

**Leon Stefanija**

## **Microtonality in Slovenia: The Concept and its Scope**

When Vito Žuraj (b. 1979), a composer active mainly in Germany, gave a pre-concert talk at Cankarjev dom on March 13th, 2015, after he received the Prešern Prize, Slovenia's highest national recognition, for his recent work, he commented that today many contemporary composers also write *only* microtonal works. He, among other composers today, accepted microtonality as a *common* compositional vehicle. The concept had to undergo a thorough redefinition to become common in music after it was, for the first time in Slovenia, reflected upon publicly in 1928 by one of the theoretically most well-informed composers in Slovenia, Srečko Koporc (1900–1965), and further propagated by the main “opinion-maker” of the 1930s, Slavko Osterc (1895–1941), who actually wrote only two pieces of microtonal music. Namely, although after WWII the concept of microtonality was considered a noteworthy asset of modern music theory and aesthetics, it was considered but a consequence (Alojz Gržinič), even as a dead-end (Ivo Petrić), of romantic chromatism.

In Slovenia, a more positive attitude toward microtonality came with the growing popularity of electronic music during the 1960s, especially with the generations of composers active from the last decades of the twentieth century onwards, members of which include Uroš Rojko (b. 1954), Brina Jež Brezavšček (b. 1957), Urška Pompe (b. 1969), Nina Šenk (b. 1982), and Petra Strahovnik (b. 1986). Microtonality today is a clear sign of composers' rootedness in the modernist tradition. However, the artistry emerging out of heterogeneous aesthetic idea(l)s connected to microtonality throughout history has gradually shifted the function of microtonality within contemporary musical practice, roughly speaking, in two directions. Thus, this contribution will summarize the scope of the concept in a chronological manner through two trajectories – two complementary threads that are relevant for microtonality in Slovenia. The first one is a transition from the almost exclusively quarter-tone music debate in the interwar period toward the sound-art debate in the last decades. The second thread addresses microtonality as a specific *theoretical* issue of musical modernism that became an integrative *aesthetic* issue pointing to certain postmodern *ars subtilior* of the musical expression shared by the musical modernists as well as members of the DIY (do-it-yourself) musical culture.

## 1 Introduction: the quarter-tone legacy from interwar Slovenia

Microtonality has a rather marginal position in Slovenia. It is connected, at first, primarily to the so-called Hába school, although it seems that it should be regarded as a pivotal concept in music theory. I will address the historical facts regarding microtonality in Slovenia in three sections: the 1920s, the 1930s, and the period after WWII.

Two complementary stories – trajectories – about microtonality are outlined: the first one charts the transition from the almost exclusively quarter-tone music debate in the interwar period toward the sound-art debate in the last decades. The second trajectory describes microtonality as a specific *poetological* issue of musical modernism that became an integrative *aesthetic* issue pointing to a certain postmodern *subtilitas* of musical expression shared by musical modernists as well as members of the DIY (do-it-yourself) musical culture.

The fact remains that few examples of microtonal music from interwar Slovenia exist – and microtonal music is exclusively confined to the quarter- and sixth-tone systems. These pieces are more educational than they are artistic, except for those by Franc Šturm, who claimed his Opus 1 was his quarter-tone piece. The scarce number of quarter-tone pieces and no published scores indicate the position of quarter-tone music within the musical culture of that time.

### Slavko Osterc (1900–1941)

1. *Tri skladbe za četrttonski klavir* (Three pieces for quarter-tone piano), 1935 (Pokorn 1970, 82: only the first is available, Moderato, probably the grading piece from Hába's quarter-tone music course; Stanko Vurnik mentioned Osterc's *Preludij in fuga* in quarter-tone system in *Dom in svet*, 1938; there is also a fragment of a *Fuga* preserved in Osterc's legacy).
2. *Štiri Heinejeve pesmi za glas in godalni kvartet v četrttonskem sestavu* (*Four Heine's songs for higher voice and string quartet in quarter-tone system*: 1. *Ej, prijatelj, kaj pomaga*; 2. *Pri kralju Visvamitri*; 3. *Ne norčuje se iz hudiča*; 4. *Kastrati so tožili*), dedicated to Alois Hába, composed probably in 1931 (Pokorn 1970, 85).
3. *Cvetoči bezeg* (*The lilac in flower*), cantata, 1936 (O'Loughlin 2000).

