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Microtonal Music in Serbia: A Newly (Re)discovered Resource

1 Close encounters of the microtonal kind

I will begin by indulging myself with an anecdotal introduction. Last year (2017), at a conference in Vilnius, I and a small party of five or six composers and theorists, previously little known to each other, spontaneously gathered for lunch in a restaurant. No sooner had the orders been placed that I found myself in the midst of a heated discussion. Dividing the octave into 31 or 72 equal parts... Boston microtonal society... a vocal coach who could sing accurately one sixth or whatever fraction of a semitone... Everyone seemed to know a great deal on the subject. Except me, that is. True, as a composer, I did sprinkle a quarter-tone or two through a couple of my works (some of which I later changed to halftones). I do tell my students there are different kinds of tuning and that the size of the smallest interval is not necessarily a semitone, but generally very little beyond that. Three days upon my return to Belgrade, I ran into my good colleague and friend from Slovenia, Leon Stefanija. He asked me to contribute an article to the volume he was co-editing. The topic? Microtonality, of all things. Coincidence? Very well, but microtonality in Serbia – is there such a thing? Several notable Serbian composers were students of Alois Hába, and they left a handful of quarter-tone compositions that nobody has performed for decades. Have I missed something lately? I randomly asked a few of my composer colleagues. No, they didn't do microtones. Microtonal music in Serbia: a null set. Or is it? I remembered vaguely something I heard from my younger – really much younger, even student – colleagues. There might be more to it than I had thought.

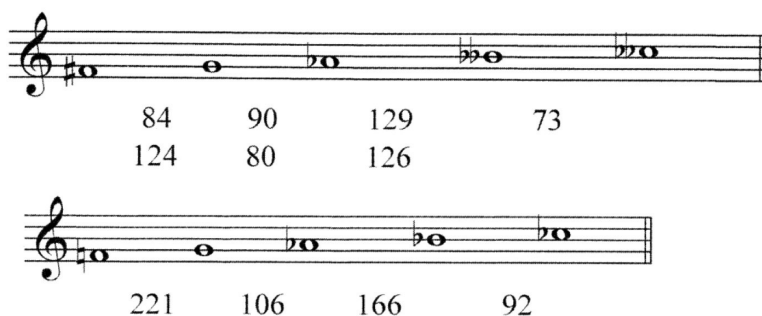
Having done some homework, I realized that writing about microtonal music in Serbia means explaining why during a century and half (roughly speaking) there was so little of it, and then an eruption over the last several years.

2 Rooted in tradition

As was the case with many other small nations, marginalized in various ways, Serbia entered the world of Western art music – roughly in the third quarter

of the nineteenth century – through traditional music, starting with simple and continuing with increasingly more complex harmonizations and arrangements of folk tunes.

As can be expected in a traditional, rural culture, Serbian folk tuning is not twelve-tone equal-tempered (henceforward 12ET). Among many different styles in Serbian folk music and many regional and local “dialects,” I will draw special attention to ancient rural singing. Its “stock” of pitches is generally limited to four or five. Tradition has fixed these pitches, making some of them more stable than others. Tonometric analyses have been only rarely conducted, and I am reproducing a couple of examples from western Serbia.¹



Example 1: Tonometric analysis of selected folk scales (Golemović 2016, 21)

Numbers represent the size of intervals in cents; two series of numbers reflect the local difference in intonation of the same “scale.” The size of intervals is not haphazard, and within a given locality, it is rendered with a high level of precision. The ancient style of rural singing is frequently heterophonic, as in Example 2 (to which I will return later).

вра - ти ов - це са пре - - - - - ви - је. И!

e, x, e, e, e

Example 2: Heterophonic singing from western Serbia (Golemović 2016, 67)

¹ Such analyses of traditional pipes can be found in Gojković and Kirigin 1961.

The notation is conventional, and the clue to the precise intonation may be found in tonometric results, as shown above. The intervals are frequently narrower than suggested by notation.

Another important thread of Serbian musical tradition is the chant of the Serbian Orthodox Church based on the system of *echoi* (lit. voices) – modes, or rather a specific combination of modes and melodic formulae, as well as spiritual qualities associated with them. They can be ultimately traced to Byzantine music but have evolved rather differently. Non-12ET is present there as well, although this aspect has not been sufficiently studied.

Thus, the Balkan ear may be “tuned” to non-tempered scales and narrow intervals.²

3 Then why have so few microtones appeared in Serbia?

Serbian composers had ample non-tempered resources to draw on. They did not do so, not even Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856–1914), the first major composer in Serbian music history. He is praised for his insightful harmonization of folk tunes based on their latent harmonic characteristics, even if it meant deviating from the rules of functional tonal harmony. But his feeling for authenticity did not go as far as to include non-tempered demotic intonation. It is not that he was unaware of it. In his writing about folk music, he did mention a narrow major third, close to minor. Kornelije Stanković (1831–1865), generally credited with being the first Serbian professional composer, actually harmonized some of these songs in minor.

This is not in the least surprising. Serbs, struggling for their national, cultural, and political emancipation and their liberation from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, sought to achieve this not only militarily and by asserting their national identity, but also through urbanization, modernization, and adaptation to Western cultural models. This tendency remained prominent throughout a great deal of subsequent history. Building on tradition was a perfectly logical path, but so was the translation of folk music into idioms accessible to a broader, international cultural community.³ The general level of education in Serbia was still rather low in the second half of the

2 Teachers of solfege encounter this in the form of systematic “mistakes” in intonation; according to my colleague Gordana Karan (personal communication), they even identify typical differences between various ethnicities living in Serbia, consistent with their respective traditions. Similar problems are familiar to directors of amateur choirs.

3 Serbia is far from being unique in that sense. See, for instance, McClary 2008, in relation to Edvard Grieg. Even the first Serbian melographers tried to provide theoretical underpinnings to the music they transcribed from the perspective of functional tonality.

nineteenth century. The majority of educated Serbs lived in Austria-Hungary and had studied chiefly in various centers in the empire or elsewhere in Europe. European music of the last decades of the nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth offered virtually no alternative to 12ET.

4 Few does not mean none

Paradoxically, what little microtonality existed in the history of Serbian music before the present century was introduced by Western sources, even if we had microtonality at hand. This was part of the same tendency of assimilating Western culture – only this culture had changed.

Some of the most prominent Serbian composers born in the first decade of the twentieth century studied in Prague, and in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of that city, they came into contact with avant-garde developments in European music. Some of them attended classes given by Alois Hába and actually wrote some quarter-tone music in an afunctional, athematic style close to Hába's own. I will take as an example Dragutin Čolić (1907–1987) who was a member of the first generation of the Serbian avant-garde: a leftist and a member of the Communist Party, he divided art into progressive and reactionary, depending on whether it fostered positive or negative social forces (Cvetković 2007, 27). He was a devoted follower of Schoenberg, and although he mastered the twelve-tone technique, his work was closer to Schoenberg's pre-dodecaphonic music, which was more fruitful for his quarter-tone interests. His *Concertino* for quarter-tone piano and string sextet (1932) was also the first composition of the piano concerto type in Serbian music. According to Sonja Cvetković, the compositional context in which he used quarter-tones include constant variation, motivic transformation, lack of external form, and dynamic impulses entrusted to the motive. In his music, there is a tendency toward a linear profiling of musical material, whereas harmony is devoid of any tonal logic, replete with chromaticism and fourth chords (Cvetković 2007, 25).

Other notable composers from that group include Milan Ristić (1908–1982) and Ljubica Marić (1908–2003); the latter became one of the greatest Serbian composers of all time (but her quarter-tone pieces add very little to her reputation). Finally, there was Vojislav Vučković (1910–1942), a social and artistic revolutionary, a communist killed by the Nazis in World War II. His quarter-tone writing may have been the most advanced of all, but that part of his oeuvre has been lost or destroyed.

After the heavy losses in the war, the country was being rebuilt under the Communist Party. The political situation, with socialist realism as the official aesthetic, may have been an impediment to pre-war avant-garde tendencies, even if Serbia/Yugoslavia was spared the ordeals that some of Soviet artists had to undergo. Even without the political factor, after the initial enthusiasm for European avant-garde, Čolić and other composers of the “Prague group” must have felt the need to find a path of their own. It often meant the restoration of the classical form and softening of atonal acuteness.

