



DUBROVAČKI SUSRETI

DUBROVNIK
ENCOUNTERS

LOVRO MERČEP – DUBROVAČKI SIMFONIJSKI ORKESTAR
I DUBROVNIK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA – IVAN HUT

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LOVRO MERČEP

saksofon | saxophone

DUBROVAČKI SIMFONIJSKI ORKESTAR

Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra

IVAN HUT

dirigent | conductor

IVAN KONČIĆ

Koncert za saksofon i gudače

Concerto for Saxophone and Strings

(premiјerna snimka / world premiere recording)

1. *Adagio* / 9:55
2. *Adagio – Tempo rubato* / 6:52
3. *Allegro: Bolero* / 4:36

BRUNO BJELINSKI

Sinfonietta za saksofon, gudače i udaraljke

I for Saxophone, Strings, and Percussion

4. *Allegro appassionato* / 6:14
5. *Larghetto* / 6:06
6. *Allegro* / 6:08

PAVLE DEŠPALJ

Koncert za alt-saksofon i gudače

Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Strings

7. *Allegro moderato* / 4:40
8. *Andante* / 6:05
9. *Vivo* / 3:21

Ukupno trajanje | Total time / 53:57



Iako Samoborac, Lovro Merčep mnogim je vezama – onim obiteljskim, kao i općenito glazbeničkim – vezan za vječni grad s juga Hrvatske. Ovaj album – Lovrin diskografski prvijenac – sniman u Dubrovniku, ostvaren s Dubrovačkim simfonijskim orkestrom, a donosi i djelo jednog dubrovačkog skladatelja, dotaknut je brojnim tangentama koje govore tome u prilog. Stoga ovaj album s pravom nosi naslov *Dubrovački susreti*, jer je dobrim svojim dijelom upravo to.

To da je za album-prvijenac odabrao tri hrvatska "teškaša", govori, pak, o Lovrinoj spremnosti da poduzme takav pothvat. Lovro je danas ostvareni saksofonist, istaknut pripadnik hrvatske saksofonističke zajednice. Ta je zajednica – zahvaljujući ocu hrvatske saksofonističke škole, Josipu Nohti (koji je, usput rečeno, bio klarinetist), i njegovim prvim diplomantima s Muzičke akademije u Zagrebu (članovima međunarodno priznatoga Zagrebačkoga kvarteta saksofona, kojima pripada i Lovrin otac Goran) – pustila duboke korijene u Hrvatskoj, a širi svoje vriježe i mnogo dalje od toga.

Lovro je, dakle, za album odabrao tri koncertantna ostvarenja koja imaju priliku – i u to uopće ne treba sumnjati – živjeti na međunarodnoj sceni. O Dešpaljevu remek-djelu ne treba trošiti riječi: radi se, uostalom, o prvome takvom koncertu u hrvatskoj glazbi. No mnogo važnije od toga – posrijedi je prvorazredno koncertantno ostvarenje koje je već ušlo u saksofonistički repertoar – i nema naznaka da će uskoro sići s njega.

Sinfoniettu Brune Bjelinskoga tu nalazimo možda nešto manje, iako zasigurno neopravdano – premda je i ta kompozicija više puta snimljena i izvođena, a imaju je na repertoaru mnogi naši istaknuti saksofonisti (poput, recimo, Nikole Fabijanića, koji je *Sinfoniettu* zabilježio na svojem diskografskom izdanju sa Zagrebačkim solistima 2015. godine). Zajedno s cjelinom Bjelinskijeva opusa, vrijeme *Sinfoniette*, vjerujemo u to, tek dolazi.

Naposljetku, tu je i *Koncert* Ivana Končića, najmlađe ostvarenje Lovrina odabira – nastalo kroz blisku suradnju između Lovre i Ivana, vršnjaka izvođača i skladatelja, Dubrovčanina podrijetlom i onoga drugog rođenjem – koje bi se, inicirano upravo Lovrinim izdanjem, moglo pokazati i velikim otkrićem, baš onako kako je to već prorekla kritika u večeri praizvedbe koja se odigrala pod svjetlima velike pozornice – ni-više-ni-manje nego na Dubrovačkim ljetnim igrama 2015. godine!

Kakav prvoklasan odabir!

Pritom je *Sinfonietta* **BRUNE BJELINSKOG** (Trst, 1909. – Silba, 1992.) prva skladba koju je Lovro izveo kao solist uz pratnju orkestra. Uz tu skladbu vežu ga, kaže, predivne uspomene, od 2007. i prvog nastupa uz pratnju Hrvatskoga komornog orkestra (na Osorskim glazbenim večerima) za vrijeme prve godine studija na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu (u klasi Dragana Sremeca, još jednog – a pritom prvog – iz generacije prvodiplomanata s Muzičke akademije u Zagrebu koji je tu razvio i vlastiti pedagoški rad), preko izvedbe i snimanja uz Simfonijski orkestar HRT-a pod ravnanjem skladateljeva sina, Alana Bjelinskog, 2015. godine, sve do najrecentnijih izvedbi uz pratnju Dubrovačkog simfonijskog orkestra na Dubrovačkim ljetnim igrama 2022. godine, u povodu 30. obljetnice skladateljeve smrti.

Skladbu je Bjelinski zaključio 17. kolovoza 1984., a ostvario na Silbi, koju je, slično drugome hrvatskom skladatelju, izvornom Silbancu, Igoru Kuljeriću, i sam prepoznao kao komadić raja. Na Silbi je Bjelinski pronašao mir koji mu je bio potreban za skladanje, kao i odmak od dotad proživljenih životnih izazova i dva svjetska rata. Prvi se klavir pojavio na Silbi upravo u kući Bjelinskijevih ("pravi koncertni, bečke mehanike", kako se prisjeća skladateljev sin Alan). Njega su lokalni ribari, prijatelji i susjedi nosili s broda, "čudili se toj crnoj kutiji, jer to nikad nisu ni vidjeli", a do kuće ga je, po makadamu, dovezao glavni otočni prijevoznik, stanoviti Paško, "čovjek koji je s broda nosio namirnice za dućan", a koji je imao "tačke i dvije mule i svaki kotač je bio od drugog traktora". Koliko je Bjelinskom

starijem Silba bila draga, govori i činjenica da je u njoj naposljetku pronašao svoj vječni mir.

U takvome ozračju ljeta 1984. na otočiću na kojem se "raj uživa" nastala je *Sinfonietta*, napisana za već spomenutog Dragana Sremeca (u to doba mladoga glazbenika, koji je na Muzičkoj akademiji magistrirao u kolovozu 1985. godine), koji je djelo praeizveo te iste 1985. uza Zagrebačke simfoničare RTZ-a pod ravnanjem Igora Gjadrova, na koncertu u povodu 30. obljetnice Odsjeka za duhačke instrumente Muzičke akademije u Zagrebu, a potom i snimio iduće, 1986., za Radio-televiziju Zagreb. U hrvatskome školskom kurikulumu posebno je omiljen uvodni *Allegro appassionato* – dostojan naslovne teme neke nove serije o Herculeu Poirotu, ali su podjednako atraktivni i meditativni *Larghetto*, i – lagan poput pera – virtuozni završni *Allegro*.

