

***Coral theatre* in the Programs of the International Festival of Chamber Choirs and Vocal Ensembles in Kragujevac (Serbia) - Contributions to Defining and Structuring the Term**

Miloje NIKOLIĆ¹

Abstract: *The paper deals with the identification and clarification of problems of organization and the possibilities of classifying of „staged concerts“ presented at the International Festival of Chamber Choirs and Vocal Ensembles in Kragujevac, Serbia, from 1995 to 2017. Starting with the essential analogies of such multimedia performances with the structures and types of forms of choruses of Serbian composer Stevan Stojanovic Mokranjac (1856-1914), the author of the paper demonstrates the possibilities of applying his specific method (which combines cognitive analysis and different discourses of intertextual reading), especially in the domain of classification that separates and internal manages subsystems of incomplete „theatralisation“ of choral concerts and comprehensive multimedia performances of „choir theatre“.*

Keywords: *staged choral concert, theatralisation, choral theatre, rukoveti, dynamic form, International Festival of Chamber Choirs and Vocal Ensembles in Kragujevac (Serbia)*

1. Introduction

The International Festival of Chamber Choirs and Vocal Ensembles in Kragujevac (Serbia) was established in 1995 (the signer of this paper was the author of its basic concept) and so far has been held 12 of his sessions, with 79 concerts in the main program. The basic program orientation of the Festival was set up as a "presentation of complete program concepts of whole-evening concerts of chamber choirs and vocal ensembles - showing this the results of sound, theoretical and musicological researches in the field of program dramaturgy for small choir ensembles (with or without instrumental accompaniment). The initial intention was directed towards researches in the field of conceptualization and dramaturgy of standard choral

¹ PhD University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Music, Serbia, milojenikolic@gmail.com

programs, i.e. concerts. The impulses of *theatralization*, which came from some of the Festival's programs in his first years (as well as related research, which author of this work, with various associates from the world of the theatre, began in the meantime to carry out with their mother chorus, Academic chamber choir *Liceum* from Kragujevac, permanent participant of the Festival), contributed to include in the basic program concepts researches that stepping out of traditional frameworks of choral concept and moving towards conceptual and syncretic (multimedia) artistic event, but all the while the focus of such an event must be on choral singing. Thus, since 2006, concerts that have significantly developed and intensified elements of scenery began to appear in the programs of the Festival: non-standard choir wardrobe and its changes during the concert, more or less developed stage movement, some kind of scenery, expressive scene light, to various types of multimedia conceptualisation (primarily scenic) of comprehensive programs, in which scenic elements exceed the level of accompaniment and ornamentation of the voice-music stream and become equal constituents of its structure form.

Available literature, which analytically deals with this type of artistic events, is relatively scarce and has not yet constituted a harmonized analytical methodology nor a standardized classification, that would interpret the structure and the form, or the meaning of already achieved artistic results, and illuminate the ways of possible further development of applied artistic prosedea. This paper aims to contribute to somehow overcoming this problem by combining selected existing analytical approaches with some new methods, which have set up and somehow developed by the author of the paper, in applying to mentioned unexplored analytical samples.

The subject of interest in this work is, essentially, those multimedia art events (performances) that result from such a staging (*theatralization*) of choral concerts so that choral music is dominant or, at least, an equal component in the resulting multimedia compound.

An important common feature of all of the more or less *staged concerts* performed at the Kragujevac Festival facilitated undertaken researches: all such concerts were created on the basis of collage choral programs, composed of a number of shorter compositions, which are not originally written (as cyclical works) for the presentation in that framework and schedule. There are noticeable analogies of the structural and formal organization of these multimedial compositions with the corresponding features of a class of bimedial, textual and musical choral works (which author of this paper studied for many years): *rukoveti* (mean: *the bunch of songs*) of Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856-1914) and related choral genre-forms: potpourri, rhapsody, suit, etc.² Transposition (*mutatis mutandis*) of the experiences

² The term *rukovet*, folklore origin (whose original meaning: all that can be touched and harvested or mowed with one swing) in Serbian and later Yugoslav choral music signifies a specific choral poem (generically derived from potpourri and similar forms), in which the equal importance have dramaturgy of its textoes, firm macroformation of music processing, and the whole and details of harmonic and facture-orchestration solutions. This name in his metaphorical function was first used by Stevan

get from the analyzes and derivative systematization of the aforementioned choral compositions into the research of *staged (theatralized) choral concerts* will be the guiding idea of analytical approach in this paper.³

Within the set of all of the staged choral concerts, the most distinctive line of demarcation that separates concerts in which elements of the scenic upgrade appear only partially (*choral concerts with elements of theatralization*) from those who are entirely, or at least dominantly covered by the staging, thus acquiring the necessary (but not mandatory and sufficient) condition to be classified in the category of *choir theatre*.

On a deeper basis, this division is not necessarily essential, because the contribution of the scenic upgrading to the *dynamic form* of staged concerts can be important also in this category, and it is crucial in some aspects. Namely, every occurrence or use of the unusual stage ambience and scenography, non-standard choir dressage, prominent stage properties and, especially, the scene movement, raises the level of dynamism of the concert, and thus adds a certain contribution to the dynamics achieved by speech and musical means. Moreover, their isolation and unexpectedness can further enhance their dynamic effect, thereby significantly enhancing its potential shaping role.⁴

However, when it comes to the influence of the elements of the staging on the overall impression at the higher receptive level, especially the associative, characteristic of the phenomenon of intertextuality - concerts with the present and incompletely conducted theatralization deprive their recipes of the experience of integrity and intentionality, and gives them the impression of a lesser degree of organization - incomplete and undefined.

