwar period can be considered proportional to those realised by Bartók in the Hungarian musical culture. In addition to shifting the stylistic horizons towards the areas of modernism, the achievements of Slavenski and Tajčević allowed Yugoslav music, as an integral part of the Balkan region, to step out of the local and into the European musical scene and to be recognised and highly esteemed within the family of the so-called “modern national schools” of their time. Perhaps even more importantly, encouraged by Bartók's new and fresh anti-Romantic approach to folklore, both Slavenski and Tajčević enriched the musical palette of the then modern world with new colours, rhythms, harmonies, agogics and, above all, specifically anti-classical forms, thereby, following on from Bartók's interests, opening the door for the musical world of the Balkans to be permanently, to this day, recognised as one of the most exciting and colourful musical territories on the planet.

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- 1 This article was written as part of the project *Serbian musical identities within local and global framework: traditions, changes, challenges* (No. 177 004) funded by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technical Development.
 - 2 We have in mind *Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* (1919–1929), *Kingdom of Yugoslavia* (1929–1944) and *Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (1945–1992).
 - 3 Both Slavenski and Tajčević belong to the music histories of former Yugoslavia(s). However, since it was neither planned, nor possible that the leading music historians of the former SFR Yugoslavia create or try to (re-)construct one unique history of Yugoslav music, the place of the two prominent composers of their times remained on the “unstable” cross-roads of the separate Serbian and Croatian music histories. At first glance, Slavenski's starting position was more “comfortable”, since the both sides have showed a great interest in “appropriation” of composer's achievements; later on, Slavenski's case proved to be more difficult and complexed. See Jim Samson, *Music in the Balkans* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013) [Chapter: Serbo-Croat, sub-chapter: Who owns Slavenski], 369–376. On the other hand, example of Marko Tajčević as a Serb born in Austro-Hungary, can serve as the best example why music histories should not be written (only) from the ethnical perspectives; Tajčević's overall fruitful activities and remarkable opus realized in the former Yugoslav (today Croatia's capital) city of Zagreb before 1940, when he finally decided to move to Belgrade, have not been recognized at all in the first most prominent history of Croatian music by Josip Andreis, “Razvoj muzičke umjetnosti u Hrvatskoj,” in: Andreis–Cvetko–Djurić-Klajn, *Historijski razvoj muzičke kulture u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1962); See also, for example, Katarina Tomašević, “Duš vremena u delima i delatnostima Mihaila Vukdragovića i Marka Tajčevića,” in *Delo i delatnost Mihaila Vukdragovića i Marka Tajčevića* [Cyrillic], ed. Dejan Despić (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 2004), 5.

One of the aims of this paper is to bring to mind numerous forgotten, very little known or insufficiently researched shared moments, which most intimately link the three composers' artistic biographies as well as the strategies, poetic and aesthetic constants in their opuses.⁴

Completely justifiably, without the name of Béla Bartók, a respectable review of the 20th century's history of music cannot be conceived.⁵ We are witnessing, however, a situation where some of the leading historical reviews of international importance, designed with the pretension of being the most thorough and most ambitious in terms of comprehensiveness,⁶ have marginalised or completely disregarded entire regions of the European musical arena and left as "white" areas of the history of music large "territories" of the creative work of many renowned and, even in the not so distant past, internationally highly acclaimed composers of the European Southeast. With regard to the Serbian, Croatian and Yugoslav music of the first half of the 20th century, these composers are not only Josip Slavenski and Marko Tajčević, whose work in the orbit of Bartók's modernism will be the main topic of this discussion, but also key representatives of the previous generation of Serbian composers: Petar Konjović (1883–1970), Miloje Milojević (1884–1946) and Stevan Hristić (1885–1958), to mention here only the most prominent of the epoch of early modernism; their works had already in their lifetime experienced not only the highest acknowledgement in their country, but also considerable recognition abroad. With rare and, subsequently, all the more significant exceptions such as, for example, the recently published book *Music in the Balkans* by Jim Samson (2013), dedicated on the whole to the traditional, art and popular music(s) of the Balkans,⁷ the achievements of the key composers from the former Yugoslavia still, most commonly, escape the attention of both contemporary western music historiography, and the comparative scholarly studies within the area of research into the musical identity of modern Europe.⁸

Consequently, this paper has opted to first address some undeniably interesting data from the early 1920s, which will take us directly to the "main stream of the story" of Josip Slavenski and Marko Tajčević as followers and companions of Béla Bartók on the path of European musical modernism.

4 This article emerged from my much shorter and differently conceived report "Modalities of Béla Bartók's Influence on the Serbian Music in the first half of the 20th Century", presented on the conference *Bartók's Orbit*, Budapest, 22.–24. March 2006.

