

Do National Schools of Musicologists Exist?

The question posed by the title of this paper is elaborated here from the aspect of the relationship between traditional and contemporary considerations of the phenomenon of national schools of musicologists.¹ Our aim is to reconsider the traditional concept of national schools of musicologists in the current postmodern compositional and musicological environment. At the same time, we propose that a new, general way of expounding the concept be introduced.

In contrast to the phenomenon of national schools of composers, which has been extensively examined in the musicological literature, that of national schools of musicologists as a particular phenomenon has been theoretically insufficiently explored. Hence, an initial question can be raised, whether national schools of musicologists constitute a particular phenomenon at all. If they do, how can these be identified - according to which criteria - especially in the conditions that have marked the period since the postmodern change in opinions, attitudes and methods in art, science and life in general.

The first and simplest step in addressing this question is to assume that the basic common feature of the musicologists of a national school is **belonging to the same national environment**, which in many cases also includes **belonging to the same geopolitical context**. At least this was so during the time of romanticism, and domination of the romantic idea of equating state and nation being synonymous. In the course of further historical development, however, the relationship between the notions of state, nation and people as well, has been conceptually and practically quite "mobile". So, especially since the beginning of the postmodern era this relationship has changed considerably, with geopolitical features acquiring greater emphasis than ethnic ones.

Here I refer primarily to the fact that musicologists who work in the same region, let us assume in the same country, formally represent the region. They represent it firstly as a geopolitical unit, and only as an extension as a national one; but national in a rather unspecified, general sense. It is so because the postmodern consciousness considers national determinants more in the sense of an ethnic composite within certain administrative borders, more in the sense of a collective rather than a metaethnic phenomenon. In other words, postmodernism does not tolerate metanarratives, and does not favour them in the sphere of the national, either. And this, in spite of a dangerous strengthening of rightwing movements in many parts of the world today, which tend to establish and develop deeply regressive ideas in this sphere.

Practically, therefore, musicologists who belong to a certain region act "on behalf" of the region, simply because they are necessarily affected by its general geographical and political determinants. This means that they are always experiencing the "destiny" of political perception and position of their country, personally encountering either advantages or problems and difficulties that originate from this perception.

So, for example, we can claim that musicologists living and professionally engaged in Serbia (or any other country), represent Serbian (or any other country's) "national" musicology. In principle, this is so, no matter what political and historical circumstances prevail in the country, more exactly, no matter how close or how distant a musicologist is to or from the official attitudes of his government, no matter whether he accepts or opposes these attitudes.

And yet, today this general determinant of national schools of musicologists is not as "mechanical" as it might seem. Beneath its formal surface, which provides the basic "sign" of a general national affiliation, the criterion of belonging to the same geopolitical sphere implies a plethora of other issues as well. Among them is, as the most natural, that musicologists are necessarily subject to influences of the whole system of life and culture of the region where they have grown up and where they live. As any other person belonging to any country and any society, a musicologist also experiences, to a greater or lesser degree, adaptation of his innate psychological, social and aesthetic features through influences of his society. In principle, these do not change even if the musicologist lives and works in an environment in which he neither grew up nor was

educated in. Surrounded by new conditions, he is inevitably influenced by them, but also influences them at the same time.

What this means is that a musicologist who is more or less integrated into geopolitical and cultural circumstances around him, is not in fact their representative from only a purely formal point of view, but also, to some extent, he unavoidably advocates at least the fundamental, common axiological hierarchy of his environment.

However, what then constitutes the national in this kind of nationality that, as we have stressed, clearly derives from the *bureaucratic* national origin of musicologists?

To answer this question we must recognize that having a **common bureaucratic** national "identity card" does not automatically imply a **common musicological** national "identity card": musicologists may have no sense of belonging together professionally, even though they are the members of the same guild. What differentiates them among themselves but thereby also unites them can be considered from one crucial aspect from which all others are generated. This aspect is historically firmly rooted, and refers to a **dependence of national schools of musicologists on national schools of composers**. This dependence arises from the tendencies common to all political and cultural endeavours of a country, especially during the development of the romantic idea of national schools. According to this idea, not only were the political but also the artistic and, in general, the cultural identities and integrity of a country expected to be established and affirmed.