Ostaje još pitanje zašto je skladbu Bjelinski nazvao *sinfoniettom* kad je riječ o posve koncertantnom ostvarenju? Za osobu koja je na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu još od 1945. predavala fugu i kontrapunkt te pritom uživala ugled jednog od omiljenih profesora, teško da je to bila slučajnost. Gotovo je sigurno da je takvim nazivom želio potvrditi neoklasičko izvorište svojega stila, definirano prostorom od Prokofjeva do Brittena i Šostakoviča. Nepretenciozan kakav je bio, govoreći u umanjenicama, Bjelinski je možda želio umanjiti i vlastito značenje u cijeloj toj 'priči'. Djelce, *concertino* ili *sinfonietta*, bilo kako bilo – danas bismo o *Sinfonietti* mogli bez grižnje savjesti govoriti kao o koncertantnom *showstopperu*!

Kad smo već kod prvih i posljednjih, osvrćući se na Sremeca, **IVAN KONČIĆ** (Dubrovnik, 1988.) pripada skupini posljednjih po tome što je bio posljednji diplomant u klasi Željka Brkanovića na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu (gdje je studij završio 2013. godine, a tu danas razvija i vlastitu pedagošku aktivnost). I to ne kažemo slučajno, jer se i u Končičevu – kao i u Brkanovićevu – slučaju očituje specifična finoća skladateljskoga rada, razvidna i u ovome djelu. Posrijedi

je rukopis u načelu tradicionalan, pritom stručno elaboriran, ali u konačnom dojmu autohton, svjež, nadahnut i samosvojan. Končićevo nadahnuće očituje se u bogatstvu glazbenoga materijala, u oblikovanju karaktera i atmosfera, ali i u izgradnji djela u cjelini. Završni rezultat jest koncertantno ostvarenje u svakomu segmentu – u solističkoj dionici kao i u dijalogiziranju solista s orkestrom, s pravom pravcatom kadencom i s punim arsenalom solističkih alata i sredstava – koncert u punome smislu svojega žanra.

Posebnu draž ostvarenju daju situacije u kojima Končić uvodi proširene tehnike, koristeći ih radi postizanja različitih tonskih situacija i boja, kojih u djelu nalazimo u izobilju, ali je njihova funkcija ponajprije usmjerena na stvaranje dramaturgije djela u cjelini. Bez obzira na to što *Koncert* na svim svojim postajama plijeni neodoljivim šarmom i nekom gotovo *noirovskom* atmosferom, a završni stavak osvaja silovitošću piazzollskoga tipa, poseban trenutak djela noćna je muzika središnjega stavka, kojoj je teško naći bolje preporuke od one da je treba jednostavno čuti – i slušati opet.

Djelo je, kako rekосmo, nastalo u suglasju između skladatelja i interpreta, kao i u mnogim poznatim slučajevima iz povijesti koncertantnoga žanra. Atmosferičnosti Končićeva *Koncerta* pritom jako dobro pristaje Merčepova sutonska boja. Zanimljivo će biti pratiti kako će ga primiti – te kako će ga čitati – i neki drugi interpreti. Nadajmo se samo da će ih biti što više.

Skladba je nastala 2015., a 31. srpnja praižvedena je na Dubrovačkim ljetnim igrama uz Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar pod ravnanjem Stefana Mazzolenija u znamenitom atriju Kneževa dvora. Djelo je bilo zajednička narudžba Rotary kluba Samobor, Rotary kluba Dubrovnik i Dubrovačkih ljetnih igara. Bilo je to prvo predstavljanje dvojice mladih umjetnika na tako prestižnome festivalu međunarodnoga formata. "Suradnja s Ivanom bila je fantastična", komentira danas Lovro. Ivan je, pak, u povodu praižvedbe zapisao: "*Koncert za saksofon*

i gudače je djelo napisano dragom prijatelju i nevjerojatnom muzičaru Lovri Merčepu... Osim što će ga prvi izvesti, Lovro je na koncertu ostavio i svoj pečat, sugerirajući svoje ideje i modifikacije za solističku dionicu iz perspektive vrhunskog instrumentalista, na čemu sam mu neizmjereno zahvalan". Vjerujemo kako će i brojni saksofonisti biti još dugo zahvalni Ivanu Končiću zato što im je podario tako uspjele ostvarenje, nakon čije je praižvedbe kritičarka Sanja Dražić zaključila: "... riječ je o iznimno darovitom i vrijednom umjetniku. Pa bi Ivana Končića, sa svim njegovim djelima, svakako trebalo poslati u kulturni svijet i sredinu koja će njegovu invenciju cijeniti, raspirivati i obogatiti".

Godine 1957. **PAVLE DEŠPALJ** (Zadranin rođen ne tako daleko od Dubrovnika – u Blatu na Korčuli, 1934. – Zagreb, 2021.) skladao je ukupno četiri ostvarenja u skladateljskoj klasi profesora i glazbenog autoriteta Stjepana Šuleka, na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu, a niz studentskih ostvarenja zatvorio je 1959. diplomskim radom, *Koncertom za violinu i orkestar*. Ubrzo potom, godine 1961., zamislio je i *Koncert za alt-saksofon i gudače* (potaknut jazz-saksofonistima koje je slušao s ploča kao dijete), započevši ga u doba svog vojnog roka u Zadru – na nagovor nekog kolege vojnika, amaterskog saksofonista, za kojeg se naposljetku utvrdilo da nije dorastao zahtjevima solističke dionice – zaključivši ga ljeti 1963. (godine 1962. Dešpalj je postao šef-dirigent Zagrebačkih simfoničara RTZ-a). Imajući, međutim, tek nekoliko tjedana do ugovorene izvedbe, solista je Dešpalj pronašao u hrvatskome klasičnom i jazz-saksofonistu Ozrenu Depolu, koji je djelo praižveo u Zagrebu 24. veljače 1964. godine, uz pratnju Gudača Komornog orkestra Radiotelevizije Zagreb, pod Dešpaljevim vodstvom. Potom ga je Depolo 1988. objavio i na LP-ju.