5 See Richard, Taruskin, "Why You Cannot Leave Bartók Out," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* T. 47, Fasc. 3/4 [Bartók's Orbit. The Context and Sphere of Influence of His Work. Proceedings of the International Conference held by the Bartók Archives, Budapest (22.–24. March 2006). Part I (Sept., 2006)] 2006: 265–277.

6 See, for example, Nicolas Cook and A. Pople, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge – Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Richard, Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 2009, 2nd ed. 2010).

7 Samson, *Music in the Balkans*.

8 Regarding the problems related to the incidence and representation of the so-called "small musical cultures" in the general western histories of music, encyclopedic and lexicographic editions, see, e.g.: Melita Milin, "General Histories of Music and the Place of European Periphery," *Музикологија [Musicology]* 1 (2001): 141–148, Katarina Tomašević, "Musical Modernism at Periphery? Serbian Music of the First Half of the Twentieth Century," in *Rethinking Musical Modernism*, eds. Dejan Despić and Melita Milin (Belgrade: SASA and Institute of Musicology SASA, 2008), 83–103, and Melita Milin, "The Place of Small Musical Cultures in Reference Books," in *Music's intellectual history*, eds. Zdravko Blažeković and Barbara Dobbs McKenzie (New York: RILM Intellectual Centre and The City University of New York, 2009), 653–658.

The first story. Josip Slavenski

It is 1930, the time immediately after the completion of the New Music Festival in Berlin, and the “witness-narrator” is the eminent Austrian musicologist Alfred Einstein (1880–1952). Summing up the impressions of the previous few years of the Festival, Einstein notes: “The year of 1924 was the year of the discovery of Josip Slavenski”.⁹

It was at the Fourth Donaueschingen Chamber Music Festival (Viertes Danaueschingen Kammermusikfest, 19–20 July), when Slavenski’s *First String Quartet*, having gone through a gruelling selection from 250 works, was superbly executed in an interpretation by the Prague “Zika Quartet” (Zika/ Czechoslovak/ Prague Quartet). It should be mentioned that in the same year of 1924, besides Slavenski’s *Quartet*, the programme of the same festival also included performances of compositions by Erwin Schulhoff (1894–1942), Anton Webern (1883–1945) and Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), among others. This was the first international success of Josip Slavenski, opening the door to the Schott publishing house from Mainz, which at that time also acquired exclusive rights to print his works.¹⁰

For the main topic, another fact, also from the late 1920s, further points to his success. According to airtime statistics regarding contemporary music broadcast on German radio, published in the journal *Melos* (Berlin, 1920–1934),¹¹ during October 1929, of a total of 157 hours of broadcast music, most time, 1h 50min, was occupied by the works of Paul Hindemith (1895–1963). They were followed by the compositions of Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), with 1h 45min, Arnold Schoenberg, with 1h 40min and Béla Bartók, with 1h 15min, while the next “position”, with a total of 1h 5min, was shared between Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) and the key protagonist of this “story”, Josip Slavenski. In the same year, the music of Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), Bartók’s closest associate and a prominent representative of Hungarian music of the time, was given 40 minutes of airtime on German radio stations.¹²

Who, then, was Josip Slavenski, the composer who, for a moment, lit up the musical sky of Europe?¹³ Although many readers of *Muzikološki zbornik* are entirely familiar

9 Alfred Einstein, “Festival Neue Musik,” *Berliner Tagblatt*, 19 June 1930, according to Eva Sedak, *Josip Stolcer Slavenski, skladatelj prijelaza. Svezak prvi* (Zagreb: Muzičko informativni centar Koncertne direkcije Zagreb – Muzikološki zavod Muzičke akademije u Zagrebu, 1984), 241.

10 In the Schott publications, a total of 33 works by Josip Slavenski appeared – 12 instrumental and 21 choral.

11 See the RIPM [Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals (1760–1966)] database. Accessed 16 October, 2015, <http://www.ripm.org/?page=JournalInfo&ABB=MEL>.

12 Taken from *Melos*, the news was also published by the Belgrade journal *Muzički glasnik* [Musical Herald] (November–December 1931). According to Sedak, *Josip Stolcer Slavenski*, 248.