**Franc Šturm<sup>1</sup> (1912–1943)**

The whole bibliography (Bedina 1978, 112) lists, beside two lost works (*Šest majhnih skladb* for quarter-tone piano and String quartet in quarter-tone system, “accepted by Alois Hába as a graduation work,” as he wrote to his sister on February 13, 1935; see: Bedina 1978, 113), four quarter-tone and two sixth-tone works, all manuscripts:

1. *Mala suita* for 2 violins, Op. 2. (1. Allegro; 2. Adagio; 3. Andante cantabile; 4. Vivace). Prague, November 1933.
2. *Luftbalonsuite* for quarter-tone piano, Op. 3. (1. Andante; 2. Allegretto; 3. Moderato; 4. Vivace). Prague, April–May 1934.
3. *Pet pesmi* for voice, violin and violoncello, lyrics by Oton Župančič (1. *Tak tenka, tak mirna je zarja večerna*, Lento, tranquillo; 2. *Svež dih od gora*, Allegro molto; 3. *Tiho prihaja mrak*, Andante; 4. *Po stranskih potih*, Vivace; 5. *Palma svetlih sanj*, Lento). N. d.
4. *Mala muzika* for two violins (1. Agitato; 2. Adagio; 3. Allegretto; 4. Lento; 5. Con moto). Ljubljana, 1938. Handwriting.
5. *Veseli, žalostni in častitljivi koledniki* for two voices, lyrics by Oton Župančič (1. *Veseli koledniki*, Vivace; 2. *Žalostni koledniki*, Grave; 3. *Častitljivi koledniki*, Moderato). Prague, February 1935.
6. *Štiri otroške igre iz Cicibana Otona Župančiča* (only two sketches for children were written) for three voices on poetry from *Ciciban* by Oton Župančič. (1. *Dedek Samonog* 2. *Otroci spuščajo mehurčke*). N.d.

**Demetrij Žebre (1912–1970)**

1. *Dan*, ciklus pesmi za godalni kvartet v četrtonskem sistemu. Prague, 1938. Lost.

**Ivan Pučnik (1915–1991)**

1. Quarter-tone String Quartett with soprano. N.d.
2. Quarter-tone Phantasy for solo viola. N.d.

This list may be prolonged, yet the additions would hardly change the historical position of the pieces as indicated below.

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the only scholar of Šturm mentions that his Op. 1 is “likely to be a quarter-tone work because Op. 2 and Op. 3 are also” (Bedina 1978, 113). Bedina mentions also “*Dan*, ciklus pesmi za godalni kvartet v četrton. sistemu” (Praga 1938), yet I could not find the piece in Slovenia.

## 2 The views on microtonal music in the 1920s

The public experience with microtonality in Slovenia seems to have started on December 18, 1924, with the concert given by the Amar-Hindemith Quartet.<sup>2</sup> It was announced in the local newspaper *Jutro* on December 17, 1924, p. 4, where among other things Hába's self-reflected historical position is expressed:

The quarter-tone system is actually nothing new, it is only a completion of our common tonal system. As it is known, this was felt by the famous Busoni and Möllendorf, they both have experienced and expected this novelty in creating music.

One of the reporters, composer Emil Adamič (1877–1936), signed mysteriously as “Č”, recorded the event with veneration for those:

[W]hom we, the Ljubljana provincialists with our straitened music, cannot hold even a candle to. They came as a storm that cleans the atmosphere, as a light that brightens the darkness. Alas, my pen cannot follow my emotions. I would have written for them all the gospels, an entirely new, and the newest, musical Testament. (–Č, 1924)

The biblical elevations, however, took an interesting turn with the judgement of Hába's two movements from his Second String Quartet (probably Op. 7, 1920). Emil Adamič continued:

Hába does not seem to me to be honest. This is experimental music, a music for itself. If I would not have been told that this is quarter-tone music, bichromatic, I could not have felt that. I consider as music, the true daughter of God, only music that is not a product of thinking and experiments but an outpouring of cordial feeling. Hába certainly did not, as far as we were able to hear, feel [the music] as a son of the Czech people that is not acquainted with quarter-tones. We could more easily claim that about our Istrians, Čičis, about Oriental people. Perhaps we even do not feel the aesthetic need for quarter-tones and similar divisions because we have passed that

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2 The programme: “1. Stravinski: Koncertino 2. Schubert: Kvartet op. 125, št. 1. Es-dur. Allegro moderato. Scherzo. Prestissimo. Adagio. Allegro. 3. Odah: Godalni kvartet B-dur op. 5. 4. Hindemith: Kvartet op. 32. Zelo odločno. Zelo počasi. Mala koračnica. Passacaglia. 5. Haba: Godalni kvartet v četrtrglasnem sistemu. Andante. Allegro Scherzando.”

over through the centuries, and the equal temperament is a liquidation of our unsteady music from the past. Anyways, the future will reveal whether Hába, his predecessors, and his followers will prove right. The Hindemithians should be happy, though: if not because of the number of their listeners than at least because of the enthusiasm. They opened up a new entrance into the temple of music where we saw and felt the beauty alongside the musical charms that we have experienced never before. (–Č, 1924)

Out of several more documents – mainly marginal notes about quarter-tone music – created during the 1920s, only two of them are (at least somewhat) more substantial. Both were published in 1928, one by Slavko Osterc and the other by Srečko Koporc. They nicely reveal the dichotomy regarding the perception of quarter-tone music.