2. Choral concerts with elements of theatralization

In partially *staged choral concerts* performed at the Kragujevac festival (which include approximately half of all theatralized festival concerts),⁵ the possibilities of dynamisation the music stream with scenography, scenic light and properties were

Stojanovic Mokranjac, probably the most significant Serbian choir composer. Written in the period 1883-1909, his *Rukovets* set up a unique artistic design for the creation of a piece of this kind, which essentially influenced all subsequent authors of related compositions. This type of composition was (to a certain extent, it remained) favorite musical genre of Serbian and Yugoslav composers through a whole new history of music - from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present.

³ Spatial limitations of current work do not allow the elaboration of the applied complex analytical method, which the author has set up and developed in his recent doctoral dissertation [cf. Николић, 2016]

⁴ Their appearance can therefore be expected above all at the marking points of the choir program, as a way of their dynamic emphasis. On the other hand, it can also be used to "rescue" the general dynamics, or the wonted *dynamic form* at the places of weakness of textual-music dramaturgy.

⁵ The exact number is difficult to determine today, because recordings from some concerts are unattainable, and memory in such cases may be unreliable.

practically unused. This conclusion can be somewhat corrected in cases where the concerts were organized in spaces whose characteristics can be associated with the contents of their programs (concerts of Orthodox spiritual music in the Cathedral church, concerts of old music in Aula of the Municipal Court, which had something of the old splendor of representative aristocratic and civic public palaces, or in the historic building of the Old Serbian Assembly, which reminds of old pre-Renaissance modest public buildings). This raised the basic dynamic level of such concerts, but thanks to the fact that these spaces (as some sort of scenographies) did not change during concerts, this influence was only meant to add a certain constants to the corresponding graphics of its *dynamic form*, i.e. this form was not fundamentally changed. The associative links between the concert program and the space in which they were performed were, on the other hand, too broad to be able to navigate this relationship and achieve any precisely-managed effects.

The use of non-standard choral dressing, as an element of active communication on the relation choir-audience, in the analyzed subset of the staged festival concerts, did not in any way affect the *dynamic form* of the respective concerts, because that dressing was not changed during the whole performance - the dynamism derived from the change of the costumes at the transition from the first to the second part of two-part concerts (with pause between parts) can be virtually ignored, because in all cases it was related to the change of the basic thematic and dramaturgical concept.

On the other hand, the influence of this type of multimedia extension of standard choral programs on the experience of the whole artistic act depends essentially on its intentionality: whether it produces certain associations and thus acquires the characteristics of the sign. A further assessment of its meaning depends on its relationship to the musical-textual dimension of the program that builds up: if it is in an active relationship, it can also acquire a certain semantic significance and influence the discourse that the audience establishes according to the choral program; if not, its significance is concentrated entirely on the pragmatic, possibly broader cultural aspect of the relationship between the performer and the audience.

In the partially *staged concerts* of the Festival, the only precise intentionality of the aforementioned kind have had folklore costumes - authentic or simulated. Where they were in correlation with the folklore-based program, they contributed to the integrality of the impression and represented an serious step forward to some musical-stage syncretism – reinstalled old or, more often, new, with a deep foundation in the old one. In cases where folklore choral dressing was an outer visual framework for diverse, including also non-folk choral works, its role can only be interpreted as a type of *estrangement*, which also indicates the origin of the ensemble, that is, the music and culture that it represent.

The stage movement is the most important dynamic factor in the theatricalization of those concerts at the Festival which did not show any tendency towards the creation of closed forms of *choir theatre*. Two characteristic types of

scene movements are recorded: a) structural changes in the initial position of choirs, or choral groups, and b) the expressive movements of individuals and choir groups, as well as the whole choir, that most often have the characteristics of the dance - these two types of movement were often combined. In all cases, these stage movements were only partial, limited to individual compositions or, in best case, to blocks of compositions.

Ad a). The dramaturgical legitimacy for changing the *mise en scène*'s positions of certain choir groups is mainly found in large textural and orchestrational changes in music content, usually in the exchange of choir groups (partial choirs, "subchoirs") within the structure of performing ensemble, especially concerning the appearance of soloists or solo groups. The essence of such changes was the most frequent switching to the foreground of the choir group that is currently the leader or the only presenter of the content, and the retreat of others. The dynamic potential of such scenic movements-events (which, in principle, is big and which could represent an important step towards the *choir theatre*) was never used – the intentionality of such movements (changes) in the context of dramaturgical design of the concert entirety could not be noticed in any case.

There are fewer examples of changes in the arrangement of the choir groups in order to achieve their kind of dialogue or other dramatic effect, expressed in the texts of the respective compositions ("extortion", overwhelming, obtaining, etc.). Such examples are relatively often realized in compositions with a folklore basis, where the typical positions of isolated groups mimic in a stylized way in appropriate folk rituals and customs.

Finally, in several cases, the entry of the choir into the scene was realized as a kind of music-stage *intrada*, in which the choirs entered singing, mimicking (stylized) situations from the beginnings of some religious rites.