13 The life and work of Josip Slavenski was the subject of a detailed study of the musicology of the former Yugoslavia. For an exhaustive bibliography of Slavenski up to 1984, see Sedak, *Ibid.*, 261–269. After the break-up of the SFRY, his work still attracts the equal attention of musicologists in both Croatia and Serbia. See, e.g., Eva Sedak, “Nationale Musik oder die Konstruktion des Nationalen als Musik am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *Kompositorische und soziokulturelle Aspekte der Musikgeschichte zwischen Ost- und Westeuropa. Konferenzbericht, Leipzig 2002*, eds. Helmut Loos and Stefan Keym, (Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2004), 7–30. The results of a more recent research published in Belgrade, see, e.g., in the collection of texts *Josip Slavenski i njegovo doba* [Cyrillic], ed. Mirjana Živković (Beograd: Fakultet muzičke umetnosti Beograd – Muzikološki institut SANU – SOKOJ MIC, 2006). About Slavenski’s contribution to the history of Serbian interwar music see in my book: Katarina Tomašević, *Na raskršću Istoka i Zapada. O dijalogu tradicionalnog i modernog u srpskoj muzici (1918–1941)* (Beograd – Novi Sad: Muzikološki institut SANU – Matica srpska, 2009), e.g. 24–27; 153, 167–170, 184–186, 237–245. See also Danijela Špirić-Beard, *Border – Bridge – Crossroads: the Construction of Yugoslav Identity in Music (1835–1938) and the Case of Josip Stolcer Slavenski: PhD diss.* (Cardiff University, 2012). Considerable attention was also devoted to Slavenski by Jim Samson in the aforementioned book *Music in the Balkans*, 369–391.

with the answer to this question, regarding its function in the main topic, the choice of data from the composer's early biography will be addressed in brief.

Ten years younger than Bartók, Josip (Štolcer) Slavenski was born in northern Croatia, in the region of Medjimurje, in Čakovec, in 1896. From his father, a local baker, he inherited an exceptional gift for music, and from his mother, whom he described as a "living music archive", he acquired a deep sense for the Medjimurje and, generally, the traditional music of the Balkans. In the beginning of association with music, Slavenski was an autodidact; the richness of the folklore of his homeland left in him the deepest mark, as he was already from his early youth fascinated with the sounds of church bells and aliquot tones.

Only when he was sixteen, did Slavenski acquire his first, classical knowledge of music. In Varaždin, where he was schooled, Slavenski fervently studied the *Well-tempered Clavier* (*Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*) by J. S. Bach (1685–1750) and Beethoven's (1770–1827) piano sonatas.

For the young, ambitious musician, being educated in Budapest was crucial, and it was here that he attended the Conservatory for two and a half years, between 1913 and 1916. During his first year he studied harmony and counterpoint with Zoltán Kodály. The recorded testimonies show that the professor immediately recognised the great talent and passionate nature of the student from Medjimurje. According to Lajos Kiss, Kodály used to say that Slavenski "was full of enthusiasm and a desire for more knowledge", and thus "in addition to compulsory tasks, (...) he produced numerous canons of every kind".¹⁴ Throughout his second and third year, Slavenski studied counterpoint and musical forms with Victor Herzfeld, Sziklosz taught him instrumentation, score-reading and acoustics, and Géza Molnár – aesthetics and history of music. World War I marked a temporary suspension of schooling for the remarkable student: he spent the next two years on the frontline of the war.

Josip Slavenski would reminisce about his Budapest studies with reverence. According to him, the significance of this incomplete three years of studying was invaluable, especially with regard to mastering the techniques of counterpoint and acquiring knowledge of acoustics.¹⁵ In Budapest he had already developed a particular affinity towards these fields, since at that time he, in a similar way to Bartók, determined his future lifelong fascination and preoccupation with numbers, proportions and the golden ratio, as the common denominators of nature, science, art in general, and music in particular, which collectively, in the case of Slavenski, subsequently resulted in his attempts to establish the theory of "astroacoustics".¹⁶

What further drew Slavenski the modernist closer to Bartók was an inclination toward experimenting and the incessant conquering of new sound-territories. It was Bartók himself who, in 1911, with his piano piece *Allegro barbaro*, made the first revolutionary, anti-Romantic step in that direction, announcing an entire stream of

¹⁴ Milana Slavenski, *Josip* (Beograd: Muzička škola "Josip Slavenski" – SOKOJ-MIC, 2006), 45.

¹⁵ For more details on Slavenski's study years in Budapest, see Slavenski, *Josip*, 43–48.

¹⁶ More on this topic can be seen in a very interesting and noteworthy article by Vlastimir Peričić, "Josip Slavenski i njegova 'astroakustika,'" *Medimurje* 7 (1985): 117–127 [The same article was also published in German language, in *Musiktheorie*, 3, Heft. I (1988): 55–70].

composers' modern interpretations of the spirit of Balkan music. Slavenski had already joined him on this path with his works as a student in Budapest – the piano pieces which represent the first, earliest examples of polytonality and the employment of sharp dissonances in Yugoslav music.