Nakon *Koncerta za saksofon* uslijedilo je doba duge autorske šutnje, koja je potrajala sve do *Dva guslačka hira za violinu solo* iz 1999. i *Koncerta za violončelo i gudače* iz 2000. godine. Količinom skroman, ali autorskim dosezima zapažen,

Dešpaljev opus poprimio je tako određenu dozu zagonetnosti, a glazbenim kuloarima provlačila su se pitanja o razlozima te autorske šutnje. Sam Dešpalj obično ju je pojašnjavao brojnim dirigentskim angažmanima. No da je kojim slučajem za sobom ostavio samo *Koncert za saksofon*, Dešpalju bi na tome mogao biti zahvalan ne samo saksofonistički nego i cjelokupni glazbeni svijet. Ili, kako je zapisao ugledni američki saksofonist i pedagog William Schwab 1982. godine: "Skladatelj mi je prenio koliko je zadovoljan da su glazbenici prihvatili njegovo djelo s entuzijazmom i govorio mi je o pismima koja svake godine prima od studenata i profesora koji izražavaju poštovanje prema njegovu djelu. Izvođači koji se upoznaju s Dešpaljevim djelom, otkrit će u njemu važan dodatak svojem repertoaru".

Na Dešpaljevu autorskome albumu iz 2004. godine *Koncert* je snimio Lovrin otac, Goran Merčep, uz Gudače Simfonijskog orkestra HRT-a pod Dešpaljevim vodstvom. O životu djela mnogo govori i činjenica da ga je potom prigrllila i generacija koju danas čine članovi Papandopulo kvarteta (Gordan Tudor, primjerice, uz maestra Dešpalja na albumu iz 2016. godine; Goran Jurković kao pobjednik Natjecanja Papandopulo iste godine). Zanimljiv je i podatak prema kojemu je glazba *Koncerta* poslužila za balet *Igre*, koji su Sonja Kastl i Nevenka Biđin postavile u riječkom HNK-u 1964. godine, a stoji i misao kako Dešpaljevu glazbu iz *Koncerta* doista nije teško zamisliti i u takvome kontekstu.

Skladba je zaživjela i u Americi (američka premijera upriličena je 11. ožujka 1971. s Cecilom Leesonom kao solistom, uz Simfonijski orkestar Floride pod Dešpaljevim vodstvom; Dešpalj je tada bio glazbeni ravnatelj toga orkestra i Opere u Orlando), a bila je obvezatna kompozicija i na natjecanju Josip Nohta 2014. u Zagrebu. U finalu toga natjecanja tada ga je prvi put izveo i Lovro Merčep. "Još i prije nego što sam počeo svirati saksofon, maštao sam kako izvodim ovu kompoziciju slušajući izvedbe oca. Kasnije sam ga često izvodio uz Zagrebačke soliste i Dubrovački

simfonijski orkestar. Uz skladateljovo odobrenje aranžirao sam ga i za ansambl saksofona te izveo na diplomatskim koncertima u Versaillesu i Amsterdamu. Iznimno mi je drago da sam na taj način imao priliku Dešpaljev *Koncert* predstaviti kolegama i profesorima u inozemstvu".

Nota bene, Lovro Merčep posebno ističe svoj angažman oko promocije hrvatske glazbe u inozemstvu, pa tako nerijetko drži predavanja i koncerte s djelima hrvatskih skladatelja na sveučilištima i akademijama u Španjolskoj, Singapuru i SAD-u. Hrvatskom glazbom uspio je "zaraziti" čak i svoj međunarodni Kvartet saksofona Ardemus, a kao pobjednici natjecanja Ferdo Livadić u sklopu Samoborske glazbene jeseni 2017. godine praisveli su za njih napisanu skladbu *In modo classico* uglednoga hrvatskog skladatelja Davorina Kempfa, za kvartet saksofona i klavirski sextet.

"Glamurozno rasvijetljen" i "virtuozno zamišljen" (Dubravko Detoni), Dešpaljev *Koncert* sastoji se od tri raznorodna stavka: prvoga sonatne forme, drugoga skladanog tehnikom *passacaglie* te završnoga u obliku ronda. Skladba afirmira značajke koje su otpočetak prepoznate u Dešpaljevu skladateljstvu: sklonost neoklasičkom stilu, romantička izražajnost, moderni harmonijski jezik utemeljen u tradiciji, čistoća forme i umijeće transformacije tematskoga materijala kroz razrađeni motivički rad. Ono što ove kategorije, međutim, ne otkrivaju, jest golem izvedbeni i izražajni dijapazon koji djelo pruža interpretu kroz sva tri stavka, a prije svega nevjerojatan raspon ekspresivnosti u središnjem *Andanteu*, sve do trenutka u kojemu "ludilo" u dionici saksofona poprimi značajke slobodne improvizacije, te izražajnog vrhunca koji potom slijedi, u kojemu solo instrument mora zazvučati "poput krika divlje životinje", kako je skladatelj jednom rekao.

U tom smislu ovaj bi se album čak mogao nazvati i albumom središnjih stavaka, zato što sva tri ostvarenja skrivaju doista prekrasne spore stavke – potvrđujući i to koliko su sva trojica skladatelja bila očarana gipkom i podatnom kantilenom

solističkoga instrumenta, kada to ne bi bilo nepravedno – a svakako jest – prema obilju glazbenog materijala koji vlada ostatkom partitura.

Osvrt na ovaj album završit ćemo pomalo neuobičajeno, jednom anegdotom i pričom o prostoru u kojemu je album sniman, koji je ujedno, na poseban način, bio i mjesto Lovrina prvog javnog nastupa, njegove glazbeničke inicijacije.

Negdje početkom devedesetih, naime, nakon koncerta Zagrebačkoga kvarteta saksofona na Dubrovačkim ljetnim igrama, članovi kvarteta otišli su s organizatorima koncerta na druženje u café ili restoran koji je u to doba bio smješten u đardinu ljetnikovca Crijević-Pucić, u kojemu je Lovro, godinama kasnije, snimio ovaj CD. Prekrasan ljetnikovac, koji je danas rezidencija Dubrovačkog simfonijskog orkestra, smješten je do parka Gradac, iznad Vrata od Pila.

Nakon nekoliko čašica pića okupljeno društvo uspjelo je nagovoriti članove kvarteta da odsviraju nešto za goste i oni su odabrali *Tri preludija* Georgea Gershwina, a maleni Lovro, kojemu su tada bile tek tri, četiri godine, pridružio im se u svirci svojim saksofonom koji je napravio od 'legića' i pjevao sva sola, koja je znao napamet s obzirom na to da ga je tata često vodio sa sobom na probe. Na svoj način bila je to, eto, Lovrina inicijacija u svijet saksofona i glazbe. Od tada do danas Lovro Merčep stekao je mnoga znanja i iskustva te odsvirao mnogo glazbe. Našavši se, pak, zahvaljujući snimanju ponovno na mjestu gdje je sve počelo, simbolično, napravio je puni krug.

