

A close-up portrait of a man with a short, buzzed haircut and a light beard. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a dark, high-collared jacket. The background is out of focus, showing yellow and green foliage, suggesting an outdoor setting in autumn.

HRVATSKI SUVREMENI SKLADATELJI
CROATIAN CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS

IVAN JOSIP
SKENDER

H D S

1. **Circles**, za klarinet i udaraljke | for clarinet and percussion 09:40

Domagoj Pavlović, klarinet | clarinet

Ivana Kuljerić Bilić, udaraljke | percussion

*snimljeno uživo na 53. Glazbenoj tribini Opatija, 2016. | recorded live at the
53rd Opatija Music Panel, 2016*

2. **Poema**, za milanolo | for milanolo. 07:11

Milan Paľa, milanolo

*snimljeno u Državnom dvorcu Bučovice, Slovačka, 2016. | recorded in State
Chateau Bučovice, Slovakia, 2016*

3. **Phantasmagoria**, za orkestar | for orchestra 14:59

Zagrebačka filharmonija | Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra

Dian Tchobanov, dirigent | conductor

*snimljeno uživo na 28. Muzičkom biennalu Zagreb, 2017. | recorded live at the
28th Music Biennale Zagreb, 2017*

4. **Treći gudački kvartet | String Quartet No. 3** 09:17

Zagrebački kvartet | Zagreb Quartet

*snimljeno uživo na 58. Glazbenoj tribini Osijek, 2021. | recorded live at the
58th Osijek Music Panel, 2021*

IVAN JOSIP

5. **Rush**, za ansambl | for ensemble 11:10

Festivalski ansambl Glazbene tribine Opatija | Opatija Music

Panel Festival Ensemble

Ivan Josip Skender, dirigent | conductor

snimljeno uživo na 55. Glazbenoj tribini Opatija, 2018. | recorded live at the 55th Opatija Music Panel, 2018

6. **White Line Fever**, za kvartet udaraljki | for percussion quartet 08:24

Udaraljkaški ansambl biNg bang | biNg bang percussion ensemble

snimljeno uživo na 27. Muzičkom biennalu Zagreb, 2013. | recorded live at the 27th Music Biennale Zagreb, 2013

7. **(Anti)Pop Sketches**, za ansambl | for ensemble 11:22

Cantus Ansambl | Cantus Ensemble

Berislav Šipuš, dirigent | conductor

snimljeno uživo u koncertnom ciklusu Cantus Ansambla, 2021. | recorded live in the Cantus Ensemble concert cycle, 2021

Ukupno trajanje | Total time: 72:19

SKENDER

„Svestran“ i „višestruko talentiran“ epiteti su koje ćemo naći u biografijama brojnih i različitih umjetnika. U rijetkim su slučajevima oni toliko primjereni i točni kao u slučaju Ivana Josipa Skendera, skladatelja, dirigenta, pedagoga, umjetnika zaigranog, maštovitog i iznimno znatiželjnog uma koji ga gura u neprestana istraživanja, avanture i igre. Oni koji ga poznaju privatno znaju da te karakteristike potječu dijelom i od jednog vječnog djeteta koje u njemu čuči, a koje ga i u odraslim godinama, uz ozbiljnu karijeru, potiče na neočekivane hobije koji uključuju specifične društvene i kompjuterske igre, sakupljanje raznolikih figurica i karata iz različitih magičnih i fantastičnih svjetova, kaligrafiju i još spektar neobičnih sitnica koje upotpunjuju njegov svijet. Hrvatsku glazbenu kulturu ovaj kreativac obogaćuje svojim djelima, ali i brojnim vrhunskim interpretacijama djela klasične i suvremene glazbe, u čemu se ističu brojne praisvedbe djela (više od stotinu!) njegovih hrvatskih kolega.

Rođen je 1981. godine u Varaždinu, gradu koji je poznat kao iznimno plodno tlo za razvoj glazbenih talenata. Glazbenu školu upisao je već s pet godina, prvo klavir, a zatim sa sedam godina paralelno i klarinet. Uz opću gimnaziju, maturirao je i glazbenu teoriju. Obje mature u dobi od 16 godina, s obzirom na to da je dva razreda u osnovnoj općeobrazovnoj školi – preskočio. Toj mladosti unatoč, uspješno je položio prijemni ispit na studiju medicine. Da je postao liječnik, mogao je od svoje majke naslijediti liječničku praksu, no razvidno je da je interes za glazbu prevladao pa je ipak upisao studij kompozicije na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu u razredu Željka Brkanovića, kao – treba istaknuti – najmlađi student kompozicije u povijesti akademije. Začetci poriva za stvaranjem glazbe sežu u ranu mladost, već u dobi od devet godina pokazuje interes za komponiranje, a uskoro ostvaruje i svoje prve skladateljske pokušaje. Dvije godine nakon upisa na kompoziciju upisuje i studij dirigiranja, u razredu Vjekoslava Šuteja. Uspješno okončavši oba studija na početku novoga milenija, Skender je zapliva u hrvatsku glazbenu scenu kao jedan od najkompletnijih glazbenika svoga doba, neprestano usavršavajući svoja znanja, bruseći vještine, razvijajući se i oslobađajući maštu. Usavršavao se i na seminarima i radionicama za dirigente (kod Klausa Arpa, Bertranda de Billyja, Zubina Mehte i drugih) te kompoziciju (kod Michaela Jarella, Jozsefa Sopronija).

Ako ga pitate smatra li se primarno dirigentom ili skladateljem, reći će da su to za njega dvije perspektive iste stvari te da za njega „ili jesi muzičar ili nisi“. U svakom slučaju, priznat će da mu je ova dvojna uloga uvelike pomogla, kompozitor je u njemu dirigentu pomogao brže i lakše dešifrirati zamisli skladatelja čija partitura leži na notnome stalku ispred njega, dok je dirigent skladatelja podučio brojnim tehničkim znanjima koja njegove partiture čine kvalitetno i zalački pripremljenima, neovisno o kojem se instrumentu radi. Svoja djela nerado dirigira, a ne voli, iako je inače vješt s riječima, niti o njima pisati za programske knjižice i kataloge.

Dirigentski angažmani vodili su ga u različite zemlje svijeta, surađivao je s brojnim hrvatskim sastavima, a u Zagrebu gotovo da nema ansambla kojim nije ravnao. Profesionalni počeci vežu ga uz Akademski zbor Bazilike Srca Isusova u Zagrebu, Palmu (2004. do 2012.) – njegov entuzijazam, muzikalnost i ljubav prema vokalnoj i zborskoj glazbi učinili su te godine jednima od najuspješnijih u recentnijoj povijesti zbora. Palma je pod njegovim vodstvom ostvarila izvedbe na doista visokoj, gotovo profesionalnoj razini, čemu svjedoče i mnogobrojne osvojene nagrade na natjecanjima te smotrama u Hrvatskoj i inozemstvu. Paralelno gradi još dvije važne i kontinuirane trase svoga profesionalnoga dirigentskog rada. Prva je angažman u HNK u Zagrebu, gdje je bio zborovođa od 2005. do 2014. godine, a zatim do 2019. dirigent Opere, a druga stalni rad s Cantus Ansamblom, s kojim surađuje od 2008. godine, a posljednjih deset godina u svojstvu stalnog dirigenta. Upravo je s članovima Cantus Ansambla Skender ostvario najveći broj izvedbi i praizvedbi hrvatskih autora, od kojih su mnoge trajno zabilježene na snimkama.