Former expressionism gave way to anachronous neoromanticism, with the inevitable folkloric overtone. (Cvetković 2007, 28)

Later, they may have achieved a kind of synthesis of their previous styles and techniques, but they practically never returned to quarter-tone writing.

Especially from the 1960s, the musical scene in Serbia (and Yugoslavia as a whole) was marked by pluralism, to which neither neo-classicism nor continued reliance on folklore nor yet any avant-garde movement were strangers. Some composers attended courses in Darmstadt; aleatory procedures of the Polish School became very influential; an electronic studio was established at Radio Belgrade. None of this produced any significant microtonal music.

The surge of nationalism in the 1990s brought as little good artistically as it did in every other way. Microtonality was certainly not on its agenda.⁴ Some of the truly outstanding music from that period lies outside the sphere of this article.

This does not mean, of course, that there is not a single microtone to be found. For the sake of illustration, I will adduce two examples. When Ljubica Marić, after a long hiatus in her creative work, wrote *Asymptote* for violin and strings (1986) using quarter-tones sporadically in the violin part, she did not hark back to her early practice. Quarter-tones are now primarily slight intonational inflections, or passing notes. They may have a deeper meaning as a probe into the microworld of musical tissue, a striving toward the infinitesimal while never, of course, attaining it, just as a curve reaches its asymptote only in infinity. In the linear notes for her compact disk, she compared this to humanity’s struggle to achieve life’s goal.

The second example is by Srđan Hofman (b. 1944) – a leading Serbian composer and professor emeritus of the University of Arts – and his composition *Dolazi!* (It’s Coming!) for string orchestra (1981). The effect is one of very

4 Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman (1997, 18) used the terms “pseudo-folklore” and “pseudo-orthodoxy”, and in her scathing criticism of such developments she pointed out their extremely simplified and superficial comprehension of tradition, in the factual, compositional and emotional respect, whereby they even impair the original itself.

gradual change of pitch, from unison to cluster. We can attribute to this a collapsing effect on space, as suits the title. (I am fond of this conjecture, although, admittedly, there is little to support it, since there are only two instances of microtones in some 50 pages of the score).

The image displays a musical score for Example 3, Hofman's Dolazi!. The top section shows the orchestral parts for Violins 4, 5, and 6, Violas 1 and 2, and Cellos. Above the staves, there are two diagrams: the first shows a downward-pointing triangle labeled 'N' with '8"' below it, and the second shows a downward-pointing triangle labeled 'O' with '5"' below it. Vertical dashed lines with numbers 1 and 2 indicate specific points in the music. The score includes performance instructions such as 'sul Re s.p.', 'sul Sol', 'pp', 'p', 'ord.', and 'senza vibr.'. A tempo change is indicated by a dashed line with '♩ = 72' and '54'.

The bottom section of the score shows the parts for Violins 1-6, Violas 1-2, Violas, and Cellos. It includes performance instructions like 'sul Re s.t. senza vibr.', 'ppp', 'mp', 'poco vibr.', 'espress.', and 'pp'. A specific note in the Violin 3 part is labeled 'La (ppp)'. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical dashed line.

Example 3: Hofman's Dolazi!

Neither did theoretical interest in microtonality fare any better during that period. There is no doubt that the most interesting ideas came from Josip Štolcer Slavenski (1896–1955).⁵ Slavenski approached microtonality from virtually all possible angles. In his early youth in the Croatian region of Međimurje, he was surrounded with non-tempered demotic intonations (folk and church music); he was in contact with Hába, with whom he argued against a mechanical division of semitones and in favor of natural intonation. He was greatly interested in the harmonic series and the chords and intonations derived therefrom; he viewed music as a universal natural phenomenon and searched for connections between the laws of music and the planetary system (“astroacoustics”), the periodic system of chemical elements, frequency spectra of light, etc. He became aware of the opportunities offered by electronic instruments and used the traonium to experiment with various divisions of the octave. His ideas are scattered throughout various articles and letters, many of them unpublished.⁶ No systematic theory resulted, and not even his music was consistent in the use of microtones. No microtones appear in those compositions that are regularly performed and that are chiefly responsible for his reputation. He is known to have written music that does not conform to 12ET, notably *Music in the Natural Tone System*, but I have not been able to locate the score.

Closer to our time, a doctoral dissertation was defended at the University of Arts in Belgrade, which addressed the question of the perception of microtones (Ђорђевић 1996). It had very little to say about microtonal music analytically, historically, or aesthetically.

5 Preliminary clarifications: defining the analytic corpus

Writing about microtonality in Serbia would not have been worthwhile were it not for some quite recent developments that alter the picture significantly. The twenty-first century, and particularly the present decade, has seen a proliferation of microtones. We will presently discuss this trend, but first, some clarification is in order. By microtonality, we can mean various things. It is not my objective to work toward a taxonomy of microtonality or produce a general historical survey. For my present purpose, it will

5 A Croat by birth, with distant German roots, educated in Budapest and Prague, he embraced various identities: Yugoslav, South Slavic, Slavic, Balkan, Eastern European. He spent a significant part of his life in Belgrade, where he taught at the Academy of Music.

6 For further reading, I recommend Živković (2014), particularly pp. 68–80 and 125–34; Peričić (1984), and Mikić (2006).

suffice to indicate two approaches. The first one includes the “classical” quarter-tone music discussed above or any other division of the octave: 31, 53, 72, etc., or dividing an interval other than the octave. In any case, we are adding new pitches to the widely accepted twelve, while narrowing intervals between them.

When we talk about the second approach, we have in mind phenomena such as intonation derived from the harmonic series, just intonation, mean-tone, and other historical temperaments from various periods and from other cultures and traditions. They do not necessarily include narrow intervals, but insofar as professionally educated musicians generally take the twelve chromatic notes for granted, the difference between them and a given non-standard tuning can be expressed in microtones. We could call this “latent microtonality.”

Somewhere between these two lie situations that include pitch bending for embellishing or expressive purposes; extensions or enhancements of effects like vibrato, glissando, or those occurring due to the exigencies of a specific instrument (i.e. some glissandi on woodwind instruments are not viable beyond a quarter-tone); and the intensification of functional relations (e.g. sharpening of the leading tone; the opposite of this can also be a desired effect). Furthermore, microtones can be applied when pitch is a function of more structural parameters of timbre and texture (e.g. Penderecki’s *Threnodia*). I assign such microtones an intermediary position because they may or may not be recognized as new pitch material.

Technically, these distinctions do not seem so important, since everything in our examples is notated as quarter-tones with the sole exception of several sixth-tones in the work of Dragan Latinčić. The question will have some relevance, though, in the context of the underlying poetics of the composers and their motives for using microtones. When they write a quarter-tone sign, they do not always mean the mechanical subdivision of the semitone into quarter-tones.

Though Serbian microtonal music does not offer vast material for research, it is still necessary to circumscribe the range of phenomena this article will include. Some possible venues for exercising microtonality are deliberately left out. In jazz, *blue notes* have always existed, but jazz and blues, and for that matter any kind of improvised music, will remain outside our present concerns. Electronic music may be invaluable for generating any conceivable kind of pitch relation, but apart from considerable technical difficulties that such an analysis would pose, I have not found instances in which an

electronic medium was exploited expressly for that purpose. I will consider, therefore, only written scores (even if they contain electronic layers).

In the subsequent portions of this article, I will try to shed light on certain analytical aspects and the way microtones are introduced and integrated into the overall texture of the piece to discuss their melodic, harmonic, structural, formal, expressive, and programmatic functions.

I will further try to pinpoint the composers' motives for employing microtones, their sources, and the possible models they followed; the effects they envisaged; and the underlying aesthetics. In that, I will rely largely on their own statements.

I will briefly touch upon the broader social and cultural context in which this (micro)burst of microtonality takes place. This will inevitably be done in a perfunctory manner, since proper examination of these circumstances would require additional research.

