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A NATIONAL MUSICAL HEROINE AT THE MARGINS OF CONCERT LIFE: THE CASE OF DORA PEJAČEVIĆ

Izvleček: Članek raziskuje politične okoliščine, ki so bile doslej spregledane pri recepciji glasbenega opusa Dore Pejačević. Ugotavlja, da je pretekla in sedanja marginalizacija njenega dela odraz hrvaške glasbene historiografije, ki je glasbeno produkcijo žensk izključila iz koncertnih odrov in znanstvenega diskurza.

Ključne besede: Dora Pejačević, glasbena produkcija žensk, hrvaška glasbena kritika, hrvaška glasbena historiografija, zgodovina recepcije

Abstract: This article explores the political context that has been overlooked in the reception of Dora Pejačević's oeuvre. It argues that the historical and contemporary marginalization of her work reflects broader patterns in Croatian musical historiography that have excluded women's musical production from concert stages and scholarly discourse.

Keywords: Dora Pejačević, women's musical production, Croatian music criticism, Croatian musical historiography, history of reception

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No composer has been more extensively and comprehensively treated in Croatian musical historiography than Dora Pejačević (1885–1923). Since she came under the spotlight of Croatian musicology in the mid-1970s, she has been a subject of sustained scholarly attention. This surge of interest was primarily due to the donation of her musical and biographical materials by her husband, Ottomar von Lumbe, to the Croatian Music Institute in Zagreb in 1972. In particular, this donation coincided fortuitously with the emergence of the first wave of feminist musicology. Since then five monographs have been published about her.[1] Numerous scholarly articles[2] and several musicological symposia[3] have addressed her work. Her legacy — documents, photographs and manuscripts — has been meticulously ordered, digitized and made accessible on the website of the Croatian Music Institute (Hrvatski glazbeni zavod).[4] Nearly all of her preserved compositions have been published by the Croatian Music Information Centre (Muzički informativni centar) in Zagreb.[5] They have also been recorded by various labels,[6] including a complete edition released as a singular project by the German label CPO.

Interest in her life and personality has extended beyond music into other artforms. She has been the subject of three films and a television series[7] and has inspired

1 Koraljka Kos is the author of four major monographs on Dora Pejačević: *Dora Pejačević* (1982); *Dora Pejačević: Leben und Werk* (1987); *Dora Pejačević* (1998); and a revised edition of the latter (2008). More recently, a new monograph by Domagoj Marić, *Dora Pejačević: život i svjetovi* has become available.

2 Representative examples can be found in a two-volume collection of scholarly articles devoted to Dora Pejačević: *Zbornik radova sa Znanstvenog skupa "Dora Pejačević – život, rad i značenje" održanog u Našicama 7. i 8. rujna 1985. godine*, ed. Zdenka Weber (Našice: SIZ kulture i tehničke kulture, 1987); and *Izazovi baštine Dore Pejačević: zbornik radova znanstveno-stručnog skupa,* ed. Silvija Lučevnjak (Našice: Zavičajni muzej Našice, 2022). Additionally, an entire issue of the journal *Arti musices* 55, no. 2 (2024) is devoted to the context, creative output and reception of Pejačević's music.

3 Major symposia dedicated to Dora Pejačević were held in 1985 (Našice, on the centenary of her birth), 2001 (Vienna, as part of an international project led by the Music Information Centre, Zagreb), 2020 (as part of the 26. Memorijal Dore Pejačević, marking 135 years since her birth), and 2023 (Zagreb and Našice, on the centenary of her death, organized by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts).

4 Hrvatski glazbeni zavod, "Ostavština Dore Pejačević", accessed 28 May 2025, https://hgz.eindigo.net/?pr=l&mrf%5B10043%5D%5B12777%5D=a.

5 Croatian Music Information Centre, "Dora Pejačević", accessed 28 May 2025, https://mic.hr/en/?s=dora+peja%C4%8Devi%C4%87&post_type=product&post_cat=sheet-music.

6 A considerable number of Croatian and international record labels have released Dora Pejačević's works, either as complete author albums or individual recordings. Among the Croatian labels are Jugoton, Croatia Records, Dallas Records, Cantus, HDS, Orfej, Aquarius Records and Gis Records; international publishers include Re Nova Classics, Herb Classics, Passavant and CPO.

7 On the basis of the television series *Kontesa Dora* (1989), Zvonimir Berković directed a feature film of the same title in 1993. In 1996, Mira Wolf produced a docudrama for television entitled

numerous visual artists, writers and poets.[8] It would therefore be entirely inaccurate to claim that she is absent from the Croatian public cultural sphere. On the contrary — she is, as the musicologist Vesna Rožić aptly put it, a Croatian brand, a cultural export product and,[9] in short, a source of national pride.

Yet her music is still rarely performed in concert programmes across Croatia. When it is included, the repertoire usually features a limited selection from the early phase of her oeuvre: short piano pieces or brief compositions for violin and piano or voice and piano. The most mature part of her output — chamber music, orchestral and concertante works, music for voice and orchestra and her final compositions such as the late solo songs or the Sonata in A-flat major, Op. 57, which is also her last work for piano solo — remains largely unknown to the wider Croatian public. Exceptions to this pattern are commemorative events such as the Dora Pejačević Festival, held in Zagreb from 1 to 5 March 2023 to mark the centenary of her death. This festival also featured a concert series that included performances of several lesser-known works.

When examined in the broader context of the persistent underrepresentation of women composers in public musical life, the limited presence of Pejačević's music in contemporary concert programs aligns with patterns observed both globally and locally. Despite sustained efforts by feminist musicology over the past fifty years to increase the visibility of women composers and examine the historical and structural factors contributing to their marginalization — including restricted access to public musical life and formal training, prevailing assumptions about creative capacities and interpretative biases in musical historiography — the overall representation of women composers in concert programming remains limited.[10]

While international initiatives and data collections have documented gradual, though modest, progress in improving the visibility of women composers, local contexts often reveal more pronounced disparities. For instance, the DONNE — Women in Music Foundation's 2021/2022 report,[11] based on programming data from 111 orchestras across thirty-one countries, recorded that a mere 7.7 percent of 20,400 performed works were composed by women. Rather than signalling substantial progress, this figure serves as a reminder of the structural inertia that continues to limit the inclusion of women composers at a global level.

Dora Pejačević, and in 2022 the documentary *Dora Pejačević – Escape into Music*, directed by Kyra Steckeweh and Tim van Beveren, premiered.

8 There are portraits of Dora Pejačević by Maksimilijan Vanka (1917), Josip Crnobori (2005), Đuro Jelovšek (1916) and Dragutin Šantek (1984) plus literary works by Ivana Marija Vidović (*Život cvijeća*, 2006), Zdravko Luburić (*Slavonska simfonija*, 2008), Stanko Rozgaj (*Priča o mladoj Dori*, 1997) and Milana Vuković Runjić (*Proklete Hrvatice*, 2012).

9 Rožić, "Feminizam i muzikologija" (2007).

10 Ingelton, "Written Out of History".

11 Di Laccio, *Equality & Diversity in Global Repertoire*.

Extending this inquiry to the national level, a parallel study was conducted in 2023 as part of the She Is Music project at the Croatian Varaždin School of Music (Glazbena škola u Varaždinu),[12] involving students and faculty from the departments of music theory and piano. According to the project coordinator Petra Zidarić Györek, the aim was "to raise awareness among students, teachers and the broader public about the issue of the (in)visibility of women composers in Croatian concert programming and music curricula and to shed light on the challenges of reception through selected works by women composers."[13] Having at one stage participated in the project myself, I take the insights it produced as a point of departure for the present analysis.

As part of the project, students reviewed the 2021/22 concert season in several Croatian cities and institutions. Their survey, which covered concert programs in Split and Osijek, as well as those of prominent national ensembles and festivals, revealed that compositions by women accounted for only two percent of the total repertoire.[14] This percentage rose to 6.77 percent only when the Zagreb Music Biennale[15] was included — a contemporary music festival known for its strong emphasis on inclusive programming. These findings show that within the Croatian context the representation of women composers in mainstream concert life remains markedly below the already modest international average.[16]

12 Funded by Varaždin County, the French Institute in Zagreb and the Varaždin School of Music, the project was not limited to local implementation. It was also presented internationally on 27 October 2023 at the Sorbonne University in Paris as part of the official Equality Month — Combating Discrimination programme and the musicological seminar "GeMM — Genre, Musique, Musiciennes"; on 29 April 2023 in an online session of the European musicology seminar "Building Relationships in a Changing World", organized by IReMus (Institut de recherche en musicologie), Paris; and on 16 November 2024 in Novi Sad at the conference "Arsfid: Ars-Femina-Identitas", hosted by the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad.

