

Bojidar Spassov's Musical Creation as a Reflection of the Eastern and Western European Traditions

Bojidar Spassov's Musical Creation as a Reflection of the Eastern and Western European Traditions

By

Maria Kostakeva

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Bojidar Spassov's Musical Creation as a Reflection of the Eastern
and Western European Traditions

By Maria Kostakeva

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2024 by Maria Kostakeva

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-0364-0561-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-0364-0561-8

World practice conclusively proves that if a nation, albeit small, has a developed musical culture and school of composition, it does have a place in the European home, as long as that nation has done something to build it.

—Bojidar Spassov, “The Contemporary Music Club was Born”, 1990.

Awareness is an important factor for the artist. But even more important is the comparison of one's own with that of others. This confrontation makes us think, raises questions and leads to creative pursuits.

—Georgi Tutev, 1989. Letter to Pierre Boulez. February 14, 1989, Paris.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations & Copyright Notes	xi
List of Musical Examples	xiii
<i>To the Reader</i>	xv
Acknowledgments	xix
Preface: Cultural Identity and Modern Cognisance	xx
<i>About Multiple Identities and the Problem of Nationality</i>	
<i>After World War II</i>	
<i>The 'Internationalism' of Art in the Eastern Bloc</i>	
<i>The Isolation</i>	
<i>The Composer and the Totalitarian Regime</i>	
<i>The Internal Similarity between Human Societies</i>	
<i>The National Identity - this Strange Phenomenon</i>	
<i>Progress or Restoration</i>	
List of Abbreviations	xxxii
Chapter I	1
The Rebel and his Environment	
I. 1 <i>Cursory Glimpse of the Artistic Paths</i>	
I. 2 <i>The Russian Mentors and the Artistic Atmosphere around Them</i>	
I. 3 <i>The Scandal</i>	
I. 4 <i>The Thorny Field in Bulgaria</i>	
I. 5 <i>Professional Activities</i>	
I. 6 <i>A New Panorama of Bulgarian Music</i>	
I. 7 <i>The Society for New Music Musica Viva</i>	
I. 8 <i>Between East and West</i>	
I. 9 <i>The Turning Point</i>	
I. 10 <i>Leaving the Homeland</i>	
I. 11 <i>The New Homeland</i>	
I. 12 <i>Folkwang University of the Arts</i>	
I. 13 <i>Composer in Residence</i>	

Chapter II.....	27
Stylistic Features	
II. 1 <i>The Composer's Mirrors</i>	
II. 2 <i>Polystylistic as a Modern Polyvalence</i>	
II. 3 <i>Ambivalence and Complementarity</i>	
- <i>Spaces – Dialogue I</i>	
II. 4 <i>Serialism or Modality?</i>	
II. 5 <i>Modality and Musical Time</i>	
II. 6 <i>Modality and Rhythm Irregularity</i>	
II. 7 <i>The Interplay of Rhythmic and Timbre Structures</i>	
II. 8 <i>The Dualism between the Folk Idea and a Modern Composer's Aesthetic</i>	
Chapter III	45
The Hidden Theatricality	
III. 1 <i>The Theatrical as a Musical Subtext</i>	
III. 2 <i>Spassov's Mythology as an Ironic Game of Allusions</i>	
- <i>Con Spasso</i>	
- <i>Vidritza</i>	
III. 3 <i>Acoustic and Visual Allusions</i>	
III. 4 <i>Musical Dedications</i>	
III. 5 <i>The Imaginary Doubles</i>	
III. 6 <i>Invincible Meetings</i>	
- <i>Incontri Invisibili</i>	
III. 7 <i>Theatrical Masks and Electroacoustic Simulation</i>	
III. 8 <i>Multimedia - Music - Theatre</i>	
III.9 <i>Video and Film Compositions</i>	
- <i>Durchschlagszunge</i>	
- <i>LaFolia</i>	
- <i>Antigrav</i>	
III. 10 <i>Nature as a Visual-Acoustic Metaphor</i>	
Chapter IV	69
The Colour of Thinking: Instrumental Creation	
IV. 1 <i>The Invisible Threads of Tradition</i>	
IV. 2 <i>Timbre as a Compositional Factor</i>	
- <i>Fiato Continuo</i>	
IV. 3 <i>The Sound Fields</i>	
- <i>Hammerremix</i>	

IV. 4 *Remembering - Forgetting*

The Antiphonal Spaces

- *Spaces*
- *Adde*

IV. 5 *The Antiphonal Sound Principle*

IV. 6 *The Sounds as a Source of the Multi-Genre Conception*

IV. 7 *A Chamber Ensemble or a Large Orchestra?*

- *Symphony*

IV. 8 *The Soloistic Idea*

- *Concert Music*
- *Violin Concerto*
- *Concerto For Oboe Feux Follets*

IV. 9 *Working with the Individual Instruments*

- *The Tryptych 3 X 3*

IV. 10 *The Metaphorical Names*

Chapter V 96

Vocal and Music Theatre Works

V. 1 *The Artistic Text as a Musical Impulse*

V. 2 *Vocal Songs and Cycles*

V. 3 *The Song as a Dialogue or Theatrical Sketch*

- *Romantic Songs*
- *J.D. Songs Cycle*
- *Caliope*
- *Otletela pemperuga*
- *Vili-Samovili*

