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‘Unconscious syncretism and wilful pragmatism’: A note on the Slovenian salon music’s aesthetics at the end of the nineteenth century

Abstract. The quote in the title of this paper, borrowed from Borut Loparnik’s survey of the nineteenth-century music practices in the territory of today’s Slovenia, neatly encompasses two main levers of a peripheral, by nature a reactionary cultural milieu, exercised to a considerable extent by non-professionals. Yet the ‘syncretism’, or better: *heterogeneity*, and ‘pragmatism’ imply a process of forming more important phenomena, constituting the milestones of a culture in which the national imagery functioned as a kind of a litmus paper pointing at the changes in understanding music.

In the Slovenian case, there were four lines of force throughout the musical life of the nineteenth century: opera and church music throughout the century, the middle class salon music (*salonska glasba*) in the first and, in the second half of the century, its more nationalistic counterpart embodied in reading room (*čitalnice*) music, to which the musical education should be added.

Although several musical institutions at the end of the nineteenth century offered a relatively lively musical life in the bigger cities and wealthier houses, the circumstances of that time as well as the relevant data gathered for this period offer only a modest insight into the private musical life of that time. The only plausible surmise is that all of the four mentioned lines of musical forces had certain influence on the private musical life. Thus the aim of this contribution is to survey the dynamic relationships between the institutional musical life and the private musical practice, discussing chosen examples of the domestic ‘musicing’ from the Slovenian fin de siècle.

Slovenian music in the nineteenth century: Institutional background

A sketch of the music institutions in today's Slovenia is necessary before concentrating on the private musical life, concentrated around a prime mover, so to speak, of the nineteenth century musical life: around the idea(l)s of national music.

Namely, the revolutionary year of 1848 also brought about palpable musical consequences for the then peasant countryside in the southern, Slavic part of the House of Habsburg, and latter the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The main *national* cultural gains were two national(istic) institutions: the *čitalnice* (reading societies) and Glasbena matica (Music Society, 1872).

Emerging from 1861 and spreading through the region of today's Slovenia, the reading societies remained a prime mover of the patriotism almost to the end of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In this context, also the Dramatično društvo (Drama Society, 1867) should be mentioned with similar yet more ambitious goals in performing more substantial stage works, leading in 1892 to the establishment of the Opera slovenskega deželnega gledališča (Opera of the Slovenian National Theatre). The main aim of these music institutions was politically motivated: to cherish 'the authentic' Slovenian as well as Pan-Slavic idea(l)s, in music and word. By the same time, the idealised vision of the Slovenian language as the pillar on which the native voice should resist the German cultural hegemony. The second institution, Glasbena matica – the main institutional factotum in Slovenian nationally biased music until World War II – had as its main goals to publish music scores for the 'church, school and domestic use' (§ 2 of the Statute of the Glasbena matica); to establish its own music school (1882, from which — latter on, in 1919 — the Conservatory grow out); to systematically collect and publish folk music, paving the ground for the

Ethnomusicological institute of the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences, to be established before World War II, and to cultivate especially choral music (the choir of the Glasbena matica was formally established in 1891).

Glasbena matica emerged as a national counterpart to the prevalently German musical culture centred on Philharmonische Gesellschaft (1784–1918), a symbolic heir of Ljubljana's first music institution, Academia Philharmonicorum (1701). Beside the Stanovsko gledališče (State theatre, 1763), renamed in the Deželno gledališče (Provincial Theatre, 1862), the Philharmonische Gesellschaft was the main house of music in the first half of the nineteenth century, comparable roughly to its peers, such as the Philharmonische Gesellschaft in Klagenfurt (1811), the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna (1814) or the Musikverein in Graz (1815). Their plans to establish a music school from 1800 were realised during the period of 1812–6 (afterwards functioned only sporadically), whereas the main role in music education should be ascribed to the Public music school, established in 1816. Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress that the music education was professionally organised on a music-theoretical basis only with the School for organ players of the Cecilijino društvo (Caecilian Society, 1877).