13 Zidarić-Györek and Maričić, "Projekt *She Is Music*", 351.

14 The review was based on the 2021/22 concert season of the Zagreb Soloists and all the subscription series of the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, the Lisinski Saturdays concert cycle, the Choir and Symphony Orchestra of Croatian Radiotelevision and the Varaždin Chamber Orchestra, as well as festivals such as the Osor Musical Evenings and the Dubrovnik Summer Festival. All the concert programmes used for the analysis were publicly available on the official websites of the respective ensembles, festivals and concert organizations.

15 The Zagreb Music Biennale was considered separately, since it is not held annually and therefore does not reflect the regular representation of women composers in concert life. As a festival specializing in contemporary music, it featured a significantly higher share of works by women (thirty-two percent). A similar pattern would be observed in the season of the Cantus Ensemble, likewise devoted to contemporary repertoire. However, such programming typically includes works by living composers. In contrast, ensembles and concert institutions that curate regular seasons for general audiences — drawing on repertoire from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries — rarely feature works by women, and performances of past women composers remain exceptionally rare where not entirely absent.

16 Zidarić-Györek and Maričić, "Projekt *She Is Music*", 353.

There is, therefore, little doubt that the position of women's musical creativity — particularly its historical output — within Croatian concert and musical life remains problematic. While it forms part of the broader issue of systemic underrepresentation of women composers, the case of Dora Pejačević appears to follow a somewhat different trajectory. What distinguishes it is the conspicuous imbalance between the enduring public presence of her figure and the striking absence of her music in performance and institutional programming. On the one hand, she occupies a prominent symbolic position as a national musical icon. She serves as an emblem of cultural identity for a country whose musical production developed historically on the margins of European musical history and today seeks greater recognition within that tradition. On the other hand, her compositions remain largely excluded from the programming of national concert institutions and ensembles. These very institutions are publicly funded and, in principle, charged with preserving and presenting works considered part of the national cultural heritage.

This asymmetry — between the imagined role of her music as a cornerstone of national musical identity and its minimal presence in the current musical landscape — raises serious questions. It invites reflection not only on programming practices, but also on the mechanisms through which cultural memory is constructed, institutionalized and enacted. That a composer so often invoked as a symbol of national pride should remain so infrequently heard in the concert hall presents a paradox that is difficult to overlook. This paradox, moreover, appears to be the result of a complex network of relations — cultural, institutional and ideological. While initially grounded in the gendered position of Pejačević as a woman composer, this network seems to have developed a logic of its own, one that no longer explicitly depends on gender yet continues to reproduce the effects of gendered exclusion. Understanding how such a structure could emerge — and how it continues to shape the reception and circulation of her music — forms the central concern of the present analysis.

NATIONAL ANTI-HERO

A substantial portion of Dora Pejačević's compositional output was both performed and published during her lifetime. Her works were heard not only in private salons but also on public concert stages in major European cities such as Budapest, Vienna, Dresden, Stockholm and London, where they were met with consistently favourable reviews.[17] Albeit to a lesser extent, her music was also performed in her native Croatia — in Zagreb, Našice and Osijek.

Her reception, however, varied markedly across national contexts. Whereas international critics generally responded to her work with appreciation and praise,

17 Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982), 2.

some domestic voices adopted a more cautious tone. One such example appears in the influential Croatian daily *Obzor*, which by the early twentieth century had established itself as the principal political newspaper of the Croatian liberal bourgeois intelligentsia. Originally founded in 1860 under the name *Pozor* and continuously published as *Obzor* from 1885 until 1941, the newspaper emerged under the patronage of Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer and was known for its opposition to Habsburg bureaucratic centralism and the policy of Magyarization in Croatia. Although politically diverse — featuring contributors ranging from moderate unionists and rationalists to national radicals — *Obzor* maintained a consistent editorial position grounded in national liberalism and cultural autonomy. By 1905, it had ceased to function as a party organ and became an independent political daily with a clearly articulated national and modern editorial stance.[18]

Within this framework, *Obzor* also served as a platform for cultural criticism, including commentary on musical life. Following a concert at the Croatian Music Institute in November 1910, which featured Pejačević's Quartet in D minor, Op. 25 for violin, viola, cello and piano, an anonymous *Obzor* reviewer offered the following critique:

> Her composition revealed both solid musical training and considerable talent, yet these alone are not sufficient qualifications for engaging with a musical genre that reached its peak long ago and today yields little more than imitation.[19]

This remark, while acknowledging her technical competence, reflects the critical standards of a publication deeply embedded in the national cultural discourse of the time and suggests that Pejačević's stylistic orientation — shaped in dialogue with broader European traditions — did not fully align with the expectations of certain domestic critics operating within that framework.

Pejačević's reception in the domestic press was shaped by a variety of critical positions — ranging from institutionally framed commentary in *Obzor* to more personally inflected judgments such as those offered by Antun Gustav Matoš (1873–1914), a central figure in Croatian literary modernism. From 1895 until shortly before his death in 1914, Matoš engaged — at times more, at times less, intensively — in music criticism, publishing reviews and essays in a wide range of newspapers and literary periodicals, including *Hrvatsko pravo*, *Hrvatska sloboda*, *Pokret*, *Samouprava*, *Agramer Tagblatt*, *Hrvatska pozornica*, *Savremenik*, *Mlada Hrvatska*, *Obzor* and *Novosti*. His critical voice, shaped by a refined literary sensibility and a pronounced

18 Gavranović, "U borbi za nacionalni identitet", 122–126.

19 "Bachmann-Trio", *Obzor*, 16 November 1910, 2–3, quoted in Marić, *Dora Pejačević*, 152–153. All translations are by the author of this article unless otherwise indicated.

aesthetic rigour, often conveyed strong and unambiguous judgments, untempered by the conventions of diplomatic or institutional restraint.

One of the most striking examples of such critical candour appears in *Savremenik*, a leading Croatian literary journal published by the Croatian Writers' Society. Appearing mostly as a monthly between 1906 and 1923 and with some interruptions until 1941, *Savremenik* served as a central platform for the nation's most prominent writers. Under the editorship of Branimir Livadić (1907–1919), this journal became the principal organ of Croatian literary life. Though not formally avant-garde, it espoused a recognizably modernist orientation and was notably receptive to the rising generation of expressionist authors such as Miroslav Krleža, Antun Branko Šimić and Gustav Krklec. In addition to literary criticism, *Savremenik* regularly published reviews of visual art and music, reflecting a broad and integrated approach to contemporary cultural production.

It was in this context that Matoš, in his reflective overview of the 1910 concert season, published in *Savremenik*, commented on the same November concert at which Dora Pejačević's music had been performed. His verdict was notably dismissive, drawing a stark contrast between the concert's high-calibre performers and the perceived secondary nature of the music itself. He wrote: "Among first-rate forces, we heard entirely second-rate art [...]. The Bachmann Trio was employed to illustrate the charming but dilettantish compositional talent of Countess Dora Pejačević [...]."[20]

Matoš's critique, couched in characteristically sharp and ironic language, not only reveals his high aesthetic standards but also reflects a broader scepticism toward what he may have perceived as derivative or insufficiently modernist musical expression. That such an assessment appeared in *Savremenik* — a journal at the very centre of national literary and cultural authority — further amplified its weight and influence. The language of "charming" and "dilettantish" invoked by Matoš crystallized a set of value judgments that, though not widely representative, contributed to the shaping of a critical horizon that would continue to condition responses to Pejačević's music well beyond her lifetime.

