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## REVIEWS

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**Asja Radonjić and Danica Maksimović,**  
***Centenary of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (1923–2023), Belgrade,***  
**Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, 2024, 260 pp.**  
**ISBN 978-86-907703-9-7**

To mark 100 years since the founding of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, the most renowned Serbian symphony orchestra, the musicologists Asja Radonjić, M.Sc.<sup>1</sup> and Danica Maksimović,

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<sup>1</sup> Asja Radonjić (b. 1977) graduated from the Musicology Department of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. She earned her M.Sc. degree in Cultural Management and Cultural Policy in the Balkans, at the University of Arts in Belgrade – UNESCO Chair. She is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade. She writes articles and reviews in the field of musicology, as well as professional reports from academic conventions, symposia, and festivals, which have

M.A.<sup>2</sup> – the program managers of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra for nearly 20 years and mainly responsible for the preparation of the concert seasons, tours within Serbia and abroad, and other activities of this institution – au-

been published in music magazines and newspapers in Serbia and internationally.

<sup>2</sup> Danica Maksimović (b. 1976) graduated from the Musicology Department at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. She was proof-reader, reviewer and editor of the Belgrade Philharmonic's publications: *Homage to Hans Swarowsky* (2005), Oskar Danon's autobiography *The Rhythms of Restlessness* (2006), Zubin Mehta's autobiography *The Score of My Life* (2010), and a children's book *The Boy with the Violin* (2015), among other responsibilities.

thored the jubilee publication titled *Centenary of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (1923–2023) / Сто година Београдске филхармоније (1923–2023)*. This luxurious and richly-illustrated book in hard cover, with parallel text in Serbian and in English,<sup>3</sup> was published by the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra in 2024. On these 260 pages in large, A4 format, the authors tell a vivid and exciting tale about the history of one of the most important Serbian institutions in the field of art music. The abundant archival material, which was collected and initially sorted with the assistance of the musicologist Marijana Dujović, M.A., is presented in a clear and methodologically-consistent manner: the authors opted for a chronological approach, which is fully aligned with the purpose of this publication. Besides the archival sources and existing literature about the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (including the manuscript *75 Year of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra [1923–1998]* by Dejan Despić), the authors have also collected personal impressions from the conductors and soloists who have collaborated with the orchestra, as well as from several former and current members of the orchestra, and other persons who have been connected to the work of this institution, which has largely contributed to the timeliness and interest of the text for the wider reading audience.

The main text, i.e. the historiographic study by Maksimović and Rado-

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<sup>3</sup> English translation: Ivana Medić, Ph.D. (main text and appendices) and Marija Drndić (*What Others Have Said About Us*).

vić, encompasses roughly one half of the book and is distributed in several chapters which follow the rises, stagnations, and new beginnings in the work of this institution, from its inception until today. After the authors' brief introduction (pp. 6–7) and a methodological chapter which presents the research approach and the relation to archival material and literature (pp. 8–11), the main text ensues, which analyses the evolution of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra over a period of 100 years. First, the study overviews the beginnings of symphonic music in Serbia and the first steps towards the founding of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (pp. 13–16), followed by the presentation of the period from its foundation until the Second World War (pp. 19–29), then the years of the institution's rise in the postwar period (pp. 31–41), culminating with the so-called "Golden Age" of the orchestra under the artistic direction of its chief conductor Živojin Zdravković, from 1961–1978 (pp. 42–57). The authors analyse the period of challenges which occurred after Zdravković's retirement, and particularly during the last decade of the twentieth century, when the institution carried out its activities in the circumstances of the society's devastation and narrowed frames (pp. 58–73). With the onset of the new millennium and the democratic changes in society, the "Second Golden Age" of the orchestra began, marked by the creative personality of the pianist Ivan Tasovac as its director (pp. 74–131), as well as by the continuous support to this institution from the well-known conductor

Zubin Mehta (pp. 132–139). The authors conclude this historic overview with the presentation of the project introducing the new concert hall for the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (pp. 140–143) and a swift “look into the future” (pp. 144–145), some sort of an “open conclusion”, sending a clear message that “the best time for the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra is yet to come” (p. 145).

Due to the limitations of this review, it is not possible to present in detail all of the fascinating insights offered by Maksimović and Radonjić in their analysis of the position and the achievements of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra in the twentieth century, but also in their overview of the institution’s more recent history and its current state. However, I do agree with Srđan Teparić’s opinion that the authors have presented both stellar moments and years of stagnation and decline, “objectively, and thus scientifically pertinent”<sup>4</sup>

As a particular quality of this book, I would like to emphasize once again its vivid and immediate style of narration, the proliferation of anecdotes which enliven the analyzed archival material and bring it closer to wider audiences, and which are presented graphically within each chapter in the form of small “internal units” under the title “Did you know?”. Also, the exquisite design and layout, with an abundance of visual materials (photos, concert posters, and other

documents), as well as the bilingual nature of the publication, all testify to the fact that the achievements of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra over the past 100 years deserve to be presented in such an optimal way to the Serbian and international readership.

The book features several expertly-prepared appendices, which are also of enormous significance for any future study of the activities and achievements of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra in both national and international frameworks. Among others, these appendices include the lists of foreign visits and tours of the orchestra, a discography, commissions, the names of orchestra members in specific years (including the jubilee year 2023), a selection from the bibliography of reviews and articles about the institution, etc.

The high quality of this publication, which documents the important accomplishments of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra during the varying periods of its history, stands in stark contrast with the lack of care for this institution shown by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia over the past several years, including the absence of more significant financial support for the jubilee concert season of the orchestra, as well as the slow pace of the realisation of the new concert hall. Nevertheless, the monograph *Centenary of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (1923–2023)* is a praiseworthy publication in which the realities of the institution and the dynamics of its changes – caused primarily by external (and some internal) sociopolitical and

<sup>4</sup> Srđan Teparić, “Recenzija monografije Sto godina Beogradske filharmonije”, <https://muzickilimbo.rs/recenzija-monografije-sto-godina-beogradske-filharmonije/>

economic, organisational reasons – is blended seamlessly with the personal experiences of the protagonists of this story which carries on. As the authors Asja Radonjić and Danica Maksimović themselves conclude: *The Philharmonic is Forever*.

*Dedicated to the memory of the conductor  
Gabriel Feltz (1971–2025)*