Danas u zrelim tridesetima, ovim albumom odlučio je dio svojega puta – toga "prvoga kruga", predstaviti svima nama. I podario nam je njime i svoje umijeće i puno dobre glazbe.

Tko zna koliko ga još takvih krugova u karijeri čeka! Poželimo mu ih što više.

Borko Špoljarić

LOVRO MERČEP (Zagreb, 1990.) naobrazbu je stekao na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu (klasa prof. Dragana Sremeca) i konzervatorijima u Lyonu (klasa prof. Jean-Denisa Michata), Versaillesu (klasa prof. Vincenta Davida) i Amsterdamu (klasa prof. Arna Bornkampsa). Tijekom studija bio je stipendist grada Samobora, Zaklade Adris i francuske vlade, dobitnik Rektorove i Dekanove nagrade Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Plakete grada Samobora te je jedan od dobitnika nagrade Mladi glazbenik godine Zagrebačke filharmonije za umjetnička postignuća u 2016. godini. Kao komorni glazbenik nastupao je na festivalima i koncertnim ciklusima u Hrvatskoj i inozemstvu, a zapaženi su i njegovi solistički nastupi uza Zagrebačku filharmoniju, Simfonijski orkestar HRT-a, Zagrebačke soliste, Simfonijski orkestar RTV Slovenije, Komorni gudački orkestar Slovenske filharmonije, Hrvatski komorni orkestar, Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar, pod ravnanjem Tomislava Fačinija, Uroša Lajovica, Berislava Šipuša, Ena Shaoa, Elisabeth Fuchs, Stefana Mazzolenija i Ivana Huta. Laureat je brojnih državnih i međunarodnih natjecanja, među kojima se ističu 7. međunarodno saksofonističko natjecanje u Novoj Gorici (Slovenija), Concours Européen de Saxophone u Gapu (Francuska) i 1. međunarodno natjecanje saksofonista Josip Nohta u Zagrebu. Osobitu pozornost posvećuje promicanju glazbenih djela hrvatskih skladatelja, predstavljajući ih kako u Hrvatskoj, tako i u inozemstvu. Na 66. Dubrovačkim ljetnim igrama praiszeo je *Koncert za saksofon i gudački orkestar* Ivana Končića, dok je na 30. Muzičkom biennalu Zagreb praiszeo *Koncert za alt-saksofon i gudače* Davorina Kempfa. U 68. koncertnoj sezoni Zagrebačkih solista praiszeo je skladbu *Praskozorje* bosanskohercegovačkog kompozitora Davida Mastikose, a snimku praisvedbe objavila je izdavačka kuća Donemus iz Nizozemske. Kompozicije su mu posvetili i Gordan Tudor, Sara Glojnarić, Ana Horvat te Sanda Majurec. Član je kvarteta saksofona Ardemus, s kojim je zabilježio niz uspješnih koncerata u Europi, nastupajući u koncertnim dvoranama kao što su Concertgebouw u Amsterdamu, Bozar u

Bruxellesu, Tonhalle u Zürichu, Elbphilharmonie u Hamburgu i Konzerthaus u Berlinu. Kvartet Ardemus dobitnik je nagrade publike na Grachtenfestival Concours 2016., a u rujnu iste godine pobijedio je na 13. međunarodnom natjecanju mladih glazbenih umjetnika Ferdo Livadić u Samoboru. Kao jedan od četiriju finalista prestižnog natjecanja Dutch Classical Talent Tour & Award 2018./2019. imao je priliku održati turneju u najznačajnijim dvoranama u Nizozemskoj. Profesor je saksofona na Glazbenom učilištu Elly Bašić u Zagrebu, a od akademske godine 2024./2025. izabran je u zvanje naslovnog asistenta za saksofon na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu. Održao je seminare saksofona diljem Hrvatske, u Španjolskoj (Conservatorio Superior de Música de Jaén), SAD-u (Stephen F. Austin State University) i Singapuru (*Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts*). Također predaje na Međunarodnoj ljetnoj školi mladih glazbenika Youngmasters u Samoboru. Ekskluzivni je umjetnik za D'Addario Woodwinds i Henri Selmer Paris.

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Nizozemsko-hrvatski dirigent i violist **IVAN HUT** (Pula, 1982.) glazbeno obrazovanje započeo je u Glazbenoj školi Josipa Hatzea u Splitu. Diplomirao je violu u klasi Milana Čunka na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu 2005. godine. Od 2000. do 2009. godine Hut je bio stalni član Splitskog komornog orkestra gdje se, uz inspiraciju maestra Pavla Dešpalja, razvila njegova ljubav prema dirigiranju. Godine 2013. osniva gudački orkestar Camerata Split. Bio je producent koncertnog programa na 59. Splitskom ljetu te ravnatelj glazbenog programa na 60. Splitskom ljetu. U kazališnoj sezoni 2013./2014. bio je ravnatelj Opere Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta Split. Godine 2014. upisuje studij dirigiranja na Umjetničkom sveučilištu Codarts u Rotterdamu, u klasi Hansa Leendersa. Za vrijeme školovanja u Nizozemskoj usavršavao se kod Kennetha Montgomeryja, Etiennea Siebensa i Antonyja Hermusa. Bio je stipendist Fonda Lovro i Lilly Matačić te zaklade za mlade dirigente Kraljevine Nizozemske, Het Kersjes Fonds.

Dodiplomski studij završava 2016., opernim debijem (Puccini, *Sestra Angelica*), a magisterij uspješno završava 2018., u istoj klasi. Među njegovim mentorima bio je i maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin. U prosincu 2020. godine postaje stalni dirigent Dubrovačkog simfonijskog orkestra. Među orkestrima s kojima je surađivao su i Sinfonia Rotterdam, Zagrebačka filharmonija, Simfonijski orkestar HRT-a, Zadarski i Varaždinski komorni orkestar, Simfonijski orkestar Sveučilišta u Guanajuatu, Riječki simfonijski orkestar, Simfonijski orkestar SNG Maribor. U SNG Maribor je 2023. ravnao izvedbama *Čarobne frule*.