V. 4 *Cantatas*

- *Dragon's Wedding*
- *Glagolic Concerto*
- *The Beginning*

V. 5 *Operas*

- *The Enchanted*
- *The Swineherd and the Princess*
- *Despair*

Instead of an Epilogue 130

Celebrating Bojidar Spassov's 75th Birthday 134

Pia Marei Hauser

Adriana Hölszky

Nicolaus A. Huber

Peter Kerkelov
Angelina Petrova
Paul Rosner
Dragomir Yossifov
Peter Veal
Catherine Vickers
Boyan Vodenitcharov

Bibliography and Discography	150
Works by Bojidar Spassov	159
Spassov's Compositions mentioned in the book.....	163
Works by Other Composers.....	166
Index of Names.....	168
Index of Terms	171
Short Biography of Bojidar Spassov	173

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS & COPYRIGHT NOTES

Chapter I

- Fig. 1: Nikolay Sidelnikov and Alfred Schnittke. © Sidelnikov family archive
- Fig. 2: Jevgenij Kharitonov. License free
- Fig. 3 a: *The Enchanted* at the Moscow Conservatoire 1975. © B. Spassov
- Fig. 3 b: *The Enchanted* at the Staatsoper Dresden 1976. © Erwin Döhring
- Fig. 4: Lazar Nikolov, Dragomir Jossifov, Bojidar Spassov (1986). © B. Spassov
- Fig. 5: B. Spassov, K. Droba, G. Minchev, M. Kostakeva, K. Penderecki, 1983. © Bojidar Spassov
- Fig. 6: Bojidar Spassov as a lecturer at the Darmstadt Summer Course 1986. © B. Spassov
- Fig. 7 a: "The City of Truth" in the centre of Sofia 1990. © Georgi Georgiev, Joni
- Fig. 7 b: The fire in the Communist Party House 1990. License free
- Fig. 8: With Edison Denisov in Berlin 1993. © Bojidar Spassov
- Fig. 9: Bojidar Spassov at the Recording Studio of ZKM 2003. © Susanne Wurmnest

Chapter II

- Fig. 1: Women singing from Shopcki region. License free
- Fig. 2 (Table 1): The rhythmic structure of the cycle *Pieridis*. © B. Spassov

Chapter III

- Fig. 1: Ulrich Land and Bojidar Spassov in Essen 2008. © B. Spassov
- Fig. 2 a, b: Tamás Waliczky 's computer animation © B. Spassov, T. Waliczky
- Fig. 3: Image from *Antigrav*. © B. Spassov
- Fig. 4 a, b: Two images (Glaucoma and Blind Musicians) from *Durchschlagzunge*. © B. Spassov

Fig. 5: Picture of the grand piano from *LaFolia*. © B. Spassov

Fig. 6 a: Spassov's picture for *Asylphonia 2*. © B. Spassov

Fig. 6 b: Spassov's grandfather Georgi; picture to *Asylphonia 2*. © B. Spassov

Fig. 7: B. Spassov in the Alps (Ötztal) 2006. © B. Spassov

Chapter V

Fig. 1 a, b: *The Enchanted*. Plovdiv production 2017. © B. Spassov

Fig. Cover: Bojidar Spassov. © Maria Kostakeva

LIST OF MUSIC EXAMPLES

Chapter II

- Ex. 1: *Cycle Spaces – Dialogue I*, bar 20. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 2: *Glagolitic Concerto*, part I, bar 35. © Copyright B. Spassov
Ex. 3: *Zmejova svatba (Dragon's Wedding)*, part 3, bar 14. © Copyright B. Spassov
Ex. 4: *Concerto for Flute*, part 2, b.134. © Edition Muzika Sofia

Chapter III

- Ex. 1: *Con Spasso* (Beethoven's *Appassionata* - Quote). © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 2: *aDDe*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 3: *Memento*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 4: *Ilumina*. © Copyright B. Spassov

Chapter IV

- Ex. 1: *Fiato continuo II*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 2: *HammerRemix*. © Copyright B. Spassov
Ex. 3: *Incontri invisibili I*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 4 a: *Incontrti invisibile II*. © Copyright B. Spassov
Ex. 4 b: *Incontrti invisibile II*
Ex. 5: *aDDe*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH
Ex. 6: *Symphony -a, b*. © 1981 by Edition Peters GmbH, Leipzig
Ex. 7: *Concert music*. © Copyright B. Spassov.
Ex. 8 a, b: *Concerto For Violin (Violin Concerto)*. © 1989 By Associazione Valentino Bucchi (till 2012)
Ex. 9: *Concerto for Oboe Feux follets*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Ex. 10 a: *The Tryptych 3 X 3* for cello, piano and percussion: Passacaglia.

