

Various Communities of Feeling in (post-)Yugoslav Popular Music: An Introductory Reflection

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A quarter of century after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, its popular music has clearly survived. It is not only a part of the memories of the good old days, and thus limited to people over 40; it is perhaps even more attractive for the younger generations than for those who were part of its development after WWII. Younger artists and audiences produce and consume popular music in their new respective countries, but their music still expresses some common structures of feeling. The authors in the present volume, all of whom come from the region, address issues of similarities and differences in the various popular music scenes and audiences across former Yugoslavia.

Music is an especially good and useful indicator of social relations and their transformation. This volume discusses the use of music and its social existence as a marker of social change in a country which has survived only in memory – and in music. Despite enormous recent

shifts in music production, distribution and use, music is still the main indicator of social relationship, especially in times of rapid change. It is an excellent indicator of barely visible commonalities and differences across space and time.

In Yugoslavia, popular music played an important, though ambivalent, role. We can claim that it served as a medium for the transmission of dominant values (festival spectacles of discipline, regime songs), but at the same time it was also a medium of expression of highly varied interests among various social groups and their identifications (youth, rebels, women, ethnic minorities, national identities). Popular music was an important part of the system, but at the same time an island of confrontation and experimentation with the system. In the proclaimed multiethnic or multinational state it at the same time connected people and exposed their differences, which were understood by audiences throughout the country as local exceptions.

Despite the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the numerous interethnic conflicts and processes of development of the post-Yugoslav nation states, the legacy of popular music is still very vital. In the area of former Yugoslavia, many forms of cooperation are emerging: between musicians and booking agents; the revitalization of certain musical expressions with reference to the Yugoslav past, as well as the informal exchange of documented products and experiences from this past via social networks.

Former Yugoslav popular music has acquired, especially during the post-Yugoslav period, the status of national production in the individual countries (e.g., “Serbian rock” or “Croatian pop”), but there are also examples of a truly shared, multinational legacy. Despite their originally apparent “Bosnian note”, Bijelo dugme, for example, became a representative of the common, i.e. multinational legacy. Some centres of popular music and their popular music venues became transnational places of memory – e.g. SKC (Student Cultural Centre) in Belgrade. In the time of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and after, some regionalisms or localisms appeared as a form of rejection of musical nationalisms, for example “*ča val*” in Croatian Istria (see, e.g., Kalapoš 2002; Čaleta 2003).

To a certain extent, popular music in former Yugoslavia served as a field of affirmation of otherwise de-privileged minorities, for example the Roma. The (Serbian-Roma) singer Šaban Bajramović, known as the king of Roma music, was considered by some fans to be the most important Yugoslav personality after Tito. The recently deceased “queen” of Roma music, Ema Redžepova, was similarly appreciated. The musical production of the Roma is still among the most important linking mediums in the whole area.

Emancipatory processes in the popular music of former Yugoslavia are nowadays present in the vigorous attendance youth music venues (for Slovenia see Muršič 2000a, 2011b; Muršič et al. 2012). In many cases, these venues are a direct legacy of Yugoslavia, i.e. self-management of the local youth organizations. Grassroots youth centres are still around and they provide a high level of direct contacts with performers of contemporary non-commercial popular music throughout the entire area of the former country, perhaps, but only to a certain extent, with the exception of Kosovo.

Audiences which welcome any revival of the legendary performers from former Yugoslavia are exceptionally good markers of the former “structures of feeling” (Williams 2005). It is now more or less obvious that the aesthetic preferences of Yugoslav popular music audiences have had a much deeper impact on the development of Yugoslavia than is usually thought.

It is not possible to understand the recent instrumentalization of popular music in the countries of former Yugoslavia without a better understanding of its origins and political history. Ordinary people reflect these trends in their everyday lives.