Slavko Osterc – a notorious Slovenian modernist, himself a pupil and a friend of Hába – claimed, to the contrary of the claim in the citation above, that Hába was highly influenced by the folk songs from his region in his quarter-tone music:

When I enrolled in the quarter-tone course, Hába first played on the automatic instruments [the Förster quarter-tone piano] to me about 30 Slovak folk songs that he “photographed” during his journeys through the Č.S.R. He wanted to call to attention that quarter-tone music also exists in the folk songs. “If you wish to hear more of it, you should go to Bosnia and the southern parts of your state,” he added. The course started with intonational exercises, and that was quite demanding at first. After about a month we managed to get into that and then he tested us about how we “follow” the quarter-tone theory and the old modal scales. Then he formed several groups, I forgot how many of them; I went to the last group with three older students that took their degrees this year (Karl Hába, Miroslav Ponc and [Rudolf] Kubín). Thus we started with practical composition and mainly composed piano pieces that Erwin Schulhoff played for us. (Osterc 1927/28)

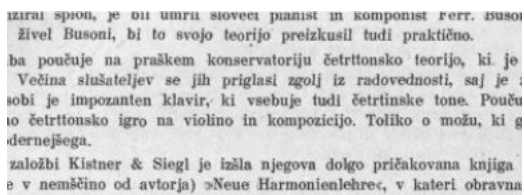
With his notorious irony, Osterc described the reception of quarter-tone music as something pragmatic and vital for his time. He thought of his sympathies for quarter-tone music as for “moral support for every fighter on his way to victory” because quarter-tone music, he noted apologetically, is:

[An] enrichment of the octave for additional 12 tones. [...] Thus the possibility for harmonic and melodic expression is not only doubled but drastically multiplied. (Compare mathematical combinations of successive numbers from 1 to 12 and from 1 to 24.) (Osterc 1927/28)

It was the same year that Srečko Koporc questioned Osterc's views. In the journal for church music *Cerkveni glasbenik* in 1928, while reviewing Hába's *Neue Harmonielehre*, after a short historical sketch of quarter-tone music from Busoni to Hába, Koporc noted:

His theory is very primitive. It is founded on multiplication of the intervals from the current [chromatic] tonal system.

For instance C–e (the third) between the major and minor third, neutral third and so forth. The 12 old tones + 12 new tones. In such a way, smaller units may be derived. Nothing different like Möllendorf's harmonium. In Hába's new book on harmony we read the explanation about chromatics, old diatonics, but not as one may expect, because he operates too much with passing notes. The same mistake holds true for the quarter-tone theory. His [string] quartets (written so far) are compositions in which the harmony is just the common one; the only difference is that above the ordinary chords some quarter-tone notes are added, considered exclusively quarter-tone notes. I expected Hába to operate and elaborate quarter-tone chords separately. Or at least in such a way as a certain gentleman (a student in the master class for composition) explained to me the first chord of B. Jirák's Sonata Op. 30. Because I may not reproduce the same chord, let me illustrate with another combination with the same interval structures as in the mentioned Sonata:



iziral spion, je on umrlu sioveci pianist in komponist ferr. busoni  
Živel Busoni, bi to svojo teorijo preizkusil tudi praktično.  
ba poučuje na praškem konservatoriju četrtonsko teorijo, ki je  
Večina slušateljev se jih priglasi zgolj iz radovednosti, saj je  
sobi je impozanten klavir, ki vsebuje tudi četrtonske tone. Pouču  
to četrtonsko igro na violino in kompozicijo. Toliko o možu, ki g  
dernejšega.  
založbi Kistner & Siegl je izšla njegova dolgo pričakovana knjiga  
e v nemščino od avtorja) »Neue Harmonienlehre«, v kateri obravna

a) This chord was considered by the mentioned gentleman as pure E major and according to him, Jiráček's Sonata starts with a pure C major chord, the second theme (of course) is on the dominant. The tones under b) are passing tones, etc. It is worth mentioning here [Marij] Kogoj's theory,<sup>3</sup> so-called "typical harmony." With Kogoj's theory, every chord of the chromatic [poltonski] system can be explained. The same will be possible in quarter-tone music. On this occasion I wish Kogoj would publish his harmony as soon as possible. We could compare both books from both a practical and scientific position. Professor Ot[a]kar Šin is also preparing a modern harmony. As it may be seen from these publications the new era aspires toward clarification of the harmonic formations, one explains them in one way the other in another. It is necessary to establish unity, which is a discipline for all teachings – be it either chromatic or quarter-tone music. The classical harmony may be a model that is slowly passing away; it dies slowly but it had unified and musically legitimate functions. It is the traditionality [tradicionalnost] that keeps it alive. (Koporc, 1928)

Srečko Koporc mentioned the "practical" and "scientific" level of the textbooks by Hába and the canonic music theory textbook by Otakar Šin. But he missed Hába's point, indicated by Osterc. Koporc omitted that Hába's book, as Spurný (2007) elegantly explained a decade ago, advocated a "Konzept einer 'Musik der Freiheit'" and was not a classical textbook on harmony. Hába pursued a socio-aesthetic goal of "free music" founded on one rule only: "Das einzig wirkliche Gesetz lautet, 'nicht traditionell zu sein,'" or, in Hába's biologicistic notion:

Die Gesetzmäßigkeit der geistigen Produktivität ist prinzipiell anscheinend dieselbe, wie die der animalen sexuellen Wollust und Produktivität. (Hába 1927, [v])

It was a textbook of *free composition* that deprived the composer only from one freedom: s/he had to remain within the confines combining intervals of pitches, not other sounds, as was indicated by the futurists and exhaustively practiced especially by electronic musicians after WWII.