© Edition Peters GmbH, Leipzig

Ex. 11: *Waterfalls*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Chapter V

Ex. 1: *Romantic Songs , The Lark*. © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 2: *J. D. Song cycle* (the beginning of the 1st song). © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Ex. 3: *Caliope* (2, 3, 4 accolade). © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Ex. 4: *Otletela Preperuga*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Ex. 5: *Vili-Samovili*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Ex. 6: *Zmejova svatba (Dragon's Wedding)*, 3. Part, page 57. © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 7: *Zmejova svatba (Dragon's Wedding)*, 4. Part (Goodbye forgive mom).

Ex. 8: *Glagolitic Concerto*, part 1. © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 9: *Glagolitic Concerto*, part 3.

Ex. 10, 11: *The Beginning*. © G. Ricordi & Co. Bühnen-und Musikverlag GmbH

Ex. 12: *The Enchanted* (Tristan-chord). © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 13 : Monteverdi madrigal collage "*Dara la notte*". © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 14: Gesualdo *Responsorium* collage. © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 15: *The Swineherd and the Princess*: The gradual flowering of the rose. © Copyright B. Spassov

Ex. 16: *Despair*: Schubert's Song *Der Doppelgänger (The Double)* – collage. © Copyright B. Spassov

TO THE READER

The proposed book is an attempt to shed light on a culture little known to the English reader - the contemporary music of Bulgaria. It is presented in the context of the political history of the country as well as of the other Balkan cultures. There is so far no other research in English investigating the oppressive atmosphere in which the Bulgarian New Music, parallel to the avant-garde in Western Europe, began its development. Having worked in this field for a long time, I have written a number of studies both on Bulgarian musical culture in general (see the article "Bulgarian" 2020 in the MGG¹ online encyclopaedia) and on its most prominent representatives in the various phases of its development: among others Georgi Atanassov, Pantcho Vladigerov, Ljubomir Pipkov, Lazar Nikolov and Konstantin Iliev up to the next two generations represented by personalities such as Stefan Dragostinov, Bojidar Spassov, Georgi Arnaudov, Simeon Pironkov and Dragomir Yossifov. There are also numerous articles on Bulgarian music written by me in such editions as The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters (in German) and the Lexikon Komponisten der Gegenwart (Edition Text + Kritik).

The focus of this work is the German-Bulgarian composer Bojidar Spassov. This is the first monograph devoted to his music, which is looked at simultaneously through the prisms of national and Western European musical traditions. Living in Germany, his compositions are performed regularly in concerts and at many prestigious international music festivals and other events in both Eastern and Western Europe where he is well known.

The title of the research work "*Bojidar Spassov's Musical Creation as a Reflexion of the Eastern and Western European Traditions*" intends to present his oeuvre in the 'double-double' perspective: of the Eastern and Western European musical traditions, on the one hand, and of the Bulgarian musical culture and the New Music in general, on the other hand. This has been determined by the fact that his style is the product of

¹ See List of Abbreviations.

the influence of three national cultures - the Bulgarian one in which he grew up, the Russian one in which his professional style was formed, and the Western European one in which he has found his own way among the myriad contemporary compositional directions.

The selected material is thematically organised in five chapters, with the Preface and Epilogue reflecting from different perspectives the most important features of the composer's oeuvre in the context of European culture.² The researcher is thus confronted with a specific multinational and multicultural phenomenon that requires a specific approach. Two main aspects become fundamental in this light: the question of an artist's multiple identities in general, and the problem of national and cultural belonging from a modern perspective. These two aspects are the subject of the Preface. Furthermore, Zhdanov's³ doctrine of "socialist realism" and the damage it has inflicted upon Bulgarian art and music as well as the art and music of other Soviet satellite countries are subjects of my exploration. This ideological topic, which was avoided for a long time after 1989 (not only by Eastern European, but also by Western European aesthetic researchers), is all the more important because the consideration and perception of art and music in the Eastern countries of that time will not be possible without broaching this special topic.

The development of Spassov's creative career in Bulgaria, Russia and Germany against the backdrop of the complicated political and cultural environment as well as the personal upheavals associated with leaving his homeland is the subject of Chapter I (The Rebel and his Environment). Chapter II (Stylistic Features) explores the characteristics of his compositional style. Here the reader can see how the musical language and procedures change at different stages of Spassov's artistic development. In particular, his method of polyvalence as a conceptual principle of composing comes to the fore. One of the most important problems considered here is the dualism between the folk idea and the aesthetics of a modern author.

² The problem with this approach is that some of the most important musical works are the subject of multiple examinations, albeit from different angles in different chapters. The advantage of this is that it highlights some essential stylistic features of Spassov's music.

³ Andrej Zhdanov (1896-1948) was responsible for developing the Soviet cultural policy. In 1938 he was elected to the Political Bureau of the party's Central Committee and was entrusted with leadership of propaganda and agitation work. His doctrine of socialist realism remained in effect until the death of Joseph Stalin.