The broader pattern of cautious or ambivalent responses to Pejačević's music extended beyond literary commentary. It continued to surface in professional music criticism, including that of Petar Konjović (1883–1970) nearly a decade later. In his review of the works performed at Dora Pejačević's composer's evening in 1918, Konjović — a Serbian composer, conductor and writer on music — offered an assessment that combined technical recognition with stylistic reserve. Active in Zagreb at various points between 1917 and 1939, Konjović initially gained visibility as a composer and gradually established himself as a prominent critic and cultural

20 Matoš, "Koncertna sezona", quoted in Marić, *Dora Pejačević*, 153.

administrator. As director of the Opera at the Croatian National Theatre (1921–1926) and later as its intendant (1933–1935), he was instrumental in expanding the repertoire to include Russian, Czech and French works, as well as giving the premieres of compositions by Croatian composers. His critical writings were informed by his artistic principles, centred on Slavic musical realism — especially the aesthetics of Mussorgsky and Janáček — and a belief that authentic musical expression emerged from engagement with national folk traditions.

In this context, Konjović acknowledged Pejačević's assured handling of musical form and compositional technique but expressed concern that her idiom bore the imprint of dominant Germanic models. He suggested that these influences limited the extent to which her music conveyed a distinctive artistic identity, noting that the national elements present in her work served more as decorative gestures than structural or expressive foundations.[21]

A related, though differently framed, critique was articulated by the Croatian musicologist, critic and composer Pavao Markovac (1903–1941). Having earned his doctorate in musicology in Vienna in 1926, Markovac became the first music editor at the Zagreb radio station and later worked for the Edison Bell Penkala record label. From 1927 onwards he published prolifically, contributing over six hundred texts — ranging from reviews and essays to theoretical studies — in the Croatian daily and periodical press. During the 1930s, he became increasingly involved in political and cultural activism, joining the workers' movement and eventually the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. His writing, especially in the later years, reflects a commitment to understanding music through the lenses of social structure, ideology and historical materialism — a position that has led later scholars to identify him as a foundational figure in Marxist music criticism in Croatia.

Following the posthumous performance of Dora Pejačević's Overture in D minor, Op. 49, for large orchestra and *Phantasie concertante* in D minor, Op. 48, for piano and orchestra, Markovac expressed reservations regarding the individuality of her musical language. He noted that the Overture lacked a clearly recognizable originality,[22] while his assessment of the *Phantasie concertante* — as summarized by Koraljka Kos in her 1982 monograph — highlighted its conventional pianistic idiom and limited expressive range:

> […] a work without a sharply defined profile, solid in construction, reflecting well-established models in terms of pianistic structure, musical expression and so forth.

21 Petar Konjović, "Iz muzikalnog Zagreba: kompoziciono veče grofice Dore Pejačević", in *Ličnosti* (Zagreb: Ćelap and Popovac, 1920), 173–177, quoted in Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982), 2.

22 Pavao Markovac, "Jubilej Vaclava Humla", *Riječ: nezavisna novinska revija*, November 1928, no. 256, 3, quoted in Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982), 2.

> However, it represents little more than a numerical addition to our piano literature. It reveals a fine talent that has lacked the opportunity to fully develop.[23]

Taken together, the perspectives of Konjović and Markovac illustrate two distinct critical paradigms at work in Croatian and Yugoslav musical discourse during the first half of the twentieth century. While the former approached musical evaluation primarily through aesthetic-national categories, emphasizing the role of cultural rootedness, the latter integrated socio-political and historical considerations into his critical method. Both, however, addressed questions of stylistic individuality, cultural orientation and the perceived artistic maturity of Pejačević's output — concerns that reflect broader critical frameworks of the time rather than isolated judgments.

While her compositional craftsmanship was on occasion acknowledged — even praised for its technical assurance and formal control — the principal criticisms that emerge from contemporary and early posthumous reviews of Dora Pejačević's work tend to focus on three recurring points: (1) a perceived disconnection from prevailing musical developments of the time, particularly the more progressive currents of early twentieth-century modernism; (2) an eclecticism that, while not necessarily regarded as technically flawed, was seen to dilute stylistic coherence; and (3) an insufficient articulation of national musical identity, with references to the national element often framed as superficial or merely decorative.

Although these reservations appear only sporadically across the broader body of critical writings — many of which were favourable or at least respectful — they have, as we shall see, exerted disproportionate influence over the long-term reception of her work. When Pejačević's music began to re-enter public and scholarly consciousness in the early 1960s after decades of neglect, it did so under the shadow of precisely these earlier judgments. As seen in Koraljka Kos's 1982 monograph, certain evaluative frameworks — emphasizing a lack of originality, stylistic derivativeness or insufficient engagement with national idioms — served as reference points in reassessing Pejačević's position within Croatian music history.[24] These tropes, grounded in aesthetic expectations prevalent in early twentieth-century criticism, continued to shape the horizon within which her music was received, often implicitly reinforcing the very limitations that earlier criticism had inscribed.

Significantly, this interpretative framework — whether explicitly invoked or subtly reproduced — remains largely intact to this day, informing both scholarly

23 Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982), 2.

24 Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982). The present discussion refers to the conceptual frameworks within which Pejačević's music has been interpreted and her creative output situated. Kos engages critically with certain evaluative positions — such as the claim that Pejačević's music lacks sufficient national awareness — while tacitly endorsing others, notably the characterization of her style as eclectic.

discourse and institutional programming. Even newer contributions to the study of Pejačević's life and work, such as the monograph by Domagoj Marić, often remain in dialogue with, or constrained by, critical positions formulated more than a century ago.[25] While these recent studies seek to reframe her biography and musical output within broader cultural, political and gendered contexts, they nonetheless reveal the enduring imprint of older aesthetic hierarchies and ideological expectations that continue to shape the contours of her reception.

LACKING ORIGINALITY

While the above-mentioned criticisms may, as will be further demonstrated in the following sections, find some partial basis in Pejačević's compositional output, they can scarcely be sustained when that output is examined in greater depth. A closer analytical engagement with her oeuvre reveals that it resists any straightforward stylistic classification, being situated precisely at the intersection of two musical epochs. Although the genres and formal structures she employed are rooted in the late-Romantic tradition, her approach to them — particularly in terms of internal organization and developmental logic — demonstrates a consistent effort not to replicate inherited models. Instead, she sought to pursue original and structurally innovative solutions that could be associated with a range of modernist compositional schools. This assessment, however, does not extend to Pejačević's early works, which consist predominantly of miniatures for solo piano, violin and piano or voice and piano. These pieces — written in the first phase of her creative development — are still the most frequently performed segment of her output today. Their continued presence in the performance repertoire is largely attributable to their inclusion in the curricula of elementary and secondary music education, where they serve pedagogical functions due to their relative technical accessibility and brevity. As a result, these early compositions have become the most familiar part of her oeuvre, inadvertently shaping and simplifying the general perception of her work. Characterized by a directness of expression, often coloured by the sentimental idiom of salon music, they are grounded both formally and harmonically in Classical and early Romantic models. Paradoxically, however, it was not these modest early pieces — rooted in salon aesthetics and pedagogical simplicity — but rather her more sophisticated and formally ambitious later works that elicited the most persistent critical ambivalence, even long after her death. This enduring tension in the reception of her music reflects a fundamental misalignment between the aesthetic

25 Marić, *Dora Pejačević*. In this monograph Marić does not critically interrogate the conceptual frameworks established by Koraljka Kos, but rather adopts and develops them further. His analysis is thus situated within the interpretative paradigms introduced in Kos's foundational study, without offering substantial revision or theoretical reconfiguration.

ambitions embedded in her mature compositions and the evaluative frameworks within which those works were judged.

Pejačević's mature oeuvre, by contrast, reveals a composer committed to the pursuit of original structural and expressive solutions, distinguished by an artistic voice of notable intensity and emotional depth. As she gradually refined her compositional skills, she acquired the capacity to conceive larger-scale formal structures — a process through which she articulated a musical language that is both structurally cohesive and expressively innovative. This compositional language is grounded primarily in the technique of developing variation, underpinned by a markedly expanded tonal framework. Her harmonic vocabulary is richly chromatic, at times pushing the tonal system to its limits and occasionally venturing into moments of atonality. Harmony in her mature works operates not only as a source of harmonic progression but also as a timbral and expressive agent — shaping musical gestures and articulating shifts in affective character. Rather than using harmonic conventions to stabilize form, mature Pejačević frequently subverts expectations, employing harmonic shifts to recontextualize familiar material and heighten narrative tension. In so doing, she constructs a musical discourse that is simultaneously rooted in tradition and exploratory in orientation — a discourse that resists facile classification and demands analytical attentiveness. This level of structural and harmonic complexity, far from being recognized unequivocally as a marker of compositional maturity, became instead a source of critical unease, particularly when measured against prevailing norms of national style or aesthetic coherence.