The composers I am chiefly concerned with were born within the period spanning between the late 70s and early 90s, most of them in the first half of the 1980s (could we call them millenials?!). It is remarkable that in the oeuvre of their colleagues who are just a few years older, whose doctoral studies predated theirs by two or three years, microtonality plays a minor role or no role at all. The majority of the works herein discussed were written as doctoral projects at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, the only place in Serbia where such a program of studies existed until recently.⁷ This may seem like a too narrow selection, but to the best of my knowledge, there is very little microtonal material outside that scope. I am not considering Serbian students who studied abroad and remained there or who left Serbia at a very early stage of their careers, with one exception (Đuro Živković) that I will account for in the appropriate place. Having precisely doctoral projects to deal with has several advantages. First, for most of their creators, they are their most accomplished works so far. Next, the doctoral composition is accompanied by a rather substantial written paper providing an analytical, theoretical, and aesthetical framework. Finally, some of them are accessible online, from the electronic repository of doctoral projects and dissertations maintained by the University of Arts in Belgrade. The following list names these composers, their birth years, affiliations (where applicable), the titles of their doctoral compositions, and the year in which the project was completed. Other compositions that I will take into account were chiefly written during the composers' doctoral studies.

7 The doctoral program in composition at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad was accredited in 2015, and it has not yet produced significant results.

- Draško Adžić (b. 1979), assistant, Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade: *Arhajski prizori – šaputanja i krici za vokalno-instrumentalne ansamble* (Archaic Scenes – Cries and Whispers for vocal-instrumental ensembles) (2017).
- Milan Aleksić (b. 1978), assistant professor, Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad: *Povratak* (Return), for orchestra and narrator, based on the Eighth Book of *Odyssey* (2015).
- Stanislava Gajić (b. 1980), assistant, Academy of Arts, University of Novi Sad: *Putovanja i razgovori* (Travels and Talks): song cycle for soprano, tenor, flute and string quintet; lyrics by Dimitrije Kokanov (2014).
- Ana Kazimić (b. 1985), *Muerto de amor* – Dance Fantasy for vocal-instrumental ensemble and electronics (2016).
- Dragan Latinčić (b. 1982), assistant professor at the Faculty of Music: *Batal* – Preludes for string orchestra (2013).
- Nina Perović (b. 1985), lecturer at the Faculty of Music, University of Montenegro in Cetinje:⁸ *Ritus* – Ritual Songs for women’s choir, chamber orchestra, piano, percussion and electronics (2015).
- Vladimir Trmčić (b. 1983), assistant professor, Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac: *Late Autumn* – A Landscape for alto flute, two harps and two accordions (2016).
- Dorotea Vejnović (b. 1986), lecturer, Academy of Arts in Novi Sad: *Kraljice* (Queens) – Chamber Fantasy for vocal-instrumental ensemble, female voice and electronics (2018).
- Nikola Vetnić (b. 1984): *...of Uruk the Sheepfold* for Chamber Ensemble, Singer and Narrator (2016).

The list also includes Lazar Đorđević (1992), assistant at the Faculty of Music and doctoral student at the same institution. A few of the younger colleagues of the abovementioned composers will be mentioned briefly later.

6 Microtones: where, when, how? An analytic approach

I will begin analytical considerations with a rather sweeping statement: more often than not, microtones are a subsidiary phenomenon, subordinate to “regular” tones and “second-class citizens” in the tonal worlds of the composers in question. Like all such generalizations this statement will need to be qualified – and significantly so – but for the time being, let me illustrate this

8 Her professional career is associated with Montenegro, but she completed doctoral studies in Belgrade.

with some typical situations in which microtones are used. They can be part of neighbor-note figures or serve as passing notes between the pitches that are a semitone apart in 12ET, as in Examples 4 and 5.

Example 4: Gajić's Travels and Talks, first song On Suffering

Example 5: Kazimić's Muerto de amor, mm. 14–19

Vladimir Trmčić uses microtones with some consistency in his doctoral composition but practically only in the context of glissando. Up to a point, it is also a technical, instrument-specific matter.

Example 6: Trmčić's Late Autumn, mm. 12–16

In the majority of compositions under discussion, microtones are meant to be minute inflections, pitch-bending devices that enrich melodic phrases rather than being their principal components. When used more extensively, they may become (or are on the verge of becoming) an important embellishment, as is occasionally encountered in Ana Kazimić's work. This, however, rarely approaches the melodic richness, subtlety and nuances, as found, for

instance, in Indian classical music.⁹ In this, as in a number of pieces by other composers, the melodic function of microtones is usually associated with recreation of archaic and traditional melodies: the question that will be discussed in the next section of this article.

The effect of microtones can be coloristic in nature. Pitch becomes a function of parameters that in the given musical language carry more structural weight (timbre, texture).

The image displays a partial score for the piece 'Memoria in aeterna, reh. F' by Đorđević. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts visible from top to bottom: Percussion 1 (Rat, Cym), Percussion 2 (B.D., Gong), Accord, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The music is written in 3/4 time and features a complex microtonal system. Dynamics range from *ppp* to *mf*. Performance instructions include *SP* (Sustained Pitch), *ST* (Sustained Timbre), *ORD* (Ordered), and *Trgl.* (Trill). The score shows a variety of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines, with some parts featuring microtonal inflections indicated by wavy lines and specific notes.

Example 7: Đorđević's *Memoria in aeterna, reh. F* (partial score)

9 I am mentioning India because Ana Kazimić herself draws such parallels, mentioning the fact that in Indian music, dozens of scales can be constructed on a single "tonic".

The way Lazar Đorđević uses microtones in his *Memoria in aeterna*, Concerto for accordion and chamber orchestra, recalls *Klangfarbenmelodie* (we will see similar situations in Živković's work). They typically appear in conjunction with a wide range of techniques (in string instruments, *sul ponticello*, *sul tasto*, *alto sul tasto* and *ponticello*, tremolo, various types of vibrato, and harmonics and in wind instruments air sounds, half air sounds, key clicks, and many more, frequently with gradual transitions between different states) contributing to the coloristic effect. They generally do not constitute a part of melody or harmony (in the usual sense) but in the context of this piece, such coloristic effects do acquire a thematic significance. It is important to mention that when an event assumes a more motif-like shape, then microtones are absent. They can also be a logical outgrowth of the extensively used glissandi (in accordance with the above-mentioned gradual transitions): indeed, we can think of microtones in this context as a way of "digitalizing" glissando. Microtones are typically used in rather rare texture, so that their pitch-bending effects come through.

Even though the predominant treatment of microtones assigns them the role of inflections of "regular" pitches, from rehearsal YY they become involved in harmony, and they are included in the closing chord.

Example 8: Đorđević's *Memoria in aeterna*, closing chord (partial score)

More emancipated and promoted into harmonic constituents are microtones in certain passages in *Archaic Scenes* by Draško Adžić.

E

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabbasso

Example 9: Adžić's *Archaic Scenes*

An instance of using microtones within extended instrumental techniques is found in Milan Aleksić's *Return*. As will be shortly demonstrated, in his piece microtones are more numerous and belong more to the core pitch material than was the case in the previously mentioned compositions.

Cl.

pp

Example 10: Aleksić's *Return*, 5th movement

Two composers from our list, Latinčić and Vetnić, require in their scores microtonal scordatura. Thus, Latinčić employs ten violins, nos. 5–8 tuned a quarter-tone lower; a similar procedure applies for violas and cellos, the one double bass remaining with regular tuning. This secures the constant presence of microtones, sometimes with a “mistuning” effect.

Most of the time, however, the individual lines are devoid of microtonal motion.

An interesting function of microtones is shown in Example 12. The melodic line being centered on D, the $\frac{1}{4}$ -sharp F represents a third which is neither minor nor major.

17 **rall.** *sul tasto* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 *al fine*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

V-ni { tuned 1/4-tone lower

pp *mp* *ppp* *p*

Example 11: Latinčić's *Batal* (partial score)

oscuro *pp*

Example 12: Kazimić's *Muerto de amor*, mm. 49–54

This neutral third may have something to do with the fact that the tempered major third is noticeably wider than the natural one, and we will remind ourselves of this major/minor uncertainty mentioned earlier in the article, in the context of folk music. In addition, by suspending the major/minor dichotomy, the composer may have positioned herself further from Western European tradition (though she herself does not offer this explanation). In this example, the $\sharp C$ is obviously meant to be a sharpened leading tone, “a leading tone plus.” Indeed, microtonality is well suited for the task. In our harmony classes, we have learned that chromatic alterations create “artificial leading tones”; accordingly, quarter-tone chromaticization can replicate this process one level down or constitute a functional enhancement. This said, we can embark on a more detailed examination of the effects of such enhancements.

