

# CROATIAN CLARINET CONCERTOS

## THE CULTIVATION OF MUSICAL TRADITIONS AFTER 1952

by Kristine Dizon

**C**roatia's musical tradition is a reflection of its turbulent cultural and political history. These factors influenced how composers thought about and wrote music, and can explain why the first clarinet concerto was not composed until the middle of the 20th century. There are few clarinet concertos in existence composed by Croatian composers, all written after 1952, and there are no existing scholarly materials and few existing recordings pertaining to Croatian clarinet concertos.

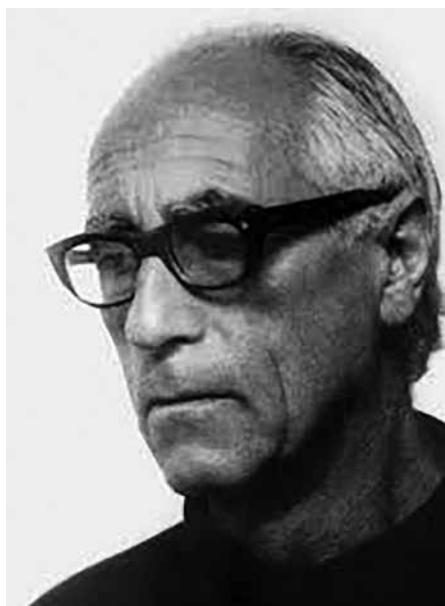
The works chosen for this study are Bruno Bjelinski's *Koncert za klarinet i gudacki orkestar* (*Clarinet Concerto with String Orchestra*) of 1952, Emil Cossetto's *Koncert za clarinet* (*Concerto for Clarinet*) of 1972 and Stjepan Šulek's *Koncert za klarinet i komorni orkestar* (*Concerto for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra*), written in 1967. These composers and works were assessed according to the quality of compositional writing for the instrument, how often the works were performed, and their historical significance in Croatia. After

an examination of Croatia's history, a discussion of these three concertos will illustrate the connection between Croatia's cultural and musical history and how musical traditions were cultivated and realized from the former Yugoslavia.

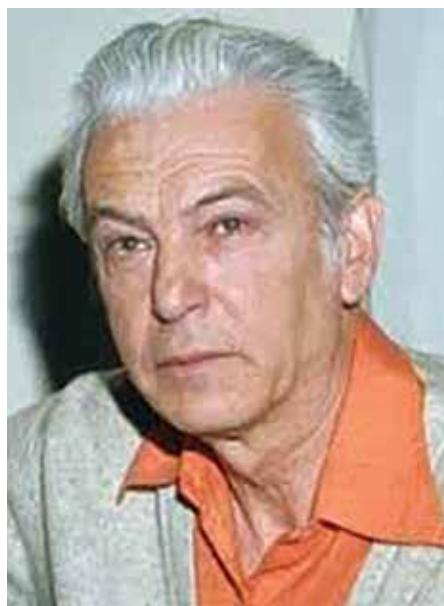
A majority of the information discussed in this article is derived from interviews with the following clarinetists: Giovanni Cavallin, Radovan Cavallin, Davorin Brozic, Milko Pravdić, Abdul-Aziz Hussein and Andrija Blagojevic. This article is dedicated to the recent passing of Giovanni Cavallin, for if it was not for him this research would not have been possible.

### CROATIA'S HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

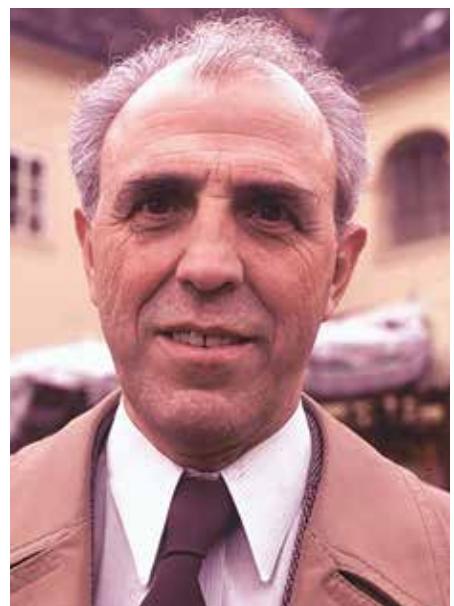
Croatia's political and cultural history played an important role in its musical development. Its history spans over several centuries: Kingdom of Croatia (925-1102), Hungarian Union (1102-1527), Habsburg Monarchy (1527-1918), Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941), Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945), Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1991), War of Independence (1991-1995) and



Bruno Bjelinski



Stjepan Šulek



Emil Cossetto



Giovanni Cavallin

Independent Croatia (1995-present). Croatia's history is unique because besides the country's independence from 1941 to 1945 and again from 1995 to the present, it has been a part of Hungary, Venice and the former Yugoslavia. According to Miroslav Mavra and Lori McNeil, "The Balkans – of which Croatia is a significant constituent – having been a part of the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Habsburg empires, has been devastated, rebuilt and continuously influenced by the confluence of divergent imperial forces and opposing tenets."<sup>1</sup> Throughout this period of history, Croatia struggled to form a national identity separate from these influences.