3 Kogoj has in a manuscript a very interesting book on harmony; it is a book in which all possible combinations [of chords] are given, past and future, in chromatic [poltonski] music. Because the author has not yet given a title to his book, I used the name "Typical harmony" because of the lack of a more appropriate one.

### 3 The views on microtonal music in the 1930s

Hába's eloquence hints at the importance of the aesthetic issues within a certain context. Yet, a mixture of social and music-theoretical arguments circling around quarter-tone music was not recognized as a compound theoretical issue. Yet it was exactly this combination of music theory and aesthetics joined by different sociologisms that reverberated long after the modernist reintroduction of microtonality. By sociologisms I mean Hába's curious idea that advocated for microtonality as an anti-Germanic phenomenon, almost as an embodiment of the modern pan-Slavic idea. Bravničar recounted his meeting with Hába in the early 1930s, noting:

"The Romans have musically taken joy in diatonics, the Germans have devised great musical works in chromaticism. To us Slavs," continued Hába, "belongs the future and the task of quarter-tone music." – "I highly respect Schoenberg because he introduced new colors in music, new expressive means, and because he went on and on upwards without compromise. Look at Strauss and Schrecker. In their last compositions they ease off and I lose respect for such people. [...] It is necessary to always move forward; every retreat is pernicious for a person and it reveals nothing but the loss of power. Thus spoke Prof. Hába. (Bravničar 1931)

The overall impression regarding quarter-tone music was prophetic only in the sense of its historical potential:

I was curious what other Czech composers thought about quarter-tone music, and I spoke about it with Vít. Novak, Jos. Suk, V. Talich and others. Strangely enough, the answers to my questions were all so similar as they would have set them up earlier. They all respect and highly appreciate the consistency, belief, and sincerity of Professor Hába, yet no one would swear with both hands on quarter-tones. Yet he successfully persuaded me that this system will be never disappear from this world and that it will coexist simultaneously with diatonic, chromatic, and quarter-tone systems, and Hába will enter the history of music as the John the Baptist of quarter-tones. (Bravničar 1931)

It was during Hába's visit to Ljubljana that the public found out about his prophetic cultural position as opposed to the aesthetic ontologies of that time. A certain "T" reported about Osterc's quarter-tone piece *Four Heine's Songs* in 1932 and Hába's visit in the newspaper *Slovenec*:



Today we mock romantic music everywhere and we try to impose on it all imaginable sins: sentimentality, effeminacy, tearfulness, whining, bombasticity. We fancy strong, clear, sometimes even primitive, music. As the undersigned has heard quarter-tone music, it is intensified romanticism, that is, intensified sentimentality, effeminacy and so forth. That does not work today anymore. Because we also know Osterc from other perspectives, we know that he wanted to pay compliments with this experiment to the propagator Alois Hába, who personally attended the concert and shared with us some of his thoughts about quarter-tone music. Yet these songs are fairly innocent, and they did disappoint those who expected that the world will fall from its hinges. If the listener had not seen the written score; that the songs were composed in the quarter-tone system, he would almost miss the fact. He would think that the performer uses too many sugary portamentos. (T. 1932, 2)

Marij Kogoj, soon to go off the Slovene public musical life due to his mental illness, reported about the quarter-tone phenomenon as “fully understandable thing”:

The novelty for Ljubljana are “Four Heine’s Song” in the quarter-tone system for voice and string quartet composed by Slavko Osterc. Prior to the concert, a short lecture was given by the pioneer of the quarter-tone composition Al. Hába. It turned out that the quarter-tones will be a fully understandable thing, even if the chords as such were not used completely in a specific manner. These songs were sang by Mrs. Arko, 4 Gradnik songs (in chromatic system) by the same composer were performed by Ms. Golobova. The programme was played by a quartet from our Conservatory of music. (Kogoj 1932, 39–40)

A month later, the (leftist) newspaper *Jutro* published a translation of Hába’s affirmative review of the same concert (“Češka sodba ...” 1932). Hába emphasized the closeness of Osterc’s quarter-tone music to the folk song diction as well as the historical necessity of quarter-tone music. He claimed that it promotes “new forms in music” within Slavic culture. Not only were the social and aesthetic variables discussed; the theoretical potential of the quarter-tone system was also recognized.

