

Tomaz Svete

Ekmelic Music in Slovenia

Since 1970 an essential part of the research work by Rolf Maedel and Franz Richter Herf at the Institute for Basic Musical Research at the Mozarteum in Salzburg was dedicated to the examination and systemisation of microtones. The results are called ekmelic music, a system basing on a 72 division within an octave. Franz Richter Herf's intention was not only to create a system, opening a wide range of possibilities for composing in a new way, but also to create some examples in the field of compositional techniques that would be useful for future generations of composers.

Franz Richter Herf (1920–1989) is considered to be a leading composer of ekmelic music. He and Rolf Maedel (1917–2000) are also theorists and founders of the 72-step ekmelic tone system. In 1991 I became familiar with the basics of ekmelic music, visiting the Institute for Basic Musical Research under the leadership of Horst-Peter Hesse (1935–2009). One of his main ideas was to consider chord constructions within the 72-step system, based primarily on the “ad infinitum” overtone scale as consonant or dissonant. Actually, this should be referred to as “chords with concordance or discordance impact”, while the term “consonant or dissonant” should be used only in relation to traditional music practice based on equal temperament. From that point of view, there are at least two types of chord construction, resulting in the concordance impact: the first one, based on the arithmetic progression of overtones (8:11:14:17:20:23:26 etc.) and the second one, based on the geometrical progression of the overtone row (8:13:21:34:55:89 etc.), which is called the golden section ratio.

Also in 1991 I wrote my first work on the ekmelic tone system called *Ein komplizierter Engel* for soprano and string quartet based on a text fragment of Dante's *Inferno*. The major dilemma of including the use of microtones into the musical context seemed to be at the very beginning the practical view of performance of new works. First of all, composers using other, uncommon tuning systems should cooperate with musicians and ensembles specialized in that kind of music. The first performance of that piece in Salzburg in 1991 came through a cooperation between ÖENM (Österreichisches Ensemble für Neue Musik) and IGEM (Internationale Gesellschaft für Ekmelische Musik) in Salzburg.

As a member since 1991, its artistic adviser and a member of IGEM's executive committee, I basically no longer have problems concerning the possibility to perform new work written in the ekmelic tone system. The main aim of IGEM is to perform the works of its members and to encourage the further recognizability of ekmelic music. Today, we have enough musicians specializing in the performance of microtonal music. On the other hand, practically every music instrument – except piano or some idiophones – is able to produce microtones. Woodwinds and brass can produce microtones through special finger techniques or through lip techniques; guitar and harp can do so through the use of special scordaturas. String instruments in general access a wide spectrum of possibilities for playing microtones and microintervals, but indeed it takes a lot of practice to achieve a satisfying level of exact playing of microtones and their relations, while strings don't have frets, like, for example, guitar.

Ekmelisch-Spektral, a concert that I have initiated and took place on January 23, 2017 in Vienna, was a cooperation between IGEM and ÖGZM (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Zeitgenössische Musik or the Austrian Society for Contemporary Music) with works from Richter Herf, Johannes Kotschy, Violeta Dinescu, Tomaž Svete, Tristan Murail, and Dimitris Mouras. This concert informed me about that problem in a different way. The performers, a string quartet from the Ensemble Reconsil, without doubt specialize in contemporary music and are even familiar with microtonal works in general, but they didn't play any work in the ekmelic tone system like Richter Herf or Kotschy until then. They performed all works, including the ekmelic pieces, sovereignly, without any bit of insecurity or question according to the practical performances of ekmelic microtone relations.

For practical reasons we should prefer, however, to choose a chamber music cast composing with microtones. But my next work after *A complicated angel*, which was *Requiem* for a great orchestra, two instrumental ensembles, two choruses, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass baritone, commissioned by Austro Mechana and performed in Prague on December 7, 1991, was partly written in the ekmelic tone system. Of course, in that work I included all possibilities of playing microtones, preferring the use of special scordaturas on harp and guitar.