In the next three chapters, the main areas of Spassov's musical creativity are examined. Chapter III (The Hidden Theatricality) highlights the particular theatrical qualities of compositions that make visual suggestions and carry theatrical subtexts without being intended for stage performance. Special attention is given to the appearance of theatrical-acoustic 'doubles' and 'mirrors' in his music, through the involvement of electronics, computer technology and multimedia. In the analyses of individual works, we will also take a look at his video and film compositions.

The phenomenon of sound and timbre as an important compositional component in Spassov's instrumental works is explored in Chapter IV (The Colour of Thinking: Instrumental Creation). First of all, attention is paid to the specific 'sound citation' based on the interaction between classical and folk instruments with the participation of electronics. Furthermore, the antiphonal sound principle is pointed out, which paradoxically connects the baroque traditions with the 'out-singing' in the Bulgarian folklore practice. Finally, the multi-genre concept of his instrumental work is examined.

Chapter V (Vocal and Music Theatre Work) focuses on Spassov's songs and song cycles, cantatas and three operas. It points to a specific tendency in his style: to blend different eras, cultures and musical traditions, which is very prominent in his vocal and music theatre works. It marks out his sense of the specific sound and expressive means of different languages, manifested in the interplay between the semantic and the non-semantic, as well as in the simultaneity of natural (Latin, English, German, etc.) and artificial languages and invented words. The relationship between music and text, a fundamental problem for every composer writing in the domain of the vocal or opera genre, is particularly acutely observed in the examples of vocal songs and song cycles. An emphasis is placed on this exploration in his most popular music theatre work, the multimedia opera *The Enchanted*.

The concluding part (Instead of an Epilogue) sums up the themes looked at in the book. Particular attention is paid to the question of how the composer gives form to his own existential experience in his music. Spassov's answer to this fundamental question lies in his method of polyvalence, based on the relationship between music, art and life. Through this 'world-inventing' approach music becomes a synthetic whole, perceived by eyes and ears, soul and spirit, and by the entire human body, in relation to the environment and nature.

The full range of topics covered in each chapter is based on concrete musical examples and tables from Spassov's major works, as well as a variety of illustrations and authentic materials. The book is accompanied by an extensive bibliography and several indexes. These will help the reader to expand their knowledge of the issues addressed in the book.

Including different interdisciplinary aspects - aesthetic, political, historic and analytical - this research is intended for a broad readership interested in the contemporary problems of art and music. It can be particularly helpful for scholars as a source of material about the specifics of the Bulgarian music culture, as well as for all scholars who want to learn more about such original artistic personalities as B. Spassov. Getting to know more about his life and work in the context of the various culture spaces – that of his native Bulgaria, that of his professional formation in Moscow, and that of Western Europe, where he chose to live – can broaden the horizons for a deeper appreciation of Eastern European contemporary music. This, in turn, opens up new and valuable perspectives for communication and rapprochement between cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of this book has been made possible thanks to the invitation of Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Thank you so much for it.

In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Adam Rummens, who has accompanied this project throughout and has offered his unconditional support for it.

I am also very indebted to Prof. Barbara Lönnqvist, who read the first version of the manuscript and made substantial suggestions. My special thanks are due to Krassimira Jeliazkova, MA, for her thorough reading of the final version of the book, her critical corrections and improvements to the style.

I would also like to thank Mr. Laurence Fenton for his valuable suggestions during proofreading.

My thanks also to Mr. Lasse Müller of Edition Ricordi and Mr. Christoph Beyer of Edition Peters for their kind permission to reprint the music examples from Bojidar Spassov's scores.

For their support and excellent technical work, I would like to thank Mr. Klaus Alberts, Velbert and David Drüke.

Last but not least, many thanks to my husband, the composer Bojidar Spassov. Over time, I have had the good fortune to follow each of his compositions and hear them performed at concerts and festivals. The completion of this book would not have been possible without his invaluable help in providing me with his own archive of scores, recordings, videos and various other materials.

PREFACE: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND MODERN COGNISANCE

The composer's job is to orient himself in the multitude of ideas, following his own path and always remaining self-critical of his own work. (...) In the current situation, following one's own credo is more important than reproducing pluralistic aesthetics as an equivalent of a pluralistic society.⁴

—Bojidar Spassov

About Multiple Identities and the Problem of the Nationality

Each creative person potentially carries, apparently unconsciously, different identities inside themselves. These identities originate from the genetic roots of the artist and his historical and social experiences are intertwined with each other like changeable masks. Some of them are still developing, discovering unpredicted facets; it depends on the artist's value system, and his aesthetic and political views, especially in relation to the social functions assigned to the artist by life. Others remain dormant or stunted. For an artist who has spent most of his life outside his native country, the feeling of his 'own' and 'foreign' loses its acuteness and the idea of homeland acquires completely new dimensions. On the one hand, it narrows down to where his home, his family, and his intellectual and social environment were. On the other hand, it expands without borders, especially in the today's digital globalised world with unrestricted access to information. Thus, the homeland is no longer reduced to just one geographical area, but is experienced much more as an internal mental and cultural space. It is in this free and unlimited space of the mind that the homeland of the creator is located.