Croatia's musical culture began to take shape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the nationalism that arose during the Illyrian Movement from 1830 to 1850. This movement promoted cultural awareness and encouraged the development of the independent state of Croatia. Gorana Doliner considered this to be a "new national orientation created in music."<sup>2</sup> According to Mavra and McNeil, "Music, media, literature and education were used and manipulated to result in ethnic socialization – the development of actions, attitudes, values and perceptions of different ethnic groups."<sup>3</sup> According to Doliner, "During the first half of the 20th

century, the period in which a national orientation in Croatian art music was dominant, most of the composers worked, some more than others, on the base of folk music material."<sup>4</sup> Folk music was considered a popular musical genre in Croatia, and composers often incorporated it into their own works, playing an important role in shaping Croatia's musical identity.

The Independent State of Croatia and World War II hindered Croatia's musical development. It was only after Croatia recovered from World War II and formed an alliance with the former Yugoslavia that they were able to invest in the country's culture, which explains why a prominent tradition of music education did not emerge until the middle of the 20th century. Croatia's first music school (Tonschule des Agramer Musikvereins) can be traced back to 1829 during the Austrian Empire. In 1921, it was later renamed the Kraljevska Mužička Akademija after the Austrian Empire dissolved and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was established. It was not until 1923 that the teachers in the music schools were recognized as professors. After World War II, music schools were divided into primary and secondary levels, which are referred to as Vatroslav Lisinski, and the schools officially recognized at the university level were later renamed the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb (Zagreb Music Academy).

Even though the development of Croatian music schools showed growth, music education was poor. Giovanni Cavallin – renowned Croatian clarinet pedagogue and the first clarinet student at the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb after World War II – stated that it was difficult to cultivate a musical tradition because there were no qualified teachers, musicians, or students aspiring to become classical musicians in Croatia. The existing musical traditions at the time included military band and popular gypsy music. In addition, Cavallin mentioned that after World War II, the country was politically unstable and it took a great deal of time to rebuild the damage caused from the war. He stated that "in general, instrumental concerto repertoire in Croatia was sparse because of lack of resources and the aftermath of the Second World War."<sup>5</sup>



Davorin Brozic

## THE CROATIAN CLARINET CONCERTO

Politics and war played a role in the delayed development of the clarinet concerto in Croatia. Even though Bjelinski and Šulek wrote their clarinet concertos after World War II, Croatia still needed to recover from the physical and economical damage caused by the war, and financial resources were limited for musicians to perform and record these works. The recovery period after World War II and the War of Independence (which ended in 1995) could have played a role in why these compositions were overlooked, forgotten, and performed not in Croatia but in other countries instead. In an interview, Davorin Brozic, principal clarinetist of the Croatian National Opera, stated:

Šulek's concerti were written and first performed in Belgrade, Serbia. For Šulek, for about 35 years, you know ... they had this Serbian recording. No one really took care [to record these works]. Even with Bjelinski and Cossetto. So, from 1967 [when Šulek's concerto was written] you don't receive the first printed edition until 2007.

The recovery period after these two wars played a significant role in Croatia's



Ernest Ačkun



Milenko Stefanovic



Josip Nochta

musical development, which can explain why these compositions may have been performed and premiered in Serbia.

Currently, there are few recordings of Croatian clarinet concertos. It was not until 1974, nearly 22 years after it was composed, that Josip Nochta made a recording of Bjelinski's clarinet concerto with Tonko Ninic conducting the Komorni Studio Zagrebacke Filharmonie "Arti Musices." The second performance was done by Zeljko Milic as part of his Briljantne Varijacije recording with the Split Chamber Orchestra with Pavle Despalj conducting – nearly 30 years after Nochta's recording. A possible explanation for this long gap is due to the War for Independence in Croatia from 1991 to 1995. The only recordings of Šulek's clarinet concerto that exist are radio performances by Davorin Brozic with Mladen Tarbuk and the Croatian RTV Orchestra in 2007, Branko Ovčarić with Pavle Dešpalj and the same orchestra in 1989, and Ernest Ackun with Zivojin Zdravkovic and the Belgrade Philharmonic in 1984. There was a radio recording of Cossetto's clarinet concerto performed by Milenko Stefanovic with Krešimir Šipuš and the Croatian Radio Symphony Orchestra.

