

Stanislav Tuksar:

The issues of programme and absolute music in the writings of the leading Croatian 19th-century musicologist Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834-1911)

Abstract

In several of his writings (notably in *Nova glazbena struja njemačka i sadašnji talijanski kompozitori* [New German Musical Streamings and Contemporary Italian Composers], Zagreb, 1892) published during the last two decades of the 19th century, the then leading Croatian musicologist and ethnomusicologist Franjo Ksaver Kuhač (1834-1911) touched upon the issues which could be considered as aesthetic in their substance and intentionality. In this, specific themes of programme and absolute music have been identified as Kuhač's implicit polemics with the aesthetical doctrine of Eduard Hanslick, whose lectures at the Vienna University Kuhač attended around 1857. Kuhač disagreed with Hanslick's formalist music aesthetics based on metaphysical-rational ontology and offered a concept which could be labelled as a "birth of music from the spirit of the nation", bearing a strong ethical component. In practical consequences, concerning suggestions to contemporary Croatian composers in how to establish their starting compositional strategies, Kuhač rejected what he called "subjective idealism", i.e. products of a free "unhealthy fantasy", a form without contents, in short, in his opinion – a false and untrue music. Instead of it, Kuhač offered an opposite to this Hanslickian concept of abstract or autonomous music – the existence of music in its ideal substance without extra-musical connotations, and favoured the creation of new art music pieces on the basis of something pre-existent: the folk music forms as emanation of folk (national) spirit. Further on, one could also trace the influence of Herderian concepts in Kuhač's ideas on the proximity of music and language, which he elaborated in his ingenious comparative research of Germanic, Romanic, Hungarian and Slavic, especially Croatian, folk songs (notably in *Osobine narodne glasbe, naročito hrvatske* [Characteristics of Folk Music, Especially Croatian], Zagreb, 1905-1908). However, in the area of Croatian symphonism his suggestions will become operational only during the first half of the 20th century within the so-called neo-national stylistic output.

In addition, the totality of these problems and topics, and the issue of music as a functional support to socio-political agenda in particular, should be also regarded and interpreted within the context of the affirmation of national cause of Croatian and other South-Slavic ethnicities in the broader cultural circumstances existing in their dynamic developments during the latest period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

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