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## **CROATIAN MUSIC HERITAGE**

Croatia is a small country that, thanks to its geographic location, has been a place of clashing and mixing of many different cultures for centuries, each of which left behind something special that became a part of the cultural heritage of Croatia as we know it today.

Even though it is not easy to pinpoint the most interesting moments in its rich music history, through this article, I will try to shine some light on the parts that are in some ways connected to the European cultural circle or those that influenced European culture.

### **The Birth of Music on the Adriatic Coast**

If we accept the historical fact that the Greek sovereign Dionysius founded the first poleis on the Adriatic around 390 BC in today's Croatia on the islands Vis (Issa) and Hvar (Pharos), it explains how Greek colonialists left behind, amongst many other things, some of the oldest written monuments in today's Croatia as well as a rich culture. So, it's not surprising that a descendant of the Dionysian wind instrument *diaulos*, under the name *šalmaj*, was used during the middle ages. Today, we can find it in Istria and the Croatian littorals as a traditional folklore instrument *sopile*. The characteristic untempered two-part singing sound that they produce create one of the most interesting musical scales that is still in use today. The so-called 'Istrian scale' and the style of two-part singing and playing in tight/ untempered intervals is a part of traditional as well as everyday life in Istria, giving the region a unique sound.

Traditional Croatian songs and dances as well as intricate folkloric attire are still very much a living and present way of music expression in other regions of Croatia as well and is usually linked to ceremonies native to each local community. The celebration of the richness and diversity of Croatian songs and dances as part of traditional ceremonies, deeply imbedded in the lives of Croatians, spurred on the foundation of the unique professional Ensemble of Folk Song and Dance (LADO) in 1949, which – to this day – researches, collects, artistically reworks and shows the most beautiful examples of Croatian folk tradition. Especially interesting is the sword dance *Moreška*, a part of the

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joint heritage of the Mediterranean, described on the island of Korčula all the way back in 1689, to honour the fight between the Saracens and Christians. However, only on Korčula it has survived until today, the island from which the great traveller and explorer Marco Polo (1254–1324) began his journeys through the Middle East all the way to China.

### **The Hint of Baroque and Classicism**

In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the Croatian side of the Mediterranean coast was under the influence of the Republic of Venice. However, some musical discoveries were made independent of this influence.

The Franciscan priest Ivan (Marko) Lukačić (Šibenik 1587–Split 1648) was a composer and organist, active in Šibenik and Split. He studied theology and music in Rome. Today, we only have one collection of his compositions, published under the name *Sacrae cantiones* in Venice, 1620, containing 27 spiritual concerts (motets), for voices between one and five accompanied by an organ basso continuo. Lukačić's introduction of the expressive and homophonic elements of early Baroque marked the shift towards new ideas in early 17<sup>th</sup> century music, and the motet *Quam pulchra es* is one of the most beautiful motets of the time.

A bit more to the south in the Republic of Ragusa, during the very beginnings of Classicism, composer and diplomat Luka Sorkočević (Dubrovnik 1734–1789) became more prominent. He was a spokesperson for the Republic of Ragusa in Vienna, in the court of King Joseph II. He spent time with Joseph Haydn, perhaps not only out of respect to the authority of the well-known musician but also the assumption that his mother was Croatian by descent, since Haydn used many folk songs from his place of birth in his symphonies and quartets, including the German national anthem. Sorkočević composed in the pre-classical style, and his works show remarkable talent as well as deep knowledge of European musical accomplishments in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most interesting works in his opus are seven three-movement symphonies that carry the marks of the Mannheim school, which led to him being recorded as the first Croatian composer of symphonies.

Another Croatian violinist and composer, Sorkočević's contemporary, Ivan Mane Jarnović (Dubrovnik 1747–Saint Petersburg 1804) took part in the concerts that greeted Joseph Haydn into London in 1791. It is assumed that he was born in the waters surrounding Dubrovnik as his parents, who were Croats by heritage, travelled to Italy. The genius violinist travelled throughout

Europe, and his concerts in Vienna were heavily praised by Leopold Mozart for his clarity of sound and intonation, the ease with which he performed even the most technically demanding compositions and, above all, his cantilena. He composed mostly for the violin and was the first to call his concerts *Romances*, which was quickly adopted by his contemporaries. According to his memoirs, he had a quick temper and his life as a travelling performer was fraught with conflicts, disputes and even duels.