DUBROVAČKI SIMFONIJSKI ORKESTAR profesionalni je glazbeni ansambl koji djeluje od 1925. godine i nastavlja dugu i značajnu glazbenu tradiciju koja se razvila još u razdoblju Dubrovačke Republike (1358. – 1808.), a 2025. godine obilježuje 100. obljetnicu aktivnog rada. Orkestar u Dubrovniku u kontinuiranom je djelovanju od 1924. godine, u početku u poluprofesionalnoj organizaciji, a potom u punom profesionalnom sastavu. Osnovali su ga mladi entuzijasti, maturanti Gimnazije u Dubrovniku, pod nazivom Dubrovački orkestar, što se već 1925. mijenja u Dubrovački filharmonijski orkestar. U prvim godinama djelovanja Orkestru se pridružuje sve veći broj članova, a tako se obogaćuje i repertoar kompleksnijim glazbenim djelima. Uz poznate dirigente, Tadeusza Sygietyńskog i Josefa Vlacha Vrutickyja, praiizvode djela poljsko-dubrovačkog skladatelja Ludomira Michala Rogowskog. Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar glavno je glazbeno tijelo Grada Dubrovnika i nositelj glazbene ponude. U njihovom sastavu sviraju profesionalni akademski glazbenici, s bogatim repertoarom klasične, moderne, jazz i druge glazbe. Grad Dubrovnik prepoznao je važnost raznovrsne turističke ponude, ali i interes gostiju za kulturnim sadržajima, stoga je 1946. godine, uz potporu članova Orkestra, osnovao Gradski orkestar Dubrovnik kao profesionalno glazbeno tijelo, koje kasnije preuzima

ulogu nositelja glazbenog dijela programa Dubrovačkih ljetnih igara. Zbog toga je kratko vrijeme Orkestar nosio naziv Dubrovački festivalski orkestar. S tadašnjim šefom dirigentom, maestrom Nikolom Debelićem, Orkestar sedamdesetih godina ostvaruje opsežne turneje (Švicarska, Njemačka, Belgija, Nizozemska), a u suradnji s Agencijom Columbia Artists Man iz New Yorka odlazi na tromjesečnu turneju u SAD i Kanadu (više od 120 koncerata sa solistima Vladimirom Krpanom, Ivom Pogorelićem, Valterom Dešpaljem...). Orkestar mijenja svoje ime posljednji put 1992. i otada djeluje pod nazivom Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar. Glazbenici koji djeluju u Orkestru svoje su akademsko znanje i talent gradili uglavnom na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu, ali i na brojnim akademijama diljem Europe i svijeta. Popis odsviranih koncerata jako je dug, uključujući turneje po Europi, SAD-u i Indoneziji. Naravno, koncerti u Gradu su redoviti i čine okosnicu glazbene ponude tijekom cijele godine. Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar surađivao je s poznatim imenima: Lovro von Matačić, Antonio Janigro, Zubin Mehta, Kiril Kondrashin, Ernst Marzendorfer, Milan Horvat, Nikola Debelić, Pavle Dešpalj, Anton Nanut, David Ojstrah, Lord Yehudi Menuhin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Svjatoslav Richter, Henryk Szeryng, Uto Ughi, Christoph Eschenbach, Stefan Milenkovich, Ivo Pogorelić, Dubravka Tomšić, Dunja Vejzović, Ruža Pospíš Baldani, Monika Leskovar, Radovan Vlatković, Mischa Maisky, Yuri Bashmet, Julian Rachlin, Michel Legrand, Alun Francis, Ivo Dražinić, Maxim Fedotov, Goran Končar, Maxim Vengerov, Nicholas Milton, Christoph Campestrini, Dmitry Sinkovsky, Emmanuel Tjeknavorian, Gordan Nikolić i brojni drugi.

Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar nastupao je u najprestižnijim dvoranama svijeta: Kennedy Center – Washington, New York, Seattle, Kurhaus – Bad Eberbach, Vatroslav Lisinski – Zagreb, Chateau Veves, Versailles, Basel, Medan – Jakarta, Musikverein Goldener Saal – Beč. Godine 2005. Dubrovački simfonijski

orkestar nagrađen je prestižnom nagradom Milka Trnina, a 2015. nagradom za doprinos ugledu i promociji Dubrovačko-neretvanske županije u zemlji i svijetu. Godine 2020. nagrađen je nagradom Grand prix Orlando za osobit umjetnički doprinos. Dubrovački simfonijski orkestar organizira niz festivala i ciklusa glazbe koji se protežu kroz cijelu godinu. Prepoznati među domaćom i stranom publikom, ti su ciklusi i festivali odlično posjećeni, nudeći raznovrstan i zanimljiv glazbeni repertoar: Međunarodni festival opernih arija Tino Pattiera, MGF Dubrovnik u pozno ljeto, glazbeni ciklusi Dubrovačko glazbeno proljeće, Jesenji glazbeni moskar, ciklus barokne glazbe Orlando Furioso i Festival komorne glazbe Stradun Classic.

Although himself a native of Samobor, Lovro Merčep is inseverably tied to southern Croatia's eternal city of Dubrovnik via both familial and professional connections. This recording debut of his, produced on location with the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra and also featuring the work of a Dubrovnik-born composer, bears witness to these numerous personal and musical tangents. It is, therefore, aptly titled *Dubrovnik Encounters*.

To choose three true Croatian compositional "heavyweights" for a debut album's repertoire speaks only of the calibre of its featured soloist, for Merčep is, indeed, already a well-established and distinctive member of the Croatian saxophone community, which – thanks to the founding father of Croatia's saxophone school Josip Nohta (himself originally a clarinettist) and his first class of graduates from the Academy of Music in Zagreb (themselves, in turn, founders of the internationally renowned Zagreb Saxophone Quartet, of whom Lovro's father Goran is also a member) – has taken deep roots both in Croatia and abroad.

Lovro has, therefore, selected three concert pieces which undoubtedly have an opportunity to hold their own on the international scene. Dešpalj's masterpiece, for example, needs no introduction; it is, after all, the first concerto of its kind in Croatian music. More importantly, his concerto is a first-rate composition which is – and remains – a constant staple of the saxophone repertoire.

While perhaps less commonly performed (even if unjustly so), Bruno Bjelinski's *Sinfonietta* – though already recorded multiple times and featured in the repertoire of many Croatian saxophonists (such as Nikola Fabijanić, who recorded it for his outing with the Zagreb Soloists in 2015) – is a piece whose time, we believe, is yet to arrive.

At last, there is the concerto written by Ivan Končić, which is by far the most recently composed of the three. Created in close collaboration between the two musical and generational peers – one born and the other originating from

Dubrovnik – this piece may yet prove to be a great discovery thanks to this release, as already foretold by the critical public on the night of its world premiere, none less than at Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 2015.

What a prime selection of works this is!

Being the first composition to feature Lovro as a soloist accompanied by an orchestra, *Sinfonietta* by **BRUNO BJELINSKI** (b. 1909 Trieste, d. 1992 Silba) is a piece for which, by his own account, he fosters wonderful memories ever since 2007 when he first performed it as a college freshman while studying under Professor Dragan Sremec (himself yet another - moreover, the first - graduate from Zagreb's inaugural saxophone class, who would continue to work as a pedagogue at his alma mater), accompanied by the Croatian Chamber Orchestra (as part of the *Osor Music Evenings* festival). He also performed and recorded the piece with the Croatian Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra (conducted by the composer's son Alan) in 2015, and lest one forget the latest performances featuring the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra during the Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 2022 – on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the composer's death.