The question still remains, where does an artist come from, what is his true homeland and which country can put a claim on his heritage? Music history abounds with examples of different countries trying to "own" the work of composers who lived in various cultural spaces. For example, to

⁴ Spassov, 2018. "Contemporary music in Germany".

which country does Georg Friedrich Handel's music belong – should it be the “property” of Germany, where he was born, or Italy, where he received his musical education, or to England, where Handel was employed as a royal composer and where he became an integral part of English culture? How can we describe the national features in Stravinsky's music – as Russian, French, Swiss or American?

Unequivocal and unambiguous explanations are slipping away precisely because the relationship between cultural and national belonging is not only dynamic and interchangeable, but often ambivalent. Is national identity a constant or does this category change depending on the historical, political and social norms of the time? What effect was exerted on the artist by the influences of the cultural environment of the country in which they grew up and with which they identified?

This question seems even more complicated for the artists who lived under a totalitarian regime. In order to get a rough idea of what happened in Bulgaria after the Soviet occupation in 1944 and what its consequences for Bulgarian culture in all its spheres have been, a careful look into history is necessary.

After World War II

Towards the end of World War II, after the Soviet invasion in 1944, a communist dictatorship was enforced across Bulgaria. This meant a complete restructuring (destructing?) of the former Bulgarian state. The political and cultural environment, similar to all other Eastern satellite countries, was entirely changed. The totalitarian regime imposed a new 'collective' identity turning the values of the individual person upside down. The only ‘true’ doctrine of Zhdanov's socialist realism was forcibly implemented. Its rules were clear and simple: the new proletarian art should be "for the people"; it must serve the interest of the working class that was ruling after the revolution.

- Music was to be traditional, cheerful and accessible; the basic source should no longer be the professional European and Russian music traditions, but functional genres like the revolutionary march, mass songs and Russian utilitarian music.
- The new Soviet music had to confront the old European and Russian romanticism.

This propaganda model of the proletarian culture was a strong instrument of power and control on the part of party functionaries: people who immediately grasped the opportunity of obtaining high social positions and privileges. The normal composer had to choose between two alternatives: the first one was to remain true to himself, living in isolation, losing his status and having no possibilities of being performed. The other one, much simpler (in order to avoid troubles and difficulties), was to slavishly conform: one should be obedient and subordinate to the new rules and ideological directives sent down by Moscow. A pact with the ‘red Mephisto’ was truly tempting – residencies in the best locations at the sea-side or in the mountains, trips abroad, decorations and monetary awards. Thus, in place of the “hostile”, “decadent” and “spoiled” bourgeois Western arts, the new ideological postulates were pushed through.

Deviation from these postulates was treated as an act of hostility and subject to close surveillance by party officials, especially after the notorious decree of the Soviet Communist Party of October 2, 1948. The article was published in the form of an editorial in the newspaper "Pravda" under the title “On the occasion of the opera *The Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli”⁵. It was immediately circulated to all satellites of the Soviet Union.

According to the composer Konstantin Iliev (1924-1988), one of the pioneers of New Music in Bulgaria from the end of the 1940s, the purpose of this decree was to "shock the whole 'camp' and paralyse any free thought, any free creative expression and in general any idea of freedom in the ideological field"⁶. These postulates determined the overall cultural policy of Bulgaria for many years. Indeed, the situation in the other socialist countries was no different. György Ligeti ironically described in his memoirs the ideological war in Hungary against the "imperialist" dodecaphony, the “anti-socialist minor second” (an important tool to avoid tonality! – M. K.), as well as the atonality of contemporary music. Not only Stravinsky and Schoenberg, but also other personalities of stature like Béla Bartók fell foul of this campaign.⁷

⁵ Vano Muradeli (1908-1970) was a Georgian composer of Armenian background. He worked in the Moscow Conservatory during the 1930s, and received the Stalin Prize in 1946. His opera *The Great Friendship* was denounced by the Soviet leadership in 1948.

⁶ Iliev, 1997. “Слово и дело” (Word and Action): 241.

⁷ Ligeti, “About my ‘Concert Româneșe’ and other early works from Ungarn”: 153.

Thus, the Zhdanov doctrine of socialist realism was forcibly implemented in Bulgaria and in other Soviet satellites. Three very important marks distinguished this doctrine: (communist) "partiality" (faith in the party), "popularity" (supported by many people) and "internationality". What the Soviet ideology meant under the latter term was the art of the so-called 'Homo Sovieticus' – a new human species cultivated in the conglomerate of all multinational states in the Soviet empire. Thus, an omnipresent "popularity" (read "profanation") of art and music began under the domination of Soviet mass song and operettas. The national musical cultures of all the satellite countries were 'enriched' not only with new marches and hymns, but also with pompous oratorios and cantatas dedicated to the 'great' communist leaders (i.e., dictators). Therefore, instead of the "hostile", "decadent" and "spoiled" capitalist art, the new ideological postulates were imposed. The common socialist-realistic and optimistic art had to be "national in form and content" and at the same time "international".