Pedagošku djelatnost razvija od 2009. godine, kada je postao asistent prof. Uroša Lajovica na Muzičkoj akademiji u Zagrebu, gdje je danas docent na Odsjeku za dirigiranje, udaraljke i harfu te na Odsjeku za pjevanje.

Treba spomenuti i da je u sezoni 2013./2014. bio umjetnički ravnatelj Opere HNK u Zagrebu, od 2019. do danas član je programskog odbora Muzičkog biennala Zagreb, dok je 2020. imenovan članom Skupštine predstavnika Hrvatskoga društva skladatelja.

Skender piše s lakoćom, on nije skladatelj na kojeg možete primijeniti romantičku sliku neshvaćenog i izmučenog umjetnika koji pati pod teretom svoje umjetnosti i u mukama neostvarenih težnji „porađa“ svoju glazbu – Skenderov razigrani um vrlo brzo može formirati glazbene koncepte i razviti ih u kostur novoga djela koji zatim često „nacrtat“ na „običnom“ papiru, dopunjujući skicu zapisima svega onoga što čuje u glavi – motivima, detaljima instrumentacije, pojedinih situacija... Tek tada, kada je skladba zapravo dovršena, počinje njemu naporan i težak dio skladateljskog procesa, pretakanje tih misli u čitljiv zapis, višednevno „kuckanje“, prepisivanje nota u kompjuterski program.

Njegov opus danas broji više od stotinu djela, od kojih je većina, uz nekoliko skladbi za različite orkestralne sastave, pisana za manje komorne sastave te ansamble. Skladbe su mu izvođene u gotovo svim zemljama Europe te u SAD-u, Kanadi i Meksiku. Možda je nešto manje poznato da je autor velikog korpusa glazbe za kazališne predstave, kao i mjuzikala, dok je jedan od njegovih najvećih uspjeha neosporno opera (za djecu i odrasle) *Šuma Striborova* prema istoimenoj bajci Ivane Brlić Mažuranić, ujedno i jedan od najuspješnijih projekata Muzičkog biennala Zagreb. Ovu je čarobnu operu Skender skladao sa samo 29 (!) godina, a zbog iznimne potražnje publike u riječkom HNK, kući u kojoj je opera postavljena, izvedena je čak 27 puta (u ponekim danima uvedene su i dvije izvedbe dnevno!), što je uistinu impozantan broj izvedbi za neko scensko djelo hrvatskog suvremenog glazbenog repertoara.

Većina Skenderovih skladbi nastala je na poticaj samih izvođača – što svjedoči o tome koliko rado oni odabiru i sviraju njegovu glazbu, a uvijek su mu naklonjeni su bili i sudovi publike te struke. Neobično je stoga, što sa svojih 40 godina, ovaj skladatelj još nije dobio i odgovarajuća priznanja, koja neosporno zaslužuje (nagrađen je Rektorovom nagradom za studija te nagradom *Stjepan Šulek* 2017. godine za orkestralnu *Phantasmagoriju* koja je dio i ovog albuma). Iako nagrade i odlikovanja u Hrvatskoj ne znače mnogo više do još jedne „recke“ u biografiji, potrebne i za napredovanja u struci, ipak je neobično da ovaj, sada već zreli opus, nije ozbiljnije nagrađen; i smatram to propustom (ili barem previdom) hrvatske glazbene zajednice. Skendera pak to ne obeshrabruje previše, on marljivo stvara

dalje, vodeći se vlastitim kriterijima kvalitete i odgovarajući uvijek prvenstveno samome sebi. Jer, reći će, citirajući SF autora Larryja Nivena – „Pisci koji pišu za druge pisce, trebaju pisati pisma.“ Ne sklada s ciljem eksperimentiranja ni težnje za otkrivanjem nečeg novog i neviđenog, ne goni ga diktat „suvremenosti“, zadovoljan je kada ostvari sadržajnu (ne nužno formalnu!) cjelinu u svojim djelima koja su najčešće eksternalizacija misli koje ga okupiraju i mnogostrukosti onoga što ga okružuje. Ta doza iskrenosti, nepretencioznog pristupa i odsustva (kvazi) intelektualističkih konstrukata, ali i visokoprofesionalan, detaljan i pedantan pristup radu upravo su ono što njegovu glazbu čini kvalitetnom, prijemčivom te bliskom svakom zainteresiranom slušatelju te zbog čega će ona zasigurno preživjeti sud vremena.

Djela na ovome autorskom albumu, ne s nekom izričitom namjerom, presjek su Skenderova stvaralaštva u posljednjih deset godina. Jednako tako, slučajno – ali možda podsvjesno uvjetovano, ovo su upravo ona djela koja su nastala pod izravnim utjecajem skladateljeva životnog i psihofizičkog stanja. Iako sadržajno raznolika, veže ih često vrlo slična pozadinska priča odnosno poriv autora da ispolji životne situacije i stanja koji ga okupiraju na dnevnoj bazi. Sve što doživljava u svakodnevici, dobro i loše, privlačno i odbojno, sve što prolazi kroz njegov sustav i na njemu ostavlja trag, sve to u njegovoj glazbi postaje refleksija i odraz vremena.

IVAN JOSIP
SKENDER

Circles, za klarinet i udaraljke

Praizvedba: 53. Glazbena tribina Opatija, Zlatna dvorana Hotela Imperial, Opatija, 3. studenoga 2016., Domagoj Pavlović, klarinet; Ivana Kuljerić Bilić, udaraljke

*„Vrijeme se okreće
vrti u viru
zakreće
i ono što će biti
bit će da se već jednom
imalo događati
negdje iznutra
kao eho srca (...)“*

Stihovi su ovo Duška Babića, jednog od omiljenih suvremenih pjesnika Ivana Josipa Skendera, čije je stihove i uglazbio u nekoliko svojih djela. Ovaj je citat Skender uključio u crticu o skladbi *Circles* prilikom praizvedbe, a već je ta naznaka inspiracije dovoljna da shvatimo da će pred nama biti jedno poetično i zamišljeno djelo.