Bruno Bjelinski completed the *Sinfonietta* on the 17th of August 1984, having worked on it on the island of Silba, a place where he had, not unlike fellow composer Igor Kuljerić (himself a native of the island), found an ever-needed sense of tranquility, which enabled him both to compose and to distance himself from personal turmoils in the wake of both world wars. The Bjelinski family had also arranged to transport the first piano to their maritime residence ("a true concert grand with Viennese action", as recounted by Bjelinski's son Alan). Local fishermen, friends and neighbours hauled the instrument off the transport vessel, "marveling at the strange black box, for they had never seen anything alike", before handing it over to a man named Paško, whose "two-mule carriage fitted with tractor tyres

of varying dimensions" was commonly used to "deliver groceries to the island's inhabitants". How much this small town on one of the furthestmost islands in the Zadar archipelago meant to Bjelinski Sr. needn't be explained further than the fact that it is where he eventually found his eternal peace.

Such was the ambient in which, over the summer of 1984, the *Sinfonietta* came to life, on an island where "Heaven is savoured". Written for Dragan Sremec – then still a young musician working to complete his Master studies at the Academy of Music, in 1985 – the same year he first performed the piece with the Zagreb Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra conducted by Igor Gjadrov on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Academy's Wind Instruments Department, and recorded the following year for Zagreb Radiotelevision. Although the introductory *Allegro appassionato* – a movement perfectly fit to be the main title theme for some new Hercule Poirot television series – is especially favoured in the Croatian music school curriculum, the medial, meditative *Larghetto*, and the feather-light, virtuosic closing *Allegro* are just as attractive.

The question remains as to why Bjelinski dubbed the composition a *sinfonietta* when it is, in fact, a thoroughbred concert piece. For a well-renowned and beloved Professor who had been teaching counterpoint and fugue at the Academy of Music in Zagreb since 1945, this choice was hardly coincidental. It is almost certain that the composer's wish was to underline the neo-classical origins of his style (as defined by influences spanning from Prokofiev through Britten and Shostakovich). Perhaps true to his unpretentious nature, Bjelinski even may have wished to 'minimise' his own significance by opting for the diminutive form in the composition's title. *Concertino* or *sinfonietta* notwithstanding, one may without remorse refer to this piece as a true concert showstopper!

Speaking of first and last while mentioning Sremec, **IVAN KONČIĆ** (b. Dubrovnik 1988) is definitely among the latter, having been the last graduate from the

class of Željko Brkanović at the Academy of Music in Zagreb (where he, after graduating in 2013, continues to develop his own teaching practice). This is not mentioned by chance, for in the cases of both Končić and Brkanović a specific finesse of the composer's work is evident, which transpires in this piece as well. The work is, while expertly elaborated, in its essence traditional, however the final impression renders it autochthonous, fresh, inspired and unique. Končić's inspiration manifests itself through a plethora of musical material, in the shaping of character and atmosphere, but also in the construction of the work as a whole. The final result is a concert piece in every segment – in the solo section as well as the soloist's dialogue with the orchestra, with a proper *cadenza* and a full-blown arsenal of performing tools and techniques – a Concerto in the full sense of the term.

Situations in which Končić introduces extended techniques, using them to achieve different tonal situations and colors – which abound throughout the score – give special charm to the work, but their function is primarily dramaturgical, aiming to contribute to the piece as a whole. Regardless of the fact that the *Concerto* captivates in all its stages with an irresistible charm, harnessing an almost *noir* atmosphere before coming to a torrential conclusion of the Piazzolla variety in the the final movement, a precious moment of the work lies in the nocturnal music of the central movement, which one finds difficult to recommend in words – it should simply be heard and listened to repeatedly.

As stated before, the work was created in collaboration between the composer and its intended interpreter, as has been the case in many an occasion throughout the history of the Concerto genre. The atmospheric quality of Končić's *Concerto* is exceptionally complemented by Merčep's gloaming tonal colour. It will be interesting to follow how it will be received – and perceived – by other interpreters, hopefully many more in the future.

The piece was composed in 2015, and premeired on the 31st of July at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival with the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra conducted by Stefano Mazzoleni in the famous atrium of the Rector's Palace. The work was jointly commissioned by the Samobor Rotary Club, the Dubrovnik Rotary Club, and the Dubrovnik Summer Festival. It was the first presentation of two young artists at such a prestigious festival of international format.

"Collaborating with Ivan was fantastic," Lovro has recounted. Ivan, on the other hand, wrote on the occasion of the premiere that "*the Concerto for Saxophone and Strings* is a work written for a dear friend and incredible musician Lovro Merčep... In addition to being the first to perform it, Lovro also left his mark on the piece, suggesting his own ideas and modifications for the soloist's part from the perspective of a superb instrumentalist, for which I am immensely grateful." We believe that many saxophonists will be grateful to Ivan Končić for years to come, because he has provided them with such a successful work, after the premiere of which the critic Sanja Dražić concluded that "[he] is an exceptionally talented and valuable artist. He and his entire opus demand to be introduced to a cultural environment that would appreciate, incite, and enrich his invention."

In 1957, **PAVLE DEŠPALJ** (from Zadar, though born not so far from Dubrovnik, namely the town of Blato on the island of Korčula in 1934 – d. Zagreb 2021) composed a total of four works under the mentorship of professor and musical authority Stjepan Šulek at the Academy of Music in Zagreb, closing off his series of student achievements in 1959 with the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, which was also his graduation piece. Soon after, in 1961, he conceived the *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Strings* (inspired by the jazz saxophonists whose records he had listened to as a child), commencing work on it during his military service in Zadar – at the persuasion of a fellow soldier, an amateur saxophonist himself, who was eventually found not to be up to the task of performing the solo part – and

completing it in the summer of 1963 (in 1962, Dešpalj had become chief conductor of the Zagreb Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra). Having had, however, only a few weeks left until the scheduled first performance, Dešpalj found a suitable soloist in Croatian classical and jazz saxophonist Ozren Depolo, who premiered the work under Dešpalj's direction in Zagreb on the 24th of February 1964, accompanied by the Strings of the Zagreb Radiotelevision Chamber Orchestra. Depolo later released it on LP in 1988.

The *Concerto* would subsequently be followed by a period of long authorial silence, which lasted until the *Two Fiddle Whims for Solo Violin* from 1999 and the *Concerto for Cello and Strings* from 2000. Modest in quantity, though notable for its authorial achievements, Dešpalj's opus took on a certain air of mystery, and questions about the reasons for the author's silence persisted through the musical community. Dešpalj himself would clarify this with innumerable engagements as a conductor. Had it been by any chance, though, that the *Concerto for Saxophone* was to be his sole compositional legacy, Dešpalj would have not only the gratitude of saxophonists, but also of the entire musical world. Or, as noted American saxophonist and pedagogue William Schwab wrote in 1982: "The composer relayed to me how pleased he was that musicians had received his work with enthusiasm, telling me about the letters he receives every year from students and professors expressing their respect for his work. Performers who become familiar with Dešpalj's piece will discover in it an important addition to their repertoire".