### BRUNO BJELINSKI

Bruno Bjelinski (1919-1992) was born in Trieste, Italy. When he was an infant, his mother died, and he was left with his grandmother. As a child, Bjelinski studied piano with Alfons Gutschy. While he was pursuing his doctorate in law, Bjelinski also studied composition at the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb with Blagoje Bersa and Fran Lhotka. He was influenced by European music at the beginning of the 20th century, particularly in the structural elements of his compositions. During World War II, Bjelinski was placed in an internment camp. In 1943, he joined the Partisans on the Croatian island of Korčula until the war ended. After the war, Bjelinski returned to Croatia to work at the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb.

Bjelinski's early works share similarities with those of Sergei Prokofiev. Bjelinski stated,

It is strange that in many elements my early music was like that of Prokofiev, whose scores we did not have at the time and who was a long time not known among us. And then, when somewhere in the 1920s in the Balkan Cinema I heard Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* for the first time, I was stunned. I

felt that my music was akin to his without my having known him.<sup>6</sup>

Bjelinski's compositions are also influenced by his experiences in Europe, the Mediterranean and Brazil. His music follows neoclassical traditions, which are evidenced in the architecture and harmonic language he uses in his compositions.

Bruno Bjelinski's *Koncert za klarinet i gudacki orkestar* is Croatia's first clarinet concerto. He began composing this work while he was in Teresopolis, Brazil, in 1952. This work is written in four movements: Allegro vivace, Allegretto grazioso, Andante and Allegro molto. In an interview, Radovan Cavallin stated that the Allegro molto was composed on the boat, while Bjelinski was traveling to Brazil.

### STJEPAN ŠULEK

Stjepan Šulek (1914-1986) was a composer, conductor, violinist and music teacher born in Zagreb. He received his early music education from the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb, where he studied violin with Václav Humi and composition with Blagoje Bersa. He was an active performer as a soloist and chamber musician. He performed with the Zagreb String Quartet from 1936-38 and the Macek-Šulek-Janigro Trio from 1939-45. As a professor, he taught violin, composition and orchestration at

the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb. Later on, Šulek launched a successful career as a conductor. He served as the principal conductor of the Zagreb Philharmonic and the Zagreb Chamber Orchestra and was a regular guest conductor in Serbia and Slovenia. According to Brozic, Šulek spent a lot of time in Serbia, which could also be the reason why he had Belgrade Philharmonic principal clarinetist Ernest Ačkun performing his works. Šulek's deep involvement in Serbia and relationship with Ačkun can explain why his clarinet concerto was performed and premiered in Serbia.

Šulek was considered one of the most versatile artists in the history of Croatian music. His compositions first appeared after World War II. Šulek's catalog includes an extensive list of symphonies, concertos, sonatas, chamber music, operas, ballets, cantatas, choir works and song cycles. His compositional style is described as neoclassical, a synthesized combination of Baroque polyphony and classical and romantic forms. Šulek composed with the audience in mind. He believed that

"music carries a human element and that its deepest meaning is derived from the sense of calm it creates for the listener, awakening an aspiration for beauty, making one a better and happier person."<sup>7</sup>

Šulek's *Koncert za klarinet i komorni orkestar* was written for Ernest Ačkun, who premiered it on December 20, 1968, with the Belgrade Philharmonic and conductor Charles Bruck. The piece was actually written in 1967 and was the only work Šulek composed that year. Ačkun recorded this work in 1984 with the same orchestra with conductor Zivojin Zdravkovic. On several occasions, Šulek served as a guest conductor for the Belgrade Philharmonic. Šulek's guest appearances with the orchestra and Ačkun's success as the prizewinner of the International Munich Competition in 1954 inspired Šulek to write and dedicate the concerto to him. In 2007, Brozic was the first Croatian clarinetist to perform this work, with Mladen Tarbuk and the Croatian Radio Symphony Orchestra. He was also responsible for revising the current printed edition.

In an interview, Brozic stated that Šulek was influenced by Russian composers, whose style is reflected in his harmonic language and how he constructed the melodies in this concerto. Normally, concerto works were written in three movements. Despite Šulek composing this work in just two movements labeled as "I" and "II – Tema con variazioni," it follows traditional classical forms. Šulek loosely uses classical structures in his two-movement clarinet concerto, but expands his harmonic language through his use of chromaticism and extended chords, similar to the compositional techniques developed in the late Romantic period.