Let me begin by quoting from Ana Kazimić's explication of her doctoral project (although this quotation might sooner belong in the next section). The composition in question is based on the poem with the same title by Federico García Lorca:

The powerful emotional charge of Lorca's verses imposed a need for specific changes as a permanent striving for something vague and perhaps unattainable. From this proceed, apart from the work on timbre [...] constant tension and restlessness of tones, owing to which they abandon the tempered system and expand their fields of living and acting on microchromaticism. (Kazimić 2016, 33)

Obviously, she recognized microtones as an expressive asset. Tension and release, so fundamental for experiencing music, can reach new heights. Feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and ambiguity, of subtle, barely perceptible changes: we can think of any number of expressive uses to which an imaginative composer can put microtones. This potential is yet to be exploited. It can be of special value in music with an extramusical program, or at least with substantial extramusical references, as the majority of these compositions are. With Kazimić, it was Lorca's poem. Stanislava Gajić bases her work on poems by contemporary Serbian poet Dimitrije Kokanov, and her explication cites a vast number of extramusical references. Among the principal ones is the myth of Orpheus, whose inebriated state is musically rendered with a contribution from microtones.

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Ten. *mp* од мор-ских ри - ба до - ма - њих — *mf* гле - дај са - да стра-шни мој

Example 13: Gajić's *Travels and Talks*, third song Solace

However, this example points back to my general observation about microtones being of secondary importance. Even though Kazimić herself underlines this programmatic use of microtones, there are actually very few of them. There are other situations in which dense chromaticism somehow invites further intensification with microtones, yet they barely appear. In her explication she mentions:

The motion of an augmented second, replaced, when melody moves in the opposite direction, with a major or even minor second, thus thinning out and condensing the meta-space of this augmented interval into the compressed and dense space of a minor second. (Gajić 2015, 36)

Yet, she stops short of compressing it further into a quarter-tone. The last movement frequently employs glissandi, or notes with indefinite pitches,

and microtones could have played a similar expressive role. They could have been included for purely formal reasons: their appearance would have been consistent with their constant (albeit infrequent) use throughout the composition; yet they are totally absent from that movement. Of course, I am not by any means trying to be prescriptive: I am not saying “she ought to have used.” My speculations about where microtones could or could not have been used simply mean that I was following a certain logic that would justify a more liberal use of microtones. The fact that the composer did not follow the same logic certainly does not denigrate her achievements; it merely corroborates my initial assumptions about the extent of the use of microtones. Her priorities are different. They lean more toward various modes, scales, and tonal centers, which she explains in detail (e.g. Gajić 2015, 17). Her logic – inasmuch as I could infer it from the score – stipulates that the clarity of modes (as, for instance, octatonic scale at the end of the first song) and pitch centers should not be obscured too much. The modal sound is primary; quarter-tones are expressive distortions, possibly exaggerations, as necessitated by the text. It is no accident, then, that in the summary of her compositional methods she does not mention microtones.

Another characteristic example is Draško Adžić, who himself underscores the microtonal aspects of his composition in the accompanying text. Yet, out of the four pieces that make up the whole, only one of them contains microtones.

Ostensibly, there should be no doubt about the subordinate role of microtones in a piece that clearly projects a tonal center, such as String Quartet No. 1 *Rumination* by Dorotea Vejnović. Examples 14 and 15 reproduce the first and the last page of the score, indicating G major as the “tonic”; tone G retains some of its prominence in the four intervening pages. The tonal effect is perhaps intensified by the traditional transposition at the fifth (see Example 16; cf. cello m. 21 and Vn. I at the beginning of Example 14), and allusions to the subdominant and dominant in the bass near the end of the piece. However, the use of microtones may sometimes acquire possible structural significance or give rise to more elaborate, possibly narrative interpretations. Thus, the beginning, the way I hear it, is meant to create uncertainty and ambiguity by alternating minor, major, and in-between. Elsewhere I have argued (Zatkalik 2017) that creating ambiguity in order to resolve it is a goal-projecting and goal-directing strategy of some post-tonal composers. In this case, the path towards clarification contains a false clue: in m.13, this alternation ends, seemingly settling in the minor mode. However, minor is (historically, as well as in the overtone series) less consonant than major, and the

establishment of G minor affects only the lowest layer (cello), the first violin trailing behind with its resolution into D, even as the D in viola is abandoned for C-sharp. These factors significantly diminish the resolving power of this event and leave us waiting for the proper resolution.

Adagio $\text{♩} = 56$

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

pp
p
pizz. pesante
mp
sul tasto
molto vib.
jete
jete
ord.
p
pizz.₃
sfz
mp
molto vib.
s.p.
pp
mf
rit.
mf
p
f
mp
sub. f
arco s.p.
arco
pizz.₃
f
pp
mp
sfz
p
pizz.₂
arco s.p.
f
pizz.₂
arco s.p.
pizz.₂
arco s.p.
- sul D -
arco

Example 14: Vejnović's String Quartet No. 1 Ruminations, first page, mm. 1–16

We can extend this idea of ambiguity-to-be-resolved or obfuscation-to-be-clared beyond the minor/major equivocality. The entire referential chord is somehow blurred round the edges, lacking intonational sharpness.

Taking G major as the principal tonal reference, we can identify a number of neighbors clustering around its major third; microtonality allows not only B-flat, but also B-flat raised or lowered by a quarter-tone as its lower neighbors, and C as its upper (witness the prominence of C, especially in second violin). Likewise, C-sharp, E-flat and their microtonal inflections surround the referential D. Since in this context we are likely to hear microtones as tiny inflections rather than pitches in their own right, I find them particularly conducive to the blurring effect. On the other hand, given the aforementioned microtonal effect on space, we can disregard whole-tone distances as true neighbors. Initially, such blurring does not affect the tonal center G, as the composer apparently wants to maintain a certain level of stability and clarity, analogous to the establishing of the home key in a tonal composition. Its leading tone/lower neighbor F-sharp comes with a vengeance in mm. 26–27 (after a brief introduction of G-sharp in m. 25 as the upper neighbor). In m. 37 another quarter-tone neighbor appears, and there are some other instances, but on the whole, G is less affected by blurring than the other two notes of the chord, which suggests the possible intention of the composer to maintain a relatively sharp focus at least on the pivotal intonation G, if not on the whole referential chord.

65

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

poco a poco s.p.

76

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

s.p.

molto s.p.

al niente

ppp

pp

pp

pizz. pesante

gliss.

Example 16: Vejnović's String Quartet No. 1 Ruminations, mm. 17–22

7 Microtones: whys and wherefores. Poetics, aesthetics, ideology: rooted in tradition (bis)

In the preceding pages, I have tried to examine the use of microtonality, to assess the effects of microtones primarily as they could be inferred from the scores: I have only sparingly used the evidence provided by the composers themselves. My intentions were chiefly analytical. It is time to delve deeper into their motives for using microtones. I will probe into their creative poetics, their aims, and how microtones fit into what they were trying to achieve.

I will again begin with a sweeping generalization: the key word is archaization. We could formulate it also as the evoking of ancient traditions. The mere titles of some of these works tell us that much: *Archaic Scenes ...*; ... *Uruk ...*; *Kraljice* (an ancient Serbian ritual); *Ritus*. Other titles may not be so revealing but will become so further in this article.

When I said traditions (in plural), I indeed meant the plural. Diverse traditions, a broad range of traditions. This leads us to another major (perhaps the most important) aspect of their creative work: an openness to a wide variety of influences and a readiness to incorporate these influences in their music.

I have already drawn attention to Milan Aleksić, one of the most consistent microtonalists. His starting point is ancient Greece; the *Return* in the title is the return of Odysseus, and its text is based on the Eighth Book of *The Odyssey*.¹⁰ What his research attempts to show is the affinity between the Homeric and Serbian epic traditions, treating the latter as an offshoot of the former. Since, musically speaking, Serbian tradition is better preserved; it also serves as a proxy for the ancient Greek one. Both Serbian and Greek traditions, as we well know, are replete with non-tempered intonations.

Searching for folk music is an archeological task.¹¹ What can be heard and transcribed today is but a wreck that has survived the tsunami of ubiquitous modernization. (Aleksić 2015, 38)

Aleksić performs this archeological task, but his relationship to folk material is personal, subjective, and he does not hesitate to incorporate diverse Serbian/Balkan traditions: the epic tradition of *gusle*¹² is naturally at the

10 To be precise, he uses the Serbian translation of Alessandro Barrico's adaptation of *Iliad*, which includes portions of *Odyssey*.