The *Concerto* was recorded for an album of Dešpalj's original compositions in 2004 by Lovro's father Goran Merčep with the Strings of the Croatian Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra under the composer's direction. The fact that the piece was later embraced by the generation which today comprises the Papandopulo Quartet (Gordan Tudor, for example, with maestro Dešpalj on the 2016 album and Goran Jurković as the winner of the Papandopulo Competition that same

year) speaks volumes about its life on both record and stage. It is also interesting to note that music from the *Concerto* was used for the ballet *Igre*, which Sonja Kastl and Nevenka Biđin staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka in 1964, proving that Dešpalj's piece is indeed not difficult to imagine in such a context.

The composition took root in America as well, with the American premiere taking place on the 11th of March 1971 featuring Cecil Leeson as the soloist, accompanied by the Florida Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Dešpalj (who was the ensemble's musical director at the time while also holding the same position in the Orlando Opera). Also, it was a mandatory composition at the Josip Nocht Competition in 2014 in Zagreb, where Lovro Merčep first performed it as part of the competition's final round. "Even before I started playing the saxophone, I fantasised about playing this piece while listening to my father's performances. Later, I would often perform it with the Zagreb Soloists and the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra. With the composer's approval, I also arranged it for a saxophone ensemble and played it at my graduation concerts in Versailles and Amsterdam. I am extremely glad that I had the opportunity to present Dešpalj's *Concerto* to colleagues and professors abroad."

It is to be duly noted that Lovro Merčep frequently emphasises his commitment to the promotion of Croatian music abroad, often holding lectures and concerts featuring works by Croatian composers at universities and academies in Spain, Singapore and the USA. He has even managed to "infect" his international saxophone quartet Ardemus with Croatian music; as winners of the 2017 Ferdo Livadić competition – itself a part of the Samobor Musical Autumn – they premiered the piece *In modo classico* by renowned Croatian composer Davorin Kempf, written for saxophone quartet and piano sextet.

"Glamorously irradiated" and "virtuosically conceived" (as observed by Dubravko Detoni), Dešpalj's *Concerto* consists of three diverse movements: the

first in sonata form, the second composed in the *passacaglia* technique, and the final in the form of a rondo. The composition affirms features pertaining to the entirety of Dešpalj's opus: a tendency towards the neoclassical style, romantic expressiveness, modern harmonic language rooted in tradition, purity of form and the art of transforming thematic material by means of elaborate motivic work. What these categories do not reveal, however, is the enormous technical and expressive range which the work offers the interpreter throughout all three movements, most notably the incredible range of expression in the central *Andante* leading up to the moment when the "madness" in the saxophone part takes on the characteristics of free improvisation leading up to the vivid climax, in which the soloing instrument is meant to sound "like the cry of a wild animal", as the composer once stated.

In this sense, the album could even be regarded as an album of central movements, since all three works harbour really beautiful slow movements – which may only confirm how much all three composers were enchanted by the lithe and supple cantilena of the soloing instrument – would such a view, in turn, not be justifiably unfair considering the plethora of musical material which dominates the rest of each respective score.

We conclude the review of this album on a somewhat unusual note, with an anecdote and a story about the venue where the album was recorded, which was also – in its own special way – where Lovro gave his first public performance; a musical initiation of sorts.

Sometime in the early nineties, after a concert of the Zagreb Saxophone Quartet at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, the quartet's members retreated to socialise with the organisers of the concert at a café or restaurant which at that time was located in the garden of the Crijević-Pucić summer residence, where Lovro recorded this CD years later. Today the residence of the Dubrovnik Symphony

Orchestra, the beautiful summer house is located next to Gradac Park, just above the Pile Gate.

After a few drinks, the company managed to persuade the members of the quartet to play something for the guests. The musicians chose George Gershwin's *Three Preludes*, with little Lovro, who was only three or four years old at the time, joining the performance with a saxophone fashioned out of Lego blocks and singing all the solos (which he knew by heart, considering that his dad would often take him to rehearsals). In its own way, this was Lovro's initiation into the world of saxophone and music. Lovro Merčep has since gained immense knowledge and experience, and has performed a lot of music. Thanks to this recording, he again finds himself at the place where it all symbolically started, thus completing a full circle.

Today, in his mid-thirties, he has decided to present this "first lap" of his musical journey by issuing this album, gifting us with both his art and plenty of good music. How many such laps is he yet to take in his career is anybody's guess. We wish him as many as there are.

Borko Špoljarić

LOVRO MERČEP (b. Zagreb 1990) studied at the Academy of Music in Zagreb (with Professor Dragan Sremec) and conservatories in Lyon (with Professor Jean-Denis Michat), Versailles (with Professor Vincent David), and Amsterdam (with Professor Arno Bornkamp). During his studies, he was a scholarship holder of the city of Samobor, the Adris Foundation, and the French government, and winner of the Rector's and Dean's Awards of the University of Zagreb, the City of Samobor Plaque, as well as one of the winners of the Zagreb Philharmonic's Young Musician of the Year award for artistic achievements in 2016. As a chamber musician, he has performed at festivals and concerts in Croatia and abroad while also giving noted performances as a soloist with the Zagreb Philharmonic, the Croatian Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra, Zagreb Soloists, the Slovenian Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra, the Chamber String Orchestra of the Slovenian Philharmonic, the Croatian Chamber Orchestra, the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra, conducted respectively by Tomislav Fačini, Uroš Lajovic, Berislav Šipuš, En Shao, Elisabeth Fuchs, Stefano Mazzoleni, and Ivan Hut. He is a laureate of numerous national and international competitions, including the 7th International Saxophone Competition in Nova Gorica (Slovenia), the Concours Européen de Saxophone in Gap (France) and the 1st International Josip Nocht Saxophonist Competition in Zagreb. He pays particular attention to the promotion of musical works by Croatian composers, presenting them both in Croatia and abroad. At the 66th Dubrovnik Summer Festival, he premiered Ivan Končić's *Concerto for Saxophone and String Orchestra*, while at the 30th Zagreb Music Biennale he premiered the *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Strings* by Davorin Kempf. During the 68th concert season of the Zagreb Soloists, he premiered the composition *Praskozorje* by Bosnian composer David Mastikosa, the recording of which was published by the Dutch publishing house Donemus. Gordan Tudor, Sara Glojnarić, Ana Horvat, and Sanda Majurec also dedicated compositions to him. He is a member of the Ardemus quartet,

with whom he has performed a series of successful concerts in Europe, playing in concert halls such as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Bozar Brussels, Tonhalle Zürich, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and Konzerthaus in Berlin. The Ardemus Quartet won the audience award at the Grachtenfestival Concours 2016, and in September that same year won the 13th international competition of young musical artists Ferdo Livadić in Samobor. As one of the four finalists of the prestigious competition Dutch Classical Talent Tour & Award 2018/2019, they had the opportunity to tour the most important concert halls in the Netherlands. He is a professor of saxophone at the Elly Bašić School of Music in Zagreb, and starting from the academic year 2024/2025, he was elected to the position of Assistant Professor for saxophone at the Academy of Music in Zagreb. He has held saxophone masterclasses across Croatia, in Spain (Conservatorio Superior de Música de Jaén), the USA (Stephen F. Austin State University), and Singapore (Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts). He also teaches at the Youngmasters International Summer School for young musicians in Samobor. He is an exclusive artist for D'Addario Woodwinds and Henri Selmer Paris.