Traces of Pejačević's use of continuous thematic transformation — a technique that enables motivic material to evolve organically both within and across movements — are already evident in her early works. This approach often blurs the boundaries between formal sections. By deriving the musical discourse from a single motivic-thematic nucleus, she subjects it to ongoing variation. In doing so, she generates conditionally new thematic ideas and shapes a coherent formal whole governed by the dynamic flux of continuous development. This principle of organic growth — where a fundamental idea is rearticulated in ever-changing guises — yields a musical architecture that is integrative rather than additive. Coherence thus emerges not through strict thematic repetition or contrast, but through transformation, resulting in a unified and evolving structural logic.

This approach would become increasingly refined in her later compositions, leading to formally inventive and, in some cases, structurally unprecedented solutions. A paradigmatic example is her final piano sonata (Sonata in A-flat major, Op. 57), composed in 1921. In this work Pejačević effectively fuses the principles of sonata form with those of the multi-movement sonata cycle, constructing a continuous single-movement structure. The entire piece unfolds from successive transformations

of a single thematic idea, which is gradually developed, contrasted and recontextualized, ultimately culminating in a fugal section that serves both as a structural apex and as a symbolic resolution of the preceding material. The fugue emerges not as a formal appendix but as an organic outcome of the developmental logic that governs the entire movement.

A comparable compositional approach is evident in Pejačević's Overture in D minor, Op. 49 (1919), a work that Markovac characterized as "lacking clearly recognizable originality." Scored for large orchestra, the Overture dissolves the traditional tripartite structure of exposition, development and recapitulation into a mosaic-like sequence of short sections. Each section is shaped through melodic, rhythmic and harmonic transformations of a shared motivic-thematic core and further differentiated by shifts in texture, orchestral colour, tempo, metre and the broader musical fabric.

This logic finds one of its most sophisticated realizations in the String Quartet in C major, Op. 58 (1922), the final composition completed by Pejačević. All four movements of the quartet are grounded in a shared motivic-thematic complex. This material is subjected to continuous transformation, not only across movements but also within the internal structure of each movement, through systematic modifications in timbre, textural layering, articulation, rhythmic profile and contrapuntal organization. The compositional process resembles a form of thematic refraction, whereby a single motivic idea is recontextualized through varying parametric treatments, producing a kaleidoscopic succession of perspectives on a unified musical object. Each transformation engenders a distinct expressive atmosphere while simultaneously invoking divergent stylistic idioms. In this sense, the Quartet — particularly in its third and fourth movements — may be interpreted as a stylistically pluralistic construct, functioning as a mosaic of contrasting gestural types, affective zones and idiomatic references. Elements of Expressionism are evident in the treatment of thematic material, while aspects of Neoclassicism emerge in the ironic detachment and lightness of instrumentation and articulation. Late-Romantic idioms surface in passages featuring expansive, lyrical melodies and a national style is suggested in sections marked by intense rhythmic drive, irregular accentuation and the use of open intervals in the accompaniment. What distinguishes Pejačević's engagement with these idioms is her refusal to treat them as fixed stylistic positions. Instead, they operate as momentary lenses — temporary vantage points — through which her musical material is refracted. The result is a fluid, intertextual musical language that resists resolution into a singular aesthetic paradigm, reflecting instead an ongoing search for personal expression within and against inherited forms.

Such stylistic plurality, fully realized in the String Quartet, Op. 58, does not result in fragmentation or aesthetic contradiction. On the contrary, it becomes the very

medium through which Pejačević articulates the complexity of a musical self shaped by, yet never entirely confined to, the conventions of her time. Her capacity to move fluidly between idioms — expressionist, neoclassical, Romantic, folkloric — without ever fully inhabiting or surrendering to any single one, reveals a compositional sensibility more concerned with exploration than with categorization. In extending the language in which she had been historically and culturally formed and in simultaneously seeking new solutions within those formal architectures most familiar to her, Pejačević touched upon a wide array of stylistic codes circulating in early twentieth-century European music. But she did so not by quoting them, nor by assimilating them as fixed models, but rather by allowing them to pass through the prism of her own voice. Each stylistic inflection is filtered through an interior logic of transformation — absorbed, reshaped and rendered translucent in the service of an expressive whole.

If one is to speak of polystylism in her music, then it must be understood not as a product of eclecticism, but as the outcome of a deeper artistic process — a search for form and identity within a cultural moment defined as much by its multiplicity as by its uncertainty. Her music does not seek to resolve stylistic contradictions but to hold them in tension: to stage, within sound, the fleeting co-presence of divergent expressive worlds. Through this process, Pejačević constructs a musical landscape in which the boundaries between past and future blur, not through synthesis but through suspension. Her works often seem to hover at a liminal threshold — between Romantic inheritance and modernist innovation, between national identity and cosmopolitan sensibility. What emerges is not a unified stylistic statement but a fragile and luminous moment of convergence, in which musical time folds in upon itself. It is precisely this quality — this evocation of an irrecoverable moment suspended between historical currents — that lends her music its enduring poetic resonance.

A FAMILY LOYAL TO THE MONARCHY

How, then, are we to interpret the critical responses to the music of Dora Pejačević outlined above? At first glance, one might attribute them to a lack of aesthetic sensitivity or to the limited analytical frameworks available to critics of the time. While such explanations may apply in the case of those lacking formal musical training, it is more difficult to accept that musically educated critics failed to recognize the structural and expressive complexity of her mature works — or, in later interpretations, the tension between her musical aesthetic and the evaluative discourse that accompanied it. The explanation, therefore, need not be sought solely in matters of individual taste or critical acuity, but rather in the broader historical context within which both her music and its reception were situated.

Amidst the intense social and political upheavals of the historical moment in which Dora Pejačević lived and worked — upheavals that would ultimately culminate in the global catastrophe of the First World War and the subsequent dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy — her family played a not insignificant role at the local level. This was a period marked by fierce and persistent resistance to the political, cultural and economic oppression imposed by Hungary in its pursuit of territorial ambitions in Croatia. Such oppression was facilitated by the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement of 1868, which followed the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Under the terms of this Compromise, Croatia was administratively divided within the Dual Monarchy into two parts: Dalmatia and parts of Istria, which came under Austrian jurisdiction, and central and northern Croatia (comprising Croatia and Slavonia), which fell under Hungarian control. As a consequence of the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement, Croatia lost a significant degree of its political and economic autonomy.

Although the Ban of Croatia continued to govern Hungarian parts of the Croatian lands, his powers were considerably curtailed. The Ban was not elected or confirmed by the Croatian Parliament (Sabor),[26] but was instead appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Hungarian Prime Minister. Croatian remained the official language, and the country retained autonomy in matters concerning law, education, religion and administration. However, financial affairs remained beyond Croatia's jurisdiction — an arrangement the Hungarian authorities exploited in pursuit of their territorial ambitions through various forms of political and economic pressure.

Hungarian repression reached its peak during the tenure of Ban Károly Khuen-Héderváry (1849–1918), who established an absolutist regime over the course of his twenty-year-long rule (1883–1903). He implemented political violence against opposition parties, and rigged elections to the Croatian Parliament, effectively reducing it to an instrument for advancing both his personal interests and the broader agenda of Greater Hungarian nationalism.[27] Under his administration Croatian self-governance was systematically dismantled. A law was enacted that restricted voting rights to only two percent of the population, based on stringent property qualifications. The press was subjected to censorship, assemblies of opposition parties were banned, and university autonomy was severely limited. The operations of the Yugoslav Acad-

26 The Croatian Sabor (or simply Sabor) is the historic legislative assembly of the Kingdom of Croatia. Traditionally, it functioned as a representative body of the Croatian nobility and later evolved to include broader political representation. During the Austro-Hungarian period the Sabor held significant symbolic and legislative roles, but its actual power was curtailed by the overarching authority of the Hungarian Crown and its appointed Ban. The exclusion of the Sabor from the appointment process of the Ban under the 1868 Croatian-Hungarian Settlement further underscored Croatia's limited autonomy within the dual monarchy.