Skladba je nastala na poticaj Glazbene tribine Opatija, i samih izvođača – Ivane Kuljerić Bilić i Domagoja Pavlovića. U šest odsjeka ocrtava vrlo jasan dramaturški luk, odnosno krug i kruženje koji leže u ideji djela, što potvrđuju i skladateljeve riječi: „Skladba *Circles (Krugovi)* odjek je razmišljanja o krugu života, prirodnim ciklusima, glazbi i ciklusu ljudskog bića te povezanosti svega. Kao i čovjek, Priroda se kreće poput velikog kotača, uvijek se okreće ukруг, ide naprijed u vremenu i prostoru, svakome od njezinih krakova potrebno je redovito skretanje u pojedinom pravcu kako bi postojala ravnoteža.“

Otvara se distancirano, jednim tonom vibrafona koji kao da inicira svojevrsni ritual. Klarinet donosi meditativne melodije, a vibrafon i druge udaraljke koje se postupno priključuju tu su da naglašavaju kontinuirano stanje transa. U drugome odsjeku, kao i u većem dijelu skladbe, instrumenti govore istovremeno, ali ne nužno u dijalogu. Klarinet je sada vedar i poletno zaigran, a u istom raspoloženju uz njega plešu udaraljke. U trećemu odsjeku one preuzimaju glavnu riječ, uz tek

poneke, gotovo sarkastične komentare klarineta. Četvrti odsjek prekida ležernu atmosferu prethodnih, uvodi naizgled lepršavu, ali ustvari nervoznu i nemirnu liniju klarineta, čiju tjeskobu pojačavaju eratični udari bubnjeva. U petome se odsjeku instrumenti napokon stvarno ujedinjuju i koračaju zajedno u motoričnom tkivu ugodnog tijeka koji neočekivano naglo iščezava u tišinu u decrescendu maracasa, dok posljednji odsjek donosi smiraj, poetskije i zamišljenije misli dužeg daha, koje postupno iščezavaju, a odjekom zadnjeg osamljenog udara vibrafona uranjaju u tišinu iz koje se uzdigla skladba, zatvarajući tako krug. U svakome odsjeku važna je i igra koloritom, Skender karaktere podcrtava različitim zvučnim kombinacijama mijenjajući tip udaraljki, ali i registre klarineta, a u jednome odsjeku klarinet in B zamjenjuje klarinetom in Es, otvarajući još jednu nijansu boje. Već sam instrumentarij, ali i način gradnje skladbe – asketskim sredstvima postignuto bogatstvo sadržaja i boja – podsjećaju na Marka Rudžjaka, kojemu je ovo svojevrsni hommage i koji je bio u skladateljevima mislima dok je stvarao ovu glazbu.

Poema, za milanolo

Praizvedba: 27. Muzički biennale Zagreb, Hrvatski glazbeni zavod, Zagreb,
21. travnja 2015., Milan Paľa, milanolo

Za Muzički biennale Zagreb nastala je i *Poema*, skladba posvećena specifičnom instrumentu i jedinom čovjeku na svijetu koji ga svira. Naime, tadašnji umjetnički ravnatelj MBZ-a, Krešimir Seletković, na jednom se festivalu na kojem je gostovao oduševio virtuosnim umijećem slovačkog violinista/violista Milana Paľe, a čuo ga je kako svira i jedan potpuno unikatan instrument – milanolo. Riječ je o svojevrsnom hibridu violine i viole, violini s dodanom petom, najdubljom žicom, instrumentu koji je konstruiran baš za Paľu te koji, uostalom, po njemu nosi i ime. Paľa je prihvatio ponudu da u Zagrebu, u okviru MBZ-a, održi solistički recital na kojem će izvoditi skladbe pisane za sva tri instrumenta koje svira, violinu, violu i milanolo, a prihvatio je također praizvesti i dvije skladbe hrvatskih skladatelja: *Innig bewegt* za violu Ante Knešaureka te *Poemu* Ivana Josipa Skendera, za milanolo. Slušajući jednu skladbu koju je Paľa sam skladao za milanolo, kako bi

drugima mogao prezentirati odlike i mogućnosti novoga instrumenta, Skender je bio očaran proširenim zvukovnim mogućnostima, većim spektrom alikvota, mogućnošću peterozvuka, snagom i punoćom tona, a tu je drukčiju zvukovnost istražio u skladbi slobodnije forme koja može biti shvaćena kao dugi monolog instrumenta ispjevan u nekoliko stihova. Skender će svojim riječima o skladbi zapisati da je proizašla iz načina na koji priča pjesme i priče za laku noć svojoj kćeri, da bude zabavno i njoj i njemu. Ako je priča uvijek ista, to brzo postaje zamorno pa koristi svaku priliku da se odjednom u radnji pojavi nešto novo i neočekivano, što opstruira dotadašnji tijek pa „u običnoj pjesmi ili priči odjednom bude iznenadne akcije, strave, tuge, smijeha, šarma, ironije... Završetak, u pravilu, mora biti smirujući... ili ne mora...“.

Prepoznao slušatelj ovu nakanu ili ne, svakako će doživjeti ekspresivnost (često virtuoznih) gesti skladbe i biti uronjen u njezinu zamamnu zvukovnost. Milan Paľa bio je iznimno zadovoljan novim djelom te ga često izvodi na svojim nastupima kao dodatak, a objavio ga je i na svom nosaču zvuka *Milano* 2016. godine, otkuda potiče ova snimka, zabilježena u slovačkom dvorcu Bučovice.

***Phantasmagoria*, za orkestar**

Praizvedba: 28. Muzički biennale Zagreb, Koncertna dvorana Vatroslava Lisinskog, Zagreb, 28. travnja 2017., Zagrebačka filharmonija; Dian Tchobanov, dirigent

Orkestralna *Phantasmagoria* odvodi nas u uzburkani svijet snova skladatelja koji, zbog hektičnog tempa života, ni noću ne može naći potpuni mir. Nastala je na narudžbu Muzičkog biennala Zagreb, gdje je prilikom vrlo uspješne praizvedbe (Maja Stanetti zapisala je za Vijenac: „Prava pravcata orkestralna fantazmagorija, koja bi se rado ponovno slušala.“) zabilježena snimka na ovome albumu. San otvara zvuk crotalesa koji nam posipaju čarobni pijesak po očima, odvedeći nas u začarani svijet snova, a njihov će zvuk služiti kao točka razgraničenja između svake od slika koje se, bez čvrste veze među njima, nižu u nekom zamišljenom snu. Slike ovoga snoviđenja raspršuju se i nestaju tek što bivaju naznačenima. Skender orkestralnim bojama izvrsno i plastično oblikuje kovitlac karaktera, situacija i atmosfera, gradeći na nasljeđu orkestralnih velikana romantike,

znalački oblikujući orkestraciju za ostvarivanje maksimalnog učinka. Slušatelj ima osjećaj da se zatekao u nekoj čarobnoj šumi kojoj ne može nazrijeti kraj, ispunjenoj neobičnom svjetlošću, dalekim i bliskim zvukovima i bićima, mirisima i osjetima, a kroz tu šumu kroči ne znajući što će ga dočekati na idućem koraku – čega se pomalo užasava, ali istovremeno znatiželjno i uzbuđeno iščekuje. Iznimna zvukovnost skladbe gotovo je opipljiva, a s obzirom na materiju koja je vrlo prijemčiva za sve skupine slušatelja i publike, prava je šteta da se djelo ne nalazi češće na repertoarima naših orkestara. Za ovo je ostvarenje Skender nagrađen nagradom *Stjepan Šulek* za 2017. godinu.

Uz skladbu je skladatelj priložio i program, opisujući svaki od osam odsjeka:

1. Na pragu sna

Ponekad prije sna teško je otresti sa sebe teret stvarnosti i umor stvara nove misli koje sprječavaju potpuni mir...

2. Zvona

Nagli prodor u san, novo, glasno i nepoznato mjesto... Jesu li zvona uzbuna ili pozdrav?