11 Notice how different this is from the circumstances in which Slavenski grew up, surrounded by the living folk intonations.

12 One-stringed chordophone that typically accompanies the singing/reciting of epic poetry throughout the Balkans.

forefront, but he also takes recourse to Dinaric and eastern Serbian singing. Heterophony (Example 17; cf. Example 2), dissonant (in the Western sense) intervals treated as stable, characteristic rhythms, and more: such demotic features inform Aleksić's composition.

Example 17: Aleksić's Return, beginning: heterophony

Aleksić is not only aiming at an evocation of some kind of imaginary folklore: he tries to emulate exact procedures and recreate folk models and formulas (Aleksić 2015, 38–9). Elsewhere he talks about reviving Serbian/Greek tradition, whereby all parameters are affected including structure, form, rhythms, and choice of instruments, even reproducing the Aristotelian formal organization of the tragedy (Aleksić 2015, 51). Microtones naturally enter into the picture as part of that recreation.

There is another angle to his microtonality. Starting from Ancient Greek foundations, he raises the questions of the harmonic series, pure intervals, and Pythagorean tuning,¹³ and he even offers a very brief overview of the history of tuning systems and of various possibilities of notating microtones. Such considerations are not completely unknown to other composers from our lot, but here they figure much more prominently than anywhere else, except in Latinčić.

As might have been expected, Aleksić also establishes a dialogue between the ancient and modern. Ligeti's micropolyphony and spectral¹⁴ music are

13 Of his fourth movement he says, "I use the harmonic and chordal structures based on the natural Pythagorean harmonic series ... which is in essence in microtonal relations" (Aleksić 2015, 43).

14 His fourth movement is based on the harmonic series with the low E as fundamental, as in Gerard Grisey's *Partiels*. Coincidence? Otherwise, there is a growing interest in spectral music, with Vladimir Korać (1986), assistant at the Faculty of Music, at the forefront, primarily in his *Event Horizon* for

cited among his influences, and some unlikely connections are discovered in the process, such as affinities between Lutosławski's last phase and ancient Serbian folk music (Aleksić 2015, 44–6).

In order to obtain the full picture of how Aleksić contextualizes his music – with significant repercussions on his understanding of the role of microtones – we need to have a look at the concluding part of his doctoral essay. He sees both music and the society in which it is created as being in deep crisis. Music has become a “commodity like any other” and a “market niche of the contemporary world, rather than an image of leading ideas and intellectual and emotional content of the society in which it is created.” Further on, he states that:

The long journey commencing with the European Enlightenment has come to an end, and apparently, the circumstances in which music exists today are similar to those before this great movement, especially pre-Baroque. Modern music lives today in very small groups of connoisseurs and music lovers, and this circle is no wider than it was in the seventeenth century, notwithstanding today's enormous accessibility of information. (Aleksić 2015, 74–5)

He talks about the fragmentation of styles and absence of a single leading school or idea.

Abrupt and swift changes in the world have deprived music of its centuries-old language, a system of sophisticated communication in transmitting its ideas. (Aleksić 2015, 74–5)

The relevance of this for microtonality lies in the concluding paragraph, where he underscores his aims to swerve from the tempered system and standard scales, traditional rhythmic, melodic and harmonic solutions, and self-reinforcing codifications.

I believe that one possible way out of the deep crisis of music creation lies in the specificities of folk, improvised, or highly personal, local musical practice [...] not relying on tradition [obviously meaning European ‘mainstream’ tradition] or a ‘school’ ... but must be rooted in the individual, personal, and local. (Aleksić 2015, 74–5)

chamber ensemble and electronics. We cannot discuss it here, although spectralism is for obvious reasons relevant for our subject.

This is a strong personal statement, providing perspective to his microtonal forays, and to many other facets of his creative achievements.

Ana Kazimić in her *Muerto de amor* starts with the poetry of García Lorca. Herself an accomplished flamenco dancer, she employs a range of procedures proper to Andalusian musical tradition. Significantly, she insists on flamenco as an amalgam of various traditions. Moreover, the flamenco tradition is refracted through the verses of a modernistic poet. The process of amalgamation is thus carried further; the traditional is fused with the modern.

I haven't restricted myself to specific scales, although the melody has a modal touch and displays similarities with certain Indian scales, with [...] Arabic maqam, Locrian mode, and Spanish Phrygian mode: generally speaking, with modes used in the cultures that helped shape the flamenco art. (Kazimić 2016, 32–3)

The basic pitch material is, therefore, not necessarily microtonal, and – as we have already established – microtones are there to embellish the melodies, emulating the practice of flamenco singers. Another characteristic statement she makes relates to incorporating melodic-harmonic features of flamenco into the procedures of art music, more precisely, the procedures derived from the dodecaphonic way of thinking (Kazimić 2016, 34). And since that way of thinking is 12ET in the extreme sense, this again points to the tempered system as the basic resource, with microtones as additions. There is no contradiction here. Assimilating a wide range of influences and incorporating the ancient into the modern is what many younger composers strive to achieve.

The idea of inclusiveness looms large in the already discussed composition by Stanislava Gajić. The variety of technical procedures is matched with a very wide range of extramusical references: the text is by a contemporary author of a younger generation, Dimitrije Kokanov, inspired by the older author Danilo Kiš, and by the Orpheus myth, plus an enormous number of other cultural references. Ancient traditions, spiritual and secular, hold a prominent place. As her text epitomizes the striving of a number of other composers, I will quote from it extensively.

In the composition *Travels and Talks*, I use melodic patterns based on segments of the melodic formulae of Serbian Octoechos, as well as our folk musical patterns from Bačka [a region in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina] and eastern Serbia; there are, in addition,

musical idioms characteristic of older types of instrumental popular music, quarter-tone layering and the like. I endeavor to conceive a music that will, in a new way, lend an acoustic shape to the forever hidden musical worlds of ancient times reaching far into the past, while gathering particles of the most diverse idioms that have accumulated on our soil throughout the centuries. In that sense, I seek inspiration, both in content and in technique, in the musical achievements of some of my paragons, such as Ljubica Marić, Iannis Xenakis, György Ligeti, Maurice Ravel, and Isidora Žebeljan. In the process of composition I have tried to explore modalities of work with various musical styles, compositional procedures, approaches, and harmonic solutions, and in this way, by experimenting, to reach a unique, original expression, setting the archaization of my musical language as the basic element that has the power of absorbing all differences and discords, and amalgamate them into a unified musico-poetic language. (Gajić 2015, 13)

Octoechos is a recurring subject in her text, where she explains at some length how its melodic patterns found their way into her music (Gajić 2015, 22–3; 44–5); so are a number of other traditions, folk music from various regions: Serbia, Armenia, and Argentina (Gajić 2015, 32). Of course, let us be reminded that the title contains the word “travel.” She concludes by saying:

[T]his system [referring chiefly to Octoechos and Serbian folk music] can be primarily linked with compositional techniques called the archaization of musical language, for it is through the refraction of the above-mentioned patterns through the prism of my musical ideas that a new musical system is created. This system creates an acoustic image that constitutes a network of interwoven musical thoughts connecting the ancient past with the present, but also with a distant future. Every present contains the entire past, thus creating an all-comprising, infinite, never-interrupted present moment, the only moment in which we exist. (Gajić 2015, 44–5)

The first quotation (mentioning her model composers) again indicates that ancient traditions and folk music are not the only sources of inspiration. She is well aware of the achievements of European art music and ready to embrace them. Stanislava Gajić’s choice of composers is consistent with this: Ljubica Marić was not only among the first to introduce quarter-tone music into Serbia, she also based the larger part of her subsequent work on

Orthodox spiritual tradition and to some extent folklore, with occasional microtones. Ligeti cherished a lasting interest in both folklore and tuning systems different from 12ET, being throughout his career increasingly dissatisfied with the latter. Thus, references to folk music or to ancient civilizations are partly direct and partly refracted through the prism of composers with similar preoccupations. From the point of view of microtones, it is particularly interesting how Gajić draws a parallel between herself and Xenakis and his *Oresteia*. She says:

Unlike Xenakis who in *Oresteia* used melodic phrases with quarter-tones along with the syllabic treatment of text, creating in this way a timeless description of the epic, ancient, ritualistic experience, I enriched with quarter-tones both the melismatic melodic phrases of vocal parts, and the brief melodic phrases in the flute, wishing to create a poetic, lyric image of the inexorable suffering that love brings. (Gajić 2015, 14)

And her Armenian inspiration is not so much Armenian as Luciano Berio's (Loosin Yelav, from *Folk Songs*; Gajić 2015, 32).

