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## NEW WORKS

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### THE RETURN OF THE BAROQUE: CONCERTO DRAGONESE BY DRAGANA JOVANOVIĆ<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** That “past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (T. S. Eliot) is confirmed in *Concerto Dragonese*, a new piece by Dragana Jovanović, dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of the existence of the Camerata Academica Ensemble of the University of Novi Sad Academy of Arts. Composed as a typical *concerto grosso*, it reflects the theoretical foundations of French thinker Guy Scarpetta and the thoughts of American art historian Gregg Lambert on the return of the Baroque to the very center of contemporary creative activity, but also into the very style of life that is today. This, however, does not deprive the piece from the ‘Benjaminian aura’, which allows it to communicate through various references to baroque masters and rhythms of contemporary popular genres of dances, film music and the like.

**Keywords:** *Concerto Dragonese*, concerto grosso, Baroque, popular culture

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“What happens when a new work of art is created”, writes Thomas Stearns Eliot in the essay entitled *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, “is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them”.<sup>2</sup> At the very section, the British poet points out that “tradition involves, in the first place, the historical sense [...] and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. [...] The past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past”.<sup>3</sup> It is precisely on the trail of Eliot’s claims that a new piece by Dragana Jovanović entitled *Concerto Dragonese*, dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the *Camerata Academica* Ensemble of the University of Novi Sad Academy of Arts,<sup>4</sup> can be listened to, interpreted and analyzed.

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<sup>2</sup> Tomas Stern Eliot, *Tradicija i individualni talenat. Eseji*, Beograd, Službeni glasnik, 2017, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Camerata Academica is a chamber ensemble that has been operating within the University of the Novi Sad Academy of Arts since 1988. The orchestra members are the best young musicians of the Academy of Arts – assistant and associate professors and the most talented students. Thus, some of the former Camerata’s members are now prominent soloists and members of prestigious European orchestras (Julija Hartig, Peđa Milosavljević, Dejan Bogadnović, Zorica Stanojević and many others). Camerata Academica has collaborated with numerous highly renowned national and foreign soloists, and performed under the artistic leadership of violoncellist Ištvan Varga in all major cities of the former Yugoslavia; they have had successful appearances in Germany (Dortmund) and the Netherlands (Amsterdam) and have participated in significant music events (BEMUS, NOMUS, the Ohrid Summer Festival, the International Composers’ Forum, the Budva Theatre City Festival...), realising, as well, a large number of permanent radio and television recordings. On their repertoire, Camerata always nurtured national compositional creativity. The orchestra operated with success until the end of 1999, when, due to the political crisis that forced many musicians to leave the country, they ceased their work. At the end of 2007, on the initiative of cellist Marko Miletić, the orchestra was built up again. Performing at concerts the most demanding pieces of the art music repertoire, as well as pieces by national composers, Camerata has achieved a great deal of success, appearing with distinguished soloists (Stefan Milenković, Wendy Warner, Dejan Mladenović, Imre Kalman, Peđa Milosavljević, Boštjan Lipovšek, Julija Hartig). The ensemble receives positive reviews in which the beauty of the sound and the remarkable expression are always emphasised. Soon after the reestablishment of the orchestra, RTV Vojvodina offered them the possibility of doing a studio recording of each performed piece.

It is no coincidence that Dragana Jovanović has specifically chosen concerto grosso as a framework of the composition commissioned by the ensemble which was established, as one of the key artistic bodies of the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, by cellist Ištvan Varga in the late eighties. From the very beginning, *Camerata* has been a symbol of the institution within which it was founded. Its members have always been distinguished students and professors of the Academy, and because of its quality, the ensemble visited the former Yugoslav region by participating in the most important festivals. According to the founder's very comments, there was even a healthy rivalry between this chamber ensemble and the Symphony Orchestra of the Academy of Arts, so members of the *Camerata* were called "Vargists".<sup>5</sup> Even that aura of specialty and excellence, as evidenced by numerous critiques, suggests that the musicians of this ensemble – just like at the time of the appearance of concert in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – "moved in harmony with each other [...] because the first real concerts did not originate from the desire for virtuosity, but for the joy of sound".<sup>6</sup> The choice of the concerto grosso form covered, therefore, everything that *Camerata* essentially is, and the given data have to be accepted as the semiotic context of all its possible interpretations (not only musical), "because that is how the depth of a specifically artistic meaning is achieved, and its life extended".<sup>7</sup>

According to the composer, the title of the piece refers to several possible meanings. The first is related to a "drago" (it.) or "dragon", and it could be understood as 'extremely virtuoso', because in Serbian colloquial speech, it is often said of one who plays well that they play 'like a dragon'. The second reference to the term "dragonese" the composer relates to the Dragone, a river in Italy, "the country of Vivaldi".<sup>8</sup> Finally, there is also "a coincidence in the pronunciation of the name Dragana, which people of the non-Balkan region most often pronounce as Dragona".<sup>9</sup> Different 'readings' of the composition's title also suggest a diverse 'listening' to the music that the composer says is based on the pluralism of styles and genres. The multi-meaning title of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ira Prodanov, Nataša Crnjanski, Nemanja Sovtić, *Mixed Choir and Symphony Orchestra of the Academy of Arts University of Novi Sad*, Novi Sad, Akademija umetnosti, 2019, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Roksanda Pejović, *Barokni koncert*, Beograd, Nolit, 1982, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Nataša Crnjanski, *Prokofjev i muzički gest*, Novi Sad, Akademija umetnosti, 2014, 34.