Ivan Pučnik, an amateur composer who hated any kind of music education although enjoyed Hába’s classes immensely (and ended up as a

physician-pneumologist; cf. Weiss 2018, 211–13), described Hába in June 1935 (Pučnik 1935) as “the most modern Czech composer.” The interview is the longest presentation of Hába’s views on composition in Slovenia and the main emphasis lies on the context: the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. The view (philosophically comparable to some ideas found by Stockhausen in his *Licht*) deserves a longer quotation:

What do you think about the new Steiner anthroposophic era in music?

As if he wanted to answer on complexity with a single word, Hába said: Yes!

Then he continued with great optimism:

First of all, nobody knew how to answer simply to the question: What is music? Kallenbach simply said: We are not on that spot to be able to answer that. But Steiner said: Music is an image of an inner man, a condensed image of his surrounding and nation. That is why every true inner music is typical for a nation and in its essence is unquestionably collective; it is a reflection of the struggle that a man fights with two powers: with the Luciferian and the Ahrimanic element, in order to attain the classical, the balance and the fullness, what personifies Christ. Luciferianism is feverish gout of ghosts and certain humidity, while the Ahrimanic element is a stabilized, non-fierce, crude dogmatism. In music, these three elements are expressed with adequate concepts: the pure original melody forms the type of Christ; Luciferianism is expressed in harmony, Ahrimanic in the rhythm. Christ is not a struggle against Luciferism and Ahrimanicism, but a harmony between the two poles in a sense of the normal, the healthy; therefore all three elements must be represented in music: thought, emotion and will, all with the same consistency. – Each of these three types, which is for itself exclusivist, is larpurlartistic. We need general spaciousness: the high and the low registers, the proper development, the power, and the balance of the elements to give birth to a Christ-type; full-bloodedness and absolute humanity.”

Hába said precisely: This is the Steiner era, which necessarily leads to uncompromising, the corresponding musicians get it. Today, these three elements, Christ, luciferism and Ahrmanism in battle must be shown, because we live in a battle and blighted age! (Pučnik 1935)

The all-encompassing, universalist view on music as a reflection of the world and the artist are the prime-movers that led Dragotin Cvetko in the late 1930s to picture Hába as the person who presented common theoretical foundation of all tone systems and set up the possibility of composing in all systems (Cvetko 1938, 562).

Publicly, however, the attractiveness of quarter-tone music was rather ephemeral. The quarter-tone music course organized by Franc Šturm in 1937 attracted only one student:

[O]nly one candidate enrolled, Primož Ramovš, a younger student of Osterc, who keeps his notes from that 'school' that consisted of three meetings only. (Bedina 1981, 18)

Quarter-tone music remained a kind of a theoretically generated propaganda for modern Slavic music throughout the 1930s. Was it more imagined by Hába himself in 1933 than considered as a feasible goal in Slovenia? Hába's article on microtonal music was published (translated into Serbo-Croatian) in the most advanced Yugoslav music journal of that time, *Zvuk* (Sound) (Hába 1933). His words were a kind of a musical light-house that sporadically indicated the coordinates of a new land. But this light did not have the power to guide many ships. The beacon, at that time, attracted only a few sailors.<sup>4</sup> Yet its light grew stronger and stronger in the following decades.

#### 4 After WWII

After 1945 an important feature of emphasizing two complementary aspects of microtonality grew in importance. On one side, the historical arguments are widening in range and include geographical (or, rather, ethnographical) as well as ethical arguments. On the other side, microtonality is seen as an aesthetic *qualia* of the modern world. It is important to stress that the second issue emerged publicly in the late 1960s. The biggest Yugoslav musicological resource, *Muzička enciklopedija*, dedicated in the second edition only a sparse three paragraphs to quarter-tone music (Kuntarić 1972) and none on microtonality at all, although the word itself and its derivatives exists in several entries. There is hardly any doubt that microtonality today is seen as

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4 Not even the both theoretically and historically informed writers, such as Osterc and Koporc, did not demonstrate the "empirical attitude" (Johnson 2015, 195) comparable to that of Nicola Vicentino, who according to Julian Johnson "revealed remarkable awareness of different musical traditions of the world. His own system of microtones, he argued, would be the first to accommodate the microtonal tunings and in infections of all the world's music" (Ibid.).

a common compositional means used by many modern musicians regardless of their stylistic persuasion, as indicated in the 1980s by Amalietti (1987, 1987a, 1987b).<sup>5</sup> This trajectory of discussing microtonality may be depicted as a process starting from a specific historical circumstance in the 1920s and 1930s, gaining theoretical importance especially with the highlights of electroacoustic music and becoming an aesthetic universal variable. It deserves a more detailed discussion.