Photo 1. „Hassler” Vokalensemble, Miskolc (Hungary), 2011

Ad **b**). Scenes of dance character in here analyzed staged concerts are mainly derived from two typical musical impulses.

The first one deals with choral processing of folk dances or songs with expressive play rhythms (which are played in folk rituals and customs or meetings). These scenic movements represent, as a rule, the stylization of the appropriate folklore dances and usually cause a certain regrouping of the previous choir.

The other is, as a rule, the companion of the composition of contemporary popular music and the draw out ideas for its stylized and spatially limited choreography from today's popular *choralography* and its *show programs* (cf. Wolfe 2016, 24-25).



Photo 2. “Christina Morphova” Female Choir, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2008

Quite rarely, in exceptional cases, in the programs of the Festival, the movement of the singer appeared, inspired by the need to illustrate the contents of the text of a certain composition, or to unite these texts in a syncretic multimedia presentation of a spatially restricted movement, by the mimics and movements of certain parts of the body of the singer “on the place”, pantomimically.

3. Choral theatre

The use of analogies between the structural-formal arrangement of those concerts whose stage upgrade includes the entirety of the choir programs or at least their dominant parts (which thus acquire the basic condition of belonging to the category of *choir theatre*), and *rukoveti* and related cyclical collage genres of choral music, headline the criteria of an analogy of equivalent structures, the degree of *gestalt good* arrangement of their basic *dynamic forms* and the consistency and integrity of the intentionality of their intertextual relations to the chosen organizing paradigms.

There are two basic sets of criteria for the relevant arrangement of compositions from the category of *choral theatre*. The first of them is directed toward studies of parsing and integration on a horizontal, temporal plane, while others analogously investigate relations on a vertical (isochron, spatial) plan, among the medial components of these multimedia works.

The model of horizontal (temporal) arrangement of a set of *staged choral concerts*, as suggested in this paper, is based on the degree of integration of basic temporal structures and the form in the whole of the respective multimedia composition. In this system, the initial (lowest) place should be taken by those choral stage performances that were created by mosaic, unregulated unification, or by simple sequencing of individual scenic upgraded compositions of a choir program - *scenic (multimedia) potpourri*. *Gestalt laws*, that govern our perception, will provide some basic *dynamic form* for such events, but it will not be possible to find any *holism*, any *intentionality* of the arrangement of the whole, in which it will be more than a mere collection of its parts, as a necessary condition for belonging to a *staged concert* in the category of *choral theatre* (Wolfe 2016, 50; Rosser 2017, 1-2, 4; Супруненко 2012, 5, 9, 19-20, 22).

A consistent or at least sufficiently emphasized conceptualization of any element of the staging (and so that our perception can be supplemented in an understandable form or meaning) has the power that moves the position of the given *staged choral concert* in the mentioned periodic system towards one of the subspecies of the *choral theatre*. In so doing, as long as the recognition of his parsing on the components (choral compositions and their scenic upgrades) is preserved in such a scenic performance, he should be classified in one of the subspecies of musical and scenic *rukoveti*.⁶ Where such a breakdown pulls into the other plan or even loses (merging into new whole, whose borders are not only the sum of those of the previous ones), and choral performance performs a different dominant inner structure and an outer form, its place in the above classification system moves upwards, to other areas of the *choir theatre*, which are more closely related to the categories of the appropriate classifications of other types of theatre artistic events - both those that carry the subtitle *musically* and those without it.

Another essential criterion for arranging choral and theatrical works is source of inspiration, that is, of the creative impulses of scenic upgrading: whether this inspiration arises primarily from music or from the text of the basic choral, bimedial (textual and musical) component of this multimedia artistic event. The primary reliance on music, as a basic nondiscursive art, necessarily places the elements of abstracted *dynamism* of the entire content and its multidimensional *dynamic form* to the forefront. *Choral theatre's* subgenres and their forms in these

⁶ More precise definitions of all variants of this term and its related, their detailed descriptions and arguments for their introduction can be found in a series of earlier papers by the author of this paper [cf. Николић, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2016]

cases are close to different genres and forms of stage- and music-scene performances, to those from the older history, to contemporary shows. The upgrades and arrangements derived primarily from impulses of the discursive textual dimension of the choral compositions draw the appropriate characteristics and on them based classification and arrangement to the side of the various *drama theatre* subdivisions.⁷

3.1. Choral theatre performances whose staging is based only or primarily on the creative impulses of the musical dimension of the choir program

Among the observed integrally *staged choral concerts* presented at the Kragujevac festival, there is not one that could be characterized unquestionably as *scenic potpourri*. The closest to it are scenic staging of concerts in which the collage textual and musical basis is not satisfactorily integrated itself, and the stage upgrade did not have the strength or interest to compensate for these basic shortcomings by its means.

Two concerts-performances from the Festival are approaching the above-mentioned model.

- Thematic wide-set program concept *Let's Sing Outloud, and Let's Dance Too...* (Academic Chamber Choir *Liceum*, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductor: Miloje Nikolic; stage movement: Sanja Todorovic; 2011) would be an ordinary mosaic choral resital of folklore inspired choirs of Serbian composers, that the means of his *theatralisation* were not invoked for help, after which he emphasized the title categorical definition of "choral theatre, staging ..."

