

CROATIAN CLARINET CONCERTOS

Only eight Croatian clarinet concertos have so far been written, the earliest dating from 1952. Kristine Dizon summarises her research on this fascinating subject and introduces three of the concertos and their composers

Only eight clarinet concertos exist by Croatian composers: three with strings and five with full orchestra, all written since 1952. The composers are Bruno Bjelinski, Emil Cossetto, Stjepan Šulek, Rudolf Brucci, Miroslav Miletić, Boris Papandopulo, Aldo Kezić, and Olja Jelaska. There are no existing scholarly materials and few recordings pertaining to these works. In this article I will look at Bjelinski's *Koncert za klarinet i gudacki orkestar*, Cossetto's *Koncert za klarinet* and Šulek's *Koncert za klarinet i komorni orkestar*,¹ discussing their compositional style and their historical significance in Croatia.

¹ The following terms are translated from Croatian to English. *Koncert za klarinet i gudacki orkestar* is translated as clarinet concerto with string orchestra. *Koncert za klarinet i komorni orkestar* translates to concerto for clarinet and chamber orchestra.

Gradec in Zagreb, Croatia



The Pula Arena, the amphitheatre located in Pula, Croatia

Bjelinski's compositions are also influenced by his life experiences in Europe, the Mediterranean and his visit to Brazil. Some of his works are reminiscent of Sergei Prokofiev. He 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.'³

Bjelinski's music follows neo-classical 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.

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 Vaclav Humi and composition with Blagoje Bersa. 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 he launched a successful career as a conductor, serving as the principal conductor of the Zagreb Philharmonic and the Zagreb Chamber Orchestra, and as 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 Ernest Arckun performing his works. Davorin Brozic, principal clarinetist of the Croatian National Opera, stated:

'Šulek [...] spent a lot of time in Belgrade. And there he met Ernest Ackun and I think he motivated Šulek. I think it was him. He played in orchestra. It's the most common way of getting a concerto. If you look to the history, you know. There's always some guy playing in the orchestra.'

Šulek's deep involvement in Serbia can explain why his clarinet concerto was performed and premiered in Serbia, along with the relationship he cultivated with the Belgrade Philharmonic's principal clarinetist.

Šulek was considered one of the most versatile artists in the history of Croatian music. His compositions first appeared after

the second world war, and he composed with the audience in mind. His catalogue 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 synthesised combination of baroque polyphony, classical, and romantic forms.

Šulek's *Koncert za klarinet i komorni orkestar* was written for the principal clarinetist of the Beogradska filharmonija, Ernest Ackun.⁴ This concerto was premiered on 20 December 1968 with the Beogradska filharmonija. Charles Bruck was the conductor. Even though it was premiered in 1968, it was actually written in 1967 and was the only work Šulek composed that year. The same clarinetist recorded this work in 1984 with the same orchestra under conductor Zivojin Zdravkovic. On several occasions, Šulek served as a guest conductor for the Beogradska filharmonija.

Šulek's guest appearances with the orchestra and Ackun's success as the prize winner of the International Munich Competition in 1954 inspired him to write the concerto and dedicate it 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.

Brozic stated that Šulek was influenced by Russian composers, which is reflected in his harmonic language and the way he constructed the melodies in this concerto. Despite Šulek composing this work in only two movements labelled 'I.' and 'II. Tema con variazioni', they follow traditional classical forms.

Emil Cossetto

Emil Cossetto (1918-2006) was born in Trieste. 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 the founder of the Joza Vlahovic and the Mose Pijade Jewish Choirs in Zagreb and was a leading force in Croatian choral singing.' 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.

Cossetto was responsible for furthering the development of amateur choir music. As a composer, he was known for incorporating native folk elements into his music, in particular Croatian and Jewish melodies as well as melodies from other

³ Bjelinski, Bruno, *Koncert za klarinet i gudacki orkestar* (Zagreb, Croatia: Croatian Music Information Centre, 2009).

⁴ Beogradska filharmonija translates to Belgrade Philharmonic.

Croatia's historical narrative

Croatia's political and cultural history played an important role in its musical development. Its history spans 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 independent Croatia (1995-present). Croatia's history is unique because, apart from 1941 to 1945 and from 1995 to the present, it has been a part of Hungary, Venice and the former Yugoslavia. Throughout these periods, Croatia has struggled to form a national identity separate from these influences.

This complexity is not only evident in Croatia's music, but also in other aspects of its culture. For example, there is the juxtaposition of the Austrian architecture in Zagreb and the Roman coliseum in Pula Istria. This illustrates how difficult it has been for Croatia to cultivate a national identity due to the countless transformations it has undergone.

Nationalism has helped shaped Croatia's musical culture. This began in the 19th century with the Illyrian Movement from 1830 to 1850 and promoted cultural awareness around the development of the independent state of Croatia. Folk music is considered a popular musical genre in Croatia, and composers often incorporated this into their works, which played an important role in shaping Croatia's musical identity.