The first Slovenian survey of microtonality was a part of the historical survey of twentieth-century music by Ivo Petrić in 1962. Although Petrić stressed that the “division on micro-intervals is a historically and geographically conditioned” phenomenon (Petrić 1962, 509), he emphasized a universalist view of microtonality, important also to Hába’s musical philosophy. Petrić identified microtonality as having a universal theoretical potential for discussing different tonal systems, as did Dragotin Cvetko as early as in 1938. However, Petrić also formulated the aesthetic function of microtonality, claiming that it erases the gaps between individual cultures and enables music to be an inclusive, integrative art:

Micro-interval division is being revived in our time. Yet it emerges as a consequence of a deeper intervention in the material and thus also in the aesthetic appreciation of the art of music. We find the quarter-tone being expressed, above all, in the works of the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki (1933); it functions to create sound masses and noises produced with traditional instruments. Micro-intervals are also used in electronic music, which artificially creates its tone material. Although micro-intervals will need a long time to enter the consciousness of the entire humanity, their usage demonstrates an aspiration to bring closer and join all existing

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5 For instance, Darja Koter (2013) mentioned in her history Slovene music after 1918 the quarter-tone music briefly in connection to Slavko Osterc and Franc Šturm (although more students attended Hába’s quarter-tone music class: beside Demetrij Žebre who left also some compositional traces in quarter-tone music, also Drago Mario Šijanec, Pavel Šivic, Marijan Lipovšek should be mentioned). And includes rather contingently the microtonality in connection to:

- electroacoustic music (Vinko Globokar),
- the acoustic analysis of the harmony and its use in composition (Božidar Kos),
- spectral music and
- world-music legacy (Tomaž Svete).

One could add only that the technical aspect of microtonality features much more prominently already in the music written by composers born in the 1920s and 1930s, as O’Loughlin does not forget to mention in connection to Milan Stibilj, Jakob Jež, Primož Ramovš, and Darjan Božič. Yet, not Koter’s and not O’Loughlin’s (2000) history of the Slovenian music since 1918 – the only synthetic histories of the Slovenian music of the last century – do not point to an important *unificatory* perspective of microtonality discussed further on.

musical cultures. The advancement of the technique alongside the traffic and, on the other side, the advancement in electronics with all its developments (the gramophone industry, tape recorders, radio broadcasts) break down the last obstacles that kept individual cultures in isolation. (Petrić 1962, 510)

It would be difficult to find a nicer proclamation of “postmodernity” as a period of “liquid” entities that “cross borders” and grow (at least nominally) into a culture of coexistence. And Petrić indicates another important trajectory about microtonality: the microtonality that emerges in the second half of the twentieth century is a result of a “deeper intervention of the material and thus also in the aesthetic appreciation of art of music” and is simply a reproach to what he saw as a more superficial phenomenon of using microtonal structures on the level of interval-distribution only. Petrić’s words echo the reproach articulated more than three decades earlier by Srečko Koporc: microtonal composers from the first half of the twentieth century “did not reach into the essence of devising music”, thus it was heard “to sound like deformed traditional music” (Petrić 1962, 510). Though, Petrić added, the use of microtonality was successful in some works based on folk music (he mentioned Bartók’s Violin Concerto and his String Quartet No. 6, Bloch’s Piano Quintet, and the quarter-tone Aria from *Oedipus* by Georges Enescu).

To illustrate Petrić’s (and Koporc’s) argument, a representative piece of quarter-tone music, a comment on the passage from Franc Šturm’s *Little Music* for two violins in quarter-tone system from 1938 may be offered. The rhythmic and metric structure is neo-classical. The leading voice may be interpreted with the judgement of microtonal music by Alojzij Geržinič (a student of Slavko Osterc and political emigrant that fled to Argentina in 1948), who in 1962 set microtonality in a line with “polytonality” specific to those for whom:

[E]ven the utmost chromatism of composers, like Reger, did not crumble the material for composition thoroughly enough; that is why they broke the whole tones into four (quarter-tone music) or more parts (Hába, Wyschnegradsky, Carrillo).<sup>6</sup> (Geržinič 1962, 249)

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6 Beside the mentioned examples, the microtonality is publicly mentioned several more times in the interwar period on different occasions: while reporting about certain pieces (of Hába in: Osterc 1931), reporting about Hába (Bravničar 1931).

The image shows a handwritten musical score for two violins, titled "I. Agitato". The score is written in a four-staff system. The first staff is labeled "I. Vc." and the second "II". The music is in 5/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics include mp, mf, and poco dim. The score is marked with "I." at the top and "Agitato" in the first staff.

Example 1: Franc Šturm, Mala muzika za dve violini v četrttotskem sistemu.  
NUK Ljubljana, Glasbena zbirka

The importance of microtonality as a theoretical concept was, again, stressed in the early 1960s by Pavle Merkù, who noted that quarter-tone music is a consequence of the fall of tonality and aspirations toward certain “pan-tonality” (Merkù 1961, 867). However, it is not only this theoretical *pregnancy* of microtonality – the concepts of *pan-tonality* (polytonality, also pandiatonicism?) – that will be of theoretical interest later on. It is also its epistemologic, primarily aesthetic flexibility – its evasive, heteronomous and heterogeneous, *pan-aesthetic* pregnancy – that attracts the youngest generation of professional as well as non-professional musicians. This interest is indicated by the activities of the sound artist Miha Ciglar, the director of the Institute for Sonic Arts Research (IRZU) founded in 2008, and the founder

of the EarZoom Sonic Festival. It is as if Hába's and Vicentino's philosophy have been rephrased and reframed into a certain holistic, all-encompassing, universal theory that exists somewhere in-between the contemporary do-it-yourself (DIY) culture and academically "self-evident" yet till now rarely theoretically reflected fact.

