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Religious music traditions in Belgrade in its way to become European town

Belgrade is a very old city, with dynamic history going back to the Roman period. In the Middle Ages it was a part of the Byzantium, then of Hungarian and Serbian medieval states, and during the 300 years of early modern European history, a city in the Ottoman empire¹.

Three decades of the 18th century during which Belgrade was in the Habsburg Lands brought the first wave of Europeanization of the city. The traces of the European building tastes can be recognized in the few remaining buildings from that period. With the reestablishment of the Ottoman rule situation returned to the previous state, and a negligible number of Catholic Christians remained in the city. Belgrade entered the 19th century as a Turkish border city in which Europe and Asia, Islamic and Christian worlds met. The First and the Second Serbian Uprisings against the Turks marked the beginning of the great changes. Already during the uprisings, and especially after 1815, the appearance of the town and the way of life within started changing with amazing speed. At this time many Christians, especially Serbs, migrated both from the South and from the North. The Serbs, as well as the representatives of other nations, who came from the Habsburg Lands brought a new way of life (architecture, clothes, schools, entertainment) founded on western tastes. Milan Đ. Milićević wrote in the 1870s: “A few decades ago the capital (main city) of Serbia was partly Turkish, partly Greek, partly cosmopolitan, but hardly, if at all, Serbian. Turkish and

¹The data about the history of the city and the population was taken from: Moderna srpska država 1804–2004: Hronologija, Grupa autora, Istorijski arhiv Beograda, Beograd 2004; Istorija Beograda – devetnaesti vek, Vol. 2, ed. Vasa Čubrilović, Belgrade 1974; Felix Kanitz, Das Königreich Serbien und das Serbenvolk. Von der Römerzeit bis zur Gegenwart, tome 1: Land und Bevölkerung, Leipzig 1904; Serbian translation, Srbija – zemlja i stanovništvo od rimskog doba do kraja 19. veka, Belgrade 1985. Kanitz published his texts with a series of drawings from his travels in the Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung in the 1860s.

broken Serbian were spoken on the streets, Greek in the shops, and even in the Church and at home more often Greek than Serbian. Houses, shops, clothes, a way of life and all customs were oriental. Today it has all changed. Turkish is not to be heard anywhere, Greek very rarely, and Serbian is being purified and corrected daily. Houses, shops, handicrafts, clothes and customs, everything is modified according to what is to be seen in the West, that is to say in the close neighborhood.”²

On the basis of the population census from 1862³ we know that the predominant number of inhabitants were Orthodox (Serbs and Tzintzars), while the largest religious minority were the Jews⁴; the fact that changed by the end of the 19th century in favour of the Catholic population (see Table I). At the end of

²Milan Đ. Milićević, *Kneževina Srbija*, Beograd 1876; Dr. Marija Ilić-Agapova, *Ilustrovana istorija Boegrada*, Beograd 1933, reprint Beograd 2002, p. 315.

³In this period Belgrade had eleven Mosques, four “tekija” (Moslem monastery or chapel), two Orthodox churches and one Synagogue. Cf. *Istorija Beograda – devetnaesti vek*, Vol. 2, Chapter IX – Etnički odnosi u XIX veku, Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Beograd 1974, pp. 513–555.

⁴The Jews have lived in Belgrade since the Medieval times. Their numbers increased after migrations of the Sephardim from Spain in the 15th century. During the Ottoman times, they were the second most influential group (after the Turks), although they continued to live in closed communities. There were already three Jewish schools in the 17th century. With the foundation of the Serbian state they became incorporated into the Serbian society, adopted the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. They retained however Jewish religious tradition and customs. The Belgrade Synagogue and a religious school were reopened in 1819 at Dorćol (a part of Belgrade), and in 1919 the Federation of Religious Councils was founded. Five years late building of Ashkenazi Synagogue started. The existing literature predictably has the least information about music, especially religious music. The Serbian-Jewish Choir has been undoubtedly one of the most important music activities of the Jewish community. Cf. N. Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji 1918–1941*, Beograd 1997; Ivan Hofman, *Srpsko-jevrejsko pevačko društvo (Hor “Braća Baruh”) 125 godina trajanja*, Beograd 2004; Ignjat Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu*, Beograd 2006.

19th c. Germans became the largest national minority followed by the Jews, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks⁵.