3. Mirisi

Sinestezija u snovima... Mirisi su boje, boje su zvukovi, zvukovi su dodiri... Vežemo li ih uz osobu? Uz prirodu? Uz miris rascvjetalog drveća u proljetnoj noći? Ili uz nekog čiji dodir još uvijek osjećamo?

4. Nemir

Nemiran san, okretanje u krevetu, nestabilna slika... meni najgori dio sna, ponekad neizbježan.

5. Ples pijanih sjenki

Ovaj ima i priču... Cesta kroz selo, kasno u noći, boje su smeđa i siva, jedna jedina slaba ulična svjetiljka, a sve izgleda kao crtić Tima Burtona u kojem je sve napravljeno od gline. Dječak i njegov pas promatraju sporu povorku koja prolazi kroz selo, ali sanjač vidi samo njih dvojicu i sjene povorke koje na njih baca ulična svjetiljka... Je li to povorka svirača, pijani mrtvački ples ili nomadska povorka, to znaju samo dječak i pas.

6. Potjera

San u kojem te netko progoni. Tko? Zašto? Nije važno, bitno je samo pobjeći od opasnosti.

7. Snovi o svemu

Opterećenje svime, previše svega. Previše ljudi, boja, događaja. Nemogućnost praćenja radnje, intenzivni snovi koji se na kraju zaborave.

8. Samoća

Sanjač ostaje sam, potrošen sa svih strana. Snovi gube svjetlo. Ostaju samo on i spokoj.

Treći gudački kvartet

Praizvedba: 58. Glazbena tribina Osijek, Arheološki muzej, Osijek, 18. listopada 2021.
Zagrebački kvartet

Gudački se kvartet uobičajeno smatra najprestižnijom glazbenom „disciplinom“ kojom kvalitetno može ovladati samo pravi skladateljski majstor. Naime, njegova je priroda takva da će vrlo brzo razotkriti ima li skladatelj potrebne alate i materiju, vještine i zanat, ali i ideje koje će znati vješto oblikovati kako bi na najbolji način iskoristio prednosti, no i limite pisanja za ovaj sastav, u kojem istovremeno do izražaja dolaze i zajedništvo i individualnost. To je istovremeno gudački orkestar u malom, ali i skup četiri solistička glasa. Neće se baš svaki skladatelj lako odlučiti na pisanje gudačkog kvarteta (mlada skladateljica Sara Glojnarčić u jednom je tekstu rekla kako je „stresno nositi se s cca. 150 godina društveno-povijesnog tereta koji taj sastav nosi.“), stoga iznenađuje što se Ivan Josip Skender s ovim izazovom uhvatio u koštac već treći put u svojoj karijeri. Prva dva kvarteta napisao je kao vrlo mlad skladatelj, 23-godišnjak, a njihov nastanak potaknuli su izvođači: Gudački kvartet Porin i Varaždinski kvartet.

Treći kvartet došao je ponovno kao narudžba: Zagrebački kvartet već je neko vrijeme želio na repertoar uvrstiti neko Skenderovo djelo, a sve se poklopilo kada je umjetnički ravnatelj Tribine, Tibor Szirovicza, na koncert Zagrebačkog kvarteta na Tribini također želio uvrstiti jedno djelo ovoga skladatelja. Odluka je

tada pala da Skender napiše novi, treći gudački kvartet. Neko je vrijeme tragao za idejom koja bi mogla pokrenuti njegovu kreativnost (ne inspiraciju, jer u inspiraciju i muze ne vjeruje, već samo u konkretne ideje), a dok je tako prebirao po svijesti i podsvijesti, jednoga mu je dana njegova kći pokazala fotografiju koju je zabilježila na ljetovanju, mnoštvo ptica koje sjede na žicama „štrika“ za sušenje rublja. Oboje ih je taj prizor, naravno, podsjetio na note smještene u notnom crtovlju pa se Skender počeo zabavljati mislju o tome kako djeca razigrano i drukčije tumače svijet oko sebe te svoj treći kvartet oblikovao kao svojevrsnu igru (ili, kako će kasnije zapisati u programskoj crtici, „niz pogleda i promišljanja o samoj fotografiji i dječjem umu kao autoru slike.“). Zadao si je određene parametre/limite smatrajući kako je gudački kvartet šakaljiva disciplina jer treba znati pronaći pravu mjeru između prevelike slobode, koja vodi u raspad, i prevelike skučenosti, koja rezultira zamorom. Ostvario je ono što ističe da mu je najvažnije, a to je da skladba, iako je ne veže neka stroga klasična forma, ima „glavu i rep“ odnosno da sadržajno funkcionira kao cjelina. U podlozi kvarteta jest načelo variranja, odnosno permutiranja jednog materijala, a Skender se poigrava i kombinirajući instrumente u odnosima 2:2 ili 1:3, uvodeći često i unisone pomake svih instrumenata. Ono što će slušateljstvo uho zaintrigirati jest upravo ta efektnost instrumentalne igre, razigrani šarm, izražena ritmičnost koja je iznjedrila i prilično *groovy* odsjeke (uz jedan neočekivani trenutak smirenja), kao i muzikalnost razlomljenih i skrivenih melodija.

Rush, za ansambl

Praizvedba: 55. Glazbena tribina Opatija, Zlatna dvorana Hotela Imperial, Opatija, 9. studenoga 2018., Festivalski ansambl Glazbene tribine Opatija; Ivan Josip Skender, dirigent

Još jedna skladba nastala na poticaj Glazbene tribine Opatija bila je *Rush*, skladana za *ad hoc* festivalski ansambl koji je na tom koncertu izvodio djela u različitim sastavima, od solo klavira do različitih duo i trio kombinacija, a Skenderovo je djelo, kao jedino za ansambl, objedinilo sve instrumente koji su bili na raspolaganju. Iako to ne čini rado, ovaj put je autor sam dirigirao praizvedbom.

Rush, ili na hrvatskom – žurba, užurbanost, jurnjava, slika je modernog života i općeg osjećaja potpune preplavljenosti količinom podražaja, u toj mjeri da više ne razaznajemo bitno od nebitnog i gubimo se puštajući da nas valovi ludila nose od točke do točke, neminovno se približavajući točki izgaranja (*burnout*). „Skladba *Rush* moja je samokritika, istovremeno i opis društva u kojem živimo. Od brzog načina života ljudi se gotovo uopće ne zaustavljaju i uživaju u ljepoti koja im je pred nosom te su glavni pokretači obaveze, stres i brige. Prezasićenost medijima i informacijama smanjili su prosječno vrijeme čovjekove usredotočenosti te od bujice informacija ono što je lijepo i duhovno gubi pravi smisao i vrijednost“, piše Skender. Gran cassa navlači zlokobne oblake na početku kompozicije, a ostali instrumenti polako se uključuju i naslojavaju u suzvučja tjeskobne napetosti. Slijedi eskalacija napetosti – svaki podražaj intenziviran je, neugodan i teško ga se otresti, što je posebno izvrsno oslikano prodornim repetitivnim tonovima puhača. Besciljna se jurnjava nastavlja, putem okrzremo poneku lijepu stvar, neki lijep glazbeni citat, ugodan i blizak, ali dalek, ne uspijevamo se na njih fokusirati zbog zamagljenosti uma; žrvanj nas tjera dalje svojim neumoljivim pulsom. Na kraju uranjamo u privid smiraja, no to je tek sumorna tjeskoba koja odjekuje i nakon zadnjeg udara gran casse...