27 "Khuen-Héderváry, Karoly".

emy of Sciences and Arts (JAZU) were obstructed, Hungarian was introduced as a compulsory subject in *Realgymnasien*, and the establishment of Hungarian-language schools within Croatia was authorized.

At the very moment when Dora Pejačević lived and composed, the Pejačević family stood at the height of its social, political and economic power. Her grandfather Ladislav (1824–1901) and her father Teodor (1855–1928) were both prominent Croatian politicians. They were advocates of the Unionist policy, which, in its most radical form, promoted the political integration of Croatia into Hungary — primarily through processes of Magyarization, most notably via the imposition of Hungarian as an official language in Croatian institutions. The most notorious enforcer of such policies was none other than Károly Khuen-Héderváry himself. Both Ladislav and Teodor served as members of the Croatian Parliament (Sabor) and of the House of Magnates in the joint Hungarian-Croatian Parliament in Budapest. They also held numerous other high-ranking political offices, positions largely acquired through hereditary privilege, social status and ideological alignment, rather than through democratic election or the expressed will of the Croatian people. Significantly, both men held the post of Ban of Croatia. Indeed, their tenures in office effectively forming a political continuity with Khuen-Héderváry's regime, since Ladislav preceded him as Ban (1880–1883), while Teodor succeeded him (1903–1907).

Ironically, both were forced to resign following Hungarian attempts to impose Hungarian as the official language in Croatian state institutions and on the railways. Although their administrations were considerably more moderate and conciliatory in tone than that of Khuen-Héderváry's, it would be difficult to describe them with the euphemism "a family loyal to the Monarchy" without considerable qualification.[28] It is important to recall that Ladislav Pejačević is remembered not only for resigning from the position of Ban after failing to resolve a conflict with the Hungarian authorities regarding the installation of bilingual signage on financial offices in Zagreb. (This episode resulted in the so-called "silent coat of arms" — insignia devoid of both Hungarian and Croatian inscriptions.) He is also known for his role as a member of the Regnikolarn Delegation, which negotiated and concluded the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement of 1868, a compromise that placed Croatia in a subordinate position vis-à-vis Hungary. Similarly, Teodor Pejačević stepped down over the so-called "railway pragmatics" — a Hungarian policy aimed at enforcing the exclusive use of Hungarian as the official language on Croatian railways, promoted under the slogan "Whose railways, his land". Although his resignation is often retrospectively interpreted as a patriotic act of protest, Teodor Pejačević never lost the trust of the Hungarian political elite. In fact, in 1913, he was appointed Minister for Croatian Affairs in the Hungarian government. The entry on him in the 1969 general

28 Marić, *Dora Pejačević*, 17.

encyclopedia (*Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda*) of the Lexicographical Institute in Zagreb describes him as follows:

> As a Magyarone, he was appointed Ban following Khuen-Héderváry's fall and continued to employ his predecessor's methods. In the 1906 elections, the Croatian-Serbian Coalition secured a majority, yet Pejačević remained in office as a trusted figure of the Hungarian authorities. He was eventually forced to resign after the Hungarian "railway pragmatics" provoked fierce resistance from the Croatian-Serbian Coalition.[29]

While for the Hungarians the Unionist policy functioned as a strategic instrument of territorial expansion through Magyarization, for many Croatian politicians it served primarily as a mechanism for preserving the existing social hierarchy, safeguarding inherited privileges and protecting economic interests. Advocates of Unionism were largely drawn from the Croatian and Hungarian nobility, who owned estates on both sides of the border. A smaller contingent consisted of members of the intelligentsia and bureaucracy, often of Hungarian origin or coming from other parts of the Dual Monarchy. For the former, Unionism represented a way of protecting landed wealth; for the latter, it provided a means for preserving social status. In a country whose economy was overwhelmingly agrarian, where serfdom had only been officially abolished in 1848, and where the first agrarian reform left large landowners virtually untouched, structural inequality was deeply entrenched. Peasants were forced to purchase their land and, burdened by taxes and repayment obligations, were often reduced to ruin. Such a policy produced a profound imbalance in the distribution of economic power, which in turn reinforced disparities in social and political influence. This imbalance contributed significantly to the stark polarization of society into a wealthy minority — among whom the Pejačević family, particularly under Teodor's leadership, was one of the richest in Croatia — and an impoverished majority. The latter, despite being the ethnic majority, struggled to preserve the official use of its own language and found itself in constant struggle against aggressive Magyarization. The Unionist political current, both at that time and subsequently, never enjoyed widespread popular support.

On the contrary, these deep social divisions were intensified by the growing discontent of a majority further impoverished by the war. This discontent was exacerbated by mass mobilization, heavy losses at the front, requisitions and shortages, wartime profiteering and outbreaks of official Slavophobic chauvinism. It ultimately erupted near the end of the First World War in the form of a mass uprising led by

29 "Pejačević, Teodor", 84.

the so-called Green Cadres. These were groups of military deserters who had fled the Austro-Hungarian army and were soon joined by large numbers of peasants. Hiding in forested areas — hence their name — the Green Cadres grew steadily in both number and territorial spread. By the end of the war, over 50,000 of them were active across Croatia. To sustain themselves, they frequently looted merchants and wealthier peasants. In the post-imperial chaos following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they also burned and plundered numerous aristocratic estates, manors and castles. Alongside noble properties and commercial holdings, political figures increasingly became targets of their attacks. While some of these acts were mere banditry, others were fuelled by more conscious motives of rebellion, partly influenced by the Russian Revolution and the vision of a new world order predicated on the redistribution of land and wealth. Although the movement lacked centralized leadership or a formal programme, certain larger groups developed basic organizational structures. In some areas, their actions began to take on the characteristics of a broader social movement. The uprising was eventually suppressed before the end of 1918 with the assistance of armed forces loyal to the National Council, the Serbian army and units of the Entente.[30] The Pejačević family did not escape unscathed. Their family estate in Našice was attacked and looted, and family members were forced to flee to Budapest, hiding in a cattle wagon.

FOREIGN SPIRIT

Just as the Green Cadre uprising represented a violent response to economic and social oppression, fierce struggles for cultural and national identity had taken place in the intellectual and artistic realms since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, this resistance to perceived threats to national self-determination permeated public discourse and cultural life, including responses to musical events. One striking instance appears in the critical writings of Antun Gustav Matoš. In his previously mentioned review published in *Savremenik* (1910) Matoš lamented what he viewed as the lack of a genuinely national audience:

> [A]lthough we noted at these concerts a scarcity of native, indigenous listeners. The fact remains that our concert hall at the Croatian Music Institute is, relatively speaking, most often filled by Jews and foreigners. While this may be encouraging for our musical conditions, it is less so for our national culture. These elements attend concerts solely on account of their international artistic character, supporting only those cultural efforts that are the least national in orientation.[31]

30 Banac, "Zeleni kadar".
31 Matoš, "Koncertna sezona", quoted in Marić, *Dora Pejačević*, 153.

Such sentiments underscore how deeply aesthetic reception was intertwined with issues of ethnicity, national identity and daily political concerns. The discomfort with Dora Pejačević's public stance — perceived as both socially elitist and culturally foreign — becomes even more apparent in an incident reported by *Obzor* and *Pokret*. The latter was a Croatian daily newspaper from Zagreb that operated from 1904 to 1910 as the voice of the Croatian People's Progressive Party. Following the previously mentioned performance of her Quartet in D minor, Op. 25 for violin, viola, cello and piano at the Croatian Music Institute in November 1910, an unnamed young man representing the Lisinski Music Club, according to *Pokret*, at one stage publicly addressed Pejačević — in the capital of Croatia — in German. The newspaper condemned the gesture as an affront:

> A certain overzealous young gentleman addressed the daughter of a former Ban of Croatia, at a public concert in the country's capital, in German […]. We can scarcely believe this to be true and hope that the society (i.e., the Lisinski Music Club, on whose behalf the gentleman spoke) will see to it that this individual receives exemplary punishment for a carelessness that many present experienced as a brazen insult. We willingly concede that the gentleman very likely assumed — quite correctly, alas — that the countess, raised in a foreign spirit, would not understand him if he spoke in Croatian.[32]

Such critiques not only reflect anxieties about linguistic identity and cultural belonging but also reveal how perceptions of class, heritage and political alignment shaped the reception of Pejačević's artistic output. Against this background, her music — marked by its introspective cosmopolitanism and lack of overt national markers — could easily appear ideologically misaligned, or even alien, to critics and audiences navigating the pressures of cultural affirmation and political instability.