Beside these institutions, also music journalism should be mentioned:

- *Slovenska gerlica* ('Slovenian turtle dove'), seven volumes 1848–62;
- *Cerkveni glasbenik* ('Church musician'; 1878–1945, 1976→);
- *Glasbena zora* ('Musical dawn'; 1899–1900);
- *Novi akordi* ('New chords'; 1901–14).

The sketch of the music institutions above offers several 'entrances' into the musical urban private life. Apart from the national identity of music, to which almost a whole chapter on reading-room societies and their 'cosy' lied culture could be added, the up

to now rather poorly researched field of private music practices are bounded to two major questions: the relations between instrumental and vocal arts, on one side, and the influence of the folk music on the other.

Before turning to these issues, a note on the nationality as far as private musical practice is concerned seems suitable. The national frictions do not seem to bear a crucial role for domestic music. A fragment from the novel *Nina* from 1899 by Ivan Cankar lively indicates the national in the domestic urban musical practice in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Describing a moment of melancholic rapture during a middle-class wedding party, where a beautifully dressed Nina, trying to overcome a disagreeable atmosphere, begins to sing quietly, accompanying herself on piano; she sings in German: ‘My Old one has passed away, / my heart has grown heavy...’

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žapletal, in prišel je v vsakem stavku samó do srede. Napósled je sela Nina h klavirju . . . Gradar je slonel s komolcem na mizi in poslušal . . . Zdelo se mu je, da so vstajali iz klavirja glasovi, kakoršnih dotlej še nikdar ni čul . . . V belih haljah, v srebrnih sandalah, temne rože v rokàh . . . Polnili so sobo in plavali nad njim, prihajali so bliže in ga božali po licih z mehкими, toplimi rokami . . .

To je bila preponižna in pretiha glasba. Ujec se je naslonil daleč na stolico, iztegnil roko in zapél:

„Mir ist meine Alte gestorben,
Mir ist das Herz so schwer . . .“

Nekateri svatje so se mu pridružili in naposled je zapela celó Hermina . . . Gradar se je poslovil, ne da bi ga bil kdo opazil. Zunaj je dihala gosta noč.

Fig. 1. Ivan Cankar, *Vinjete* (Ljubljana: Schwendtner 1899), 108.

The point of this example is far from suggesting that the common urban musical practice was exclusively in German. Yet, the share of the German music as

the domestic music was considerable in the common perception at the end of nineteenth century in Slovenia.

Music distribution

This surmise is underpinned by two facts. First, the national production of the most widespread genres outside of the church music practice and thus potentially music for private usage, lied and choir music, began to circulate more widely with the musical journals and prints, specifically with *Slovenska gerlica* in 1848, yet systematically much later with the *Glasbena matica* in the 1870s, and especially with *Novi akordi* from the beginning of the twentieth century on. And, secondly, a scanty number of wealthier middle-class population and intelligentsia was economically as well as culturally attached to the political centres of that time, culturally mainly to Vienna, intellectually to Prague, and in fashion to Paris; one should also add that especially since the 1970s, after the internal political division of nationalists into liberal and conservative streams, patriotic music, to which actually any Slovenian music should be counted, was gradually losing its role of ‘a weapon. It was becoming a sign, at the end only appendage to the national rituals’,¹ losing its former special social status. Furthermore, domestic musical practices were, according to Nataša Cigoj Krstulović, ‘even at the beginning of the 20th century, due to a lack of music education, more or less confined to singing, in all respects, of the most simple, most commonly folk songs’.²

Up to the beginning of the twentieth century – specifically: up to the establishment of the music journal *Novi akordi* – the main focus of Slovenian music (not music in Slovenia) must have been almost exclusively on vocal pieces. And with few exceptions, it was concentrated in Ljubljana, a city that was added to the political

map with the congress of the Heilige Allianz in 1921, a provincial capital with 10,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century and about 24,000 before the big earthquake in 1895.³ Although far from being impressively modern, at the end of nineteenth century the Austrian statistics held Ljubljana as a medium-sized city,⁴ with a relatively modern Philharmonic Hall with eight hundred seats and an the Opera House with six hundred seats since 1892, a cinematograph already in 1896, good economical connections with Venice and German as official language spoken exclusively by the small yet politically leading minority (only 5,423 people of the total 36,547).