What was, however, crucial for the subsequent creative identity of Josip Slavenski was the close collaboration with Kodály and Bartók in their ethnomusicological work. Despite the fact that Bartók never taught Slavenski (at that time, Bartók was the head of the Piano Department), it can be assumed that the two of them had already met at the very beginning of Slavenski's studies at the Conservatory. This is testified to by an interesting anecdote that Slavenski, many years later, would gladly retell to his students. During his first year of attending the course of harmony, Professor Kodály never ceased to wonder why his otherwise talented and diligent student persistently and stubbornly harmonised a given melody in a minor tonality, using B flat instead of B. The student's response that he preferred it in such way, i.e. that it was "more beautiful like that", did not convince the professor, who subsequently complained to his colleague Bartók on one occasion. In solving this "riddle", Bartók exhibited profound intuition and perspicacity, asking his student to sing a few songs from his native region, Medjimurje. In these tunes, which were etched in Slavenski's musical memory and consciousness from his earliest childhood, Bartók found his answer and joyfully exclaimed "Eureka!" It was the characteristic B from the mixolydian mode, typical of melodies from Medjimurje, which drew Slavenski toward the so-called "erroneous" harmonisation.¹⁷

From that point on, Bartók took an increased personal interest in the gifted student. Aware of the destitution he was fighting against, he invited Slavenski to participate in the ethnomusicological work in exchange for a modest payment. The student was entrusted with the transcription of Kodály's and Bartók's melographic notations into clean copies. Having thus been in immediate contact not only with both of the researchers, but also with the material from the field, Slavenski would later often say that he had never in his life learnt more about folklore than from listening to Kodály's and Bartók's comments and discussions. Also, the foundation of his future, creative attitude to folklore and traditional music was gradually formed directly under the influence of Bartók. "I had the most direct access possible to his methods of research", he emphasised many times.¹⁸

His immediate proximity to the leading figures of Hungarian modernism completely determined the future orientation of Josip Slavenski: in Kodály's and Bartók's

17 See Slavenski, *Josip*, 46–47.

18 According to the recollections of Milana Slavenski, although the young student from Medjimurje had, in fact, respect for both Kodály and Bartók and their "unquestionably scholarly and artistic pursuit of truth", he felt "here and there, and not overly seldom, that they do not manage to consistently and utterly overcome their, perhaps even unconscious, but deep-rooted sense of national supremacy, when in the folklore of their neighbours, of subordinate Medjimurje in particular, see and underscore the primacy and predominance of the Hungarian influence. This is why his patriotic Medjimurje heart suffers and rebels." (Slavenski, *Josip*, 47). The patriotic indignation and revolt would, in Slavenski, reach its zenith several decades later, following the arrival in Belgrade of a copy of Bartók-Lord's book *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* (1951). For further details on the subject, see Sanja Radinović, "Stanislav Vinaver, Ježef Debreceni, Josip Slavenski i Bela Bartok u etnomuzikološkom diskursu (ili: o mogućim posledicama jedne stare polemike)," in *Josip Slavenski i njegovo doba*, ed. Mirjana Živković, 239–255. Concerning the marginalia of the renowned Serbian ethnomusicologist Miodrag Vasiljević, noted on the pages of the Serbian translation of Bartók-Lord's study, see Jelena Jovanović, "Marginalije Miodraga Vasiljevića o studiji Bele Bartoka *Morfologija srpsko-hrvatskih narodnih melodija*," [Cyrillic] *Muzikologija* [Musicology] 6 (2006): 365–393.

music, or, possibly, midway between their individual musical expressions, Slavenski found the key to his own creative path.

Having spent two years on the frontline of the war, in 1921, Slavenski resumed his studies in Prague, at the Department of Composition, under Josef Suk (1874–1935) and Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949). In the Czech capital in those years (1921–1923), at the concerts of the *International Society for Contemporary Music*, he could become acquainted with the latest avant-garde trends of contemporary music and of the Second Viennese School. However, like Bartók, having neither the inclination nor an understanding for avant-garde projects of deconstructing tradition, in Prague, Slavenski devoted himself to the study of the musical past, primarily of the masters of polyphony, form and harmony. “At that time”, Slavenski noted “my best friends were Palestrina (1525–1594), Bach and Beethoven”;¹⁹ in the same way, these masters played their part as the greatest “teachers” and role models in Bartók’s “evolution” as well. From the more recent past, both of them were drawn most to Debussy (1862–1918), whose innovative solutions related to harmonic language later led them towards the areas of modality, then bi- and polymodality, as well as to a markedly colouristic treatment of harmony and orchestration.