As for musicologists, this meant dealing with the whole range of composers' poetics that relied on the conscious, intentional and consistent artistic use by composers of the folklore material of their nation. Being engaged in promoting the same idea from their specific analytical and theoretical points of view, musicologists dealt with the complex issues of the ways of forming and affirming national schools in music. Quite naturally, they were occupied predominantly with the national school of music of their own country. For example, they strived for explanations of the phenomenon of the national school in itself, for collecting and analyzing the indigenous music of their country, for examining processes and methods of compositional treatment of this music regarding general characteristics as well as particular procedures applied by the individual composers, etc. In this way, directly or indirectly, the activity of musicologists was characterized by common national features, at least from the **thematic point of view**.

At the same time, their activity was characterized by a **specific methodology**, which arose from the fact that each problem circle in composing necessarily demands musicological approach that best expounds this circle. This means that a particular problem circle considerably shapes the ways in which musicologists treat the subject at issue. Thus, musicologists who have investigated the field of artistic use of music folklore have inevitably established a recognizable methodology.

Generally speaking, this methodology relies on a consideration of the full spectrum of impacts of specific folk material applied in a composition on the features of this composition: on the structure of its melodic-rhythmic contents, characteristics of its harmony, texture, formal shaping; on scoring and practice of performing, treatment of instruments and voice, particular solutions in the field of orchestration; style and compositional aesthetics, etc. However, these methods can be efficient only where a composition is, essentially, structurally affected by folklore materials. It cannot be productive when applied to a composition where folklore acts "on the surface", that is, far from the principles of national schools. This means that a musicological approach to, let us say, the works of Haydn and his use of folk melodies, will differ crucially from an approach to the works of Musorgsky or Bartók for example. It is necessary and important that a chosen methodology be adequate sufficient to reach the core of the matter.

Being able to function in this way, to scrutinize the matter analytically and theoretically in various dimensions, such an approach actually implies a certain "transposition" and expression of compositional principles to musicological principles of utterance. The foundations of the utterance itself lie in the logic and vocabulary of a musicologist's national language, which is why we suggest that the concept of national schools of musicologists, established in romanticism, began in the context of the language and since then have been materialized in the context of the language. But, until postmodernity, the relationship of the language to the music reality examined by the language was traditionally considered, in principle, as a

“realist text” which captured the true nature of this reality. Hence, this relationship was accepted as reliable, in fact, as an embodiment of a holistic cultural construct.

In other words, for musicologists of pre-postmodern times **being-in-the-language** meant the adherence to an overall, more or less comprehensive and totalizing hierarchical system. Having acted within it, that is, gathered around “the truth”, musicologists formed their own “school units” characterized by methodologically and nationally prevalent traits.

But a question arises at this point, whether a national school of musicologists can exist even though investigated music lacks national traits. In other words, can a musicologist who deals with avant-garde music be considered a representative of a national school?

Our answer is in the affirmative, despite the fact that such a “national school” quite clearly encounters subject matter that is more “universal” than national. This is naturally due to the exclusive, totalizing and esoteric character of the avant-garde, more precisely, to its ideas and dreams of a “universal utopia”. Besides, as we have stressed, every music phenomenon requires an appropriate scientific approach, as indeed does avant-garde music. It has, in fact, generated unique methods of analytical and theoretical elaborations, which yield results only when applied in the sphere of avant-garde achievements, methods which are undoubtedly far removed from those defining *national* musicological procedures.

So, what then is national in musicology that examines the avant-garde “universalism”?