White Line Fever, za kvartet udaraljki

Praizvedba: Festival Ljubljana, Konzervatorij za glazbu i balet, Ljubljana,
22. lipnja 2012., Slovenski tolkalni projekt

Skladba *White Line Fever* nastala je kao narudžba u okviru projekta *MusMA – Music masters on air*, europskog projekta koji je okupio nekoliko festivala i radijskih kuća s ciljem stvaranja trajne mreže za promociju i poticanje suvremenog glazbenog stvaralaštva mladih autora. Muzički biennale Zagreb, kao jedan od partnera u ovome projektu, za svog predstavnika odabrao je Skendera, a zadani sastav bio je udaraljkaški kvartet. Ideja za skladbu Skenderu je došla u automobilu – tada na čestim putovanjima boljim i lošijim autocestama Europe, u jednom je trenutku, putujući iz Padove u Beč, shvatio da se posljednjih 15 minuta vožnje uopće ne sjeća, odnosno da je vozio automatizmom, na „autopilotu“.

dok su mu svjesne misli bile okupirane drugim stvarima, poslom, rokovima, planovima... Ta se vrsta hipnoze autoputa kolokvijalno naziva još i groznica bijele crte, odnosno *white line fever*, odakle naslov kompozicije. Skladba se razlaže u tri odsjeka koje slušatelj jednostavno razabire. Početak putovanja naznačen je repetitivnošću koja sugerira stalni puls isprekidane bijele linije pod kotačima automobila. Odjednom cesta iščezava, a suočeni smo s gotovo sanjivim ugođajem skladateljevih misli koje su se odvojile od fizičkih procesa koje prolazi skladateljevo tijelo pri vožnji te lutaju vlastitim prostorima. Naglo se ovo stanje delirične hipnoze prekida, snažni udari timpana i povratak repetitivnih ritamskih obrazaca označavaju buđenje i otrježnjenje, ponovno spajanje tijela i uma, ovdje i sada.

Nakon praizvedbe u Ljubljani, skladba je izvedena u nekoliko europskih gradova (Wrocław, Basel, Beograd...), a snimka na ovom albumu ostvarena je u okviru 26. Muzičkog biennala Zagreb, 7. travnja 2013. u Studiju Bajsčić HRT-a, kada su *White Line Fever* izveli udaraljkaši iz ansambla biNg bang.

(Anti)Pop Sketches

Praizvedba: Koncertna sezona Cantus Ansambla, Hrvatski glazbeni zavod, Zagreb, 7. lipnja 2021.; Cantus Ansambl; Berislav Šipuš, dirigent

(Anti)Pop Sketches još su jedan, možda i najuvjerljiviji primjer eksternalizacije skladateljeva subjektivna doživljaja svijeta koji nas okružuje. On sam kaže kako je to jedna „bezobrazna mješavina zvučnih situacija koje možemo čuti u današnjim medijima, propuštena kroz prizmu uma okruženog suvremenom glazbom“. Ukratko, to je on, akademski skladatelj, sa svojom suvremenom glazbom, izložen popu i anti-popu, dobrom i lošem, koji vlada medijskim prostorom i od kojeg ne možemo pobjeći. Ova, možda „najmanje ozbiljna“ i najekstrovertiranija skladba na ovome albumu donosi brojne citate pop i anti-pop kulture, od Queena, preko Joy Divisiona pa do Toma Waitsa, sve to u jednom često prilično grotesknom i užasno zabavnom amalgamu, a Skender se i narugao velikom dijelu današnje glazbe koja u želji da bude *nabrijana* koristi iste postupke te sve počinje nalikovati jedno drugome, sve je isto i bezlično. Da stvar ne bi bila tako jednostavna i da

ne zaboravimo na pogled kroz prizmu „uma okruženog suvremenom glazbom“, Skender je u podlogu djela utkao nevidljiv i nečujan, ali za sam sadržaj ključan element: cijela skladba počiva na jednom dvanaesttotskom nizu i njegovim permutacijama.

Martina Bratić u svom je osvrtu o ovom djelu za časopis Cantus izvrsno sažela njegove karakteristike: „Šarolika glazbena vizija, nacrti koji se inspiriraju pop-kulturom, ali i izvrću njezine zakone, frenetičan plan koji, taman kad se negdje slušno smjestimo, odmah osjetimo da je u nekom svom parametru – off. Od polimetričnoga uvoda plesnog karaktera do nagloga skliznuća u soundtrack nekog akcijskoga filma (gdje zloguki trombon nagoviješta lava ili aligatora ili nešto treće), Skenderova *mala trgovina užasa* skriva mnogo fantastičnih čudesa. Također, neporeciva je činjenica da se autor u svojim nacrtima ne libi instrumentacijskih ekshibicija, od kojih bih svakako istaknula par trube i sintesajzera, a element boje bitan mu je i u statičnijim blokovima koji će, recimo, aludirati na neki trop Twin Peaksa. Kako bilo, djelo ne nudi mirnu kolijevku ni mjesto za opuštanje; malo je to noćna mora, malo Aladin; Aladin pak pojede aligatora, a Fred Astaire hoda svijetom s jednom kraćom nogom. Težnje Ivana Josipa Skendera ipak ne bih čitala kao pokušaj razotkrivanja velikih prijevara koje nam popularna kultura oduvijek servira, nego radije kao apeliranje na naš zvučni imaginarij kao neiscrpan i bezgraničan, i na kulturu kao mjesto varijacije i kreacije. Uz uvjerljiv kompozicijski doprinos, takve nam citatnosti uvijek treba!“



“Versatile” and “multi-talented” are epithets found in the biographies of many different artists. However, there are not many instances where they are as appropriate and accurate as in the case of Ivan Josip Skender, composer, conductor, pedagogue, artist with a playful, imaginative and inquisitive mind that spurs him on to constant explorations, adventures and games. Those who know him personally know that these characteristics are in part a result of an eternal child lying inside, who, even as an adult and with a serious career under way, encourages him to take on unexpected hobbies, including specific board and computer games, collecting various figurines and cards from different magical and fantastic worlds, calligraphy and a number of other unusual little bits that make his world. This creative artist enriches the Croatian musical culture with his works and with numerous excellent performances of pieces of classical and contemporary music, in particular many first performances (over 100!) of the pieces by his Croatian colleagues.

He was born in 1981 in Varaždin, a city known for being an unusually fertile ground for the development of musical talents. He enrolled in music school at the age of 5, first in piano, and then, at the age of 7, also in clarinet. He graduated from music school (music theory) and from a gymnasium, both at the age of 16, as he skipped two grades in elementary school. In spite of his youth, he passed the medical school entrance exam. If he had become a doctor, he would have inherited his mother’s medical practice, but his interest in music won over, and so he enrolled in composition studies at the Music Academy in Zagreb, in the class of Željko Brkanović, as – it is worth noting – the youngest composition student in the history of the Academy. The beginnings of the desire to create music date back to his youth, as already at the age of 9, he showed an interest in composing, and soon created his first works. Two years after enrolling in composition studies, he also enrolled in conducting studies, in the class of Vjekoslav Šutej. After successfully completing both studies at the beginning of the new millennium, Skender entered the Croatian musical scene as one of the most full-fledged musicians of his time, constantly improving his knowledge, perfecting his skills, developing and freeing his imagination. He attended various

master classes and workshops for conducting (with Klaus Arp, Bertrand de Billy, Zubin Mehta, etc.) and composition (with Michael Jarell, Jozsef Soproni).