Music scores for private use – educational ones as well as those with artistic pretensions – have found their place in Slovenian houses through personal engagement of import from different cities around as well as from the music score reseller in Ljubljana since 1763. Yet the score market was not Slovenian. Scholars agree that the beginnings of the Slovenian score distribution could be set with the first Slovenian publications of lied in its narrower sense and should be dated as late as 1948. However, not before 1961 the genre label lied (*samospev*) was used for the published Slovenian vocal pieces, more in terms of a generative designation and less, if at all, with its reference to the musical form.⁵ The expressions for vocal pieces, warns Nataša Cigoj Krstulović, were used laxly, such as: ‘song’ (B. Ipavec: *Slovenske pesmi za en glas in glasovir*, 1867), ‘voices for ...’ (F. Gerbič: *Glasi slovenski za četverospjev, samospjev in glasovir*, 1862), or simply ‘toasts’ (J. Fleišman: *Mične slovenske zdravice za samospjev in četverospjev postavljene*, 1862), whereas even in 1890 Anton Ratzinger labeled ‘lied’ (*samospev*) a set by Anton Nedvĕd 3 *Ave Maria* pro una voce organo aut harmonium. Furthermore, lied as well as – mainly male – choirs were distributed irregularly before the editions of the Glasbena matica. Until

1872, there were only a few Slovenian compositions available in print. Afterwards the Glasbena matica published one volume per year, mainly choirs, and, in addition, also special editions (again, mainly lied and choral works) were published. But above all, the introduction of music education as a compulsory subject in 1869 offered a stimulus for the Glasbena matica to engage its forces also in this direction: the subject shared the same cultural ideals with the Glasbena matica as a footage aiming ‘to awake the vocal sense, to stimulate children’s aesthetic appreciation and to awake the patriotic thoughts’.⁶

The rare scores of Slovenian instrumental music reveal standards of a salon musicianship that could be only partly compared to the one known in the bigger musical centres. Published scores of Slovenian ‘leisure’ music – again, not of the music played in Slovenian houses, which followed the *Sang und Klang* aspirations of *Ah, so Schöne* (Eggebrecht) musical fragments, yet for the provincial milieu rather technically too difficult performable music – were more of a curiosa than a regular part of the music distribution up to the end of the nineteenth century, in spite of the proclaimed concern of Glasbena matica regarding private music practice. Out of hundred-sixteen editions published by Glasbena matica between 1873 and the beginning of the Great War, when one should consider the spiritual as well as habitual end of the Slovenian nineteenth century, there are only seventeen volumes of instrumental music mainly for private use. Before commenting on those, it should be noted that beside piano pieces, not much Slovenian music literature for other instruments circulated outside the music school practice.

Homeliness, employability, and feasibility

While musicological studies on nineteenth century Slovenian music do not offer particular details on the private music life, ethnological fragments suggest that music was mainly sung – except in the salons of the wealthier citizens (usually consisting of two drawing-rooms, of which one used to be called ‘Musikzimmer’, and a kitchen), where occasionally also hired pianists, chamber duos or even smaller ensembles found their place.