Not only did Dora Pejačević, as a woman composer in an environment that still expected women to be obedient, pious, submissive, chaste and modest — where her primary roles were believed to be that of mother, wife and homemaker[33] — encounter resistance in the Croatian musical sphere, but she also faced opposition on account of her family background. This resistance did not arise primarily from her compositional achievements, but was rooted, rather, in ideological positions — whether these stemmed from a fervently nationalist perspective (such as that of Antun Gustav Matoš or Petar Konjović), an oppositional anti-monarchist and anti-Magyar

32 "Koncerat Bachmann-trio", *Hrvatski pokret*, 15 November 1910, 3, quoted in Marić, *Dora Pejačević*, 156.

33 Župan, "Uzor djevojke".

one (like that of *Obzor*) or a class-based Marxist one (as articulated by Pavao Markovac). A host of personal and biographical factors emerging from her privileged social status only further solidified this opposition. These dimensions compounded the biases she encountered, ultimately shaping the reception of her music through extra-musical lenses.

With German as her first and everyday language, and embedded in a web of family and social connections spanning the Monarchy, Pejačević — although she grew up in Našice, Croatia, and regarded it as her home — was nevertheless largely isolated from the Croatian social and national milieu. German was, in fact, the language of communication among the upper social classes in Croatia until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It functioned not so much as a marker of national identity but rather of class affiliation. This linguistic orientation is further illustrated by the fact that, of the six languages she spoke — German, French, English, Italian, Hungarian and Croatian — she used Croatian the least. Judging by a few extant letters to her Croatian publisher, she also wrote it with some difficulty. Such a linguistic-cum-cultural habitus, so closely tied to her privileged social standing, was also reflected in her educational background. At that time, it was customary for girls from the upper social strata to receive private instruction on condition that they passed the state examinations. Yet there is no evidence that Dora Pejačević ever sat for such examinations, leaving her educational background largely undocumented and obscured. Given that her education, as well as that of her siblings, was entrusted to their English governess, Edith Davison, it is difficult to believe that it extended to Croatian language, history or culture. This is further underscored by her meticulously kept reading diary. Among the 465 books she recorded there is not a single work addressing Croatian history, nor a single Croatian author, nor any book in Croatian translation — with the sole exception of a political treatise by Milovan Grbe, itself written in German. She likewise never set to music any poem by a Croatian poet or any poem in the Croatian language, except for *Three Children's Songs*, Op. 56, on texts by the Serbian poet Jovan Jovanović Zmaj.

In fact, by virtue of her origins — her mother and paternal grandmother were both Hungarian — her lifestyle and her circle of friends, she was in many respects a true child of the multilingual and multi-ethnic Monarchy. The texts she chose to set to music reveal her preoccupation with existential and intimate themes, while her letters indicate an interest in class and social affairs.[34] The national question — which, in

34 It is particularly striking that, as her letters reveal, Pejačević harboured an intense critique of her own social class. This attitude is further corroborated by her meticulously kept reading diary, which includes a number of anarchist and leftist political works, such as *Socializmus und soziale Bewegung* by Werner Sombart, *Terrorismus und Kommunismus: ein Beitrag zur Naturgeschichte der Revolution* by Karl Kautsky, *Memoiren einer Sozialistin – Lehrjahre and Memoiren einer Sozialistin – Kampfjahre* by Lilly Braun and *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* by Peter Kropotkin. The

that era, was an urgent and defining issue in Croatia — finds no place in her creative output. It lay entirely outside the horizon of her artistic and intellectual interests. As a result, the "national style" — then the dominant orientation of the Croatian musical sphere, functioning as an extension of the national question into music and as the most potent imprint of a superimposed national sensibility — was neither close to her artistic identity nor something with which she could fully identify. Or at least not exclusively so. Some of her works, such as the Sonata in B minor, Op. 43 for violin and piano (known as "Slavic Sonata"), can be described as employing a national style. However, it remains difficult to ascertain precisely exactly whose national musical idiom they draw upon.

In this sense, it is impossible to overlook the connection between her critics' charges of a lack of national sensibility in her music (however that may be defined) and the fact that she was, by most criteria of national affiliation, difficult to categorize. Whether one considers genetics, language, cultural background, national consciousness or professional milieu,[35] Pejačević was hard to accept unreservedly during her own lifetime. Later, she also proved difficult to situate unambiguously within the Croatian (or indeed any other) national musical tradition.

Just as it is essential to contextualize the negative responses that initially shaped the reception of her work, it is equally important to consider the broader historical and ideological conditions that fostered renewed scholarly interest in her oeuvre. This interest emerged particularly from the 1960s onward, amid efforts to reconstruct national canons within the framework of socialist Yugoslavia. This period framed the recovery of female figures such as Pejačević within narratives that, despite their progressive appearance, often reproduced the very paradigms they sought to correct. The foundational work of scholars like Koraljka Kos was undoubtedly crucial in securing Pejačević's place in Croatian music historiography and in initiating serious scholarly engagement with her oeuvre. However, even this important contribution remained embedded within early musicological discourse shaped by dominant interpretative models. These models emphasized precisely formal coherence, national identity and stylistic homogeneity, thereby limiting the space available for understanding hybrid, marginal or politically inconvenient compositional voices. As a result, while Kos's work laid the groundwork for Pejačević's canonization, it also inadvertently reinforced certain normative expectations that continued to frame how her music was analysed and valued.

In this light, the persistence of reductive or ambivalent readings of Pejačević's music cannot be explained by gender alone, though gender remains a highly impor-

writings of Rosa Luxemburg likewise appear among the books she intended to read, underscoring her sustained engagement with radical political thought. See: Župan, "*Books I Have Read*".

35 Nagode, "Prokrustova postelja nacionalizma", 10.

tant factor. Rather, it reflects the entanglement of gender with institutional logic, dominant ideology and aesthetic norms that governed both her lifetime and the decades that followed. To fully understand her reception, one must attend to the layered historical conditions that have shaped not only how her music was heard, but also how it was remembered, narrated and positioned within the national canon.

A closer examination of these discursive dynamics reveals that aesthetic judgments were often inseparable from broader strategies of biographical framing. This was particularly evident in relation to class and social identity, which were selectively emphasized or suppressed according to shifting ideological imperatives. This is especially apparent in the treatment of Pejačević's aristocratic origins. Despite the assertion by Croatian pianist and musicologist Ladislav Šaban — made in a letter in 1971 to Ottomar Lumbe, the composer's widower — that in "a socialist country, prejudices about a composer's aristocratic origin play no role in her recognition," the historical record tells a more complicated story. At the time when Croatian musicology began to engage more systematically with Pejačević's life and oeuvre, there appears to have been an implicit, if not explicit, tendency to avoid or minimize the class-bound and political dimensions of her biography. Šaban himself played a key role in preserving her legacy. It was through his initiative that Lumbe donated to the Croatian Music Institute in Zagreb the part of her estate that had remained in his possession. Yet the fact that no mention of Pejačević's aristocratic background — notably, that she was the daughter of Croatian Ban Teodor Pejačević — appears in dictionary entries and general surveys of Croatian music until the mid-1980s is highly revealing. This omission reflects not merely a historiographical oversight but a deliberate silencing aligned with the ideological pressures of socialist cultural policy. In such a framework, aristocratic heritage was incompatible with the dominant narratives of class neutrality and proletarian cultural production.

As ethnomusicologist Naila Ceribašić has noted, a recurring discriminatory trope in Croatian lexicography concerning women in music is the tendency to define them relationally — as daughters, wives or sisters of prominent men.[36] In the case of Pejačević, this pattern was temporarily inverted: during the socialist era, such affiliations were conspicuously suppressed, only to reappear in the 1990s, when key elements of Croatian history were subjected to revision and reframed within new national narratives. From that point onward, references to her lineage — especially her connection to Ban Teodor Pejačević — began to feature regularly in academic and lexicographic accounts. This shift illustrates how both the inclusion and exclusion of biographical detail function as tools of ideological positioning, telling us less about the subject herself than about the political and cultural frameworks within which her story continues to be told.