IVAN HUT (b. Pula 1982) is a Dutch-Croatian conductor and violist who started his musical education at the Josip Hatze Music School in Split. He graduated in viola in the class of Milan Čunko from the Zagreb Academy of Music in 2005. From 2000 to 2009, Hut was a permanent member of the Split Chamber Orchestra, where his love for conducting developed under the influence of maestro Pavle Dešpalj. He founded the string orchestra Camerata Split in 2013. He was the producer of the concert program at the 59th Split Summer Festival and the director of the music program at the 60th Split Summer Festival. He was the director of the Opera of the Croatian National Theatre in Split in the 2013/2014 theater season. In 2014, he enrolled in conducting

studies at the Codarts University for the Arts in Rotterdam, in the class of Hans Leenders. During his studies in the Netherlands, he furthered his training with Kenneth Montgomery, Etienne Siebens, and Antony Hermus. He was a scholar of the Lovro and Lilly Matačić Fund and the Het Kersjes Fonds, Young Conductors Foundation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. He completed his undergraduate studies in 2016 with an opera debut (Puccini's *Suor Angelica*) and successfully completed his master's degree in 2018, in the same class. One of his mentors was also maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin. He became a permanent conductor of the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra in December 2020. Among the orchestras he has collaborated with are the Sinfonia Rotterdam, the Zagreb Philharmonic, the Croatian Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra, the Zadar and Varaždin Chamber Orchestras, the University of Guanajuato Symphony Orchestra, the Rijeka Symphony Orchestra, and the Maribor National Theatre Symphony Orchestra. In 2023, he conducted performances of *The Magic Flute* at the Slovene National Theatre Maribor.

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The **DUBROVNIK SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA** is a professional musical ensemble founded in 1925, continuing a long and significant musical tradition which developed during the period of the Republic of Dubrovnik (1358 - 1808), also due to mark its 100th anniversary of active work in 2025. The Orchestra has been in continuous operation since 1924 (initially as a semi-professional organisation before developing into a fully professional ensemble). It was founded by young enthusiasts (graduates of the Gymnasium in Dubrovnik) under the name Dubrovnik Orchestra, which was changed to the Dubrovnik Philharmonic Orchestra as soon as 1925. In the first years of its activity, an increasing number of members joined the Orchestra, thus enriching its repertoire with more complex musical works. Together with famous conductors Tadeusz Sygietyński

and Josef Vlach Vruticky, they performed the works of Polish-Dubrovnik composer Ludomir Michal Rogowski. The Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra became the main musical body of the City of Dubrovnik and the principal proponent of the city's musical identity, featuring professional academic musicians and performing a diverse repertoire of classical, modern, jazz and other music. The city of Dubrovnik recognised the importance of a diverse tourist offer, but also the interest of guests in cultural content, therefore in 1946, with the support of the members of the Orchestra, the Dubrovnik City Orchestra was founded as a professional musical ensemble, which later assumed the responsibility of providing musical accompaniment to the program of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival. For this reason, the Orchestra was called the Dubrovnik Festival Orchestra for a short time. Under chief conductor mo. Nikola Debelić, the Orchestra toured extensively in the 1970s (Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands), and in cooperation with the Columbia Artists Man Agency from New York went on a three-month tour of the USA and Canada (holding more than 120 concerts with soloists Vladimir Krpan, Ivo Pogorelić, Valter Dešpalj etc). The orchestra changed its name for the last time in 1992 and has been known as the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra ever since. The musicians working in the Orchestra mainly cultivated their academic knowledge and talent at the Academy of Music in Zagreb, but also at numerous academies throughout Europe and the world. The list of concerts played by the ensemble is very long, including tours throughout Europe, USA and Indonesia. Naturally, the Orchestra regularly holds concerts in the City, providing the backbone for Dubrovnik's musical life throughout the year. The Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra has collaborated with famous names, such as Lovro von Matačić, Antonio Janigro, Zubin Mehta, Kiril Kondrashin, Ernst Marzendorfer, Milan Horvat, Nikola Debelić, Pavle Dešpalj, Anton Nanut, David Ojstrah, Lord Yehudi Menuhin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Sviatoslav Richter, Henryk Szeryng,

Uto Ughi, Christoph Eschenbach, Stefan Milenkovich, Ivo Pogorelić, Dubravka Tomšić, Dunja Vejzović, Ruža Pospíš Baldani, Monika Leskovar, Radovan Vlatković, Mischa Maisky, Yuri Bashmet, Julian Rachlin, Michel Legrand, Alun Francis, Ivo Dražinić, Maxim Fedotov, Goran Končar, Maxim Vengerov, Nicholas Milton, Christoph Campestrini, Dmitry Sinkovsky, Emmanuel Tjeknavorian, Gordan Nikolić and many others.

The Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra has performed in the most prestigious halls in the world, including the Kennedy Center in Washington, New York, Seattle, the Kurhaus in Bad Eberbach, Vatroslav Lisinski in Zagreb, Chateau de Versailles, Basel, Medan in Jakarta, and the Musikverein Goldener Saal in Vienna. In 2005, the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra was awarded the prestigious Milka Trnina award, and in 2015 the Orchestra received the award for contribution to the reputation and promotion of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County in the country and the world. In 2020, the Dubrovnik Symphony Orchestra was awarded the Grand Prix Orlando award for special artistic contribution. The Orchestra organises a series of festivals and serial events which extend throughout the year. Renowned among both domestic and foreign audiences, these events and festivals are well attended, offering a varied and interesting musical repertoire, some of which are the International Festival of Operatic Arias by Tino Pattier, MGF Dubrovnik in Late Summer, the Dubrovnik Musical Spring series of concerts, the Autumn Musical Festival, the baroque music serial manifestation Orlando Furioso, and the Stradun Classic Chamber Music Festival.

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