<sup>8</sup> From the correspondence with the composer in November 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

piece thus resonates with the diversity of its musical language, in which Dragana Jovanović creates a wide range of music associations that allow the listener to ‘choose’ in Barthes’s way the time and compositional means through which they ‘hear’ the *Concerto Dragonese*. For, “if a piece of music is seen [...] as an open message that can be given more possible meanings, or in which at the same time different meanings can coexist, we cannot be satisfied with only one verbal translation that limits its possible semantic range”.<sup>10</sup>

**Example 1:** Dragana Jovanović, *Concerto Dragonese*, I movement, *Energico*, b. 1–5

I  
*Energico*

Dragana Jovanovic, 2018

♩ = 86

Vc 1

Vc 2

Vn I

Vn II

Vla

Vcl

Cb

El piano  
sound of  
l'arpicordo

*Concerto Dragonese* is a concerto for two cellos, string orchestra and electric piano with the sound of the harpsichord (obligatory instrument). It is a “concerto grosso in the full sense of the word”<sup>11</sup> in which the technically demanding sections of two solo cellos, separately or in two-part playing, compete with relatively clear and simple orchestra parts, which, however, have very subtly determined agogic and dynamic marks. All the characteristic elements of concerto grosso are present, dialogues based on the same thematic materials that ‘rise’ from one core, the concertare principle between the two

<sup>10</sup> Joseph P. Swain, *Musical Languages*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1997, 84.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

soloists, or between them and the orchestra, as well as the solo cadences in each of the three movements. The first movement *Energico* sounds especially baroque with its unison from the beginning, resembling the beginning of Bach's *Concerto for Harpsichord and Orchestra* in D Minor, BWV 1052, while the ripieno 'answer' is the echo of the famous answer from the *Concerto for Violin and Oboe* in C Minor BWV 1060, shifted to the first beat. However, this is just one possible listening because "someone will hear Monteverdi, someone Bach, and someone Vivaldi".<sup>12</sup>

**Example 2:** D. Jovanović, *Concerto Dragonese, Arioso, Molto legato e espressivo*, b. 8–12

The image shows a musical score for measures 8-12 of the first movement of the Concerto Dragonese. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Violin I and II, Viola, Violoncello, Contrabasso, and Piano. A box with the number '10' is placed above the first measure of the Violin I part. The music is in a minor key and features a unison melody in the strings and woodwinds, with a piano accompaniment of chords and moving lines. The tempo/mood is marked 'Arioso, Molto legato e espressivo'.

The first movement also contains a typical baroque harmonic progression in the dominant key, which the composer calls a "fifth or dominant level",<sup>13</sup> as well as a Vivaldian multiple repetition of the main theme, and the

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Sound examples are available online at the official New Sound YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/DicYjQrfKkY>.

return to the initial tonal center in a. The second movement, *Arioso*, is made of three musical slurs of one and the same theme, each of them increasing in dynamics, becoming richer in polyphony and orchestration, and which are framed with an introduction and coda.

**Example 3:** D. Jovanović, *Concerto Dragonese*, Allegro con brio, Energico, b. 101

The image displays a musical score for Example 3, consisting of seven staves. The top two staves are for Violin I (Vc 1) and Violin II (Vc 2), both in bass clef. The next three staves are for Violin I (Vni I), Violin II (Vni II), and Viola (Vle), all in treble clef. The bottom two staves are for Violoncello (Vc) and Contrabasso (Cb), both in bass clef. The Piano/Contra Bass part (El. pftē) is shown in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The score features a complex rhythmic pattern with many triplets and slurs, indicating a fast and energetic tempo.

The vividness of their gradation gives this musical content something of the distressing atmosphere in the Williams' music theme from the *Schindler's List* movie (1993), although there is no specific similarity of motifs. And, the composer's ability is noticeable right here in connecting various postmodern combinations of styles and genres, which encourages listeners to seek for associations in the entire opus of their own musical experience. That ability also reflects a Milhaudean belief in the significance of the melody in the classical sense of the word, which will fix the piece in one's memory;<sup>14</sup> because in this movement, the melody is an absolutely dominant musical element, 'softened' and sustained by the 'rounded' effects of the triplet rhythm.

<sup>14</sup> Ira Prodanov, *Istorija muzike 20. veka*, Novi Sad, Akademija umetnosti, 2013, 37.

Finally, the third movement, *Allegro con brio*, extremely virtuoso, with a dose of the energy of an extravagant tango-like gesture, even more closely corresponds with the baroque compositional techniques, among which are, explicitly, the effects of building harmonic sequences.