In order to tematize and conceptualize this scene extension, a support has been found in the stylization of various forms of folklore syncretism, as the most natural source of inspiration for the scenic upgrades of choral compositions that articulate the musical folklore itself. It was chosen a model of emphasizing the stage movement, in the manner of a kind of (pseudo)folklore choreography, in which dominate the rapid rhythms of narrative dramatization, animated illustrations and relatively developed choreographies.

In the staging of folklore rituals, the stylized forms of original ritual musical-stage syncretism were paraphrased.

⁷ In the following analyzes and classifications, the second criterion will be used as the initial criterion for practical reasons: in the selected analytical sample, it gives faster and easier noticeable results.



Photo 3. *Let's "Sing Outloud, and Let's Dance Too..."*

In the composition of works based on the artistic arrangements of custom and entertaining folk songs, the degree of freedom of the upgraded stage movement was much higher and solutions were found more freely mizanscenically conceived, with a more emphasized role of dance elements, folklore provenance. In compositions where the heterogeneity and the shortness of the selected original songs practically prevented the setting of longer and stylish rounded scenes, the staging stepped down to the level of a single song, emphasizing elements of illustration of poetic and musical images and short narrations in them. In order to emphasize the contrast in such a vastly conceived stage event, a larger (cyclic) composition was performed in the classic static choir setting. In the same way was presented also the initial song, which is attributed to the character of the overture.

The solution for overcoming the mosaic structure of basic textual-musical-scenic *potpourri* was found and realized primarily at the level of organization of the basic *dynamic form*, which shows a clear ascending, growing profile. It is somewhat conceptualized also at the level of the presumed line of historical development of folk art: from strict rituals, through more liberal customs, to entertainment, from an active performer to a passive recipient. However, this type of choral theatre remained closer to the pseudo-choreographic, *show-programs*, rather than to the more complex and coherent types of *choir theatre*.

- Staged chorus resital *Evening* (Chamber Choir of Krasnoyarsk Pedagogical College N° 1, *Maxim Gorky*, Krasnoyarsk, Russia; conductors: Galina Grigorievna Kozyreva and Dmitry Anatolyevich Wieser, 2011) was a *potpourri* of artistic arrangements of Russian folk songs, among which some compositions from different genres were inserted. The focus of the integration of this staged concert was on the staging, but it was itself also a kind of *potpourris* of dynamic stage scenes, in which the shift of layout at the stage of choir groups and soloists and their folklore-inspired dance was in the foreground. Giving a name to the whole project which should be associated with some kind of (non-existent) folklore ritual or

custom, has not been substantially conceptualized by this program, so in this case its choral theatrical setting is close to the previous one: a choreographed (*choralographed*) pseudofolklore *show program*.



Photo 4. *Evening*

- The concert *The Homeland Songs by Dimitrije O. Golemovic* (Academic Chamber Choir Liceum, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductor: Miloje Nikolic; stage movement: Marija Jakovljevic, light and computer effects: Ljuba Brkic, director: Bojan Milosavljevic; 2009), on which were presented musical folklore based compositions of this stated author (born in 1954), on first sight was similar to that previously described.

As ethnomusicologist and active researcher of folklore in his primary vocation, Dimitrije Golemovic built his relationship with folk songs mainly based on the immediate experience of the wider contexts of the original, of "natural" folklore life of these songs. This resulted in a characteristic style of artistic arrangement, which consist basically of the retention of the most important "living" expressive elements of the folklore origin and their combination with some of the modern musical stylistic language idioms, such as the author recognizes as the material and framework for an artistic upgrade that at the very least impairs the original, and enables him to live in new conditions. Where the composer does not use folklore music quotes, his musical language in folk-based musical compositions from this program is a kind of Bartok attributed "folklore mother language".

The scenic superposition is based on analogous insights and features, which "deeply correspond" with the basic music and local, textual part of the program. Mizanscene settings and their changes are based on the appropriate impulses of folklore "originals" - typical layouts in the area of village life and folklore rituals and customs, as well as characteristic types of movement, especially those of dance character. They then apply them creatively in extremely non-folklore scenic conditions: on an empty big scene, whose only scenery is scenically light focusing

on the choir (sometimes colored), and projections of various dynamic visual effects on the video video screen in the background. The avoidance of the traps of “folklorism”, on which obviously insists the procedure described above, was also helped by the choice of non-folklore, neutral (white) choir dressing and keeping the chorus singing from the scores.



Photo 5. “*The Homeland Songs*” by Dimitrije O. Golemovic

The concert itself itself runs as a series of scenic pictures, static or locally scenic revived, based on the impulses generated primarily by the character of music, only occasionally and locally as well as the content of the text. The essential dynamics of macroformation is obtained primarily by large contrasts in the music and stage. It is obvious that the ideas and experiences of agreeing the force of the artistic effects of various arts, as can be found in the *dynamic forms* of the Mokranjac's *rukoveti*, are used, so that this concert event is itself a kind of modernized musical-scenic *rukovet* - what has become at an virtual ancient flower meadow with one swing of the scythe, but then arranged carefully, as when making a bouquet to one of today's, modern dear.

