

phase in the development of music psychology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade (but also in the country and region), which after increasing activities in this field in the last 15 years, established itself as an important center for the development of music psychology. Regional networking, which was formalized during the conference with the establishment of the Regional Network Psychology and Music (RNPaM), as well as the planned new international conference PAM-IE Belgrade 2022, as additional incentives, will certainly contribute to the further development of music psychology in our region.

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**CD Arrhythmia – Piano Works by
Contemporary Serbian Authors**

Neda Hofman-Sretenović, piano

Duration [41:37];

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The persistent dedication to contemporary art music that Belgrade-based pianist Neda Hofman-Sretenović has demonstrated for a number of years now, through her noted and active work in pianism, pedagogy, and organizing, has yielded another contribution in the form of a CD album titled *Aritmija* (“Arrhythmia”), released in 2019 by The Construction Site Contemporary Music Ensemble.¹ Partly comprising works by Serbian authors commissioned by the pianist, as well as pieces personally selected by her, the album offers a possible and rather individually shaped survey of the diversity of pianistic expression in a relatively

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¹ The editor of the release and author of the essay in the sleeve notes is Dr Ivana Miladinović Prica.

broad generational cross-section. Inspired by the title of a piece by Milana Stojadinović Milić (Милана Стојадиновић Милић, 1962), *Aritmija – slagalica za Nedu* (Аритмија – слагилица за Неду; “Arrhythmia – A Puzzle for Neda”), which, behaving like an “open work”, invites the performer to engage in a game of freely ordering the movements as s/he pleases, enabling an unpredictable repercussion of its characters, the appearance of the same term in the album’s title perhaps suggests precisely this irregularity (absence of rules), disharmony (un-coordination) of stylistic, aesthetic, and poetic expressions in contemporary (Serbian) music as one of its constant features that is likewise evident on this album. This arrhythmic mosaic thus comprises Svetlana Maksimović’s (Светлана Максимовић, 1948) impressionist-tinged work titled *Fragmenti molitve za mir (Po Moneu)* (Фрагменти молитиве за мир (По Монеу); “Fragments of a Prayer for Peace (After Monet)”), wherein the author adapts her musical language to the stylistics of the fine art works that she evokes in her music; Ivan Brkljačić’s (Иван Брклјачић, 1977) animated and partly toccata-like diptych titled *19...91 (Spokoj/Sjokoј – “Serenity” and Tragično kolo / Трајично коло – “Tragic Round Dance”)*; as well as three pieces that approximate one another in terms of sonority: *Auroriel (Аурорел)* by Ana Kazimić (Ана Казимић, 1985), expressively close to Scriabin’s expressionist poem *Vers la flamm*; *Random* by Tatjana Milošević (Татјана Милошевић, 1970), based on examining the possibilities of re-contextualizing and re-signifying borrowed materials and quotations; and *From Ray-*

leigh to Mie by Branka Popović (Бранка Поповић, 1977), where the author transposes various regimes of light and its conditioning of the visibility of heavenly bodies into sonic states of blurriness and clarity. The motivic or colouristic nucleus in all three pieces is the repetitiveness of a single note, which serves as a common *thread* and an evidently “cohesive” element in the album itself. It is ultimately rounded off by *Sadness/Untitled*, an extraordinary piece by Marko Nikodijević (Марко Никодијевић, 1980) presenting an economic construction as a result of his pioneering work with fractal structures, which are present in his later works as well.

It seems that writing for the piano as a medium inspires the authors whose works are included in the album chiefly as an instrument whose sonic identity rests on the phenomenon of echo, which is sought and attained in these works by means of rather diverse procedures taken from the rich sonic treasure trove of piano music. In that sense, it is evident that a special challenge for the performer was to find an adequate aesthetic dimension for her interpretation by sculpting the sonic mass presented in each piece in a different way – by resorting to percussionist procedures (Brkljačić, Milošević), sonorous colouristic projections of sound (Stojadinović Milić, Maksimović, Milošević, Popović, Nikodijević), and “unconventional” performance tactics by sporadically intervening on the instrument’s strings themselves (Kazimić, Popović). One may assume that it is precisely these aspects of the piano sound that constitute the main source of inspiration and driver of creativity for Hofman-Sretenović, who

shows a good understanding precisely of those ideas by the composers that are hidden “between the lines” of their scores, that is, those that one must sense rather than read in the score and whose materialization in sound equally entails imagination and a firm feeling for form, to tame the dynamic and temporal dispersion of sound and establish the very meaning of the work. In that sense, whether the approach to producing the piano sound on this album is percussionist or not, gesturality emerges as a striking quality of its performative momentum, which, as an expression of bodily movement, perhaps opens that most significant domain of interpretative freedom when it comes to this music, enabling precisely the pianist’s individual gestic properties to impress a fitting interpretative mark on the music itself. Aligned with the selected works’ diversity of character, those properties are applied in a range that extends from the materialization of meditative and nearly static conditions of music to expressive, sometimes resigned releases of pure energy in sound.

The works included in this album, dominated as they are by sentiments of alienation, melancholy, apathy, resignation, and only occasionally cheerfulness and optimism, present their authors’ testimonies, made from widely different artistic perspectives, about a time deprived of ideals, security, certainty, and order, and thereby also the desire to follow any kind of paradigm, an epoch freed from great meta-narratives and the need to search for the (musical) Truth. Instead, they construct small, personal narratives in their pursuit of musical research,

thereby delimiting an enclosure for expressing unpretentious, individual interests and leaving their mark. It is as though they sought to establish their personal and not necessarily coherent poetic oases, to make room from a post-historical perspective for freely addressing the past as a repository of stylistic, expressive, and every other kind of potential models that might be refined by the experience of contemporaneity and its own sensibility. In that sense, the interpretative challenge facing Neda Hofman-Sretenović no doubt lay in the very procedure of *initially* deciphering the author’s message, as well as in the fact that interpreting contemporary music entails a sonic aesthetic that cannot entirely rely on inherited performance practices, nor can it rest on an exclusively conventional (learnt) application of directions from the score, but instead entails a creative engagement with the very idiom of the piano sound, in an uncertain quest for a possible sonic materialization of an entirely new work.

The album’s high quality of production, which took place in the acoustic interior of the Great Hall of the Kolarac Endowment in Belgrade, using an instrument endowed with a substantial range of expression (Steinway & Sons, Model D), ensured that the recordings would provide a suggestive presentation of the musical selection included in the album, in other words, that right from the moment of release, they would serve as a fundamental point of departure for every subsequent approach to these works, whether in performance, musicology, or just listening.