However poorly researched the private music ‘programs’ may be, the closer look into the editions of instrumental music published by Glasbena matica offers a glimpse of the common private musical practice, if embedded in the wider context of the Slovenian musical practice of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The following is a list of published works:⁷

Glasbena matica (Ljubljana): Editions of instrumental music 1873–1914

Year	Composer	Title	Instrument	Publisher
1874	Anton Foerster	<i>Sur le lac auprès de Triglav</i> . Illustration concertante d’un air Slovène national	pianoforte	Wien, Lithogr. De Schmelka & Eberle
1877	Franjo Krežma	<i>Moje sanje/Mon rêve</i> (‘My dreams’)	pianoforte and violin	Wien, G. Wegelein
1877	Anton Stöckl	<i>To the memory of Anica</i> , mazurka concertante	pianoforte	Ljubljana, Blaznik
1879	Danilo Fajgelj	<i>Slovenian organist</i> . 100 interludes for organ	organ	Ljubljana, Blaznik
1880	Danilo Fajgelj	Transcription of the Slovenian folk song ‘Luna sije’ (The moon is shining)	pianoforte	Ljubljana, Blaznik
1880	Benjamin Ipavec	Quadrille concertante	pianoforte	Ljubljana, C. k. kaznilnice Leipzig, Engelmann & Mühlberg
1882	Fran Serafin Vilhar	<i>In the quiet darkness</i> , fantasy	pianoforte	Ljubljana, Blaznik
1883	Viktor Parma	<i>Jour fixe</i> , march	pianoforte organ/ harmonium/pianoforte	Ljubljana, Blaznik
1885	Danilo Fajgelj	Preludiji (Preludes), 2 vols.		Ljubljana, Blaznik
1885	Hrabroslav Volarič	<i>In the domestic circle</i> , potpourri of Slovenian folk songs	pianoforte	Wien, jos. Eberle & Co.
1885	Karol Hoffmeister	Rhapsody on Slovenian folk songs	pianoforte	Wien, jos. Eberle & Co.
1892	Anton Foertser	<i>Zagorska</i> , easy fantasia concertante on Slovenian folk song ‘Kje so moje rožice?’	pianoforte	Wien, Jos. Eberle & Co.
1892	Hugolin Sattner	Fantazija (Phantasy)	pianoforte	Wien, Jos. Eberle & Co.
1895	Karol Hoffmeister	Scherzo, intermezzo in valček (Scherzo, intermetzo, and waltz) op. 6	pianoforte	Wien, Jos. Eberle & Co.
1898	Karol Hoffmeister	<i>Blede pesmi</i> , three pieces	pianoforte	Wien, Jos. Eberle & Co.
1909	Emil Adamič	Tri skladbe: Humoreska, Nokturno, Barkarola <i>Slovenski mladini: album 25 slovenskih pesmi zagosti s spremljevanjem klavirja</i> (‘To the Slovenian youth’, album of 25 Slovenian songs arranged for piano and violin)	pianoforte	///
1913	Žiga Polašek / Josip Vedral		pianoforte and violin	Graz, Senefelder

This list reveals a rather modest picture of the ‘*stilus fantasticus*’ of salon music that has to be supplemented with several editions published privately by different composers. Above all, also instrumental pieces published in the journal *Novi akordi* indicate a growth of interest in instrumental music. (During the first year of publishing, 1901, *Novi akordi* offered twelve instrumental compositions for the wider audience, mainly for piano.) Yet the more rounded-off information on private music market – and taste – can be inferred from a more detailed insight into the ‘private’ opus of Anton Foerster.

His Concert illustration on a Slovenian folk song (actually a song by Miroslav Vilhar spread as a folk song), *Po jezeru sred’ Triglava*, as the first edition of instrumental music published by the Glasbena matica, is a fine example of salon music. Anton Foerster, a Czech musician who came to Ljubljana in 1867 and composed the most popular Slovenian operetta, *Gorenjski slavček* (1872)⁸ was, as a central figure in Slovenian music throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, equally meritorious in church music, at the time fairly conservative, in the national movement as well as in music education. His compositional expertise and performance skills brought him an honoured name and highest professional posts. In other words, he was not as confined, due to his musical capacities, as the majority of the Slovenian musicians at that time: he had only to pay regard to the mediocre musical skills of the ‘golden mean’ music lovers.