In IRZU's 2011 description of a series of events entitled *Theory and Techniques of Contemporary Music*, we read:

With sound becoming – through the various contexts and discourses – the object of our thoughts, it simultaneously raises numerous questions that can be seen both as a challenge for new interpretations and as a subject matter for creation.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that Ivo Petrič's indicated hypothesis that microtonality has still a long time before entering into the "consciousness of the entire humanity" as an "aspiration to bring closer and join all existing musical cultures" has become the behest of young DIY musicians and their fascination with "the sound itself." What emerged as a moving idea within different modernisms of the twentieth century and became a compositional theory further unfolds through aesthetic reflection in the functionally hardly comparable context of "alternative" music culture.

## 5 Inclusiveness and exclusivity of microtonality today

Today, microtonality is a commonly accepted compositional feature. Some of the most recognized Slovenian composers today – beside already mentioned Vito Žuraj at least Uroš Rojko (b. 1954), Tomaž Svete (b. 1956), Larisa Vrhunc (b. 1967), Urška Pompe (b. 1969), Nina Šenk (b. 1982), Matej Bonin (b. 1986), and Petra Strahovnik (b. 1986) may be mentioned here – use microtonal procedures with astonishing skill. Although not interesting for all composers, the microtonality seems to have become a part of a wider discourse on sound art. Similarly as the microtones existed, without the theoretical background, in the futurist aesthetics of sound, the sound art seems to be interesting not only for the academic composers but for different musical practices connected to DiY culture. With an important consequence: the theoretical, aesthetic, and ideological layers obviously differentiated indicate interestingly entangled notion of our musical modernity.

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<sup>7</sup> See leaflet to the IRZU's 2011 at: [http://irzu.org/flyers/TPSG\\_2011.pdf](http://irzu.org/flyers/TPSG_2011.pdf).

In the above-quoted leaflet to the IRZU 2011 event, the editorial starts tellingly with a series of questions:

How are we to think of sound in all its heterogeneity? How can we ascribe meaning to this evading, transitory, yet omnipresent entity that does not fall within conventional categories offered by music or within aesthetic interpretations, musicological analysis, and a breaking down of its structure, organization, and syntax? How are we to rethink the critical interpretation of various sound practices, the media, and technology-mediated sound, its modes of production and the wider social implications, and the role of sound in the consumer culture, and how can we extend the act of perceiving outside the dominant cultural patterns?

This confusingly rich “shopping list” of phenomena – sound in all its heterogeneity – semantically implodes in itself. It only thematizes the heterogeneity of sound as an “evading, transitory, yet omnipresent entity.” It may be read as a nice idealistic echo of the eleventh analytical recommendations formulated by Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, namely that:

Sei dir bewußt und gib es zu verstehen, daß du sie [die Wahrheit] niemals als Ganzes erreichen kannst, sondern nur als einen Strahl des unendlichen Strahlens. (Eggebrecht 1995, 136)

The “rays of radiation” seem to add an idealistic conundrum to the universe of music, picturing the communication chain as an eternal process of generating endless variables out of which *also* music emerges through “various sound practices”.

The “various sound practices” and “inscription of meaning,” taking into consideration the different strata of the musical culture, is an essayistic formulation of the field that since Guido Adler tries “[d]as Verhältniß der Musik zur Kultur, dem Klima, den nationalökonomischen Verhältnissen” (Adler 1885, 12–3) to grasp and define anew. The quotation of IRZU 2011 event actually juggles with the phenomenon of sound *and* the social (communicative, cultural, cognitive) processes in which the sound appears in a freely integrative fashion, otherwise promoted as interdisciplinary approach. The very substance of “the sound itself” in “its entire heterogeneity” disappears into different meanings, different contexts, perfectly flexible to cross disciplinary borders.



Although DIY culture does not use the theoretical idea of microtonality for understanding music, it is probably not difficult to connect the concept as advocated by Busoni and Hába a century ago with their endeavors: the advancement – in its widest sense: *differentiation* – of expression is the main idea behind it. Yet, the DIY culture of sound-art rhetoric at first sight concentrates on sound, it moves the sound and the reflection, paradoxically, away from the sound. Instead of thematizing the delicacies of the sound – as was done by *ars subtilior*, *seconda pratica*, Expressionism, electronic music, the spectralists, or the composers of the New Complexity – the DIY music culture transforms the debate into a conceptual hotchpotch. Instead of imposing differentiated epistemological integration and proposing complementary of disciplines dealing with music research, a socially pregnant yet loosely defined universe connected to artistry with sound and the ideas of freedom is emphasized. Noone seems to feel at home where everybody may be home.