For his part, Draško Adžić particularly emphasizes mythological aspects, which prompts him to include a number of anthropological references as well as Jungian archetypes. *Archaic Scenes* takes as its primary focus the exploration of the multiple modes of transposing archaic samples into music. The four pieces that make up the composition are devoted, respectively, to two mythological beings, one Slavic and one Irish, and two places associated with them. He discusses folk music from the Balkans, which inevitably brings up the subject of non-tempered intonation.

Archaization is the foothold of his composing. He draws attention to the characteristics of the most ancient and primitive layers of folk singing and enumerates his previous compositions in which he attempted their artistic transposition, citing specifically his *Symphony I: Four Scenes* for symphony orchestra for the use of folk-inspired, non-tempered pitches (Adžić 2017, 6–7).

As is already obvious, he, like his colleagues, will not limit himself to a single tradition. Not only does he juxtapose Serbian and Irish folklore, he invokes many other influences. He refers, for instance, to the traditional Japanese *No* theater, and in the typical blending of ancient and modern, he finds analogies between the *No* and Balkan traditions on the one hand, and expressionism on the other. Expressionism, more precisely "pagan expressionism," for its part, is naturally related to Stravinsky (Adžić 2017, 2). Ancient Greece enters

into the picture both as a universal source of ancient, pagan inspiration, and through (again) Xenakis's *Oresteia*, complete with microtones.

Dragan Latinčić talks about the dialogue of cultures (Latinčić 2013a, 3). He starts from the carpet-weaving traditions of the Balkans and Middle East (the title *Batal* is associated with these traditions) and fuses them with certain localities from the city of Belgrade, but ultimately his attempt is:

[T]o translate the musical language and selected motifs from the cultural, historical, and spiritual experiences of the East into the musical language and experience of Western civilizations (Latinčić 2013a, 6).

As I have already indicated, he is unique in his use (albeit very scant) of microintervals other than quarter-tones; he is one of the two composers with whom the presence of microtones is continual throughout the composition by virtue of microtonal scordatura, but probably his most outstanding achievement is his theoretical elaboration of microtonality, which I will yet have to address.

The ancient world that Vladimir Trmčić conjures is Chinese landscape paintings, from the twelfth century and earlier. His aim is to explore relationships between music and painting (Trmčić 2013, 2), and he refers to Claude Debussy, Toru Takemitsu, and especially to Olivier Messiaen's treatment of color as the constituent element of music. His use of quarter-tones is practically only apparent in the context of glissando, something to add color and atmosphere.

8 Two special cases

Probably no one has pushed the limits of the use of microtones further than our next two composers, Nikola Vetnić and Đuro Živković.

With Nikola Vetnić and his *...of Uruk the Sheepfold*, we continue our conversations with ancient civilizations. It is Gilgamesh in this case, and he states that his goal is "to situate the old Babylonian narrative in modern musical surroundings." Recognizing this as anachronism, he justifies it by attributing anachronistic, timeless qualities to the character of Gilgamesh himself (Vetnić 2016, 31). Drawing on a book by Peter van der Merwe (1989) as a source of information on the possible characteristics of music of that time and place, he talks about translating certain methods and manners of ancient musical practice into the acoustic space of modern composition, but insists that:

[O]f all performing techniques and procedures van der Merwe discussed in his book, I chose only microtonality and built it into the very foundation of the pitch structure of the chordophones. In that way, I avoided naivety and associations with popular clichés which, in my opinion, would have been inevitable if the vocal parts had conformed with van der Merwe’s description of ancient Mesopotamian singing. (Vetnić 2016, 28)

He is not unique in that his use of microtones is “overdetermined”: it is archaic, as we have seen, and at the same time results from convoluted mathematical operations. Within the framework of this article, it is impossible even to scratch the surface of these operations.¹⁵ This applies generally to his musical material, of which microtones are an essential part. He obtains by such procedures a series of chords, which are assigned certain roles within the composition, thus creating a kind of protofunctional harmonic system (Example 18).



Example 18: Vetnić’s ...of Uruk the Sheepfold, chordal structures (Vetnić 2016, 36)

He applies scordatura on the guitar, “mistuning” certain strings by quarter-tones. Rather than being embellishments or expressive gestures, microtones are thus “cemented.” But the deep microtonal roots of his musical language are part of yet another strategy. Whereas “justification” for the use of microtones is sometimes sought in extramusical content, Vetnić uses microtones, along with some other devices, as an “anti-programmatic” device. He wants to draw special attention to the music itself, not to allow it to “slip” into the background for the mere recitation or chanting of the text. Along with the texture saturated with dissonances and the relatively unusual scoring¹⁶ producing occasionally sharply aggressive sound, this is meant to play a crucial role in establishing the musical layer as equal to the literary one (Vetnić 2016, 24).

15 In order to generate his musical material, he takes for instance, two series of numbers, Fibonacci and Lucas, subjects them to certain operations, such as dividing by specified numbers, using the remainders instead of the original series, grouping the members of the resulting series into “cells”, taking the sum of the cells as yet a new series etc.

16 Comprising three electric guitars, two acoustic guitars, five-string electric bass guitar, four cellos, harpsichord, marimba, vibraphone, and a drum set.

Unlike many of his colleagues to whom – whatever their explicitly stated intentions were – microtonality is secondary, with Vetnić microtonality becomes a norm; at a certain point (Vetnić 2016, 41) he even feels he needs to justify the absence of quarter-tones by drawing attention to the fact that his harpsichord is a 12ET instrument. Likewise, he explains that in the vocal part quarter-tones are replaced with semitones to lower the technical demands on the singer (Vetnić 2016, 47).¹⁷

One composer stands aside our analytic sample. Born in 1975 in Serbia, Đuro (also spelled Djuro) Živković was educated partly in Serbia and partly in Sweden, where he now resides. None of his major works was written before he left for Sweden.¹⁸ By these criteria, he does not belong to the present analytical sample. I am nonetheless including him, not only because of his advanced use of microtones and his overall high achievements. Namely, it has been pointed out that:

Živković fits into the existing social and cultural paradigms since he openly respects and cultivates ‘Serbian traditions’, embodied in the Orthodox religion [...] in a state where the influence of the Church is extremely strong. (Milojković 2012, 84)

Although Živković lives in Sweden, it is very important to consider his work in the domestic context, since:

[It] corresponds with the dominant cultural practices in our midst [...] in spite of the composer’s foreign engagement, the most significant social relations that his work creates are those with a Serbian cultural context. (Milojković 2012, 86)¹⁹

For Živković, microtonality arises from a collusion of several factors. By now, the relevance of these factors for microtonality will have become clear. The initial one was Serbian folk tradition, or rather traditions, for he draws on various facets of traditional music: ancient heterophonic singing, *gusle*, and

17 The issues he has with performers seem to be rather serious. He refuses to have his works performed in Serbia citing precisely the serious problems he encounters in finding mutual language with them (Vetnić 2014).

18 His career has been remarkable. His compositions are commissioned and performed by prestigious ensembles, he has won numerous awards, and the crown of his career so far is the 2014 Grawemeyer Award. He taught for a while at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. He is also a professional violin player and improviser on the violin and piano.

19 This was written before the Grawemeyer Award. Naturally, interest in his music has greatly expanded since.

wailing for the dead (an ancient tradition that hails from pagan times).²⁰ Among his sources of inspiration he also cites church bells (think of their unusual frequency spectra!), and church singing. Concerning the latter, he wants to create music out of the very short ornaments (it is understood that they would contain microtonal inflections), which are usually left unnoticed by an average listener (Živković 2015). In addition, his penchant for improvisation may account for some microtonality in his compositions.

What largely permeates his work is his striving toward wholeness and integration. Although he does not make this link himself, I will conjecture that including microtones is a gesture towards totality. Obviously, in the literal sense, it is impossible to include *all* pitches, but if you can go along that path so far, so far he will go. This points to a spiritual, almost mystical aspect to his work, to which I will shortly return.