36 Ceribašić, "Glazbene umjetnice".

THE ABSENCE

The other two criticisms noted in the aforementioned responses to her works — namely, her perceived lagging behind contemporary currents and her reliance on well-established compositional models — can be attributed to the informal nature of her musical education. Like her general education, her musical instruction was conducted entirely by private means. Although it is known with whom she studied,[37] even after nearly fifty years of scholarly investigation it remains impossible to ascertain with any certainty the exact content and scope of her training. Private tuition not only deprived her of formal certification of her knowledge but also denied her access to the professional networks and formal affiliations within the musical guild that would have accompanied a more institutional education. Coupled with the restrictive expectations of her social class — which in itself constrained women's professional activities in any domain — these circumstances hindered her musical development. This was especially true for composition, an art form regarded at the time as an almost exclusively male preserve. As a result, her musical endeavours in her domestic setting were frequently dismissed as little more than idle amateurism.

The condescending attitude toward Dora Pejačević's creative output was thus rooted not solely in her subordinate status as a woman. It was also — further intensifying it — shaped by the perception of her class privilege and the view of her father's political activities as anti-national and anti-Croatian. Although she was almost entirely forgotten in the decades following her death until the 1970s, this attitude toward her music endured. It was grounded in class and political animosity and continued to shape how she was perceived. It is worth noting that the origins of these attitudes among a segment of the musically educated critics of her era were likely less decisive in themselves. More crucial was their ideological congruence with the world view that informed post-1945 socialist Yugoslavia. This alignment is evident in Krešimir Kovačević's book *Hrvatski kompozitori i njihova djela* (Croatian Composers and Their Works, 1960).[38] In this book, Pejačević is mentioned for the first

37 Her musical education began in her family home in Našice. Her musical development was certainly influenced by her mother, Countess Lila Vay de Vaya, a trained singer and pianist, who also composed and frequently performed at charity and official events. Her first music teacher was Károly Noszeda, an organist from Budapest who spent his summers in their house in Našice. When her father became Croatian ban, the family moved to Zagreb and Dora Pejačević continued her musical education privately with teachers from the Croatian Music Institute. From 1902 to 1905, she studied violin with Václav Huml, theory with Ćiril Junek, and instrumentation with Dragutin Kaiser. From 1909 to 1912 she continued her musical studies in Germany, taking private lessons in composition and violin: first in Dresden, where she studied counterpoint and composition under Percy Sherwood and violin with Hans Petri, and then in Munich, where she studied composition with Walter Courvoisier.

38 Kovačević, "Dora Pejačević".

time after the Second World War and described as a composer whose works exhibit a high degree of compositional technique, yet an eclectic and inconsistent style lacking in national sensibility. This judgment, which positioned her as technically skilled but ideologically suspect, would be repeated verbatim twenty years later in the *Jugoslovanska glasbena dela* (Yugoslavian Musical Works, 1980).[39] This repetition suggests not an independent assessment, but rather the persistence of an inherited ideological framework that continued to overshadow any critical re-evaluation of her oeuvre.

Although Koraljka Kos is arguably the most instrumental figure in securing the visibility and canonization of Dora Pejačević's oeuvre within Croatian music history, her monographs,[40] despite an ostensible scholarly distance grounded in the analysis of Pejačević's works, nonetheless perpetuate a similar narrative. Kos's contributions to the recognition of Pejačević are invaluable. She played a decisive role in consolidating Pejačević's position within the national canon and in illuminating the richness of her musical output. Yet, despite this substantial contribution, Kos's writings still reveal certain interpretative limitations. While Kos is critical of the accusations of "lack of national sensibility" in Pejačević's music — questioning, in fact, what "national sensibility" should even entail — her portrayal of Pejačević remains infused with notions of eclecticism, inauthenticity and even a lack of knowledge. Thus, on the basis of the fact that Pejačević's musical education was private, Kos concludes that she was essentially self-taught. This view can imply an amateurish deficiency of knowledge that risks obscuring the significance of Pejačević's actual compositional achievements. Moreover, the dedication of her Kos's monograph — "to all the women who have not renounced their own creativity"[41] — carries an implication that may inadvertently downplay Pejačević's serious engagement with composition: a problematic implication, suggesting that her artistic output was merely the idle pursuit of a woman unburdened by obligation. Such framing can be especially problematic, given how rarely women throughout history have even had the opportunity to exercize such creative choice. It risks trivializing Pejačević's deeply considered compositional work as the product of a privileged dilettante, rather than recognizing it as an act of cultural resistance and self-determination.

In the comprehensive biographical section of her monograph, Kos does not disregard Pejačević's familial environment. However, she carefully softens its contours, avoiding any critical scrutiny. In an effort to sidestep the potentially contentious

39 Kovačević, "Pejačević".

40 This passage refers to Kos's first monograph on Dora Pejačević, published in 1982. While her narrative remains largely unchanged in subsequent monographs, the rhetoric in her two most recent works is notably more moderate.

41 Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982), v.

political context, she instead turns the spotlight on Pejačević's individuality — her distinctiveness and divergence from the unspoken, yet implicitly understood, familial framework. To substantiate this portrayal, Kos deploys Pejačević's personal correspondence as "evidential material", making her intimate thoughts and private reflections a matter of public record. This disclosure aims to demonstrate how these private sentiments frequently stood at odds with the expectations of her social class and familial milieu. In effect, Kos presents Pejačević as a figure standing apart from her family background. Such an interpretative orientation would go on to shape the predominant trajectory of subsequent scholarship. Increasingly, this scholarship turned its gaze to her private life, with an insistent emphasis on gathering, analysing and publishing biographical data. Each successive monograph contributed new collections of photographs, social contacts and letters. Through this process her private sphere has come to subsume — and indeed, to absorb — the broader historical narrative of her family. This reconfiguration has had profound implications. Her biography has been reshaped as a story of intimate selfhood, rather than as one shaped by inherited social and political legacies. As a result, virtually every aspect of her private life has become known today, including matters that, by prevailing standards of privacy, might otherwise have remained obscure. Meanwhile, her creative output has received comparatively limited attention and awaits systematic and contextualized scholarly analysis.

The systematic elision of Dora Pejačević's family background — particularly the conspicuous absence of any contextualization of the politically fraught activities of her father — did not merely foreclose a critical examination of the ideological and political frameworks that shaped the reception of her music. It also impeded any serious consideration of her position as a female composer in historical, political, class or professional terms.[42] Moreover, this elision determined the vantage point from which Kos herself approaches Pejačević's creative output. Rather than treating Pejačević's music as an autonomous compositional domain — one of the multiple musical languages of her era, each with its own legitimate genealogies — Kos consistently analyses her work in relation to the established "great" canons of music history. Her readings are thus invariably comparative, continually juxtaposing Pejačević's musical ideas, harmonic structures and compositional techniques with those of other composers deemed more central to the canon. Indeed, it is difficult to find an analysis — across the entire corpus of Pejačević's works — where Kos does

42 Two notable exceptions are the essays "Feminizam i muzikologija: kako još misliti Doru" by Vesna Rožić, which approaches the work of Dora Pejačević from the perspective of feminist musicology, and Dalibor Davidović's analysis of the *Two Sketches*, Op. 44. Davidović's study "Zagonetka njene samotnosti" seeks to trace how Pejačević's compositional idiom was shaped by her teachers, exploring what she learned from each and how she translated these elements into her own musical language.

not draw some parallel, similarity or associative link to a figure from the dominant historiography of music. A particularly illustrative instance occurs in her discussion of Pejačević's symphony:

> Listening to the Scherzo, one cannot help but be reminded of Dvořák, while the slow movement recalls the Russian symphonists (Borodin). In the orchestration we recognize the unmistakable influence of the great masters: Wagner, Richard Strauss, Debussy. The idea of the "fate motif" is present, reminiscent of Tchaikovsky.[43]

Equally telling is her commentary on Pejačević's use of developing variation:

> The composer's deployment of this technique, along with the numerous subtleties she brings to the "abolition of opposites" within musical development, naturally invites associations with the music of Brahms.[44]

The issue, then, is not that Pejačević directly adopts Brahms's methods — indeed, many of her contemporaries did the same — but rather that her use of these techniques causes her music to resonate with the idiom of Brahms. In this way, Kos seeks to anchor the legitimacy of Pejačević's work within the musical legacy of other, "great" composers. Her approach is understandable, given the long-standing marginalization of Pejačević's oeuvre within the broader historical record. By aligning her music with these canonical figures, Kos effectively claims a place for Pejačević — and, by extension, for Croatian music — within the canonized history of Western music. Yet in her efforts to secure this place, Kos inadvertently reifies and, in a negative sense, canonizes the very class- and politically inflected interpretative framework that has long shaped perceptions of Pejačević's music.