It seems that microtonality has been itself devised and thematized from three sides. Firstly, it was introduced as an epistemologic tool for addressing different musics (Vicentino) outside of the modal/tonal system as well as a tool for analyzing musical performance based on different scales (Alexander J. Ellis's logarithmic system of cents); this aspect is still crucial for music research in the era of computer-aided analyses. Secondly, Busoni, among others, set the microtonality as a theory for enriching the expressive possibilities of music; in Hába's eyes, microtonality as a new system of harmony enabled *total freedom* of composing. Thirdly, the microtonality was addressed through an aesthetic point of view, most thoroughly by the expressionists, futurists and dadaists. Yet, contemporary DIY culture seems to introduce the fourth side with the sound art, an evasive soundscape philosophy points to a "borderless tonicity" in which any sound may be treated as a tone, any noise as a pitch, any audible event as music. DIY culture stirs up the layers microtonality as a heterogeneous concept combining aesthetics, music theory and sociology (anthropology), in short, as a tool for theorizing musickings of the world.

## 6 P.S.

It is as if the initial idea for Hába's microtonal system (the games with his brother about "'false' intonation" in his youth)<sup>8</sup> has been granted legitimacy

8 "Den größten Dienst haben mir meine zwei älteren Brüder (Josef und Vincenz) erwiesen. Hätten sie mit mir in meinem Kinderjahren nicht das tolle Spiel der Intonation der ‚falschen‘ Töne betrieben, wäre kaum die Viertelton- und Sechsteltonmusik von mir da, auch keine Theorie der neuen Tonsysteme könnte ich ohne klare Tonvorstellung der kleineren Tonstufen schaffen." (Hába 1927, XIII–XIV)

for creating a kind of “generational history” of microtonality, now addressed often as “sound art.” What earlier and for other musical cultures seemed acceptable has yet to be theoretically and aesthetically re-defined to meet the expectations of concrete users.

Yet, Hába also emphasized his personal experience with the microtonal acoustic world as an important advantage of his, comparing himself to Busoni, who did not live long enough to create any microtonal music, allegedly because of lack of instruments, even though he pioneered the contemporary theory of it. And Hába also rather pragmatically explained the necessity of microtonal music:

Was entsteht zuerst, die Theorie oder die Musik? Zuerst ist eine Sehnsucht da, das oder jenes zu erreichen. (Hába 1927, XV)

It is the same pragmatic context in which today’s reflections on the heterogeneity of the “sound itself” implicitly or explicitly evoke the theoretical foundations, aesthetic features, and social contexts of microtonality. If the mysterious “Č” reported about the Amar-Hindemith Quartet not bothering with the theoretical foundation of the tone system and offering sociologism while falsely denying the existence of microtonal features in the folk music of Hába’s milieu, Hába and Osterc, to the contrary, knowledgeable from first-hand experience, indicated a that there was a universalistic historical and theoretical foundation for microtonal music. The theory, ethnographic evidence, and aesthetic expectations did not coincide, obviously – and it seems that they often still fail to do so.

Microtonality as an “aesthetic enrichment” rooted in the romantic ideal of differentiation of the expression remains important for the fragmented yet to a reasonable extent comparable musical practice today. Not as a social concept in the sense of Hába’s idea of microtonality as a vocation of Slavic music, but certainly as a concept of sound art and its aesthetic universalism that was equally emphasized by Hába (here indicated by Cvetko in 1938, later by Petrić, and to some extent by Merku). Aesthetic universalism found a pragmatic echo in DIY culture and its “heterogeneity.” If the “main rule” that Hába derived from his music teachers about the possibility of connecting any tone/chord to any other tone/chord (Hába 1927, VI–VII),<sup>9</sup> contemporary iterations of sound art elevate the theoretical possibilities of creating music

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9 “Mein Grundsatz lautet: Jeden Ton kann man mit jedem anderen Ton jedes Tonsystems verbinden (in Beziehung bringen). Jeden Zweiklang und Mehrklang kann man mit jedem anderen Zweiklang und Mehrklang jedes beliebigen Tonsystems verbinden (in Beziehung bringen).” (Hába 1927, VI–VII)

“from the sound itself,” using the fascination of sound as a synonym for electronic music and (free) improvisation, creating imagery of a incommensurable, utterly subjectivist, contextually conditioned notion of sound art as *the* (referential) state of contemporary music.

It is, of course, not difficult to take sides *pro et contra* whether microtonal music, as Srečko Koporc claimed, is “a reminder that the world today is living faster and more superficially than ever before” (Koporc 1928, 112) or not. But it would be interesting to compare further the idea of *progress* that was the giant who carried also the theory of microtonality with the other theoretical concepts on the giant’s shoulders. The giant is fairly alive, he just seems to have several more dwarfs on his shoulders.

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