Although different musical pasts are met in *Concerto Dragonese*, the Baroque seems to be the most dominant one. However, it is not just about restoring the neo-baroque composing style, as was the case at the beginning of the 20th century in Western Europe. According to the French theoretician of art, Guy Scarpetta, the word is that “we live the period of Baroque”,<sup>15</sup> and that it is possible to speak of the return of the “Baroque trait to the very center of modern creativity”.<sup>16</sup> Namely, the Baroque introduces a “tremendous relief [...] general enjoyment and arbitrariness [...] a world in which the mask is more truthful than the face it hides [...] where the other side of a décor is another décor”.<sup>17</sup> The Baroque also represents the period in which “illusion is designated as such, where the spectacle is accepted, doubled, where what is represented already belongs to the line of representations, where beyond the fiction there is always another fiction [...]”.<sup>18</sup> The use of social networks such as Facebook or Instagram today, where the displayed contents most likely represent the ‘best’ part of the personality that creates the profile, the worship of the body with a dramatic increase in the number of surgical interventions that enlarge or change its parts, the use of excessive accessories, artificial eyelashes, artificial eyebrows, a wardrobe in which zircon and diamonds are the highlight of beautification – all this speaks of the society of “hyper-theatralization” that lies behind the scenes of its fictional realities, in which “the illusion is combated by the very processes of creating an illusion”.<sup>19</sup> And not just that: the extreme (public) display of feelings, the most diverse spectacles in which “what appears is good; what is good appears”,<sup>20</sup> testifies to a new understanding of emotions, to the need to ‘expose’ them to the limits of stamina, especially in the media. The French scholar reads such a “burning with excitement, feeling of trembling, restlessness, enthusiasm, exhilaration”, in baroque

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<sup>15</sup> Gi Skarpeta [Guy Scarpetta], *Povratak baroka*, Novi Sad, Svetovi, 1988, 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Guy Debord, *Theory of Spectacle* [http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The\\_Society%20Of%20The%20Spectacle.pdf](http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The_Society%20Of%20The%20Spectacle.pdf)

art, emphasising its tendency to “excessiveness, some kind of vertigo that directly turns to the body and whose effect could refer to a term that is both secular and sacred – the ecstasy”.<sup>21</sup> What is unusual in that ecstasy is that it is not ‘natural’, but is caused by a play of shapes, codes, styles – by the artistic skill.<sup>22</sup> It is precisely this play of codes that is recognised and applied by Dragana Jovanović, achieving the effect of identifying with the culture of the Baroque, well-known and recognised, wrapped in the common Benjaminian aura, but now with the aura of contemporaneity that gives her the incredible freedom of interpretation. Or, as Thomas Bernhard says, “it is not about developing a story, but about wrapping it”.<sup>23</sup> An additional argument for such interpretations of the *Concerto Dragonese* is given by American scientist Gregg Lambert. This American scientist sees the return of the Baroque even where the Baroque never existed, in the island countries, in the Caribbean, in the areas that had their own autochthonous culture and, within it, their musical tradition independent of the European or the Baroque-European one. Lambert’s orientation to the Baroque as a “global phenomenon in the modern world”,<sup>24</sup> which is why he wants to talk about it in the plural (“there are many baroques”<sup>25</sup>), explains why audiences from different parts of the world today ‘eagerly’ look at contemporary works based on baroque poetics. There is something – states Lambert – that contributes to the fact that the Baroque has restored some impression of ‘timelessness’ thanks to abandoning the linear understanding of history and the theory of the acceleration of time that allows movement ‘through it’ in all directions.

It should not be forgotten that the Baroque ‘became involved’ in the popular music of the second half of the 20th century. Songs such as *In My Life* by the Beatles, *A Whiter Shade of Pale* by Procol Harum, or *Angel in My Heart* by Mick Jagger, invoke elements of the baroque style in various ways, indicating the popular culture’s tendency to absorb the elements of high and low culture and offer ‘solutions’ that – even according to the English theoreticians, that is culturalists, such as Hall, Fiske and Williams – express the creativity of the current state of culture, and not something random, ‘less valuable’ and ephemeral.

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<sup>21</sup> Gi Skarpeta, op. cit., 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Tomas Bernhard, *Brisanje. Raspad*, Beograd, Lom, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture*, London, Continuum, 2004, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

*Concerto Dragonese* by Dragana Jovanović precisely represents such a creative result in which the communication primarily between the performers and then the audience is achieved by the known (baroque) elements of an equivocal tonality, buoyant rhythm and rich melodic potential, and not because of the eagerness for technical perfectionism of demanding sections, but precisely because of that “joy of sound”, pointed out by Roksanda Pejović.

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### Summary

That “past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past...” (T. S. Eliot) is confirmed in *Concerto Dragonese*, a new piece by Dragana Jovanović, dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of existence of the *Camerata Academica* Ensemble of the University of Novi Sad Academy of Arts. Composed as a typical concerto grosso, it reflects the theoretical foundations of French thinker Guy Scarpetta and the thoughts of American art historian Gregg Lambert on the return of Baroque to the very center of contemporary creative activity, but also into the very style of life that is today. This, however, does not deprive the piece from the ‘Benjaminian aura’, which allows it to communicate through various references to baroque masters and rhythms of contemporary popular genres of dances, film music and the like.