The 'Internationalism' of Art in the Eastern Bloc

The paradox is that the artificial notion of 'internationalism' actually meant the complete isolation of the countries belonging to the Communist bloc.⁸ The intensive pre-war trade and the natural cultural and musical exchange among the Balkan countries were systematically and deliberately interrupted in the name of 'internationalism' between peoples. Without a basis for comparison, isolated neighbouring and non-neighbouring countries were doomed to uncritical self-assessments of history and art outside the common European development. Each country aimed to praise the 'uniqueness' and 'exceptionality' of its own national culture. This well-known 'recipe' of Soviet historiography was also used in the self-reflection of some Balkan countries - a phenomenon that has not been overcome to this day.

It is well known, however, that all those cultures can trace their common roots in the Balkan Peninsula back to ancient times. Investigation only makes sense if they are looked at in relation to each other, as well as in the context of the other European cultures. The fact that this range of problematic issues has not yet been a subject of a comprehensive scientific analysis, and is rarely the topic of musical research, can be explained either by a lack of interest on the part of the researchers from the 'great'

⁸ Kostakeva, 2006. "National Culture or Cultural Identity".

nations, or, a belief that the time is still not ripe for it.⁹ The Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krāstev sees a real danger in the so-called "ethno-nationalism" which resulted from "the bloody wars in the former Yugoslavia."¹⁰

The Isolation

Quite different was the situation in the Central European countries belonging to the Soviet zone, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In 1956, thanks to the financial help of West German Radio, the contemporary music festival "Warsaw Autumn" was founded. Entry to this festival was prohibited for the most important representatives of the New Music in Bulgaria, the composers Konstantin Iliev and Lazar Nikolov (1922-2005).

At the same time Polish composers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as Russian composers (the school around Edison Denisov, Alfred Schnittke and Sofia Gubaidulina) in the 1970s, supported by Western colleagues and cultural institutions, got the opportunity to develop in a natural environment, to attend the courses in Darmstadt and Donaueschingen, as well as to be performed at the famous festivals of contemporary music. And, in addition to this, they could communicate with their peers and eminent Western contemporaries!

In the years when Western avant-garde composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono, György Ligeti and Luciano Berio were meeting each other in Darmstadt, charting new paths in the music of the era, not one of the Bulgarian composers was allowed to cross through the Iron Curtain. (I leave aside the usual "business trips" - read "leisurely travels" - of the functionaries - on state funds, it goes without saying - to the most attractive countries of the 'rotting capitalism'). The repressive Soviet structures had taken such deep roots in the little Balkan

⁹ An example is in the state of Northern Macedonia (formerly known under other names, including FYROM), which was created in 1991 after the former Yugoslavia disintegrated. Following centuries of disputes over its ownership between the Bulgarian, Serbian and Ottoman powers, its post-WW2 status was of 'a constituent republic of Yugoslavia', but it is beyond any doubt that a lot of its cultural and historical legacy is shared among the above-mentioned countries. However, instead of accepting this historical truth, the Macedonian authorities prefer to exaggerate its alleged but unproven connections with Alexander the Great which makes constructive conversations on cultural topics next to impossible.

¹⁰ Krāstev and Holmes, 2019: 8.

country that the composers could not even dream of Warsaw, let alone Darmstadt, Witten or Donaueschingen.¹¹ As evidenced by the correspondence between Konstantin Iliev and Lazar Nikolov, the concerts broadcast live by Bavarian Radio were their only information from that time.¹² There is no doubt that this was no more than lip service to the supposed 'openness' of the socialist system; there was no way that radio broadcasting could have replaced the real experience of attending these events, not to mention establishing personal contacts with Western colleagues.

The Composer and the Totalitarian Regime

To this day, little, if anything, has been said or written about the silent tragedy of an entire generation of composers in Bulgaria. Certainly, 35 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the topic does not seem to be pertinent or politically attractive. Hardly any of the young composers today would think about the fact that in order to create the New Music in Bulgaria in the era in which 'steel' chains tied artists down, Promethean fortitude, moral stoicism and inhuman endurance were needed.

The tragic fate of Dimităr Nenov (1901-1953), one of the most original composers, a brilliant pianist and architect, and a graduate of Dresden University, is a powerful example. After 1944, he was immediately sacked from the Sofia music high school, where he was then teaching. Until his death in 1953 he lived in poverty, seriously ill, hardly composed any more, and died bitter and isolated. Benedict Bobchevski (1895-1957): the composer, conductor and musicologist, who had completed his music education in Vienna and Munich, had a similar fate. The author of two operas and many symphonic works, he developed intensive conducting activities in his native country and abroad. In the 1930s, Bobchevski was the most important conductor in Bulgaria (especially for Wagner and Richard Strauss), created about 40 productions on the stage of the Sofia Opera House, also including a number of Bulgarian operatic works. After 1944, his name was completely erased from the Bulgarian music history.

It is significant that composers with leftist convictions, but using heretic 'modernist' means of expression in their music, like the composer Georgi Tutev (1924-1994), one of the leading names in Bulgarian New Music,

¹¹ Danova-Damjanova 2009: 27.