Although it might sound rather surprising, we would claim that, to a certain degree, it is exactly this “universalism” itself. More accurately, what characterizes the national in this context are the ways and forms of the acceptance of this universalism in different geopolitical and cultural surroundings. This acceptance is, in fact, the main and prevalent issue for those musicologists who “follow” the phenomenon of avant-garde music. Although applying specific analytical methods informed by the very substance of avant-garde music itself, musicologists have mostly treated avant-garde endeavours and procedures from the aspect of artistic influences and impacts of these procedures on particular music environments. In this way, the features of the national of a musicologist who explores the avant-garde ensue from a specific interchange between the “universal” and the local: between the universality of the “rules” of the avant-garde and explanations of the locality of their applications. It is exactly this stage of the problem sphere of the national in musicology that directly precedes the postmodern status of the same problem.²

And this in spite of the fact - as we have already emphasized - that postmodernity, in contrast to the avant-garde, has declined significantly in “master narratives”. Hence, instead of metanarratives, there are “narratives” in postmodernity; instead of an authoritatively unifying system there are “systems”; instead of a hierarchy there are “hierarchies”; instead of the truth there are “truths”... And instead of the national there are ethnicities.

So, rather than adhering to folk materials of one region, a postmodern composer³ reaches for various contents of ethnic music from regions even far beyond the geographical borders within which he lives. Accessibility of these contents is decisively facilitated by the network communication, through which the composer easily can obtain any music particulars stored in a relevant database. All music facts (including folklore) are equally important constituents within an entire stored music collection. In the sense of this “neutralized” hierarchy and, in parallel, originating from all parts of the world, the supplied contents define the phenomenon of world music. That is why a composer’s interest in indigenous music is, actually, an interest in the contents of world music. This also means that a composer chooses, treats and elaborates folklore material from the same viewpoint as any other music materials. He combines all music particulars - including also those totally unrelated - entirely freely, meaning, according to his individual compositional plans regarding a particular work. The composer’s motivation is, therefore, determined by purely acoustic music reasons, and not by any intention to reflect the idea of a national school or revive a particular national school in any of traditional dimensions.⁴ Therefore, we would claim that the traditional phenomenon of a national school of composers has been replaced, in postmodernity, by the concept of world music. Rather, in this paper, it would be better to say that it has been replaced by the notion of the **music of the global village**.

In such a compositional context, musicological **being-in-the-language** has also acquired a new dimension. On the one hand, it has dealt with the phenomenon of the global village, and on the other, it has exhibited an essential disbelief towards any unifying theoretical explanations.

In elaborating the question of a music global village, a postmodern musicologist enters, as a matter of fact, into the problem sphere of *music transculturality*.⁵ In examining the issues of a global village, he deals with forms of music culture and concrete music matter, which are based on a high degree of "intersection" and interchange between the global and the particular, that is, between the cosmopolitan and the local. And the limitless ways and forms of this interchange are exactly what "deprives" musicologists of common national issues in their treatises, common in the sense of the problem vocabulary of a national school.

At the same time, the rejection by musicologists of any kind of total truth, their scepticism about it, has impelled them to act within decentralized systems in the search for meanings and truths. However, a postmodern musicologist knows that the right meaning and the real truth are never attainable. It is for this very reason that he applies his own analytical and theoretical constructs, his own scientific "plays", which are based on "readings" and "misreadings" of a certain piece of music, music problem, music in general, musicological treatise or standpoint... So, according to this typically postmodern relativism, especially that of the Derridians, reading is always already a misreading.

This is why musicological acting in the sense of **being-in-a-language** implies production of meanings that actually represent **individual musicological constructs** in the language. Hence, to understand the created constructs it is important to be able to relate to the system of logic on which they are based, a system that can have hardly any general ethnic feature.

In such a context, therefore, the traditional concept of national schools of musicologists is practically dismantled and transformed into a kind of creative, scientific, transcultural construct based on an endless chain of production and dissemination of meanings.⁶

References

¹ The terms “national schools of musicologists” and “national schools in musicology” are used synonymously.

² Thereby, we must be aware that both conceptions of the national in musicology – its romantically established national school and the approach determined by avant-garde attitudes – have not disappeared and still exist, producing important scientific results.