If you asked him whether he considered himself a conductor or a composer, he would say that these were two aspects of the same thing, and that for him it merely meant “whether one is a musician or not”. In any case, he will admit that this dual role helped him a lot, the composer in him helped the conductor decipher the ideas of the composers whose scores were on the music stand in front of him more quickly and easily, whereas the conductor has taught the composer many technical skills that make his scores well and skilfully prepared, regardless of the instrument to which they are dedicated. He is reluctant to conduct his own works, and dislikes writing about them for program booklets and catalogues, even though he is good with words.

His conducting commitments have taken him to different parts of the world; he has collaborated with many Croatian ensembles, and there is hardly an ensemble in Zagreb that he did not perform with. His early professional life is associated with the Palma Academic Choir of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Zagreb (2004-2012) – his enthusiasm, musicality and love of vocal and choral music have made these years one of the most successful in the choir’s recent history. Under his leadership, Palma has performed at a very high, almost professional level, as evidenced by the many awards won at competitions and festivals in Croatia and abroad. In parallel, he has built another two important and ongoing lines of his professional conducting career. The first is his engagement at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, where he served as choirmaster from 2005 to 2014, then conductor of the Opera until 2019, and the other one is his ongoing collaboration with the Cantus Ensemble, with whom he has been cooperating since 2008, and for the last ten years as a permanent conductor. It was with the members of the Cantus Ensemble that Skender realized the greatest number of performances and premieres of works by Croatian authors, many of which are available as recordings.

His teaching career began in 2009, when he became an assistant to Prof. Uroš Lajovic at the Music Academy in Zagreb, where he is currently an associate

professor at the Department of Conducting, Percussion and Harp and the Department of Singing.

It should also be noted that in the 2013/2014 season he was artistic director of the Opera of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, and is a member of the program board of the Music Biennale Zagreb since 2019, while in 2020 was appointed a member of the Assembly of Representatives of the Croatian Composers' Society.

Skender writes with ease. He is not a composer to whom one can apply the romantic image of a misunderstood and tortured artist suffering for his art and in the agony of unfulfilled aspirations produces his music – Skender's playful mind can very quickly concoct musical concepts and develop them into the skeleton of a new piece that he then frequently “draws” on “plain” paper, supplementing the draft with notes of everything he hears in his head – motifs, details of instrumentation, certain situations... Only then, when the composition is really done, does the difficult part (for him) of the composing process begin: translating these thoughts into bars, “typing” for days, transcribing notes in computer software.

Today, his opus contains more than one hundred pieces, most of which, in addition to several compositions for various orchestral ensembles, were written for smaller chamber groups and ensembles. His compositions have been performed in most European countries, as well as in the United States, Canada and Mexico. It may be less known that he is the author of a large corpus of music for theatre and musicals, while one of his greatest achievements is undoubtedly the opera *Stribor's Forest* (for children and adults) based on the fairy-tale of the same name by Ivana Brlić Mažuranić, which has also been one of the most successful projects of the Music Biennale Zagreb. Skender composed this magical opera when he was only 29 (!), and it was performed as many as 27 times (some days there were two performances a day!) because of the high demand of the audience at the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka, the opera house where it was staged, which is a truly impressive number of performances for a stage piece from the Croatian contemporary music repertoire.

Most of Skender's compositions were created at the request of the performers themselves, illustrating their willingness to choose and play his music, and he has always enjoyed audience and peer support. It is therefore unusual that, at the age of 40, this composer did not yet receive appropriate recognitions he undoubtedly deserves (he received the Rector's Award as a student and the *Stjepan Šulek* Award for the orchestral piece *Phantasmagoria* in 2017, which is also a part of this album). While awards and honours in Croatia are little more than a line in a biography, needed for professional development, it is still unusual that this opus, now mature, has received no other major award; I consider this to be an omission (or at least an oversight) of the Croatian musical community. Skender is not too deterred by that. He diligently continues to create, guided by his own criteria of quality and answering primarily to himself. Because, he is known for saying, quoting the science fiction writer Larry Niven – "Writers who write for other writers should write letters." He does not compose in order to experiment or because of his desire to discover something new and unseen, he is not driven by the dictates of the "contemporary", he is happy when he achieves a meaningful (not necessarily formal!) whole in his pieces, which are usually the externalization of the thoughts that occupy him and the multiplicity of that which surrounds him. This dose of sincerity, unpretentious approach and the absence of (quasi)intellectual constructs, as well as a highly professional, detailed and meticulous approach to work are precisely the factors that make his music well-written, receptive and close to any interested listener and the reason why it will surely stand the test of time.

The works on this album, without explicit intent, are a cross section of Skender's opus in the last ten years. Likewise, these are, by chance, though perhaps subconsciously conditioned, also the works that were created under the direct influence of the composer's mental and physical state and the circumstances of his life. Though varied in terms of content, they are often linked by a very similar underlying story, namely the author's need to express the circumstances and situations that occupy him every day. Everything he experiences in everyday life, good or bad, arresting or repulsive, everything that passes through his system and leaves a mark, it all becomes an echo and a reflection of the time in his music.

Circles, for clarinet and percussion

First performance: 53rd Opatija Music Panel, Golden Hall of the Hotel Imperial, Opatija, November 3, 2016, Domagoj Pavlović, clarinet; Ivana Kuljериć Bilić, percussion

*“Time turns
spins in a whirl
curves
and what will be
may have already
come to pass
somewhere inside
like an echo of the heart (...)”*

These are the verses by Duško Babić, one of Skender’s favourite contemporary poets, whose verses he has set to music in several of his pieces. Skender included this quote in a brief commentary on the premiere of the composition *Circles*, and this indication of inspiration is enough to know that what we have before us is a poetic and imaginative piece.

The composition was commissioned by Opatija Music Panel and the performers themselves – Ivana Kuljериć Bilić and Domagoj Pavlović. In six sections, Skender outlines a very clear dramaturgical arch, a circle and an orbit rooted in the idea of the piece, as confirmed by the composer: “The composition *Circles* is an echo of thoughts about the circle of life, natural cycles, music, the cycle of human beings and how everything is connected. Nature, like man, also moves like a large wheel, always spinning round, moving through time and space, each of its spokes rotating steadily in a given direction in order to maintain equilibrium.”