Table I

Year of census	Orthodox	Catholics	Protestants	Jews	Moslems	Undecided	Total
1862	Serbs & Tzintzars 89 %	9 %	2 %	10,4 %			25 000
1895	49 220	5 849	791	3 097	159	59	59 175

On this occasion there was not enough time to look more closely into the situation of the members of different religions and confessions in Belgrade. It is especially difficult to find information about the temples and the patterns of services which were held. Therefore we will discuss only the development of the Orthodox Church music in Serbia.

European influences on the Serbian religious music spread in two ways: a) Through the work of the Serbs and members of other nations who lived in the Habsburg monarchy (Austro-Hungary); b) Through the activities of the Serbs from the Principality, later Kingdom, of Serbia who studied at the European Hochschulen and Universities.

I

During the 18th and the 19th century Serbs in the Habsburg monarchy came under the influence of the West European music practice – accepted either directly from the Central Europe, or indirectly through Russian and Ukrainian art. It was revealed through new music genres, acceptance of the European music notation, the beginning of use of the music instruments, choir singing, development of the theatre music, chamber and home music making, the impor-

⁵See, *Istoriya Beograda – devetnaesti vek*, Vol. 2, Beograd 1974. See also, Georg Wild, *Die deutsche evangelische Kirche in Jugoslawien 1918–1941*, Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks, München 1980.

tant place of music in the education⁶. At the same time with these developments, the enthusiasm about national music grew among the Serbs in Habsburg monarchy, stirred on one hand by the ideas of German intelligentsia about the importance of “Volkskunde”, and on the other hand by their wish, common to all nation in the monarchy, to prove and present themselves in the multinational and multi-confessional Habsburg monarchy.

The most important name among Serbian musicians was the composer, pianist and conductor Kornelije Stanković, who was born in Buda (today’s Hungary) but studied music in Vienna. In the 1850s Stanković wrote down for the first time Serbian traditional both secular and church songs, which he then enriched by simple harmonisations. At concerts in Buda, Vienna, Novi Sad, Belgrade, and many smaller towns in today Vojvodina and Serbia, he performed, apart from the pieces by German composers, the arrangements of Serbian and other Slavonic folk songs⁷.

The First Belgrade Singing Society, founded at that time (1853), performed German songs, both in the original language and in the Serbian translations. The coming of Kornelije Stanković to the place of the Society’s conductor, their repertoire slowly turned towards stylisations of Serbian and other Slavonic songs. The citizens of Belgrade, gathered in this Society, did not readily accept such changes⁸. Unlike them many European composers, both anonymous and well known –

⁶Cf. Danica Petrović, *Le chant populaire sacré et ses investigateurs*, in: *Srpska muzika kroz vekove [La musique serbe à travers les siècles]*, *Gelary of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts*, Vol. 22, Beograd 1973, pp. 275–292; eadem, *Srpski muzičari u Budimu i Pešti u 19. i početkom 20. veka* (in Serbian and in Hungarian), in: *Istorija srpsko-mađarskih kulturnih veza. A Szerb-Magyar kulturális kapcsolatok történetéből*, Novi Sad-Budapest 2003, pp. 213–235; Katarina Tomašević, *Music – an activity of the Jesuits in Belgrade and Petrovaradin in 17th and 18th c.* (Summary in English), *Matica srpska Journal of Stage Art and Music*, No. 18–19, Novi Sad 1996, pp. 69–78.

⁷Danica Petrović, Kornelije Stanković; Marijana Kokanović, *The Piano Music of Kornelije Stanković*, in: *Kornelije Stanković: Complete Works, Piano Music*, Vol. 1, Belgrade-Novı Sad 2004, pp. 9–22.

⁸Cf. Danica Petrović, *A Hundred and Fifty Years of Work: I The First Six Decades*, in: *Prvo beogradsko pevačko društvo – 150 godina*, *Galerija Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti*, Vol. 101, Beograd 2003, pp. 227–233.

E. Grieg, P.I. Tchaikovsky, F. Bayer, J. Strauss-son, A. Dvořak, N. Rimsky-Korsakov – eagerly used in their works the so far unknown Serbian melodies⁹.

After Stanković, many both local (such as Josif Marinković, Jovan Paču) and visiting composers of different nationalities, usually educated in Vienna (Jew-Josif Schlesinger, Austrian-Alois Kalauz, several Czech musicians, a Slovene Davorin Jenko), worked on joining of the Serbian traditional music with the European music styles¹⁰. Belgrade was yet to start educating people for the new time.