His *Illustration*, one of the most famous Slovenian salon pieces, was the eighth registered composition in this genre – within the smaller part of his secular opus consisting, in total, of 183 compositions, out of which only twenty-two are instrumental:⁹

1863	<i>Kduž te vidím, ma panenka</i> . Illustration sur la chanson bohème national, pianoforte, lost
1863 (r. 1912–7)	Mazurka de salon I and II, pianoforte, lost
1864 (r. 1912–7)	Mazurka de salon III, pianoforte, lost
1867	Rondo capriccioso, pianoforte, lost
1867	Quodlibet form Czech folk songs, small orchestra, lost
?	<i>The King Vondra The Sixtieth</i> , orchestration for small orchestra (originally by J. Illner), lost
1870	Illustration sur una chanson slovena nationale, pianoforte, lost
1870–4 (1892)	<i>Sur le lac auprès de Triglav</i> . Illustration concertante d’un air Slovène national
1874–6	Fantasy of Slav songs, harmonium, lost
1890–2	<i>Zagorska</i> , easy fantasia concertante on Slovenian folk song, lost
1893	Carniolan solemn march, pianoforte
1907	Slavic suite (Slavic lime), small orchestra or pianoforte
1909	Song of St. Venceslav, harmonium
1914–6	Slavic sonata, pianoforte
1914–6	<i>Gentle moon</i> , pianoforte
1914–6	Slovenian waltzes, pianoforte
1916–7	Three Slovenian songs, string quintet, lost
1919	Quadrille ‘From the Czech folk songs’, pianoforte
?	Mazurka, pianoforte, lost
?	Galop, pianoforte, lost
1920	Sonatina, pianoforte and violin

Except for the Sonatina for piano and violin, all the titles bear witness of a *national* appeal or of a *salon* lyricity. The art music, as Dragotin Cvetko generally noted and as it could be neatly applied to Foerster, is not only a ‘result of an artistic, but also, and especially, of a national development’.¹⁰

However, it is not only nationalist vim to which one should turn for addressing the aesthetical values of the Slovenian private music in the nineteenth century. It is also a typical salon aesthetics embodied, for instance in the following description of Foerster’s composition *Po jezeru*:

‘In Foerster’s fantasia concertante the air appears in a pianistic bravura and reaches the ultimate charm of a glowing pearl, reflecting rays of grace through the richness of harp-like arpeggiations’, “reports Vladimir, Foerster’s son”, and

proceeds, in the raft of tones, bursting out from the variations of the theme, a magic shine gleamers as on some playful waves; the composition, in its entire structure, is distinguished by a noblesse of a refined comprehension.’¹¹

One could question the objectivity of such a praise from a similarly described music – either in negative or, as mainly in the case of Anton Foerster, positive terms. One holds true, however: Foerster’s salon pieces represent the most public side of an otherwise private musical practice, in which ‘culinary’ notions of music prevail – of music as ‘the big chunks of furniture and noble decoration expected by custom’.¹² Similarly as the citizens of Ljubljana’s wealthier families considered such furniture as a necessity that ‘showed off not only due to its expensive materials, but also due to the level of a workmanship spend in the process of production’,¹³ salon pieces followed the fashion of music that was described by Louis Ehlert in 1879 as a ‘charming without being trivial, and serious without being profound’.¹⁴ That, according to Ehlert, was ‘die Musik für die gebildete Welt’, to which also Anton Foerster and the majority of the here mentioned composers did belong.¹⁵

Yet at the same time, the Slovenian private music of the nineteenth century – stretched between pioussnes, nationalist ideals, and folklore ‘naturalisation’ – had well paved the way for much of what can be considered as an art, according to Borut Loparnik, of ‘unconsciously coined syncretism and wilful pragmatism’,¹⁶ a feature of musical practice that seems to resist aging.