- The specific deviation from the above mentioned models, and still in the category of staged concerts whose concept is based on the overwhelming musical basic impulses, makes the concert *Golden Age of Bunch of Songs*⁸ in Yugoslav Choral Music, 1890-1960 (Academic Chamber Choir *Liceum*; conductor: Miloje Nikolic; Folklore group of singers of the Cultural Artistic Society *Abrasevic*, artistic manager: Slavica Mihajlovic; Kragujevac, Yugoslavia; 1997). His theme was the presentation of a small anthology of *rukoveti* in Serbian and broader Yugoslav choral music. The arrangement of the internal dynamics of individual compositions was not, unfortunately, automatically transferred to the whole of their chronological order in the concert program. It was only the insertion of original songs from the

⁸ One of earlier used translations for the term *rukovet*.

splited last choral composition in the series, as stylistic contrasting "intermezzos", that provided (primarily on the musical plane) conceptualized program dynamism, in the form of a kind of *parallel game* and in some sort of dramaturgical *latent two-part polyphony*. The inversion in order of the folklore versions of the songs in relation to their order in the final composition, which collects them, transformed, produced a double effect of specific symmetrical arrangement and gradation.

The sound and stylistic contrasts between the original and artistically processed folk songs were emphasized in this program by introducing another performer, a folklore group of singers, whose original singing style was distinctly different from that practiced in the choir ensemble. This circumstance was used to achieve a certain step towards the *theatralization* of the program: the folklore singing group was dressed in folklore costumes (while the chorus was wearing a standard choir wardrobe), changed her positions on the stage during the program, and some songs sang in "ordinary" movement or in a more or less stylized folklore dance manner.

The described theatrical addition in this program was in the overall dramaturgy of the concert in the second plan, but it was intentional, encompassing the whole of the artistic event, adding to the musical-scenic basis specific dynamism and color, achieving a clear *dynamic form* – enough elements, that this comprehensive artistic event becomes a *choral-theatrical* status. On the other hand, although the syntax of this performance was (also) theatrical, its semantics were not: everything that happened at the level of the staging had nothing to do with the textual contents of the songs, neither individually nor in whole. From all of the above, it seems that it must be concluded that the described staged concert belongs to some type of *musical-scenic rukoveti*, now modernized in relation to the Mokranjac's paradigm.

3.2. Choral theatre performances whose staging is based on the creative impulses both from texts and music of the choir program

- In the arranged collection of those staged choral concerts performed at the Kragujevac Festival, which impulses and the ideas of their *theatralization* find (also) in the texts of choral compositions, one of the starting places should most probably take the concert program "*Madrigals and Poetry of Serbian Authors – musical-poetic suite*", based on the presentation of an anthology of the madrigal of Serbian composers (Academic Chamber Choir Liceum, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductor: Miloje Nikolic; staging: Ivica Klemenc; 2008). In order to overcome the problem of poor dramaturgical connection and coherence of texts of compositions, chosen primarily based on musical criteria, and monochrome or at least a much reduced colored game of their musical content, a new, poetic binding material was inserted into the basic music and textual material. That addition, consisted of the poetry of Serbian poets, got the dramatic role of narrator, the guide through the poetic areas of

the selected madrigals and interpreters of skipped parts of mosaic-collage-formed poetic history.

The staging of such specific musical-poetic *rukovet* is set up to follow primarily the inner *dynamic forms* of poetic texts (both spoken and singing), derived from their meaning, and, where possible, not only illustrates but also enhances their dynamism. The author of the staging set the whole project into a kind of virtual Arkady, in which the singers in a light summer wardrobe walked on the stage barefoot, with light steps, gathering in various scenic formations between choral songs, or, occasionally, moving one towards others and “through” others during singing, in accordance with the dynamic impulses that come from choral compositions.



Photo 6. *Madrigals and Poetry of Serbian Authors*

Both the semantics and the syntax of this concert event are undoubtedly theatrical, only set primarily at the highly abstract level of *dynamic forms* of poetic texts and choral music compositions, without illustrative elements. In this way, this staged poetic-musical recital became features of *choral theatre*, close to the concept of *theatre of poetry* (widely set and still popular). In the context of the classifications in this paper, he presents a kind of *poetic-musical-scenic rukovet*, but this time with a clear participation and textual impulses in the construction of both basic *dynamic forms* and the intertextual multimedia concept.

- A more detailed, and more elaborate concept of *choral theatre* as a music-scenic *rukovet* presents the concert *Love Songs from Stevan Stojanovic Mokranjacs' "Rukoveti"* – collage (City Chamber Choir *Liceum*, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductor: Miloje Nikolic; staging: Milic Jovanovic; 2013). In the textual and musical component of this program were done the deconstruction of thirteen of the total of fifteen compositions from the Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac's capital's collection *Rukoveti* and the collage re-construction of a whole-evening "meta-rukovet" from the selected most beautiful love songs. In addition, the macroform of the program so

produced, and of each of its five parts, new *rukoveti*, was made according to laws analytically derived from the original, and applied according to the principle *mutatis mutandis*. The organizing idea of re-assembling selected songs into new *rukoveti* was to group songs according to the thematic principle: each new *rukovet* gathers songs that speak of one type, or a degree of development of romantic love. As an element of surprise and *estrangement*, the program includes two compositions by others, more recent authors, who in a significantly different way arrange some of the already selected songs.