Concerning to the question of singing microtones and unusual intervals, it should be recommended that they be integrated very carefully into the compositions. A singer can take a special intonation from a single instrument, but it is also possible to sing ekmelic tone relations without

any instrumental support. Hitomi Akiyama, who sang a few of my compositions in the ekmelic tone system and Paulette V. Herbich, Herbert Druml, and Bernhard Halzl, the performers of *Requiem*, acknowledge that argument. Gertraud Steinkogler-Wurzinger (b. 1958), the long-standing president of IGEM, professor at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, composer, and singer is renowned for singing ekmelic music as a soloist or with her Belcanto Chorus.

Quartettino d`archi (1992) was still composed in the ekmelic tone system, but afterwards I struggled to find a new tone system according to the new stylistic orientation. I supposed that many possibilities that we strive to discover in one very complicated and artificial way are already available in foreign musical cultures such as Arabic or Indian musical practices. Cantata *Sacrum delirium* (1st prize for Composition competition in Gorizia, Italy, 1994) is based primarily on the use of quarter-tone scales like in Arabic music.

Candor est lucis aeternae (2001), a spiritual motetto for soprano, flute, and harp using special scordatura on harp, first performed at the Mozarteum in Salzburg the same year, seems to be a microtonal work but not written in the ekmelic tone system. *Mystics* for two harps (1999), performed for the first time in 2016 in Vienna (the 2nd and 3rd movements), uses a wide spectrum of microtones and rich combinations of colours in the way of a “super-harp.”

Lilium pedibus detruere (2009) for clarinet, saxophone, guitar, and piano combines elements of the ekmelic ton system with special playing techniques like multiphonics and other sound effects on woodwind instruments.

A return to the roots of ekmelic music was realised in *Deux aquarelles écméliques* for flute, viola, and harp, first performed in Salzburg in 2010. At the very beginning of the piece, the initial row of tones, “a sort of an Arabic scale,” moves into a vertical position, forming a chord construction according to the overtones 8:11:14:17:20:23 (Example 1). In the second movement, I used principles of overtone spectrums of metals (*La lune et la guillotine*) researched by the composer and theoretician Kurt Anton Hueber (1928–2008), a long-standing member and the president of IGEM.

L’après midi d’un grillon (2014) for violin, violoncello, and guitar with special scordatura must be considered a continuation of the tradition of ekmelic music and of a compositional work of Franz Richter Herf.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Deux aquarelles écéméliques" by Svete. The score is written on multiple staves. The top staff is for Flute (Fl) with dynamics like 'f', 'cresc.', 'ff', and 'poco rit.'. The second staff is for Viola (Vla) with dynamics like 'f', 'mf', 'mp', and 'ff'. The third staff is for Viola (Vla) with dynamics like 'mf', 'cresc.', 'mp dolce', and 'cresc.'. The fourth staff is for Viola (Vla) with dynamics like 'm.d.', 'm.g.', 'p', and 'pp'. The fifth staff is for Viola (Vla) with dynamics like 'm.g.', 'p', and 'pp'. The sixth staff is for Viola (Vla) with dynamics like 'm.g.', 'p', and 'pp'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 1: Svete's *Deux aquarelles écéméliques* (2010), fragment of the score

Conclusion

Asking myself if there exists any influence of ekmelic music in Slovenia, I could hardly respond in a positive way. First of all, I should be considered the

only representative of that musical style among Slovenian composers; further, all my activities in the field of microtonality are bound up into the activities of IGEM and the Austrian musical cultural area. The only work including microtones through special scordatura on harp that was not performed or initiated through IGEM is my 10th opera, the chamber opera *Ada* performed in Ljubljana in the 2017/18 season. Of course, I initiated some guest performances and concerts with ekmelic music in Slovenia, but there have been no noticeable results of those efforts. The area of microtonal music, in the first line ekmelic music, should be seen as an important part of my compositional oeuvre, but not the only one.

It is not the object of our observation, but if we ask ourselves about the use of microtones and microtonal systems, there are obviously some Slovene composers using them. At the moment, we can just say “we guess,” or “we suppose.” The task to research microtonality in Slovenia should be temporarily considered as an object of upcoming investigation.