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¹ Borut Loparnik, *Vloga Cerkve v slovenskem kulturnem razvoju 19. stoletja*. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1989, 155.

² Nataša Cigoj Krstulović, 'Samospev v glasbeni kulturi druge polovice 19. stoletja na Slovenskem'. *De musica disserenda* 2/1 (2006), 13.

³ The population grew rapidly after the earthquake to around 36,000 people in 1900, and 53,000 after the Great War.

⁴ Andrej Studen, 'Zgodovina higienizacije in dezodoracije Ljubljane pred prvo svetovno vojno', <http://videlectures.net/ff07_studen_zhd> (accessed 1 September 2007)

⁵ Cigoj Krstulović, 'Samospev v glasbeni kulturi druge polovice 19. stoletja na Slovenskem', 8.

⁶ Dragotin Cvetko, *Zgodovina glasbene umetnosti na Slovenskem*, vol. 3 (Ljubljana: DZS, 1960), 221.

⁷ The original list of all editions of Glasbena matica was made by Zoran Krstulović, 'Bibliografija založbe Glasbena matica v Ljubljani', *Naši zbori*, 46/6 (1994), 1–76. The original data of the instrumental compositions listed in English below reads: Anton Foerster, *Po jezeru bliz' Triglava*, koncertna ilustracija slovenske narodne pesmi/*Sur le lac auprès de Triglav*, illustration concertante d'un air Slovène national, pour le piano (Wien: Lithogr. De Schmelka & Eberle, 1874); Anton Foerster, *Zagorska*, lahka koncertna fantazija na slovensko národno pesen ('Zagorska', easy fantasia concertante on Slovenian folk song], for piano, op. 51 (Wien: Jos. Eberle & Co., 1892); Franjo Krežma, *Moje sanje*, romanca za gosli sè spremljevanjem glasovira/*Mon rêve*, op. 1 (Wien, G. Wegelein, 1877); Anton Stöckl, *V spomin Anici*, koncertna mazurka za glasovir (Ljubljana: J. Blaznik, 1877); Danilo Fajgelj, *Slovenski*

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⁸ For the wider context of Slovenian musical works cf. the first Singspiel *Jamska Ivanka* by Miroslav Vilhar, 1850; the first operetta *Tičnik* by Benjamin Ipavec, 1862;

the first Slovenian romantic opera *Teharski plemiči* by Benjamin Ipavec, composed in 1892, when the first performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* in Slovenian language took place, whereas the first Slovenian romantic symphony *Lovska simfonija* by Fran Gerbič was written not earlier than in 1915.

⁹ Cf. Darja Karnovšek, 'Anton Foerster in njegovo delo'. B.A. thesis, University of Ljubljana, 1959.

¹⁰ Cvetko, *Zgodovina glasbene umetnosti na Slovenskem*, 395.

¹¹ Vladimi Foerster, *Antona Foersterja posvetne skladbe*, typescript in: *Glasbena zbirka Narodne in univerzitetne knjižnice v Ljubljani*, 8.

¹² Andrej Studen, 'Stanovati v Ljubljani. Socialnozgodovinski oris stanovanjske kulture Ljubljančanov pred prvo svetovno vojno'. DPhil diss., University of Ljubljana, 1994, 98.

¹³ Studen, 'Stanovati v Ljubljani', 99.

¹⁴ Imogen Fellingner, 'Die Begriffe Salon und Salonmusik in der Musikanschauungen des 19. Jahrhunderts' in *Studien zur Trivialmusik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. C. Dahlhaus. Regensburg: Gustav Bose Verlag 1967, 137.

¹⁵ Fellingner, 'Die Begriffe Salon und Salonmusik in der Musikanschauungen des 19. Jahrhunderts', 137–8.

¹⁶ Loparnik, *Vloga Cerkve v slovenskem kulturnem razvoju 19. stoletja*, 157.