The staging of this program was made according to a picturesque idea-leader (published in the printed program): "After a hundred years, the old coin Steva (Mokranjac) and his (psychoanalytic) Alter Ego for the second time among the Serbs."

Each of the five newly created *rukoveti* is staged as a special act of a concert-performance, with an overture and four intermezzos that precede them. The stage movement is conceived predominantly as re-arrangements of the position and internal arrangement of the choir in a series of images, which change in the rhythm of song changes. The choreographic elements within these frames are very modest, often reduced to emphasizing natural movements that accompany singing and ease it, with minimal illustrative elements. The exception is the last act, in which the culmination of the performance is achieved by "capturing" the entire choir in a large circle, in a kind of folk dance *kolo* (round), with a hidden symbolic message (from the prologue of Drzic's Renaissance *Dundo Maroje*): "put your mind on the comedy!"

The dramatic prologue (overture) and intermezzos among the acts were places of somewhat enhanced scenic effect, with the primary aim of changing scenic and overall experiential atmospheres. In addition, the very beginning of the performance, organized as a musical-stage paraphrase of the beginning of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, was a stylized sound-visual narrative - the allegory of a slightly quoted drama *motto* of the performance.

The conductor, in the role of the elderly Mokranjac, differentiated from the rest of the choir and his antique clothing (a tailcoat against the choir's casual-jeans), moves very dynamically and freely in the scene, in constant active interaction with the choir. The impression that he thus tries to explain the chorus of the new generation of his musical ideas and defends them from the misunderstanding of the new time makes the role and behavior of the conductor (out of context: very intrusive) understandable and in the given circumstances natural. The flutist, whose initial function was to give the intonation to the chorus, transformed into Mokranjac's youthful Alter Ego, with his seemingly unmotivated and unorganized behavior and movement, brought in the dynamic factor some impulses of "decorative chaos" in the firm basic organization of this concert-performance.



Photo 7. *Love Songs from Stevan Stojanovic Mokranjacs' "Rukoveti"*

From the previous comprehensive description, it can be concluded that this concert-performance belongs undoubtedly to the category of *choir theatre*. Its more precise positioning within the framework of the division of the subgenres points to the already known type of *musical-scenic rukovet*, with the elements of the stage narrative and the existence of a certain framework dramatic action shifting to specific mixed *music-dramatic* genre-forms.

- The latest project of the *choir theatre* presented at the Kragujevac festival, “*Love Songs in Serbian Choral Music – choral theatre*” (City Chamber Choir *Liceum* and Mixed Choir of Faculty of Philology and Arts, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductors: Miloje Nikolic and Katarina Stankovic; basic idea: Miloje Nikolic; composer of electronic part of the program: Luka Cubrilo; dramatization /directorial-dramaturgical process/: Dejan Prcic and Milja Mazarak; 2017), in its basis has a concert of choral compositions with practically the same theme of their lyrics as the one described previously. The novelty is that the compositions are now composed by various authors, written in different styles and music languages, with varying lengths and complexity of the form. Avoiding an illustrative scene illusion as an staging upgrade, the author team decided to show by its dramatization and staging “not how love looks, but how it is experienced”. This would mean that it was necessary to extract from the choral compositions dynamic values and forms of poetry texts, compare them and in some way “compile” with those from the music upgrade, and then add the dynamic values of a completely abstract, non-narrative staging.

This very complex and sensitive work was facilitated by the author's team by introducing a kind of “natural criterion” for the organization of choral compositions: linking the contents of their lyrics with one of the three major phase of the development of love feelings in the human lifetime, simplified: a romantic youth - dramatic mid-year - maturity calm and wisdom. This lifelike emotional triptych was recognized as an arcane *dynamic form* with a climax in the middle, which looked to

the tripartite structure and analogous *dynamic form* of the Shakespeare comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Thus, the three mentioned phases became the acts of this musical-scenic event and received metaphorical marks: pastoral - expressionism - impressionism, which was then managed by the arrangement of selected choral compositions based on appropriate stylistic analogies – they, must be said, in the chosen series were quite approximate and relative.

The stage movement of the choir was in this concert-performance minimalized, reduced to only two changes, between phase/acts. The expressive limitations of the small scene, on which this concert-performance was set, led the authors to fix only two positions of the choir on it, while the third phase/act was performed in the same place as the first one, only the singers sat, significantly, the second time. The culmination in second part was located in the final depth of the scene, at an extremely large distance from the audience, due to which the play introduced, as a necessity, and stage sound system. This further aroused the idea that the interplay between individual songs, or their groups, would be filled with newly formed expressionist electronic music, performed live, partly improvising, by its author himself. Finally, the emphasized static character of the choir as the main actor is offset by the partial introduction of the ballerina, which, in the manner of a modern ballet, provided its dynamic expressive improvisations with a dynamic counterpoint and commentary on the remarkable points of the choir program.



Photo 8. *Love Songs in Serbian Choral Music* – choral theatre

From the above description, which coincides with the genesis of that project, it is easy to conclude that this is also a type of *choral theatre* with the characteristics of *music-scenic rukovet*. What makes this performance different from the previously analyzed is the fact that the choral part is not dominant in defining the *dynamic form* of the whole, but in this, more or less, all the elements of music and stage addition and upgrading are included equally.