In sum, the cumulative gathering of biographical data — while systematically avoiding or softening critical dimensions of its historical, political, social and class contexts — has not only curtailed but also distorted our understanding of how the reception horizon for Dora Pejačević's music was shaped. At the same time, it has ensured that the very stereotypes engendered by this context have been woven into the interpretative framework, thereby entrenching them within contemporary discourse. In its attempt to situate Pejačević's music within the periodicized historical narrative of Western music, this approach constructs and legitimizes a discourse that views her oeuvre primarily through its supposed dependence upon the paradigms of the "great" musical traditions. She is consequently characterized as a composer of

43 Kos, *Dora Pejačević* (1982), 162.
44 Ibid., 183.

considerable technical competence, yet whose eclecticism and stylistic heterogeneity only intermittently align with contemporaneity. Within canonical frameworks, such an assessment implies a lack of authenticity and an insufficiently internalized creative engagement, culminating in the perception of a body of work that ultimately lacks persuasive artistic force.

Through this interpretative perspective, the fluid, rich and stylistically elusive musical world of Dora Pejačević has been effectively relegated to the margins of the grand narrative of Western music history, even within her own cultural environment. In a word, it has been relegated to the margins of Croatian national musical life, left waiting in the antechamber of the national repertoire.

CONCLUSION

The case of Dora Pejačević emerges, upon close examination, not merely as an instance of historical oversight or gendered marginalization, but as a paradigmatic illustration of the complex and often contradictory mechanisms through which cultural memory, artistic value and national identity are constructed, negotiated and institutionalized. Her position at the intersection of symbolic presence and practical absence — lauded as a national icon while remainin g largely unheard in contemporary Croatian concert life — reflects not a personal failure, but a structural and discursive impasse shaped by intersecting vectors of ideology, historiography and aesthetic normativity. While the composer has in recent decades been rehabilitated into the symbolic architecture of Croatian cultural identity, her music continues to circulate predominantly in mediated, representational forms — through monographs, iconography and commemorative discourse — rather than as a living, audible practice. The persistent under-representation of her works in performance repertoires reveals the extent to which programming decisions remain governed by entrenched aesthetic paradigms and institutional inertia. This exclusion cannot be understood in isolation from the broader historical conditions of her reception: the entanglement of her aristocratic lineage with nationalist and anti-monarchist critiques; the gendered expectations that confined women to the margins of musical authorship; and the historiographical frameworks that have persistently evaluated her oeuvre through the lens of canonical comparativity, seeking legitimacy through analogies with "greater" male composers.

Yet a rigorous analysis of Pejačević's mature output discloses a musical language of remarkable formal coherence, harmonic audacity and stylistic plurality — a body of work that resists reductive classification and challenges the very criteria by which artistic value has traditionally been measured. Her compositional idiom, situated at the liminal threshold between late Romanticism and early modernism, does not seek synthesis but inhabits a space of productive tension. Through continuous thematic

transformation, expanded harmonic palettes and a subtle polystylism that refracts rather than reproduces prevailing idioms, Pejačević articulates a subjectivity that is both historically situated and aesthetically singular. The critical failure to recognize this complexity — both in her own time and in the decades that followed — reveals less about the music itself than about the structures of evaluation through which it has been interpreted. These structures, shaped by political ideology, gender bias, class-based assumptions and nationalistic imperatives, have consistently constrained the horizon within which her work could be understood and appreciated. Even the most well-intentioned scholarly efforts to reinsert Pejačević into the national canon have often done so by reinscribing her into existing paradigms, emphasizing biographical exceptionalism or stylistic derivativeness rather than acknowledging the distinctiveness of her compositional voice on its own terms.

To reassess Pejačević's place within music history is thus not simply to correct an omission, but to confront the epistemological and ideological conditions that produced and sustained it. It requires a reorientation of inquiry — one that moves beyond the metrics of canonicity and influence and takes seriously the aesthetic, historical and political specificity of marginal voices. Viewed in this light, Pejačević's music offers not only a compelling object of renewed analytical attention, but also a critical lens through which to interrogate the exclusions, silences and asymmetries that continue to shape our understanding of the musical past. Far from embodying a dilettantism born of privilege or a derivative nationalism, her work articulates a more fragile and luminous proposition: that of a composer negotiating the contradictions of her time, seeking form without conformity and voicing — often in solitude — the complex interiorities of a self that refused to be reduced to a symbol. In recovering her voice, we do not merely recover a forgotten chapter of music history: we gain an opportunity to rewrite its terms.

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Povzetek

NACIONALNA GLASBENA JUNAKINJA NA OBROBJU KONCERTNEGA ŽIVLJENJA: PRIMER DORE PEJAČEVIĆ

Članek je kritična študija recepcije, historiografije in institucionalnega položaja skladateljice Dore Pejačević (1885–1923), katere posmrtna zapuščina je na Hrvaškem zaznamovana z izrazitim nasprotjem med simboličnim povzdignjenjem in praktično marginalizacijo. Čeprav Pejačević zavzema pomembno mesto v hrvaški glasbeni historiografiji in je v širši javnosti priznana kot nacionalna kulturna osebnost, je njena glasba – zlasti kompozicijsko najzrelejši del njenega opusa – še vedno premalo zastopana in skoraj odsotna v programih nacionalnih koncertnih hiš na Hrvaškem. Večplastna analiza prikazuje, kako je ta paradoks nastal in kako se je ohranil. Marginalizacijo skladateljice umešča v širše vzorce izključevanja na podlagi spola v zgodovini glasbe in razkriva, kako so zgodnje kritične odzive na njeno delo oblikovali ne le glasbeni kriteriji, temveč tudi ideološki, nacionalni in razredni diskurzi. Njen domnevni slogovni eklekticizem, pomanjkanje nacionalnega izraza in »tujost« – tako kulturna kot jezikovna – so bili od začetka 20. stoletja stalna tema kritike. Avtorji kritik so bili pogosto vplivne osebnosti, med njimi na primer Antun Gustav Matoš, Petar Konjović in Pavao Markovac. Ocene niso bile zgolj estetskega značaja, temveč so bile tesno prepletene s takratnimi strahovi v zvezi z nacionalno identiteto, socialnimi hierarhijami in vlogo žensk v javnem kulturnem življenju.

Članek nadalje analizira skladateljičina zrela dela in opozarja na njihovo formalno inovativnost, harmonično bogastvo in slogovno raznolikost. Ugotavlja, da je bila kompleksnost njenega kompozicijskega izraza zaradi vztrajnega opiranja na preozke estetske okvirje in historiografske paradigme, utemeljene na kanonskih primerjavah, dosledno napačno razumljena ali vsaj podcenjena. Celo znanstvena prizadevanja za rehabilitacijo njene zapuščine – zlasti temeljno raziskovalno delo Koraljke Kos – so pogosto celo okrepila takšne paradigme, saj so njeno delo obravnavala skozi prizmo izpeljane legitimnosti in bolj poudarjala njeno biografijo kot avtonomno glasbeno logiko del. Članek preučuje tudi ideološke pogoje, ki so oblikovali historiografsko obravnavo Dore Pejačević, zlasti strateško utišanje ali preoblikovanje njenega aristokratskega porekla v socialističnem jugoslovanskem kontekstu, od devetdesetih let 20. stoletja pa

tudi njeno ponovno vključitev v nacionalistične narative. Takšno biografsko okvirjanje je zameglilo kritične razsežnosti recepcije in oviralo popolnejše razumevanje položaja Dore Pejačević v hrvaški in evropski glasbeni moderni.

Članek poziva k ponovni oceni skladateljskega opusa Dore Pejačević skozi zgodovinsko in ideološko ozaveščen objektiv, ki odklanja reduktivne binarne opredelitve prisotnosti in odsotnosti, kanona in periferije, nacionalnega in tujega. Zagovarja interpretativni pristop, ki lahko na lastnih temeljih obravnava stilistično dvoumnost, zgodovinsko liminalnost in izrazno kompleksnost glasbe.