### **From the First Operas to the Divas of the World's Opera Scenes**

The opera life in Croatia began twenty years after the establishment of the opera in Italy. In the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the pastoral-allegoric play with music *Dubravka* was performed, written by the Dubrovnik poet Ivan Gundulić (1589–1638).

In Zagreb in 1827, the Croatian Music Institute and its school were founded, greatly contributing to the development of musical life. It was the time of the Illyrian movement and the fight for the Croatian language, which led to Samobor nobleman and composer Ferdo Livadić (1799–1879) creating music for the first Croatian reveille *Još Hrvatska nij' propala*. It was the first time the Croatian language was sung on the Austro-Hungarian theatre stage.

Then, Vatroslav Lisinski (1819–1854) composed reveilles as well as the first Croatian opera *Ljubav i zloba* at the age of 27, based on the libretto of Dimitrij Demeter (1811–1872). The premiere of the opera was held on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1846. The newspapers in Zagreb wrote about the opera and the performance with no small amount of celebration. The Parisian *Revue et Gazette musicale* wrote on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1846: "Here is a truly unexpected musical novelty", and the Viennese *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* confirmed its success on the 8<sup>th</sup> May. This was ten years after the first Slavic national opera, *Ivan Susanin* by Mikhail Glinka, and twenty years before Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*.

At the young age of thirty-five, Vatroslav Lisinski died, creating a gaping need to find someone who will continue to develop what the Illyrians began. The ideal candidate appeared as Ivan Zajc (Rijeka 1832–1914), a man of Czechoslovakian heritage who, at the time, was composing operettas in Vienna. At the requests of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905) and poet Petar Preradović (1818–1881), Zajc came to Zagreb in 1870, where he established the Croatian opera as an institution of art and continued to enrich the national operatic repertoire with his work as a conductor, pedagogue and composer. In the same year, his opera in the Croatian language *Mislav* was performed for the first time and in 1884, his opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* was also performed.

For the duration of Zajc's management of the Croatian opera, one of the greatest vocal artists Milka Trnina (1863–1941) debuted and performed, going from performing in Zagreb to winning the stages of the world.

This musical upswing led to the construction of a new building for the Croatian national theatre and a new building for the Croatian Music Institute. Emperor Franz Joseph I inaugurated them, both on the same day, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1895.

Out of this musical environment came several famous singers who became an unavoidable part of European culture, such as the prima donna of the National Theatre in Prague and the muse of Leoš Jančáek, Gabrijela Horvat, the prima donna of the Berlin national opera, Violetta de Strozzi, chamber music singer of the Munich and Vienna State Opera, Đurđa Milinković, the soloists of the Vienna State Opera, Josip Gostič, Sena Jurinac and Dragica Martinis, the prima donna of the Metropolitan 'voice of the century' Zinka Milanov (née Zajc) and Marijana Radev, Nada Puttar-Gold, Božena Ruk-Fočić, Tomislav Neralić, Vladimir Ruždjak, Ruža Pospiš Baldani, Dunja Vejzović and Ljiljana Molnar-Talajić.

### **The Legacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century in Croatia, much like in most other countries, was marked by great musical personalities whose contributions to the Croatian as well as the world's musical heritage will forever be recorded, and their works and their creative and performing lives will encourage and inspire young musicians on their paths towards excellence.

The violin virtuoso and composer Franjo Krežma (Osijek 1862–Frankfurt 1881) served as a true example of the tragic heroes of romanticism. He studied first in Zagreb and, then, in Vienna where, in 1875 at the age of thirteen, he successfully graduated from the conservatory as the youngest student ever. Newspaper critics regularly compared his playing with the virtuosity of Paganini. Additionally, many famous artists such as Giuseppe Verdi and Franz Liszt, with whom he played, praised him greatly. At the age of seventeen, he became the concertmaster in Bilsé's orchestra in Berlin, from which the Berlin Philharmonic was created in 1885. He was deemed the youngest concertmaster ever with a shining future ahead of him. Then, suddenly, on a tour in Frankfurt after a short illness, he died on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 1881, right before turning nineteen. He left behind around one hundred compositions.