II

The Kingdom of Serbia systematically found ways to send its talented young people to study abroad. In the realm of music culture the education of young Stevan Mokranjac was the most successful enterprise with excellent results. He spent, with occasional small breaks, full seven years (1879–1887) at conservatories, first in Munich, and later in Rome and Leipzig. It was one of the most successful investments of the Kingdom of Serbia. After his return to Serbia, Mokranjac worked as a composer, conductor and teacher, he founded the first music school and the first string quartet, the Union of singing societies, Union of musicians, and he worked as a melographer of the traditional folk and church music¹¹.

Mokranjac's work on transcribing the traditional Serbian Church chant was a pioneering one in Serbia. Before him similar work was done only among the Serbs in Austro-Hungary. He

⁹Cf. Đorđe Perić, *The Bibliography of Kornelije Stanković: IV The Reception of Stanković's Works*, in: *Kornelije Stanković i njegovo doba* [Kornelije Stanković and His Time], ed. D. Stefanović, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Musicology, Scientific assemblies, book XXIV, Beograd 1985, pp. 303–307.

¹⁰Stana Đurić Klajn, *Serbian Music through the Ages*, Belgrade 1972, pp. 48–115.

¹¹About Mokranjac's Life and Work, see, Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, *Život i delo* (in Serbian), eds. Dejan Despić, Vlastimir Peričić, in: *Complete Works of Stevan St. Mokranjac*, Vol. 10, Beograd 1999.

not only wrote down, but also selected different variations of the traditional chant. He purged the melodies from “excessive ornaments and the vibration of voice”. Unfortunately his intention to write a study about the variations of the Serbian chant remained unfulfilled, and his autographs were lost during the First World War. For this reason today we are unable to determine the nature of his interventions on the traditional melodies he wrote down. Shortly after it had been published (1908) his redaction of the “Octoeschos” became the official textbook for the Seminaries of the Metropolitanate of Serbia, and after the First World War for all Seminaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Today it is the most widely applied variation of the Church Chant and plays the role of its standardized version. Later musicians classified this variation as “Belgrade Chant”, although it ensued from the widely spread older Serbian Chant, and was in fact its less ornamented version created by Stevan Mokranjac¹². In his compositions, both secular and religious, Mokranjac combined in a marvellous way the characteristics of the European music language with the folk songs from various regions of Serbia and the music tradition of different nations, whose folklore he studied (Hungarian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Macedonian and Croatian). The vocal polyphony he studied in Rome, harmony, form and “Tonkunst”, which he learned first in Munich and then here in Leipzig, found a highly artistic application in his startling sacred compositions, which he wrote for the services in the Belgrade Cathedral Church, and for the choir of the First Belgrade Singing Society whose conductor he was from his return from Leipzig (1887) until his death in exile in Skopje (1914)¹³.

His sacred compositions – *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, The Requiem, Two Hymns for Good Friday, Three Stasis for Great Saturday, Akathistos to the Mother of God, Megalynar-*

¹²Danica Petrović, The Octoechos in Serbian Chant and in the melographic works of Stevan St. Mokranjac, in: Complete Works of Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, Vol. 7, Beograd 1996, pp. XV-XXXIV; eadem, The General, Special nad Festal Chants of Stevan St. Mokranjac, in: Complete Works of Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, Vol. 8a, Beograd 1998, pp. XI-XLI.

¹³See, Prvo beogradsko pevačko društvo – 150 godina [First Belgrade Singing Society], Galerija Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, Vol. 101, Beograd 2003.

ion to St. Sava – represent the highest achievements not only of the Serbian church music, but of the Orthodox Church music in general¹⁴. Social changes which took place in Europe in the 19th century influenced the creation of the artistic tendencies through which Russians and many of the smaller European nations – many of them Slavonic – found their way to the international musical scene for the first time in their modern history.

Mokranjac returned to Germany on a tour with the choir of the Belgrade Singing Society in 1899. For that occasion, the German emissary in Belgrade, baron Wecker-Gotter, translated into German and published the texts of all songs. They held two well visited concerts in Berlin, and even sang in front of the German Emperor and Empress. The newspaper reported that the Emperor greeted them with the words: “Famos, meine Herrn”. In Dresden they gave concerts in the Royal Opera (“Semperoper”) and in the “Zwinger” palace, and in Leipzig in the Albert Hall (“Albertsaal”). “Musicalisches Wochen-Blatt” wrote that it was well attended and by large the most interesting concert of the season. In Berlin they sang at the Liturgy in the Chapel of the Russian embassy. At the concerts in Germany they performed: Mokranjac’s *Rukoveti* – choral suites – II, V, VI, VII, VIII, *Coastal Melodies*, *Two Turkish songs*, *Spiritual Concert* by Dimitri Bortnyansky, two songs by Brahms. German press reviewed very positively all concerts of the Belgrade choir¹⁵.