³ I refer here to a composer who does not simply live in the time of post-modernity, that is, after modernity, but composes within the framework of postmodernity as one specific artistic tendency in the post-modern time. (About the difference between “post-modernity” and “postmodernity” /written with hyphen and without it/, see in: Mirjana Veselinovic-Hofman, *Fragmente zur musikalischen Postmoderne*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Verlag, 2003)

⁴ More about the treatment of folklore in postmodern music, see: Mirjana Veselinovic-Hofman, “Folklor u muzici postmoderne” (Folklore in Postmodern Music), in: *Folklor i njegova umetni-ka transpozicija* (Folklore and Its Artistic Transposition), Beograd, Fakultet muzi-ke umetnosti, 1989, 261-270, and from the same author: “The Folklore Sample and Its Relations With the Electronic Medium in Postmodern Music”, in: *Folklore and Its Artistic Transposition*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 1991, 463-489.

⁵ I have introduced the notion of music transculturality as an analogue of the Wolfgang Welsch’s notion of transculturality, in my study “The Relationship Between Tradition and Culture – A sketch of a possible topography in postmodern music”, in: *Man and Music*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 2003, 563-572.

⁶ This phenomenon has been dealt with more extensively in the already mentioned book *Fragmente...*

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Summary

It is not often nowadays that compositional and musicological fields of work are accorded equal status within theoretical thought. So, I was very optimistic when I noticed that such equality was implied by a sub theme of this conference, because I have always endorsed the thesis that musicology should be treated not only as a "service provider" for compositional activities and achievements, but also as the space of creativity in itself. Intentionally or unintentionally, the sub theme *National schools of composers and musicologists...* seems to suggest that both compositional and musicological professions will be handled at the same conceptual rank.

I aim to illustrate this equivalence of rank by pondering the notion of **national schools of musicologists**. I will start by assuming that the existence of these schools is possible, and that they are characterized not only by geographical / ethnic issues, but much more importantly by issues of scientific approach: common in their general methodological principles but original in their individual endeavours and results. During this inquiry I will also reach the point where the notions of **national schools in musicology** and **world musicology** will be introduced. By this, I will indicate the present status of musicology as a creative activity in itself, as well as a vision of its future within the phenomenon of current transculturality.

Ar egzistuoja nacionalinės muzikologų mokyklos?

Santrauka

Šiais laikais retai pasitaiko, kad teorinio apmąstymo atveju kompozicinės ir muzikologinės sritys įgautų lygiavertį statusą. Taigi, aš optimistiškai nusiteikiau, pastebėjusi, jog tokią lygybę numato šios konferencijos potėmė, kadangi visados tvirtinau, kad muzikologiją reikia interpretuoti ne tik kaip „paslaugos teikėją“ kompozicinei veiklai ir rezultatams, bet ir kaip kūrybinę erdvę savyje. Atsitiktinai ar ne potėmė „Nacionalinės kompozitorių mokyklos...“ tarsi siūlo, kad tiek kompozicinės, tiek ir muzikologinės profesijos bus nagrinėjamos tuo pačiu konceptualiuoju lygiu.

Aš norėčiau pailustruoti šią kategorijos lygybę, apmąstant sąvoką „nacionalinės muzikologų mokyklos“. Pradėsiu nuo minties, kad tokios mokyklos gali egzistuoti ir kad jos yra apibūdinamos ne tik geografiniu / etniniu požiūriu, bet daug svarbesniu moksliniu pagrindu: joms yra būdingi bendri metodologiniai principai, tačiau jos yra savitos individualių pastangų ir rezultatų atžvilgiu. Čia taip pat pristatysiu sąvokas „nacionalinės muzikologinės mokyklos“ ir „pasaulinė muzikologija“. Pastarąją apibrėšiu dabartinį muzikologijos padėtį kaip kūrybinę veiklą savyje ir kaip jos ateities viziją dabartinės transkultūros aspektu.