The first major international success of Josip Slavenski was the aforementioned *First String Quartet* from 1924. However, despite the accolades gained abroad, for many reasons it seemed as if Slavenski was not welcome in Zagreb, where he initially planned to settle after his studies and start a professional career. “The musical world [of Zagreb], having originated from higher social strata and having been brought up on classics, (...) looked down on Josip’s Medjimurje plebeity”, as Milena, Slavenski’s life partner, noted in her memoirs.²⁰ Still, even more than that, an obstacle to the acceptance of Slavenski in Zagreb his conspicuously modern, impulsive researcher’s attitude towards folklore, which was at odds with the moderate, dominant streams of the Croatian musical Moderna at the beginning of the third decade.

Unaccepted within the academic circles of Zagreb, in 1926, Slavenski permanently settled in Belgrade, from that time joining completely the trends of Serbian music as part of the Yugoslav region. It is necessary, however, to underline that Josip Slavenski, an otherwise leftist at heart, by his intimate orientation was, above all, a Yugoslav and a humanist. For him, music was the highest religion, a golden bridge to the brotherhood of all people, which would later, in the mid-1930s, be testified to most convincingly by his inspired and famed cantata *Symphony of the Orient* [Symphony of the Orient], or *Religiophony* [Religiofonija] (1934).

A further identified instance of the converging poetics of Bartók and Slavenski occurred at the time when Slavenski, during his sojourn in Paris in 1925, found himself in the wider circle of the *Zenitists*, the avant-garde artists from Yugoslavia, who, similar to the Dadaists and Futurists, maintained the belief that the old world of Western European culture was completely worn-out, having no capacity to further restore itself. The *Zenitists* opposed the idea of the Europeanisation of the so-called “small nations” in the Balkans with an idea and programme for the “Balkanisation of Europe”. Josip

19 Slavenski, *Josip*, 57.

20 *Ibid.*, 63.

Slavenski was not nearly as radical as this movement's leading poets and writers.²¹ Pursuing, in a creative sense, the concept and spirit of Bartók's *Allegro barbaro*, but also recognising in the rustic, rural, archaic layers of folklore the most fertile seeds for the transformational potential of contemporary music towards a new and authentic sonority and aesthetic, at that time Slavenski already found himself in the same field of ideas cherished by the "modern national schools" of the first half of the 20th century, out of which emerged the achievements of Stravinsky and Prokofiev (from the so-called "Russian period"), Leoš Janáček (1854–1928), Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók himself.²² The closest connection to Bartók is perhaps associated with Slavenski's inclination towards polyphonic forms and an archaised expression.

Convincing confirmations of the closeness of certain compositional procédés of Bartók and Slavenski could be provided by numerous examples, of which, on this occasion, only two characteristics are highlighted. These are the final movements of Bartók's *Fourth String Quartet* (1928) and Slavenski's *Second 'Lyric' Quartet* (1928), both composed in the form of a fugue, and two symphonic dances – Bartók's *Hungarian Peasant Songs* (1933) and the closing "Bulgarian Dance" of Slavenski's *Balkanophony* suite (1927).

The suite *Balkanophony*, on this occasion, also deserves closer attention. Striving for an integral representation of Balkan music, Slavenski realised the suite in eight movements, throughout which the genres of dance and song alternate: 1. Serbian Dance; 2. Albanian Song; 3. Turkish Dance; 4. Greek Song; 5. Romanian Dance; 6. My Song; 7. Bulgarian Dance. Thanks to the composer's publisher – Schott, the score aroused the interest of the renowned conductor Erich Kleiber (1890–1956), who also quickly ensured the *Balkanophony's* world premiere. Under the baton of Kleiber, Slavenski's suite was very successfully premiered by the members of the Belgrade and Zagreb Philharmonic, at the "Under the Linden Trees" theatre in Berlin ("Theater unter den linden"), on 25 January 1929. Thereafter, *Balkanophony*, with a total of 82 foreign performances, triumphed across Europe and the world: with interpretations by the greatest conductors of the time, it was performed in Buenos Aires (Kleiber), again in Berlin (Walter), Athens (Mitropoulos), Wiesbaden (Bölke), Munich, Warsaw, Hamburg, Nuremberg, Prague, in Russia, Copenhagen, Paris, London, etc.²³

Completing the picture with regard to the points of intersection between the artists' biographies and composers' poetics of Bartók and Slavenski, a few key moments

21 On Slavenski's connections with the Zenitist movement, see, e.g.: Sanja Grujić, "Veze Josipa Slavenskog sa zenitističkim pokretom," *Medimurje* 4 (1983): 53–63; Melita Milin, "Tonovi naričanja, melanholije i divljine – zenitistička pobuna i muzika," [Cyrillic] *Muzikologija* [Musicology] 5 (2005): 131–144; Katarina Tomašević, "Istok-Zapad u polemičkom kontekstu srpske muzike," [Cyrillic] *Muzikologija* [Musicology] 5: 119–130; Slavenski, *Josip*, 71–74; Irina Subotić, "Two Self-Portraits of Josip Slavenski," *New Sound* [Novi zvuk] 33 (2009): 65–76.