Finally, Živković is interested in Ancient Greek philosophers/mathematicians/acousticians, mentioning, in particular, Pythagoras and Archytas. He thinks of them in terms of mathematical relations in music, but also of the metaphysical and ethical quality of their ideas and the unity between harmonies: astronomy, music, and humanity.²¹

Obviously and typically, microtones in his compositions create folklore association, in accordance with the aspects of folklore being evoked (Example 19).

Taking as an example his *Serenade* for strings (2002), we can listen for heterophonic singing, comparable to what we have previously identified in Aleksić's work. In the same composition, sections replete with microtones stand beside those from which microtones are absent, and this contrast becomes a form-defining factor. Microtones can be integral to motivic structure: in places such as shown in Example 20, microtones are clearly more than mere decorations. Juxtaposing elements containing $\frac{1}{4}$ steps and those that do not go beyond $\frac{1}{2}$ steps (Example 21) may be seen as a microstructural reflection of the large-scale distinction between microtonal and non-microtonal passages.

20 This area of his interest predates microtonality. In his *Two Dirges* for soprano, viola and piano (1997), one could feel almost palpably the need for non-tempered tuning, for some crude intonation. A dirge is halfway between speech – highly emotionally charged – and music; therefore, it is imprecise with respect to pitch. He makes use of *Sprechstimme*; piano trills in the low register where pitch is barely distinguishable, and yet he shies away from writing down any non-12ET intonation.

21 This may have some connections with the *Diffitone* project, whereby harmonic progressions are derived from combination tones. This is not part of his microtonal world, but since it involves the questions of just intonation and pitches derived from harmonic series it is connected with a system different from 12ET, hence at least latently microtonal. It is extensively discussed, with a complex mathematical apparatus, in Živković 2015.

Example 20: Živković's Serenade, reh. 10 (microtonal motives)

Example 21: Živković's Serenade, non-microtonal (partial score)

Microtones contribute to super-dense, “layered polyphony,” nor would I exclude their coloristic effects, such as we have mentioned in connection with Đorđević and which can be clearly perceived, for example, in the first pages of *On the Guarding of the Heart*.

Owing to microtones, stepwise motion can be slowed down, allowing very gradual expansion of musical space or registral shifts (as particularly clearly seen on the first two pages, Example 19 above). We could compare this to an image of the musical space enlarged under a microscope, or, in temporal terms, the moment of musical time stretching out towards infinity.

A link can be established with the strongly pronounced spiritual side to Živković’s thinking about music (and otherwise). The titles like *The Mystical Sacrifice*, *White Angel*, *Ascetic Discourse*, *Unceasing Prayers* or *I Shall Contemplate* testify to this. It is probably stated with the greatest clarity in his comments on the Grawemeyer Award-winning *On the Guarding of the Heart* for chamber orchestra and piano. His spiritual habitus is associated with Eastern Orthodox mystical texts concentrated around the idea of *philokalia*: the love for the good and for beauty, and the need to guard one’s heart against evil. This includes self-examination, self-improvement, and striving for perfection. In addition, as he says in a 2017 interview, he insists on “trying to squeeze yourself and art together to get the essence. I think that fighting for the essence [...] is the most important in the creation of art.” Thereupon, if I be granted free rein to speculate, microtones may be an outward manifestation of his probing the “subatomic” level of musical substance, which, in turn, proceeds from his quest – desperate, since unattainable – for the essence of music.²² Comparisons with Ljubica Marić are viable in this respect.

Even though he became involved with questions like difference tones and tuning systems, Živković was, on the whole, not so much experimenting with microtones *per se*, but he had certain aesthetic, philosophical, spiritual goals, and in microtones he found (one of many) means to attain them.

For the sake of completeness, I will consider, very briefly, microtonality as an object of recent theoretical and historical interest. This is chiefly restricted to the composers’ explications of their own compositional aims and methods

22 In his interviews and online texts, Živković (2017 & 2018 & n. d.) repeatedly expounds his religious and philosophical views in relation to his music. He sometimes offers descriptions like: “The sound must melt walls in the hall, the audience should stop breathing, and every single atom and particle of time should condense in the true unfading light, in the eternal life, in hidden mystery, in everlasting exultation, in ineffable reality, and will come close to the incomprehensible face.” He would even provide verbal “translation” of music: “The piano comes in and it says, ‘Stop. Concentrate. Guard your heart’... the music is saying, ‘Pay attention on yourself. Focus on the essence of your life.’”

of achieving them. They may touch on purely theoretical issues, but they are not intended to be theoretical or historical studies. Dragan Latinčić, in his doctoral essay (2013a) and his two books (Latinčić 2015 & 2017) is an exception. He draws from Greek, Arabic, and mediaeval sources, engages in lengthy discussions of Mid-Eastern and Ancient Greek tuning systems, relationships between Greek modes and Arabic tetrachords, and more. His mathematical apparatus is impressive, and his rather convoluted text is a *tour de force* of demonstration that various phenomena from different domains may be connected with or reduced to a kind of common denominator. Quoting from Dionysius of Halicarnassus that rhythm and harmony are one and the same thing, he recognizes philosophical implications that we, in turn, recognize as akin to Marić's and Živković's work. This notwithstanding, his terminology is sometimes vague, his concepts poorly defined, and there is confusion between technical, metaphorical, and the everyday sense of words. He sometimes takes metaphorical representations of natural phenomena and treats them as scientific facts or applies uncritically a set of rules proper to one domain to a different one. His writings are a laudable undertaking but ultimately fall short of being a genuine theoretical contribution; even so, they remain essential to his endeavors as a composer.

The only other example worth mentioning is again the text accompanying a doctoral project, this time by a harpsichord player Svetlana Stojanović Kutlača (2012). Her keen interest in French Baroque, its expressive potentials and philosophical foundations, led her to consider the tuning systems proper to that period.

9 In conclusion

However scant the use of microtones was throughout the history of Serbian music, the situation has radically and perhaps abruptly changed in this century. We can narrow down this period to the present decade and narrow it even further to the last several years, when the use of microtones has become almost a matter of "political correctness." Not a few composers seem to feel bound to pledge allegiance to microtonality.

Given their sporadic previous use, microtones can be treated as a relative novelty in Serbia. This is probably the reason why some composers seem to exercise caution in using them. It has been noted that in the history of music certain innovations were first introduced in program music, where extra-musical program served as a kind of alibi (think of Monteverdi's tremolo or various orchestral solutions by Berlioz). The compositions from my sample

generally have a strong program component, and this may have “emboldened” the composers to use microtones. Some of these composers, it is true, use them more boldly than others. In any case, the preferred manner of usage is melodic, and when used in that context they tend to be embellishments, devices to enrich melody; less commonly, they are part of the scales or pitch collections that constitute the core pitch content. Microtones in such situations amount to more than mere decoration, becoming a resource for creating melodic subtlety and nuance, or for heightened emotional expression, sighs, or anxiety. Quarter-tone harmony is rare and only in the case of Vetnić we can observe something like a protofunctional harmonic system emerging. Accordingly, they often possess little structural weight, and weak form-defining power. The microtonal aspect of a given composition is, as a rule, less strictly regulated (if at all). A case in point is Ana Kazimić, who explains elaborate procedures of serial and other types of pitch organization, but nothing of the kind is applied in relation to microtones.

Microtones are found in conjunction with various timbral devices (e.g. Đorđević), with noise (see Milojković 2012 regarding Živković). The microtonal swerves are then not so much new intonations: they are a coloring device, something that I tentatively compared with *Klangfarbenmelodie*. Finally, in works by Kazimić and Vejnović, I believe I have sensed an effect of creating ambiguity, uncertainty, or indecision, especially in contexts that bear some traits of functional tonality. There are possible dramatic or narrative implications to it.

If we are looking for a single most obvious common denominator of all composers that formed our analytical corpus, it will be archaization, or their interest in all things ancient, traditional, ritualistic, and mythological. The readers need simply refer back to the list of compositions to assure themselves of the importance of Serbian/Balkan rituals, ancient styles of singing, the epic *gusle* tradition, or Eastern Orthodox spiritual heritage; of ancient Greek, or more broadly Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Mesopotamian civilizations; or even more “exotic” ones (Trmčić).