The piece opens detached, with a single vibraphone tone which seems to initiate some sort of ritual. The clarinet brings meditative melodies, and the vibraphone and other percussions that gradually join in are there to underline the continuous state of trance. In the second section, as in the majority of the composition, the instruments speak concurrently, but not necessarily in dialogue. The

clarinet is now cheerful and dashing playfully, and the percussions dance with it in the same mood. In the third section, the percussions take the lead, with some, almost sarcastic, comments from the clarinet. The fourth section puts an end to the relaxed atmosphere of the preceding sections, by introducing a seemingly fluttering, but in fact nervous and restless, clarinet line, whose anxiety is further heightened by erratic drum beats. In the fifth section, the instruments finally really unite and move together in a motoric body of a pleasant flow that suddenly and unexpectedly fades into silence in the decrescendo of maracas, while the final section brings serenity, more poetic and contemplative thoughts of a longer breath that gradually vanish, and with the echo of the final lone stroke of vibraphone plunge into the silence from which the composition arose, closing the circle. In each section, the play with colours is also important; Skender underlines the characters with different sound combinations, changing the type of percussion as well as the registers of the clarinet, and in one section replaces the Bb clarinet with the Eb clarinet, opening another shade. The instrumentation itself as well as the manner of “building” the composition – the richness of the content and the colours achieved through ascetic means – remind us of Marko Rudžjak, to whom this is a kind of homage and who was in the composer’s thoughts while he was creating this music.

Poem, for milano

First performance: 27th Music Biennale Zagreb, Croatian Music Institute, Zagreb, April 21, 2015, Milan Pala, milano

Poem, a composition for a specific instrument and the only person in the world who plays it, was also written for the Music Biennale Zagreb. The then artistic director of the MBZ, Krešimir Seletković, was fascinated by the virtuoso skills of the Slovak violinist/violist Milan Pala at a festival which he attended as a guest, and heard him play a completely unique instrument, the milano. It is a sort of a hybrid of a violin and a viola, a violin with an added fifth (deepest) string, an instrument that was designed specifically for Pala and is, in fact, named after him. Pala accepted the offer to hold a solo recital in Zagreb, as

part of the MBZ, on which he would perform compositions written for all three instruments he plays – the violin, the viola and the milanolo – and he also agreed to premiere two compositions by Croatian composers: *Innig bewegt* for viola by Ante Knešaurek and *Poem* for milanolo by Ivan Josip Skender. Listening to a composition Paľa himself wrote for the milanolo, as a showcase piece in order to present the characteristics and possibilities of the new instrument, Skender was fascinated by the expanded sound possibilities, a broader range of aliquots, the possibility of pentachords, the power and richness of tone, and he explored this different sound in the composition of a freer form which can be interpreted as a long monologue of the instrument sung in several verses. Skender wrote that the composition originated from the way he tells bedtime poems and stories to his daughter, how he makes them fun for both him and her. If the story remains the same, it quickly becomes boring, so he uses every opportunity to suddenly add something new and unexpected to the plot, which obstructs its present flow so “in an ordinary poem or story there is suddenly action, horror, sadness, laughter, wit, irony... The end, as a rule, must be calming... or not...”

Whether or not the listener recognizes this goal, they will surely experience the expressiveness of the (often virtuoso) gestures of the composition and will be immersed in its seductive sound. Milan Paľa was extremely satisfied with the new work and often performs it as a bonus piece, and also included it on his CD *Milanolo* in 2016. The piece was recorded at Bučovice Castle in Slovakia and that recording is now republished on this album.

Phantasmagoria, for orchestra

First performance: 28th Music Biennale Zagreb, Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall, Zagreb, April 28, 2017, Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra; Dian Tchobanov, conductor

The orchestral composition *Phantasmagoria* takes us into a turbulent world of the composer's dreams as he cannot find peace even at night because of his hectic pace of life. It was commissioned by the Music Biennale Zagreb, where the recording on this album was made at its very successful premiere (Maja

Stanetti wrote for Vijenac: "A true orchestral phantasmagoria that we would love to hear again."). The dream opens with the sound of crotales sprinkling our eyes with magical sand, taking us to the enchanted world of dreams, and their sound will serve as a dividing point between each of the images aligned in this imagined dream, without a strong link between them. Images of this dream dissipate and fade away just as they are alluded to. Skender uses orchestral colours to excellently and plastically shape the whirlpool of characters, situations and atmospheres, building on the legacy of orchestral greats of Romanticism, expertly shaping the orchestration to achieve maximum effect. The listener feels as if they have found themselves in an endless enchanted forest filled with unusual light, distant and near sounds and creatures, scents and sensations, and they go through it without knowing what lies ahead of them in the next step – which terrifies them somewhat but at the same time makes them curious and excited. The exceptional sonority of the composition is almost palpable, and given that the material is very acceptive to all groups of listeners and audience, it is a shame that the piece is not found more often in the repertoire of our orchestras. Skender was awarded the *Stjepan Šulek* Award for this piece in 2017. The composer enclosed with the composition a program describing each of the eight sections:

1. At the threshold of a dream

Sometimes, before a dream comes, it is difficult to shake the weight of reality, and fatigue produces new thoughts, which frustrate perfect tranquility...

2. Bells

A sudden incursion into a dream, a new, loud and unfamiliar place... are these the bells of an alarm, or a greeting?

3. Scents

A synesthesia in dreams... Scents are colors, colors are sounds, sound is touch... Do we associate them with a person? With nature? With the smell of blossoming trees on a spring night? Or with someone whose touch we can still feel?

4. Restlessness

Restless sleep, tossing and turning in bed, unstable images... For me, the worst part of sleep, sometimes unavoidable.

5. Dance of drunken shadows

This one has a story... a village road, late at night, the colors are brown and grey, and a single weak street lamp. It looks like a Tim Burton animation, where everything is made of clay. A boy and his dog observe the slow procession passing through the village, but the dreamer only sees the two of them, and the shadows of the procession cast on them by the street lamp... is it a parade of musicians, a drunken dance of the dead or a procession of nomads – only the boy and the dog know.

6. Manhunt

A dream that you are being chased. By whom? Why? It does not matter, escaping danger is the only important thing.

7. Dreams of Everything

Burdened with everything, too much of everything. Too many people, colors, events. Impossibility to follow the plot, intense dreams that are in the end forgotten.

8. Solitude

The dreamer is left alone, drained all over. Dreams lose light. Only the dreamer and the quiet remain.

String Quartet No. 3

First performance: 58th Osijek Music Panel, Archaeological Museum, Osijek, October 18, 2021, Zagreb Quartet

The string quartet is generally regarded as the most prestigious musical “discipline” which can only be grasped by a true composing master. Its nature is such that it will reveal very quickly if the composer possesses the necessary tools and substance, skills and craftsmanship, as well as ideas that they know how to expertly shape in order to best use the advantages and the limitations of

writing for this ensemble, in which both unity and individuality are accentuated. It is not only a mini string orchestra, but also a group of four soloists. Not every composer will easily choose to write a string quartet (the young composer Sara Glojnaric once said in a text that it is “stressful to deal with approx. 150 years of socio-historical burden that the string quartet carries.”), so it is surprising that Ivan Josip Skender has already taken up this challenge three times over the course of his career. He wrote the first two quartets as a very young composer, a 23-year old, at the request of their performers, the Porin String Quartet and the Varaždin Quartet.