¹² "We listened to the music with a great interest and excitement, exchanging our impressions and discussing them". See: Iliev 1997: 67.

were also disregarded. In contrast, some of the most important composers like Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978), Vesselin Stoyanov (1902-1969) and Lyubomir Pipkov (1904-1974), having created their best works in the 1930s, fully adapted to the requirements of the new rules after 1944. Whether they behaved this way just to maintain their position in society and the music scene, I will leave with no comment.

Others had to resign. 'New' comrades, easily obtaining the dream professorships, took their places. While Lazar Nikolov, both before and after 1989 (the year Berlin Wall fell), was not allowed to teach composition, his younger colleagues and later on their students took teaching positions. There is no evidence in their work suggesting much interest at all in what was happening around the world. Neither the modern compositional techniques nor the education of future performers of New Music seem to have ever been in the range of their attention.

The absurdity and hypocrisy of the party ideologues can nowadays be judged from the (above-mentioned) book by Konstantin Iliev, "Word and Action",¹³ as well as from the numerous reports from the Union of Bulgarian Composers (UBC). In the early 1970s, when the political atmosphere was no longer as hard as in the 1950s, the functionaries claimed that there was no "discrimination towards the use of 'modernist' compositional means."¹⁴ "All kinds of techniques could be used" on only one condition: to create "our socialistic contemporary art!"¹⁵ However, one can ask the question: was it possible to create contemporary art whilst obeying the rules of socialist realism?

All these circumstances can explain why contemporary Western music was until recently a blank spot in The National Academy of Music.¹⁶ First of all, the doctrine of socialist realism excluded the study of 'rotten' Western music. Furthermore, composers and performers hostile to the new regime were dead professionally and no longer had their places in academia or in the concert life of Bulgaria. All this can help determine the situation of New Music after the change.¹⁷ But instead of the previous ideological barriers, other no less problematic ones arose, creating

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Petrova, 2022. "Unshared fragments of the ideology of the 70s": 16.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Iliev: 29.

¹⁷ Danova-Damjanova: 27.

conditions for a new isolation and 'marginalization' of musical life in Bulgaria. There is one sad and sorry clarification: the place of the modern music is mostly taken by pop, folk and rock culture, flowing into the general entertainment industry. In fact, a similar phenomenon is observed throughout the globalised world.

Nevertheless, it would be unfair not to mention the annual festival *Nova bālgarska musika* (NBM) (New Bulgarian Music) organised by the Union of Bulgarian Composers (UBC) since 1973. This festival, quite unique in the socialist countries, was a review ostensibly aimed at presenting the best of the work of Bulgarian composers during the year. In fact, the main task and its hidden agenda were purely ideological - to exercise censorship on music that did not meet the criteria of the socialist realist doctrine. That is why the communist regime was a rich sponsor of this music event: it assigned funds to all symphony¹⁸ and chamber orchestras and opera houses, as well as various other formations from the capital city and the provinces participating in it. Although the main contracts and awards were distributed among the 'loyal' composers-officials of the UBC, all members could also participate in a fairly democratic way. However, the main task of this festival was purely political: the music performed in the presence of invited delegations from the Eastern bloc countries (primarily from the Soviet Union and the GDR) was to be a showcase for "socialist realism" art. Any work deviating from these principles was subjected to fierce criticism by the media and in official discussions of the Composer's Union.

The Internal Similarity between Human Societies

Let's get back to the problem of national identity. Due to all the social and political turbulences mentioned above, the exploration of the 'nationalisms' in the countries of the Eastern Bloc was left to Western historiography. It should be recalled and emphasised however, that New Music, using innovative modern strategies and techniques, completely rejected all kinds of 'nationalisms', 'exoticisms' and 'folklorisms' typical for the romantic

¹⁸ In the most difficult economic crisis immediately after the war, ten symphony orchestras were founded in Bulgaria: the Sofia State Radio Orchestra (1945-47), the Sofia Philharmonic State Orchestra (1947-49), the Plovdiv State Orchestra (1945), Varna (1946), Razgrad (1947), Burgas (1947), Russe (1948), Vidin (1949), Pernik (1950), Pleven (1953), and Shumen (1954). In addition, eight autonomous opera orchestras were formed at the state opera houses in the major cities.

epoch and particularly of the first half of the 20th century. From this point of view, Balkan nationalisms were often seen as "borrowing and lagging behind in time", as the Professor Maria Todorova¹⁹ of the University of Illinois noted. Consequently,

these nationalisms are 'later' and however 'more immature, young, unruly, or imitate forms that are organically unsuitable for the context in which they are grafted and therefore most often degenerate.'²⁰

In some cases national movements were interpreted as "exports of Western ideology" and in others as results of "manipulation and suggestion by the great powers."²¹ Very similar is the statement of Ivan Krăstev:

The post-communist imitation of the West was a free choice of the East, but it was encouraged and monitored by the West.²²

To all these theories about the political and cultural imitations being 'behind in time' in Eastern Europe, Todorova opposes the idea of the internal similarity between human societies, even when they are not in direct contact with each other. Such a consideration should probably be more of a common rule than the exception. Even more than that, it can also be confirmed by a number of researchers in the fields of anthropology and the history of religions. For example, Mircea Eliade, a French scholar of Romanian origin, researching in the field of primitive religions and mythology, proved the fundamental unity between cultures in the world.²³ Only a Balkan perspective, where all three of the above-mentioned scientists come from, can help to see the idea of the internal similarity between human cultures as key to all these problems.