At the same time, the violinist and pedagogue of Czech descent Vaclav Huml (Beroun 1880–Zagreb 1953) was born. A Prague student of the great Otokar Ševčík, he lived and worked in Zagreb as a violin and chamber music teacher at the Croatian Music Institute from 1903 and, later, as a professor of the Zagreb Music Academy. He played as a soloist and in chamber ensembles and also co-founded the *Zagreb Quartet* in 1919, which is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, making it the oldest European chamber ensemble to perform without break.

By educating over 200 students, he is considered the founder of the Zagreb Violin School, growing off the seeds planted by O. Ševčík and K. Flesch. In his honour, the *International Violin Competition Vaclav Huml* has been held every four years since 1977.

Svetislav Stančić (Zagreb 1895–1970) was a pianist and a piano pedagogue. He studied the piano in Zagreb and Berlin and composition with F. Busoni. After coming to Zagreb in 1922, Stančić dedicated himself to performing, pedagogic work and the revival of the Croatian music heritage. For almost over half a century, he taught nearly all the pianists in Croatia. He had 99 students, of which 66 graduated under him and 40 decided on concert performance as their life orientation. His teaching method and individual approach to every student were so successful that, for a time, people always spoke about the Zagreb Piano School. The European Piano Teachers Association Croatia (EPTA) has held the *International Piano Competition Svetislav Stančić* in Zagreb every four years since 2006.

From the same generation, Lovro von Matačić (Sušak 1899–Zagreb 1985) was a Croatian conductor and composer, belonging to the elite of Europe and the world's music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born on Sušak, in a family that became nobility at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, tracing roots all the way to the Siege of Szigetvár in 1566. Matačić branched out to opera and symphonic and choir repertoires, with the crown of his achievements being serving as a conductor for the Berlin Philharmonic in 1936. After this, he became a frequent guest of the orchestra. He continued his remarkable work all throughout Europe and the USA as a conductor and director. For years, he led the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, and he became the chief conductor of the Zagreb Philharmonic from 1970. In his seventy years of work, he also wrote a number of compositions. In his will, he left funds for the education and help of young conductors and, in 1995, the *International Competition for Young Conductors Lovro von Matačić* was founded in his honour.

Around the same time, Boris Papandopulo (Honnef 1906–Zagreb 1991), one of the greatest composers of Croatian music history, composed over 440 works in many different forms and for different instruments. As a pianist, conductor, choir leader, opera director and, above all, an artist who truly felt for music and his fellow musicians, he was also a stellar interpreter of a huge number of compositions by Croatian composers, which he introduced not only to the Croatian but also to the world's public. Encouraged by the richness of his opus, the Croatian competition of young music artists Papandopulo was established in Zagreb in 2012, which cyclically showcases nearly all instrumental categories, along with solo singing and jazz.

Antonio Janigro (Milan 1918–1989) came to Zagreb at the age of 21, at the beginning of World War II, and stayed a full 30 years. Upon his arrival, the 'young prince of the violoncello' (as critics called him after his first concerts) had classes with the violin professor Vaclav Huml as he thought that the methods of the founder of the Zagreb Violin School would help improve his own technique. Soon, he realised there were a number of amazing musicians surrounding him, whom he brought together in 1953 to form the Zagreb Soloists Ensemble. This put Zagreb on the music map of the world, which has lasted even to this day.

All the above-mentioned people and the professionalisation of music life made it possible for and encouraged composer Milko Kelemen who founded the Music Biennale Zagreb, an international festival of contemporary music in 1961, following the needs and readiness of Zagreb and Croatia for contemporary, avant-garde and experimental music. The most important participants in the international music scene appeared in Zagreb, such as composers Stravinski, Britten and Shostakovic as well as many others who by then the classics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in amazing reception and even more encouragement for the growth of the local music culture.