His String Quartet No. 3 was also a commission. The Zagreb Quartet wanted to have a piece by Skender in its repertoire for a while, so when the artistic director of the Music Panel, Tibor Szirovicza, decided to present a piece by this composer at the concert of the Zagreb Quartet at this festival, things lined up nicely. The decision was then made for Skender to write a new piece, a third string quartet. For a while, he looked for an idea which would spark his creativity (not inspiration because he does not believe in inspiration or muses, only in specific ideas), and while going through his consciousness and subconsciousness, one day his daughter showed him a photo she had taken during the summer holidays – a photo of a multitude of birds sitting on several laundry lines. The scene, of course, reminded them both of the notes in a music staff, and Skender began thinking about how children interpret the world around them in a playful and different way, so he formed his third quartet like some kind of a game (or, as he would later write in the commentary of the program “a series of views and reflections about the photo itself and the mind of the child that is the author of this photo.”). He set himself certain parameters/limits, thinking that a string quartet is a tricky genre as it is necessary to find the right balance between it being neither too free, which leads to breakdown, nor too constricted, which results in weariness. He has accomplished what he believes to be the most important thing, that is, that the composition, while not bound by a strict classical form, has “a head and a tail”, meaning that it functions as a whole in terms of content. The basis of the quartet is the principle of variation, namely the permutation of one material, and Skender also plays

and combines instruments in ratios of 2:2 or 1:3, often introducing unison shifts of all instruments. What will intrigue the listener's ear is the effectiveness of the instrumental play, the playful charm, the pronounced rhythm that also brought out some rather groovy sections (with one unexpected moment of calm), along with the musicality of fragmented and hidden melodies.

***Rush*, for ensemble**

First performance: 55th Opatija Music Panel, Golden Hall of the Hotel Imperial, Opatija, November 9, 2018, Opatija Music Panel Festival Ensemble; Ivan Josip Skender, conductor

Another piece commissioned by the Opatija Music Panel is *Rush*, written for the *ad hoc* festival ensemble that performed pieces in different configurations at this concert, from piano solo to various duo and trio combinations, and Skender's piece, as the only one for the entire ensemble, fused all available instruments. While he is reluctant to do so, this time the author himself conducted the premiere.

Rush – to hurry, dash, move with haste is the picture of modern life and the overall feeling of being completely overwhelmed by the quantity of stimuli, so much so that we are no longer able to distinguish the important from the insignificant, and we lose ourselves, letting the waves of madness carry us from one point to another, inevitably bringing us closer to a point of burnout. “The composition *Rush* is my self-criticism, but also a description of the society we live in. As a result of the faster pace of life, people rarely stop to enjoy the beauty that is right in front of them and their primary motivators are responsibilities, stress and worries. Excessive media and information saturation has reduced a person's average concentration time and in this flood of information, what is beautiful and spiritual loses its true purpose and worth,” Skender wrote. The gran cassa forms ominous clouds at the beginning of the composition, and the rest of the instruments slowly join in and layer in the harmonies of anxious tension. The tension then escalates – every stimulus is more intense, unpleasant and hard to shake off, which is particularly well illustrated by the piercing repetitive tones of the wind instruments. The aimless pursuit continues, along the way we stumble

upon beautiful things, some marvellous musical quotes, pleasant and close but distant, we cannot focus on them because of the fuzziness of the mind; the millstone pushes us with its incessant pulse. In the end, we dive into a semblance of calm, but it is only a gloomy anxiety that echoes even after the final stroke of the gran cassa...

***White Line Fever*, for percussion quartet**

First performance: Ljubljana Festival, Conservatory of Music and Ballet, Ljubljana, June 22, 2012, Slovenian Percussion Project

The composition *White Line Fever* was commissioned by the *MusMA – Music Masters on Air* project, a European project that brought together various festivals and radio broadcasters to create a permanent network for promoting and encouraging contemporary music creation by young authors. Music Biennale Zagreb, as one of the partners in the project, chose Skender as its representative. The assigned ensemble in the project was a percussion quartet. Skender came up with the idea for the composition in the car – at the time, he was often traveling on Europe's best and worst highways and at one point, on his way from Padua to Vienna, he realized that he could not even remember the last 15 minutes of the journey, namely that he was driving on autopilot, while his conscious thoughts were preoccupied with other things, work, deadlines, plans... This type of highway hypnosis is colloquially known as the *white line fever*, hence the title of the composition. The piece is divided into three sections that the listener can easily discern. The beginning of the journey is indicated by a repetitiveness that suggests the steady pulse of the broken white line under the wheels of the car. All of a sudden, the road disappears and we find ourselves facing an almost dreamlike mood of the composer's thoughts, which have separated from the physical processes going through the composer's body during the drive and roam their own spaces. This state of delirious hypnosis comes to a sudden end, powerful timpani strokes and the return of repetitive rhythmic patterns signify waking up and sobering up, a reunion of body and spirit, here and now.

After the premiere in Ljubljana, the composition was performed in several European cities (Wrocław, Basel, Belgrade...), and the performance on this album was recorded at the 26th Music Biennale Zagreb, on April 7, 2013 at the Bajsić Studio of the Croatian Radiotelevision, when the *White Line Fever* was performed by the percussionists of the biNg bang ensemble.

(Anti)Pop Sketches

First performance: Cantus Ensemble Concert Cycle, Croatian Music Institute, Zagreb, June 7, 2021, Cantus Ensemble; Berislav Šipuš, conductor

(Anti)Pop Sketches is another example, perhaps the most compelling one, of the externalization of the composer's subjective experience of the world around us. He himself stated it was a "brazen blend of sound situations that could be heard in today's media, filtered through the prism of a mind surrounded by contemporary music." In a nutshell, this is him, the academic composer, with his contemporary music, exposed to pop and anti-pop music, good and bad, that dominates all the media and from which we cannot escape. This, perhaps "the least serious" and the most extroverted composition on the album, brings numerous quotes from pop and anti-pop culture, from Queen, through Joy Division to Tom Waits, all in an often rather grotesque and incredibly entertaining amalgam. Skender also makes fun of much of today's music which, in its desire to be *hype*, uses the same procedures, so that everything begins to look alike, everything feels the same and bland. But to make things more complicated, and not to forget the view through the prism of "a mind surrounded by contemporary music", Skender has woven into the basis of the piece an element that is invisible and inaudible yet essential for the content: the whole composition rests on a single twelve-tone sequence and its permutations.

In her review of this piece for the Cantus magazine, Martina Bratić neatly summed up its characteristics: "A colourful musical vision, sketches inspired by pop culture, but also by those that twist its laws; a frenetic plan that, just as we get our audio bearing, we immediately sense is - off - in some parameter of its own. From the polymetric introduction of a dance-like character to

the sudden slide into a soundtrack of an action movie (in which an ominous trombone alludes to a lion or an alligator or something else), Skender's *little shop of horrors* hides many fantastic marvels. It is also an irrefutable fact that in his sketches the author is not afraid to use instrumentation feats, among which I must highlight a trumpet-synthesizer pair, and the element of colour is also important to him in the more static blocks that, in a way, allude to some Twin Peaks trope. In any case, the piece does not offer a peaceful cradle or a place to relax; it is a mixture of a little nightmare and a little Aladdin; Aladdin eats the alligator, and Fred Astaire walks around with one shorter leg. However, I would not take Ivan Josip Skender's aspirations as an attempt to expose the big cons that popular culture always serves us, but rather as an appeal to our sound imagination, inexhaustible and infinite, and to culture as a place of variation and creation. We could always use such a citationality if it were coupled with a convincing compositional contribution!"

IVAN JOSIP
SKENDER

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