This gives food for thought. Supposing the human societies are substantially similar and related to each other, the problem of identity should be seen first as a genetic and historical memory. On the other hand, this memory - whether it originates from a separate village or from a large geographical area - means above all a distinction from the 'otherness'. The history of

¹⁹ Todorova, 2004. "The lag tra: Modernity, Temporality and Eastern European Nationalism". See also Todorova, 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*; Todorova, 2015. "Is there weak nationalism and is it a useful category?", *Nations and Nationalism*: 681-699.

²⁰ Todorova, 2004. "The lag tra: Modernity, Temporality and Eastern European Nationalism".

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.: 111.

²³ Eliade, 1981.

the great cultures teaches, however, that the development of a national and cultural community only happens as a result of a cooperative dialogue among diverse cultures, rather than navel-gazing at one's own traditions.

The National Identity - this Strange Phenomenon

It is not a coincidence that the question of national identity has been the main focus of discussion since the establishment of the Composers' Union in Bulgaria in 1933. From its very inception the young Bulgarian culture attempted to view its national roots in the context of the modern artistic tendencies in Europe. This was confirmed by the work of D. Nenov, as well as by the already mentioned composers of the 1920s-1940s: Vladigerov, Stoyanov and Pipkov: it was formed both by the late romantic and new aesthetic movements like Impressionism, Expressionism and Symbolism, on the one hand, and by the idiom of traditional music²⁴, on the other hand.

In the time of the dogmatic 'socialistic realism' after 1944, the perception of nationality was reduced to the local and naturalistic imitation of the folklore in the music language of a large number of composers. In the official institutions this problem was the subject of many discussions about the development of the contemporary Bulgarian music. K. Iliev noted:

The national style is not a fruit of the mere copying of the folk song, but to the creative individuality of the composer who cannot escape the characteristic features of the spirit of his people, even if he has set himself such a task. This is what nationalism boils down to in the work of all great composers, writers and artists.²⁵

The statement of the composer Bojidar Spassov about all these deformations in the Bulgarian music culture during Communism is similar. According to him, the perception of nationality should be far from the "dangerous nationalist tendencies."²⁶ He clarifies:

I have always rejected the idiomatics and sonority, closed in the narrow, local meaning of Bulgarian folklore. Such aesthetics do not fit into the global development of music cultures today. The localisation of the

²⁴ Typical features of this idiom are the Bulgarian asymmetric rhythms, metric variability and modality.

²⁵ Iliev, Word and Action: 55.

²⁶ Spassov, 1997. "Turkish oriental dance, withered vitality or unattainable illusions."

musical language coming from the folklore is typical for most followers of the so-called socialist realism and was present in all genres of Bulgarian music - from serious to pop music.²⁷

Spassov was convinced that a lack of distance from the folklore material in a composer's work leads to anachronisms. Glinka's sentence, that "music is created by the people, and composers only arrange it", repeated as a 'mantra' by the functionaries of the time, was subjected to a devastating irony by Spassov: "The people create the New Music, and composers have nothing to do with it". He added: "Composers create the folk music that we, the performers, sing."²⁸

The composer conveys the paradoxical idea that true Bulgarian folk music is not easy to sing at all. In addition to it, at a composition workshop, Spassov demonstrated a recording of authentic Bulgarian folklore, mistaken by his colleagues as an author's avant-garde work!²⁹

The question of national identity in music, narrowly understood as the inclusion of folklore elements in the work of professional composers, has been subject of various ideological and aesthetic discussions throughout the 20th century – both in the countries of the former Eastern bloc and in the West. This controversy dates back to the time of Theodor Adorno, the ideologue of Arnold Schoenberg, and his 12-tone system in the 1930s. In his "Philosophie der neuen Musik", he antithesises the two key figures in 20th-century music: Schoenberg as the bearer of progress, and Stravinsky, stamped as "regressive", "non-dynamic" and "mechanical". The German philosopher obviously mentioned the inimitable rhythmic concept grounded on the irregular 'folk' pulsations in the grandiose structure of Stravinsky's ballet *Sacre*. This emblematic work of the modern epoch, a metaphorical embodiment of the natural sacrament, is completely torn apart by Adorno because of its closeness to archaic folk culture and the asymmetric rhythms used in it.

Curiously, the music of composers who were loyal communist functionaries in Bulgaria before 1989 (and obviously also in the majority of the Eastern European countries), despite the change of plots and subjects, remains true to the socialist doctrine that 'the art must be national in form and content.' In other words, music continues to be based on a naturalistic and unreflective attitude towards folklore.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Spassov, 2001.

²⁹ Spassov, 2005.