22 See the assessment of Josip Slavenski's position within the circle of the aforementioned composers in a noteworthy article by Bojan Buijić, "Daleki svijet muzikom dokučen," *Izraz* VII/11 (1963): 327.

23 For more details with regard to the international performances and the reception of *Balkanophony* see, e.g.: Roksanda Pejović, "Prilog monografiji Josipa Slavenskog. Mišljenja kritičara o njegovim kompozicijama u vremenu od 1920–1941. godine," *Zvuk* 3 (1981): 51–58; Ana Kara-Pešić, "Prepiska Josipa Slavenskog: odjeci kompozitorovih dela u inostranstvu," [Cyrillic] *Novi zvuk* [New Sound] 15 (2000): 117–126; Tatjana Marković, "Internacionalna delatnost Josipa Slavenskog u svetlu njegove korespondencije," in *Josip Slavenski i njegovo doba*, op. cit., 30–55. For one of the most relevant contemporary musicological insights into the cycle, see Samson, *Music in the Balkans*, 381–382.

which firmly position both of these creators in the field of modernism will now succinctly be indicated. Let us start with Bartók's famous words, cited in the *motto* of this text. Like Bartók, Josip Slavenski also possessed a "zest for life" and the seed of an ever conscious, inquisitive, creative quest for the underlying universal principals of "Nature, Science and Art".²⁴ Being, like Bartók, a great lover of spending time in nature, Slavenski was an avid mountaineer and an amateur astronomer, a true modern Pythagorean, equally immersed in both the micro-physical world of atoms and the periodic system of the elements, as well as the macro-world of the cosmos and its harmony. Believing, as did Bartók, in the uniqueness of the elements upon which the entire universe rests, he tirelessly sought the meaning of musical aesthetics in forms "that have not yet been corrupted by the Western man's hand".²⁵ Resembling Bartók in temperament, in whom tenderness and passion coexisted equally, Slavenski was a master of lyrical expression and of warm chanting tunes, but also, in the same way, exhibited an affinity for vehement, robust dancing rhythms, at times achieving a musical expression of pronounced rudimentary force.

In the process of shaping his individual musical speech, Slavenski, like Bartók, in works inspired by folklore, strived to achieve a synthesis of a seemingly "barbaric primitivism" and the so-called "rational constructivism".²⁶ Deeply interested in the phenomenon of pure, "untainted" folklore, as was Bartók, he confined himself neither to the region of his native Medjimurje, nor to the Balkans, as his wider musical homeland. Similarly to Bartók, he travelled the whole world as a result of music, realising, for example, in the *Symphony of the Orient*, fruitful creative dialogues with Arabic, Turkish, Jewish and Indian musical traditions. Like Bartók, he essentially believed that true progress in music can be achieved only with the new synthesis of western and eastern traditions.²⁷ In light of this, it is therefore not a coincidence in the least that Bach, Beethoven and Debussy were shared role models of both composers.²⁸

Nevertheless, the manner in which Bartók treated folk melodies was most likely the main guiding force for Josip Slavenski. Not infrequently would they both quote a tune in its original form, and would not vary it in succeeding occurrences. Instead, they would intervene on the "periphery"; unaltered, the tune would be repeated a number of times, which would ultimately result in an increase in tension, until the climax at the very end of the composition, or its segment. Comparative analysis of their mutual, typically modernistic compositional procedures identifies a few additional significant characteristics: these are monothematic thinking, an abundant and diverse

24 On the reflections of Bartók's relationship with nature in his creative poetics, see Maria Anna Harley, "Natura naturans, natura naturata" and Bartók's Nature Music Idiom," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, T. 36, Fasc. 3-4 [Proceedings of the International Bartok Colloquium, Szombathely, July 3-5, Part I] (1995): 329-349.

25 A fragment of Slavenski's response to the questions posed to contemporary Yugoslav composers in the journal *Muzika* [Music], in 1928, is paraphrased here; see "Anketa o nacionalnom muzičkom stilu," [A survey on the national music style] [Cyrillic] *Muzika*, 1/5-6 (1928): 158.

26 Ibid.

27 "Anketa...", 158; see also Tomašević, *Na rasršću Istoka i Zapada*, 24-27.