• Program “Literary-musical composition *Tcherevichky*” /*Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*/ (The Choral Ensemble of Soloists *Tebe poyem*, Krasnoyarsk, Russia; conductor and author: Konstantin Yakobson; director: Vasilij Vavilov; 2009) came to the Festival from the workshop of authors and performers who belong to the central course of the Russian school of *choral theatre*. The textual basis of this program, presented by the narrator, was excerpts from the narrative of Nikolay Vasiljevich Gogolj’s *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, in which they are included dramaturgically compatible passages from this story and from another famous Gogoljev’s work, *Sorochinskaya Fair*. They were served as texts of selected musical pieces, numbers and scenes from the Russian national operas: Modest Petrovich Musorgsky’s *Sorochinskaya Fair*, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s *Tcherevichky* and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Night before Christmas*. The circumstance that the performing collective was a ensemble of soloist was used on this occasion as a motive for the majority of the selected content to be solo numbers and ensembles with relatively few choral pieces - this can also be viewed as exiting from the definite domains of the *choir theatre*. Let’s say too that the piano was used instead of the orchestra.

The staging of this “literary-musical composition” was made in the manner of the classical school of directing Russian national operas: bright folklore costumes, including stylized ritual masks and necessary scenic requisites, as well as strong and sudden changes of light in the function of highly elaborate and dissolved, almost virtuous scene movement, founded in Russian folk dances and archaic rituals.



Photo 9. *Tcherevichky*

At the theoretical level, the *choral theatre* presented by the described *staged solo-choral concert* is actually a derivative of the classic *opera theatre*, obtained by the deconstruction of several of its works and re-installation of a new composition from the ensuing segments. The absence of any more pronounced declination from the semantics of the original works used, does not allow it to appear that such a choral

theatre is also postmodern - it is, therefore, closer to the classification of *opera re-arranging* or *pastiche*, once used very gladly.

- Scenic-concert performance 1915. *Opelo (Orthodox Funeral Service). Salonika Songs*. (City Chamber Choir *Liceum* and Male Chamber Choir, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductors: Miloje Nikolic and Marko Nestic; idea and synopsis: Miloje Nikolic, staging: Milic Jovanovic; 2015) connected music and scenic contents related to two anniversaries of exceptional significance for Serbia and Serbian history and culture: a hundred years since the "Albanian Golgotha", exodus from its own occupied land of the entire Serbian army and a large part of its people, through Albania and Montenegro to Greece, and the same time since the creation of one of the capital works of Serbian spiritual choral music, *Opelo* by Stevan Hristic.

In an attempt to link the two events at the level of music, the author of the choral component of this concert, as the most authentic musical reflection of this tragic historical event, takes the so-called *Salonika Songs*: folk or simple art songs taken from the earlier repertoire of choirs and soloists, or created on the spot, composed by educated composers or anonymous folk singers, and singing among soldiers and refugees during this exodus (and in the whole "Great war"), on folklore way, or artistically in ad hoc-formed military choirs. On the other hand, Hristic's *Opelo* has long been recognized as a composition that is a more authentic and unique authorial spiritual concert than a ritual music. It opposes and combines the holiness and restraint of the traditional church ritual with the worldly developed painting and sensibility of metaphorical upgrades of composer's hidden (possible) program.

Boosted by the relatively wide latent metaphoric potentials of *Opelo*, inspired by Benjamin Briten's *War Requiem*, and guided by his own personal associations and metaphors, the author of this multimedia concert-performance combined the two powerful sources of Serbian choral music into a unique composition. It was realized as a kind of collage *metaphoric passion*, in which the *Salonika songs* took over the historical function of the initiators and interpreters of the historical work, and numbers of *Opelo* were set as coupled emotional and contemplative comments. Adding trumpets signals of the Serbian army from the same period served as symbolic markers of the major phases in the dramatic structure of the composition.

Simplified *opera-oratorium* staging was based on a time-separation of two music-textual worlds: *Salonika songs* were put into the past, *Opelo* to the present - in intention to achieve the effects of the exciting and always mystical *Coincidentia oppositorum*. The accommodation of the entire artistic event in the area of *The Old Foundry Museum*, where the most prominent exhibits are authentic specimens of weapons from the wars of the early 20th century, gave the entire event a dimension of authenticity, and the old military-industrial architecture of the 19th century building added a note of certain mysticism. This circumstance was used in the staging to enhance the visual and associative distance between the two choirs: the

static mixed choir, interpreter of *Opelo*, is placed in the center of the stage (in front of an old casting furnace, which relates to the door of hell), while the mobile chamber male choir, who sang solo songs, occupied positions on museum exhibits that at the given moment were the closest scenography for the content of the songs that were currently sung. An analogous role also had a difference in the dressing of the participants: the mixed choir was in a black ceremonial civic dressing room, while members of the male choir were dressed in World War I uniforms.



Photo 10. 1915. “*Opelo. Salonika Songs*”

The dynamic effect of the staging is reinforced by the introduction of a group of members of a folklore society in folk costumes, who participated in several short dramatic scenes - the dramatization of the events that the male choir sang at a given moment. They marked the most remarkable situations in the basic, mosaically set drama action of the celebrated historical events and, together with the inserts of authentic film footage, presented on the video-beam in the central part of the performance space, represented the dynamic highlights of this musical-performing performance.