There have been many anthropological studies done on the history of Yugoslavia and its violent dissolution (e.g., Bowman 1994; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Silber and Little 1995; Halpern and Kideckel 2000; Muršič 2000b; Allcock 2002), as well as of the post-socialist transition in former socialist countries (e.g., Kürti and Skalník 2009), but not many have addressed the continuity between the past and the present, especially not in the field of popular culture and popular music (with noticeable much later exceptions, e.g., Perković 2011; Velikonja 2013; Perica and Velikonja 2012). The previously underestimated field of popular music studies therefore appears as a perfect subject for studying these processes, because popular music is at first sight neutral, but in its social effectiveness is a heavily politically charged area of cultural production. The articles in this collection compare contemporary (everyday) life in the countries of former Yugoslavia from the perspective of their present or past popular music. They focus on a seemingly trivial part of everyday life, its popular music. The field of gender studies, especially studies of women in popular music, who have so far been almost completely neglected, is also touched on, although this topic deserves special attention and therefore will be presented in another volume.

Interestingly, the academic production of analyses of popular music during and after socialism is relatively sparse. There are a few important exceptions, such as Eric Gordy (1999), who analyses the destruction

of alternatives in Serbia, Alexei Monroe's work on turbo-folk (2000) and *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (2005), and others, such as Petra Sabrina Ramet (1994), Carol Silverman (1996), Mark Slobin (1996), Jane C. Sugarman (1997), Mattijs van de Port (1998), Ljerka Rasmussen (2002), and Catherine Baker (2011). It is difficult to define Mišina's work (see 2013) either as domestic or foreign, but in any case, domestic researchers have been more productive. One early attempt was the research on music in the Croatian war by Svanibor Pettan (1998) and his study of Roma musicians in Kosovo (1992). Also worth mentioning are some other works on music and music-related topics from the area (Kulić 1980; Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Čolović 1994, 2006, 2008; Hujčić 1996; Zlatanović-Cvetković 1997; Ceglar 1999; Longinović 2000; Vogrinc 2000; Grlja 2002; Andree Zaimović 2004; Kronja 2004; Žolt, Višnjevac and Vučurević 2004; Jeffs 2005; Ceribašić 2007; Milojević 2007; Volčič 2007; Mijatović 2008; Vuletić 2008; Lukić-Krstanović 2010; Kostelnik 2011). Finally, we should also mention some of the important contributions to the topic from the writers in the present volume (Muršič 2000a, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008, 2011a, 2011b; Petrović 2011, 2012; Hofman 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2015; Petrov 2016).

Over time, there has also been an increasing number of popular memoirs and historical overviews (Malečkar and Mastnak 1985; Luković 1989; Barbarič 1996; Janjatović 1998; Žikić 1999; Lovšin, Mlakar and Vidmar 2002; Jakovljević 2003; Kostelnik 2004; Mirković 2004; Škarica 2005; Bašin 2006; Collin 2004; Vrdoljak 2008; Đekić 2009; Perković 2013; Pogačar 2013, etc.)

This volume brings writings that touch on a longer historical framework, beginning with early Slovenian recordings between WWI and WWII by Drago Kunej, followed by an overview of Yugoslav rock music in the 1970s by Irena Šentevska. Tanja Petrović presents the important parody band *Rokeri s Moravu*, while Urša Valič presents the rich photographic archive at the Museum of Recent History in Ljubljana, covering the development of popular music in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. Petra Hamer writes about patriotic songs in besieged Sarajevo, while Ana Petrov presents the emotional attractiveness of present-day concerts of popular former Yugoslav acts. Miha Kozorog writes about a Bosnian refugee rock band in Slovenia. Ana Hofman and Martin Pogačar write about partisan songs in the present, in the repertoire of younger music performers. And, finally, Rajko Muršič writes about music, memories and imagination.

The collection *Sounds of Attraction* will hopefully contribute to further discussions on the relationship between the development of the popular music scene and the Yugoslav socialist system. As noted

above, from what we know about popular music in former Yugoslavia, the aesthetic preferences of music audiences appear to have had a much deeper impact on the development of the socialist state than is usually thought to be the case.

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