28 Bartók's assessment of Debussy's music and its reflections on Bartók's works is convincingly written about by László Vikárius, *Modell s inspiráció Bartók zenei gondolkodásában. A hatás jelenségének értelmezéséhez* [Model and inspiration in Bartók's musical thinking: toward the interpretation of the phenomenon of influence] (Pécs: Ars Longa Jelenkor Kiadó, 1999); see also a more detailed account of Vikárius's book, written by Klára Óricz, "The Anxiety of Influence and Comfort of Style," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* T. 40, Fasc. 4 (1999): 459-474.

use of polyphonic, contrapuntal techniques, as well as the harmonic language, often grounded in modality and the pentatonic.

To demonstrate each of the aforementioned characteristics would require a separate study. Consequently, the focus here is on one unusual circumstance, which also, in a specific way reveals the relatedness between Bartók and Slavenski. Despite everything that has thus far been discussed, Josip Slavenski would, actually, vigorously and briskly decline to make any comments on the possible influence Bartók had on his evolutionary path as a composer. And not only Bartók's influence, but anyone else's as well! Even of himself, he would rather refer to as an autodidact, asserting that everything "new" that his music might possibly have brought, "he learnt from the very folklore, and not from the music of others".²⁹ Thus, he once again stood shoulder to shoulder with his great Hungarian contemporary, who himself, as László Vikárius convincingly and inspiringly wrote, by attempting to escape his personal anxiety of possible visible influences, found in folklore not only his psychological refuge, but also the most powerful ally for concealing the traces of inspiration that he would find, in different stages of his work, in the models of the art music of both his predecessors as well as his contemporaries.³⁰

The second story. Marko Tajčević

In contrast to Slavenski, Marko Tajčević, a dedicated supporter of the national idea in music and a great admirer of the legacy of Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856–1914) – the founder of Serbian musical Romanticism, never felt the need to conceal the origin of the initial impulse which directed him toward the path on which he would win recognition as one of the most prominent representatives of the interwar Yugoslav and European musical modernism. Tajčević was only twenty-five when in Zagreb, where he lived and worked at the time, he heard Bartók's music for the first time at a concert in 1925, and somehow managed to obtain the scores for the piano compositions.

"The first time I was leafing through Bartók's works", Tajčević openly admitted, "I was astonished. I felt something special, the rebirth of novelty in music and that absorbed me instantly".³¹ The first powerful creative echo of his fascination with Bartók soon occurred in Tajčević, resulting, in 1926, in the creation of the piano cycle *Seven Balkan Dances* [Sedam balkanskih igara].

The subsequent recognition of this youthful accomplishment of Marko Tajčević convincingly confirmed that the cycle was a true masterpiece, one of those rare and, therefore, quite extraordinary, crucial achievements that have the power to divert dominant trends of national music toward new, hitherto unexplored and unconquered sound-territories.

Along with the works of Josip Slavenski, the *Seven Balkan Dances* by Marko Tajčević are considered not only the most indicative accomplishments of the national

29 Tomašević, *Na raskršću Istoka i Zapada*, 243.

30 Cf. Móricz, "The Anxiety of Influence...", 461.

31 Dragoslav Adamović, *Razgovori sa savremenikima. Ko je na vas presudno uticao i zašto?* [Cyrillic] (Beograd: "Privredna štampa", 1983), 252–254.

musical modernism, but also among the most successful representatives of the contemporary musical views of the Balkans in the first half of the 20th century.

In musicology and music-theory literature, it has already been established that there is a wide range of relatedness between Tajčević's *Dances* and *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm*, with which Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* concludes.³² Obvious analogies can easily be discerned in other examples as well, by comparing, for instance, "Bagpipe Music" (*Mikrokosmos*, No. 136) with the first dance of Tajčević's cycle.

Similarly to Slavenski's *Balkanophony*, Tajčević's *Seven Balkan Dances* achieved great international success: they found their way into the repertoire of Artur Schnabel, Ignaz Friedman, Nikolai Orlov, Kendall Taylor, and others. The renowned violinist Jascha Heifetz performed them worldwide, adapted for violin and piano,³³ whereas the eminent German pianist Walter Georgii ranked them alongside "top-class Eastern European music, which includes the piano suite from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, *Czech Dances* by Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959), *Romanian Dances* and *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* by Béla Bartók." (...) "A rich burning dance rhythm and a full-blooded musical tissue give this opus an elemental power", Georgii wrote in 1950.³⁴

There is no doubt that Georgii rightly acknowledged Tajčević's *Dances* in the same sphere in which the "Balkan segment" of Bartók's opus was realised. This innovative picture of what were, up to that point, unexplored and unfamiliar musical soundscapes of the Balkans, as a zone of intersecting and permeating influences coming from the East and West, North and South, echoed as a real challenge to the musical world of the European West. That the chosen path, sensed in the aura of Bartók's modernism, was right, Slavenski and Tajčević received confirmation with the exceptionally favourable international reception of *Balkanophony* and *Seven Balkan Dances*, the compositions which widely open the way for the integration of the than Yugoslav music onto the world's stage.