This seems to be a broader trend than microtonality. Even when not using microtones, some composers, such as Milorad Marinković, are deeply devoted to building their works upon the foundations of tradition – Orthodox liturgical chant in his case. Dorotea Vejnović could perhaps be named in this context, since her *Kraljice* is very much concerned with tradition and its translation into modern terms, but the use of microtones is minimal. Conversely, the minority of composers who rightfully belong to these

generations (by birth or by schooling) but do not insist on tradition also do not use microtones.

Of course, the composers from our sample do not by any means want to be stuck in the past. They are creative and inquisitive; they are all keen on creating something original or unique. Since almost all of them are recent doctoral students, they were channeled toward research. Therefore, a more precise formulation would be: what they are onto is a dialogue between the past and the present, incorporating the past into the present.

Which brings us to our next point. Microtonal forays may be done routinely, whether or not directly serving the main idea of the work, or being even incidental to it. Sometimes – to put it simplistically – the impression is one of “what have I not tried yet,” or “let’s see how it works.” In more sophisticated terms, it is part of a widespread tendency to integrate a large number of approaches. They explore various possibilities of pitch organization, and their research endeavors lead them toward all manner of modes and scales, with or without pitch centrality, to serial writing; they will invent algorithms for generating their materials or structures and combine tonal and atonal passages; quarter-tones are just another thing to be included. Or, if the melodic line is richly embellished, if it avails itself of glissandi or of any number of traditional or extended instrumental techniques or *Sprechgesang* in vocal parts, quarter-tones come as a logical consequence. This is part of this all-embracing attitude that accounts for the assimilation of so many diverse traditions. In addition – and this is a feature of microtonality that they unwittingly utilize – it may bridge the gap between art and science. It is highly artificial, resulting from mathematical calculations and sometimes cutting-edge technology capable of producing it, and at the same time ancient, primordial, unadulterated by civilization.

Whereas archaic evocations are regularly cited in connection with microtones, it is less frequently that one comes across the stance such as Milan Aleksić takes. Namely, he is highly iconoclastic against 12ET, calling it unmusical and claiming that its use on keyboards has done the greatest damage in the history of music. The natural acoustic eco-system, the natural dwelling place of music over thousands of years, has been replaced by a rigid, essentially unmusical system (Aleksić 2015, 40). However, an attempt at a detailed, in-depth study of microtonality is found only in Latinčić.

Some possible approaches to microtones are notably absent. Even though Serbia owes its first true contact with quarter-tones to Alois Hába, hardly anyone ever mentions him, let alone composers such as Ivan Wyschnegradsky.

Certainly, in the twenty-first century, the prospect of going back to Hába does not seem particularly appetizing. However, nobody has taken any interest in American microtonal tradition, either: in Harry Partch, Lou Harrison, or some more recent ones like Kyle Gann, in American microtonal societies, or in the Mexican microtonalist Julián Carrillo. Moreover, even though there is no doubt that every one of our composers is aware of the evolving tuning systems and of the relatively late inception of 12ET, in their minds – I believe I can infer that much – the Western canon is regularly associated with equal temperament. Blending past and present is prevalent, but the past never assumes the shape of, say, Nicola Vicentino and his archicembalo.

Throughout this article, I have placed an equal sign between microtones and quarter-tones. It is obvious that most of the time, our composers' idea is not quarter-tones *per se*, a further equal subdivision of the 12ET, but rather the most convenient way of notating pitch inflections. They will speak about microtonal deviations and non-tempered tuning, but the notation always looks like an instance of 24ET. Stanislava Gajić describes certain effects inspired by Ligeti's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, but she does not attempt to emulate his minute work with non-tempered pitches. Ana Kazimić (personal communication) claims that during the process of composing, she heard inflections precisely, a $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, or other value, but the strict quarter-tone notation was a matter of convenience. Latinčić is the only one who expressly calls for a sixth-tone.

Thus, the briefest possible microtonal formula would be:

- inclusiveness, with particular emphasis on blending the old and new;
- hence (partial) archaization;
- hence microtones;
- hence quarter-tones as their approximation.

In the history of Serbian music, the same factors are involved in the existence and non-existence of microtones. A small nation, catching up with the big world while riding the wave of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism, felt that it had to dispense with certain aspects of its tradition to become more compatible with the trends in modern composing – the trends in which all our composers were educated. Coarse, dissonant, “out-of-tune” rustic sound had to be sacrificed. When modern composing became something else, being part of it meant, for some composers, trying to transcend the barriers of twelve chromatic tones. Hence Ljubica Marić and other students of Hába.

Interpretations of history seem in hindsight relatively straightforward. On the other hand, I can certainly see diverse, even conflicting factors behind current trends. The creators of the works we were chiefly concerned with are mostly at early stages in their respective careers (Živković excluded). In the ever harsher struggle for survival, they were looking for their own niche, and several of them found it in the uncharted (in the context of Serbian music) territory of microtones. This, at the same time, amounts to a kind of generational identification, a sign of recognition. Taking recourse to tradition is in a specific way overdetermined. Although at this moment I cannot reliably discuss broader issues within our society, it is safe to say that retraditionalization is a facet of many areas of life.²³ Microtones are, in that context, an aspect of our heritage hitherto unexplored. At the same time, freely availing oneself of traditions, one's own or those of others, is a phenomenon by no means unique to this country. All these composers under discussion are active participants in the globalizing world, adept at the unprecedented levels reached by modern means of communication. They share today's wide interest in world music. Being inheritors of postmodernism, they feel they have the entire history of music at their disposal. My encounters of the microtonal kind from the beginning of this article were not coincidental. There is a growing interest, only people younger than myself recognized it before I did.

It is seldom a rewarding task to pass value judgments. Yet, I will venture to offer a very brief and very general assessment of microtonal achievements in Serbia. It is beyond any doubt that for the composers who constitute the canon of Serbian music history, who are held in highest esteem, microtones are barely relevant, if at all. No single work that can be labeled as a Serbian masterpiece contains such pitch material. I would argue that this statement could hold true for many other cultures, including North American, notwithstanding their microtonal advancements.

For the younger "microtonal generations," it is safe to say that their overall achievements can be assessed quite high: there are plenty of talent and superb technical skills to go around. Microtones, up to a point, set them apart; they lend them their specific voice, but they do not make the decisive contribution to the quality of most of their works. Nor do their works constitute a significant contribution to microtonality in general.

And the future? As we have seen, most of the composers herein discussed are in the early years of their careers. We cannot say whether they will, having

23 Some social and political implications of this, related to the music of Đuro Živković, are discussed in Milojković 2013.

completed their doctoral studies, continue to pursue the same, or seek new modes of expression, or even make radical reversals. In my long teaching career, I have seen all these events. What we know for certain is that a number of younger composers follow the lead. Thus, Jug Marković, who has recently acquired his master's degree in composition, uses microtones (*Vokativ* for orchestra), whereas in his sextet *Mother Tongue* the use of quarter-tone signs nearly equals other signs. He does not specify any intention of recreating tradition, but the title of the work is suggestive, and he does talk of his fascination with certain objects from the past (personal communication). He also holds a degree in archeology. Damjan Jovičin, currently a master student in composition, has already used microtones, and his colleague Igor Andrić intends to introduce them in his master project, citing specifically Ljubica Marić's *Asymptote* as an influence (personal communication). In a discussion on these matters, my colleague Tatjana Milošević,²⁴ professor of composition at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, has agreed with the observation that inserting microtones has recently become a matter of course. Possessing no crystal ball, I cannot speak beyond this.

To the best of my knowledge, this article is the first attempt to survey microtonality in Serbia. While I take certain pride in being the first, I am also fully aware of the many aspects that have not received adequate treatment or any treatment at all. A more in-depth consideration of the social and cultural context of recent microtonal developments may be in order. Each of the works discussed, and a number of those left out, could be subject to thorough analysis, perhaps resulting in some reevaluation of my initial judgments about the use of microtones. The same holds for the sporadic use of microtones in the second half of the twentieth century. The issue of performance, perception and reception of such music has not even been touched. And if all along I have not been showing sufficient enthusiasm for the cause of microtonality, I do heartily recommend it as a subject of further research.

24 She helped me procure some of the scores, and I use this opportunity to express my gratitude.

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