### EMIL COSSETTO

Emil Cossetto (1918-2006) was born in Trieste, which was part of Croatia at the time. He was a Croatian composer, conductor, choirmaster and music teacher. In 1947, he graduated with a conducting diploma from the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb. Cossetto was considered "the founder of the Jozza Vlahovic and the Mose

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Pijade Jewish Choirs in Zagreb and was a leading force in Croatian choral singing.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, he directed the Zagreb Radio Mixed Choir and the Lado Ensemble for Folk Dances and Songs. For a short time, he also conducted the Symphony Orchestra of the former Yugoslav National Army in Belgrade.<sup>9</sup>

Cossetto was responsible for furthering the development of amateur choir music. As a composer, he was more known for incorporating native folk elements into his music, in particular, Croatian and Jewish melodies. He composed many pieces for choir, the best known of which are found in the international folk dance community, such as “Ladarke,” “Moja Diri Dika,” “Posavski Drmes (Kisa Pada),” “Dobri Denek” and many other works from Croatia and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>10</sup> He was considered a musician for the people. He believed that folk music and poetry celebrate life and nature, and composed music that would be understood and accepted by the audience. For Cossetto, his folk-influenced compositions were representative of humanity in the beauty of its melodies and harmonies. Cossetto’s compositions were filled with a spectrum of emotions that served as a testament to his spirituality.<sup>11</sup>

Even though Cossetto was mostly known as a choir composer, he also wrote for instruments, including his clarinet concerto written in 1970. The concerto is in three movements: “Fanfare – Quasi Scherzo,” “Intermezzo” and “Finale.” It was first performed by the Simfonijski orkestar RT Zagreb (Zagreb Radio Television Symphony Orchestra) with conductor Kresimir Sipus with Milenko Stefanovic as the soloist. Even though Cossetto did not

use any of the traditional folk instruments, he incorporated folk elements in his clarinet concerto. Folk music characteristics used in this concerto include repetitive melodies, isometric meter changes, the use of the pentatonic scale and simple harmonies.

## CONCLUSION

The repertoire chosen for this study illustrates how Croatian composers wrote for the clarinet in the middle of the 20th century. Bjelinski wrote the first Croatian clarinet concerto while he was travelling to Brazil, with each movement following traditional classical structures. Cossetto also used traditional classical structures, but also incorporated folk melodies into his clarinet concerto, illustrating how he related to his own musical identity. The prevalence of these traditional forms plays an important role in understanding how Croatian musical identities were constructed and how the clarinet concerto developed in the middle of the 20th century.

## CROATIAN CLARINET CONCERTOS

- Bruno Bjelinski – *Clarinet Concerto with String Orchestra* (1952)  
Boris Papandopulo – *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (1960)  
Stjepan Šulek – *Concerto for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra* (1967)  
Rudolf Brucci – *Concerto for Clarinet and Strings* (1970)  
Emil Cossetto – *Concerto for Clarinet* (1972)  
Miroslav Miletic – *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (1978)  
Emil Cossetto – *Concerto for Clarinet “Rustico”* (1989)  
Olja Jelaska Na Suncanoj Strani – *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (2010) ❁

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[An earlier version of this article was published by the *Clarinet and Saxophone Society of Great Britain* in *Clarinet & Saxophone*, Vol. 43, No.1 (Spring 2018). This version includes several updates and corrections. Ed.]

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Miroslav Mavra and Lori McNeill, “Identity Formation and Music – A Case Study of Croatian Experience,” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2.
- 2 Gorana Donliner, “The Folk Idiom in Croatian Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Institute for Musicalogical Research*, 18 (1987), 56.
- 3 John M. O’Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, *Music and Conflict* (Champaign-Urbana, 2010). 6.
- 4 Doliner, 51.
- 5 Interview with Giovanni Cavallin, 11 January 2017.
- 6 Bruno Bjelinski, *Koncert za klarinet i gudacki orkestar* (Zagreb, Croatia: Croatian Music Information Centre, 2009), XI.
- 7 Ivan Supicic, “Stjepan Šulek: 1914-1986,” *Razred za glabenu umjetnost i muzikologija* (Zagreb, 1987).
- 8 “Composer Emil Cossetto Dies in Zagreb,” *World Music Central News Department*. July 14, 2006, <http://worldmusiccentral.org/2006/07/14/composer-emil-cossetto-dies-in-zagreb/> (accessed May 14, 2017).
- 9 “Ladarke,” California Multicultural Arts Institute, 2013, [www.mendocinofolklorecamp.com/ladarke.html](http://www.mendocinofolklorecamp.com/ladarke.html) (accessed May 14, 2017).
- 10 “Composer Emil Cossetto Dies in Zagreb.”
- 11 “Mjesoviti pjevacki zbor: Emil Cossetto,” [www.mpz-ecossetto.hr/cossetto.htm](http://www.mpz-ecossetto.hr/cossetto.htm) (accessed May 14, 2017).

## ABOUT THE WRITER



An international artist and teacher, Kristine Dizon has performed in Europe, Asia and South America.

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