In the coda of this paper, the following should be noted: although Josip Slavenski and Marko Tajčević, as composers, emerged from the very orbit of Béla Bartók, they did not, however, remain as mere satellites of the Hungarian master, but equal to him, as followers and companions, they participated in the exciting modernistic adventure of creating a new and fresh, rich, colourful and beautiful musical universe, in which Balkan and Eastern European folkloric traditions experienced, in a Bakhtinian sense, a "celebration of their rebirth".

32 For a meticulous comparative analysis of the compositions, illustrated with score examples, see the article by Anica Sabo, "Bela Bartok - Marko Tajčević," in *Delo i delatnost Mihaila Vukdragovića i Marka Tajčevića* [Cyrillic], ed. Dejan Despić (Beograd: SANU, 2004), 113–131.

33 Vlastimir Peričić, *Muzički stvaraoči u Srbiji* (Beograd: Prosveta, s.a.), 540.

34 Walter Georgii, *Klaviermusik* (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1950), according to Dejan Despić, *Marko Tajčević* (Beograd: Udruženje kompozitora Srbije, 1972).

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POVZETEK

Ni dvoma, da sta celostno delovanje in kreativni dosežki Béle Bartóka (1881–1945) odločilno vplivali na razvoj muzikologije in etnomuzikologije, v nekdanji Jugoslaviji. Glavni namen dotične raziskave je raziskati in pretresti modalitete Bartókovega skladateljskega vpliva v prvi polovici 20. stoletja.

Poudarka sta na Josipu Slavenskem (1896–1955) in Marku Tajčeviću (1900–1984), dveh pomembnih skladateljih jugoslovanske medvojne glasbene zgodovine. Slavenski in Tajčević, ki sta bila zavezana balkanski ljudski glasbi, torej glasbi njune domovine, sta ustvarila – vsak po svoje – nov, svež in inventiven glasbeni jezik, čigar ekspresivna svežina in kakovost sta dosegla velik odmev v tujini. Slavenski je mednarodno zaslovel zlasti s svojo slikovito suito za orkester *Balkanofonija* (1927), medtem ko je Tajčević zablestel s svojim učinkovitim ciklom za klavir *Sedem balkanskih iger* (1926). Kljub dejstvu, da so med vojnama obe deli večkrat po vsem svetu igrali slavni orkestri, tema dvema jugo-vzhodnima Bartókovima sopotnikoma še zmeraj posvečajo zelo malo pozornosti. Nedavno izjemo predstavlja knjiga *Music in the Balkans* avtorja Jima Samsona (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013).

Sprva je prikazana zgodnja biografija Josipa Slavenskega, kjer je izpostavljen študij na Konservatoriju v Budimpešti (1913–1916). Slavenski je tedaj pomagal Kodályju in Bartóku pri njenem etnomuzikološkem delu. V primerjavi z drugimi jugoslovanskimi skladatelji je Slavenski (naj)bolje poznal Bartókovo delo in njegove moderne ideje, postopke in strategije. Prikazati podobnosti med njima predstavlja bistvo

nadaljnega koraka raziskave. Ne glede na dejstvo, da sklepi v članku jasno pokažejo, da njuno glasbo in svet idej prepredajo mnoge skupne značilnosti, ki sodijo v kontekst modernizma, kako je bil Slavenski, enako kot Bartók, zaskrbljen glede modernističnih vplivov in kako je, znova vzporedno Bartóku, našel zatočišče pred to skrbjo v ljudski glasbi (Cf. Vikárius 1999).

Drugi je Marko Tajčević, srbski skladatelj, ki je živel in delal v Zagrebu do leta 1940. V nasprotju s Slavenskim je Tajčević prostodušno priznal pomen lastnega navdušenja nad Bartókom: v svojem iskarnju novosti v glasbenem izrazu mu je Bartókova klavirska glasba služila kot vzor in ga v najširši meri spodbudila h komponiranju njegovih privlačnih in tehnično zahtevnih *Sedem balkanskih iger*. Zadnji del predstavlja mednarodno recepcijo Tajčevićevih dosežkov.

V zaključnih opazkah so potrjene začetne premise: kljub dejstvu, da najdemo v opusih Slavenskega in Tajčevića na široko posejane sledove Bartóka, ta izjemna skladatelja ne smemo imeti za posnemovalca madžarskega mojstra; prav nasprotno, nista bila zgolj uspešna Bartókova naslednika, ampak tudi sopotnika na skupni, razburljivi dogodivščini ustvarjanja novih, sodobnih in barvitih slik balkanske glasbene tradicije.