- The greatest step towards some kind of innovative *dramatic theatre form* among the programs performed at the Kragujevac International Festival of Chamber Choirs and Vocal Ensembles was achieved in the performance *Seven*, which was described by its authors as "a tragic musical concert of Negro spiritual songs" (Academic Chamber Choir *Liceum* and Theatre *Joakim Vujić*, Kragujevac, Serbia; conductor: Miloje Nikolic; director and scenographer: Uros Jovanovic). This project was created as a result of the search by the conductor of the choir, and two specially engaged creators in the field of drama art, for the best form of staging, or multimedia presentation of the whole-evening concert of Negro spiritual songs. The basic idea was that the selected model provides a dramatic framework for scenic upgrading of musical and textual content of selected Negro spiritual, retaining them as a kind of dramatic core, which initiates scenic events.

The decision to choose the classical Aeschylus' tragedy *Seven against Thebes* can be explained, inter alia, by the specific possibilities that it, in the newly-conceived context, provided, first of all, through the traditional double role of the choir in its framework - as participants in the drama action (isohronal) and as her commentator (whose status, at least in principle, is timeless). This made possible to move the original text of Aeschylus' tragedy into contemporary, or timeless, and even all-the-time context. Thus, the basic tragic conflict of the two brothers and other accompanying complications of Aeschylus' pieces' dramatic narrative moved to an indefinite time and spatial framework. In addition, the original discursiveness of the content was further blurred by the director's intervention, which squeezed the text of the entire tragedy into one single exclamation point, so that the actors present a dramatic action exclusively with the means of *physical theatre*, extremely expressive. The aforementioned sentence was placed in the very center of the play, making it a kind of center of symmetry for the entire performance.

The choir concert, from which in principle everything started and which should be at the center of attention, is placed in the background, with the numbers that are distributed between the scenes of the drama action. In the role of the people who always suffer in such great conflicts, the choir sings Negro spiritual songs, whose lyrics, literally unchanged but contextually displaced (occasionally and shortened, in accordance with the dramaturgical demands of the show), speak of pain and hope for deliverance.



Photo 11. "Seven"

The actors and chorus are both carriers of parallel actions, which are only lightly touching during the performance, but in the denouement of the tragedy they unite, and the previous relationship of subordination turn to the victory of the people and its coming to the forefront. Let us emphasize, however, that such literary interpretation of the contents and messages of the described performance-concert is substantially contested by the postmodernist parody treatment of various stage

actions and symbols. Moreover, postmodern, parody citation and paraphrasing of various symbols and icons of the modern world is significantly and functionally represented in this performance - it forms a translucent collage network, which overlaps with basic meanings and gives the basis for their various readings and interpretations.

4. Short conclusion

According to all previous, *staged choral concerts*, especially those from the category of *choral theatre*, shown in the 22-year history of the International Festival of Chamber Choirs and Vocal Ensembles in Kragujevac, make a numerically and qualitatively relevant set of specimens of this relatively new type of artistic event. The presented analyzes and descriptions show that each of them was unique, both in setting specific artistic tasks and challenges, as well as in finding appropriate solutions, which could mean that their set is not easy to organize according to the unique classification criteria. Of crucial importance was the fact that they all have preserved structural-formal organization of their generic core: their collage choral program. Thanks to that, the application of analytical and classification experiences from one of the partially equivalent, but also specific and endemic choral class, *rukoveti*, to a new and relatively complex multidimensional analytical sample could give satisfactory results: *theatralized performances* have been summarized as a model of relatively wide, but quite precisely arranged pallets, with the characteristics of a kind of periodic system – empty spaces are expected to fill in the future.

5. References

- Rosser, John. 2017. Chortheatre; Der Chor als Interpret/Darsteller, u: *Vorarlberg Singt* 3-2017. Available at: <http://www.chorverbandvlbg.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Chortheatre-John-Rosser-2017-.pdf>. Accessed on 29.10.2017.
- Wolfe, Albert Joseph Jr. 2016. *Choral Theatre. Dissertations*. 314. Available at: <http://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/314>. Accessed on 29.10.2017.
- Николић, Милоје. 1993. Развој форме руковети у српској хорској музици између два светска рата, *Нови Звук* (2), Београд, 1993, 63-74
- Николић, Милоје. 1995. Руковети и сродне форме у српској хорској музици после другог светског рата (први део), *Нови Звук* (6), Београд, 1995, 111-122
- Николић, Милоје. 1996. Руковети и сродне форме у српској хорској музици после другог светског рата (други део), *Нови Звук* (7), Београд, 47-62

- Николић, Милоје. 2016. *Примена геиталт аналитичког метода у проучавању форме Мокрањчевих руковети*; докторска дисертација. Београд, Универзитет уметности. Available at: <http://eteze.arts.bg.ac.rs/handle/123456789/186>. Accessed on 30.10.2017.
- Супруненко, Галина Владимировна. 2012. *Хоровой театр как жанр взаимодействующей» музыки и его воплощение в творчестве отечественных композиторов на рубеже XX-XXI веков*; Автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени кандидата искусствоведения; Нижний Новгород. Available at: <https://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjn4sam1JXXAhWOKFAKHQunCQIQFggIMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdlib.rsl.ru%2Floader%2Fview%2F01005019587%3Fget%3Dpdf&usg=AOvVaw0YAYM6CJefPJ133XjzmgDN>. Accessed on 29.10.2017.