The second world war hindered Croatia's musical development. It was only after Croatia recovered from this war and formed an alliance with the former Yugoslavia that investment was made 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 dates back to 1829 during the Austrian Empire. It was called Tonschule des Agramer Musikvereins. In 1921, it was renamed the Kraljevska Muzička Akademija after the Austrian Empire dissolved and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was established. It was not until 1923 when teachers in the music schools were recognised as professors. After the second world war, music schools were divided into different levels, and the music school officially recognised at the university level was later renamed the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb.²

Another reason for the lack of instrumental concertos in Croatia could be that classical music was not considered a popular genre

Even though the development of Croatian music schools showed growth, music education was poor. Giovanni Cavallin, a Croatian clarinet pedagogue, has 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 the second world war, the country was politically unstable and it took a great deal of time to rebuild after the damage caused by the war. In an interview in 2017 he said: 'In general, instrumental concerto repertoire in Croatia was sparse because of lack of resources and the aftermath of the second world war.'

The Croatian clarinet concerto: Bjelinski, Šulek and Cossetto

Politics and war played a role in the late development of the clarinet concerto in Croatia. Even though Bjelinski and Šulek wrote their clarinet concertos some years after the second world war, Croatia still needed to recover from the physical and economical damage caused by the war. This recovery period could have played a role in why these compositions were overlooked, forgotten or mainly performed outside Croatia. In a recent 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. Even with Bjelinski

Instrumental concerto repertoire in Croatia was sparse because of lack of resources and the aftermath of the second world war

and Cossetto. So, from 1967 [when Šulek's concerto was written] you don't receive the first printed edition until 2007. No one took care [to record these works] and that's it.'

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

Another reason for the lack of instrumental concertos in Croatia could be that classical music was not considered a popular genre. According to Giovanni Cavallin, gypsy and band music were more popular when he was growing up during the 1930s and 40s. In addition, Cavallin states that during the 1940s and 50s there was no systemised music education programme in Croatia. After the second world war, Cavallin was the first clarinet student at the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb.

Bruno Bjelinski

Bruno Bjelinski (1919-1992) was born in Trieste. He studied piano with Alfons Gutschy. Bjelinski studied composition at the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb with Blagoje Bersa and Fran Lhotka. He was influenced by European music to the beginning of the 20th century, in particular the structural elements of this music. After the second world war, Bjelinski returned to Croatia to work at the Muzicka Akademija Zagreb. ➡

² Muzicka Akademija Zagreb translates to the Zagreb Music Academy.

European countries. He composed many pieces for choir, the best known of which are found in the international folk dance community, such as 'Ladarke', 'Moja Diru Dika', 'Posavski Drmes (Kisa Pada)', 'Dobri Denek' and many other works from Croatia and the former Yugoslavia. 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.

Folk music is considered a popular musical genre in Croatia, and composers often incorporated this into their works

Cossetto's clarinet concerto was written in 1970. The concerto is in three movements: 'Fanfare – Quasi Scherzo', 'Intermezzo' and 'Finale'. It was first performed by the Simfonijski orkestar HRT Zagreb with conductor Kresimir Sipus with Milenko Stefanovic as the soloist. Cossetto's knowledge of instrumental accompaniment is derived from Mozart in his choral works. His compositional catalogue included cantatas and concertos using structures from the classical period. 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, the use of the pentatonic scale and simple harmonies.

Summary

Croatia constantly rebuilt itself from various political and cultural transformations that occurred over its known history. As a result, it was difficult for it to cultivate a sense of identity. The conflict surrounding Croatia's political infrastructure also impacted its sense of musical identity. After the second world war, Croatia systemised music education by creating music schools and recognised music as an academic discipline at the university level. These musical milestones played an important role in how Croatian composers began writing instrumental concertos.

The repertoire chosen for this article illustrates how Croatian composers wrote for the clarinet in the middle of the 20th century. Bjelinski wrote the first Croatian clarinet concerto while travelling in Brazil. Whether this work was influenced by his experiences in Brazil is not known, but what is known is that each movement follows traditional classical structures. Cossetto also incorporates traditional classical structures while incorporating folk melodies into his clarinet concerto. Incorporating these folk melodies into his compositions illustrates how he relates to his own musical identity. 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 composition techniques developed in the late-romantic period. Each of the composers created their own compositional style, which reflect the different influences that they experienced as individuals. The prevalence of traditional forms played an important role in understanding how Croatian musical identities were constructed and how the Croatian clarinet concerto developed in the middle of the 20th century. ■

www.theclarinet.co.uk

✉ aroberts@theclarinet.co.uk

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Do you want the freedom to concentrate on the music and your performance?

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I have only known Andy personally a short time, but I have been aware of him for considerably longer, having blown several colleagues instruments that have had the 'ARCS' magic performed on them. He worked on my B&H 1010, improving the C#/G# note by removing and fitting a custom C#/G# tone hole and reshaping the key. He also tweaked and altered the shape and feel of the key-work to make it feel more like a Buffet. What a massive improvement. He has since gone on to adjust my R13 'A' clarinet to correct two very stuffy notes, and has done a complete overhaul of my Buffet S1 Bb clarinet using his latest Mk 5 pads.

Andy is a genius, not only is he a wonderful soloist/clarinet player himself, but he is also a marvellous technician. He is able to offer his personal knowledge of playing to advise you and then execute the highest level of workmanship to his repairs, modifications and overhauls. He is very easy to communicate with, and from the very outset, it is clear that he knows everything there is to know about clarinets. He is also able to advise on everything from posture to mouthpiece choice, (I am now using a Brad Behn mouthpiece purchased from Andy).

Thanks so much Andy.

Mike Read, Freelance woodwind Specialist and Tutor



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