At the turn of the century the music life in Belgrade revolved to a great extent around and with Stevan Mokranjac. The map of his tours with the Belgrade Singing Society is quite remarkable: from Sofia, Plovdiv, Thessaloniki and Constantinople to Budapest, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod and Kiev, from Cetinje and Dubrovnik, to Split, Zadar, Rijeka, Zagreb, from Sarajevo and Mostar to Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig. It is impossible to mention all places in Serbia and Serbian regions of Austro-Hungary in which they gave concerts. They also sang regularly at services in the Belgrade cathedral, St. Nathalie’s church and in the chapel of the Royal Palace in Belgrade, at concerts and

¹⁴See, Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac: Complete Works, Vols. 4, 5, 6, ed. V. Ilić, Beograd 1994–1996.

¹⁵Cf. Kosta P. Manojlović, Spomenica Stevanu St. Mokranjcu, Beograd 1923.

celebrations: crowning of the Serbian kings, funerals and requiem services for both the members of the Serbian Royal family, state and church officials, well known people from the publicly life but also for the church singers, choir members and choir's benefactors; they sang a memorial services for the English king Edward VII (1910), Miss Irby; they organized festivities in honor of the visit of the Croatian bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, sang in the Catholic church in Belgrade at the memorial service for the Rev. Ivo Stojanović from Dubrovnik (1897). They gave a large number of humanitarian concerts, especially when some of the young members were supposed to leave to study abroad.

Religious music was at that time still rarely performed outside churches, and if something was performed it was mostly the separate hymns, not the Liturgy as a whole. Mokranjac organised traditional spiritual concerts in Belgrade during the Lent, in the Passion Week. As far as we have found out the first one was in 1896. Not only was the Orthodox Church music performed, works of Serbian (Mokranjac, Marinković, Topalović) and Russian composers (Bortnyansky, Malashkin, Tchaikovsky, Davidov, Grigorev), but also the works of the European composers (J. S. Bach, J. Haydn, F. Schubert, A. Dvořak, Lorenzo Perosi).

The Belgrade Singing Society cooperated with many musicians, and with other choirs. At the celebration of the Society's 50th anniversary, held under the patronage of the King, 23 choirs participated: 7 of them were from Belgrade, the Serbian-Jewish singing society and one Catholic choir among others, 8 choirs were from different towns in the Kingdom of Serbia and 7 were from Austro-Hungary. On that occasion the foundation of the union of Singing Societies was discussed.

The great works of the European music, Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Haydn's oratorio *Genesis*, were performed in Belgrade for the first time in the first decade of the 20th century. Stanislav Binički, composer and conductor, the former music student in Munich, was the "spiritus movens" of these musical events.

Within the religious music, the influences within one confession were numerous – e. g. Greek-Serbian influences, Russian-Serbian influences. The influence of the Catholic and Protestant churches were not of the local character, but penetrated from the larger cultural centres, through musicians who were educated abroad

and through the performances of the works of foreign composers. These developments resulted in the growing tendencies to write less strictly structured church compositions, in form not limited by the liturgical use. Stevan Mokranjac already wrote such compositions (e.g. *Two Stichera for Good Friday, Three Stasis for Holy Saturday*), and this direction was also to be followed by his younger contemporaries Petar Konjović, Miloje Milojević and Stevan Hristić.

This process led to a division which is still present in the Orthodox Church music. On one hand we have church chant as a part of the church services – traditional unison or simply harmonised in a way which does not interfere with the traditional melody and the liturgical service¹⁶.

On the other hand there is choir music in which composers developed their own religious notions, relying loosely or not at all on the traditional melodies and the canons of the Church law. In modern Serbia both currents are equally small in number as the social developments after the Second World War have brought to a stand still work in the field of the church music, and this negative tendency has not been completely overcome up to the present time.

¹⁶Cf. Dimitrije Stefanović, *The Phenomenon of Oral Tradition in Transmission of Orthodox Liturgical Chant*, International Musicological Society Study Group – Cantus Planus, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Musicology, Budapest 1992, pp. 303–310; idem, *The Theological Dimension of Liturgical Music from an Orthodox Perspective*, in: *Studia Liturgica* 28, 1998, pp. 32–45.