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Peter Machajdík – composer, life and works

Summary

Slovak composer, musician and concerto organiser. He was born in Bratislava in 1961. He studied economy at University of Economics in Bratislava. In the 1990s, he attended music composers courses in Amsterdam and Graz. After these courses, he was a guest of the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program. His music has been performed in many countries including Europe, America and Asia. He has collaborated with some of the most famous orchestras and ensembles, soloists, harpists, organists, cellists, violists and many others. His output includes a wide range of chamber, orchestral, electronic and multimedia works. During his career, he has received many awards all over the world. Currently, he lives in Ružomberok, working as a freelance composer. The paper presents his life, works and his way of musical thinking.

Keywords: Peter Machajdík, composer, works, collaboration, music, Slovak contemporary music.

Musical interests in youthful period

The composer and multimedial artist Peter Machajdík was born on 1st June 1961 in Rača, a borough of Bratislava, into a musical family, whose most of the members were inclined to art. His grandmother came from Vienna and in her musical interpretation Peter could daily find snatches of music by Schubert, Schumann, Mozart or Beethoven. He had his first close contact with music at art school, where he studied piano. At that time he was really fascinated by music. While he was a teenager, he was interested in popular music and he used to listen to popular songs on an old gramophone. He reminisces about listening to bands

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like The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin or Slovak and Czech pop scene, including Karel Gott, Václav Neckař, Olympik, Prúdy with its lead singer Pavol Hammel or the band Collegium Musicum with its frontman Marián Varga. Later, he tried to reproduce their music with friends so he rehearsed, with his own bands, the repertoire of pop bands, mostly bands like Yes, Genesis or Pink Floyd¹.

By the end of his studies at grammar school, he started to be interested in current classical music intensively, through the Austrian broadcasting station – ORF. At that time he became acquainted with the artistic work of Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Olivier Messiaen, Luigi Nono, György Ligeti, Edgard Vares, and also the music of Igor Stravinsky, Paul Hindemith, Arthur Honegger and many others. Another important impulse in making the decision to become a composer was *Adagio* from Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 10, which he heard via the local Radio Devín. To his first composer's attempts belonged small compositions for piano.

The eighties and nineties. **Self-study and progress of the composing style**

In his last year of grammar school, in 1980, he sent an application letter to the VSMU, the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. His music mentor was, now deceased, professor Juraj Pospíšil. During admissions, he introduced himself with *Composition for Prepared Bike and Tape*. Yet, he was not accepted, due to the incomprehension of the commission, which was influenced by the past political regime. Professor Vladimír Bokes claimed that he wanted to accept him as his student, but he himself had then a really tough situation at university. After this failure, his next choice was the study of economics at the Faculty of National Economy at the University of Economics in Bratislava. The studies helped him to gain knowledge about the state and the functioning of society. Within his musical activities, he continued as a self-taught. Many of his colleagues composers were envious of his freedom in thinking and composing, because they spent time during their studies focusing solely on the transcriptions of Slovak folklore songs².

His music and thinking were then strongly differentiated from the domestic composers' scene, due to a strong influence of the European and world's avant-garde. At that point, he admired mostly the composers Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage. It provoked him, so he started a personal communication with both of them. Much to his own surprise, Stockhausen gave him all his recordings

¹ P. Slabý, *Baví mě skládatsvo dobně bez jakýchkoliv témat*, [online], "Kulturni Magazin" 2011, No. 8, <http://magazinuni.cz/hudba/bavi-me-skladat-svobodne-bez-jakychkoliv-temat/> [page visited on 11.10.2018].

² O. Reháč, *Už sa naozaj nemusíme od nikoho nič učiť*, [online], <https://kultura.sme.sk/c/4264715/uz-sa-naozaj-nemusime-od-nikoho-nic-ucit.html/> [page visited on 2.06.2018].

and books about his own music, with a personal dedication. On the other hand Peter Machajdik was impressed by Cage, especially by the inspiration drawn from the Eastern philosophy, simplicity, playfulness and carefree expression. At that time, Peter began to become acquainted with another composers such as: Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Pierre Boulez, György Ligeti, Lou Harrison and Mauricio Kagel. He also exchanged letters with them and gained much inspiration from their work³.

As one of the few, he became a contributor to many different western art magazines – like the American *Keyboard Magazine*, British *Crescendo International* and *Jazz Forum*. In return, he got CDs with current music. Besides music Peter Machajdik looked for an inspiration in intermedial projects with the use of electronics. Therefore, he addressed the Massachusetts institution Centre for Advanced Visual Studies, one of the first labs of multimedial art where, at that time, operated the artists like Peter Campus, Lowry Burgess, Otto Piene and Nam June Paik⁴.

In the time before the revolution, he belonged to the musicians of a closed, underground scene performing alternative music in Slovakia. He gained admirers from a batch of the VSMU students, with whom they discussed and listened to contemporary music. In the first half of the 80's, he took up with Michal Murín, and this way he started his cooperation with the motion theatre called “Boulder”. Their common efforts ended in the formation of the ensemble Transmusic Comp. with Milan Adamciak, with which they performed for the first time on the opening of the First exhibition of the Gerulata art association, in Bratislava, on 15th October 1989. Machajdik himself found that time interesting and inspiring. In their work, they aren't inclined to follow the accurately prescribed rules, but they were lead by independence, improvisation and intuitive music. Aside from traditional musical instruments, they used other different objects from common life or electronic machines. They realized musical graphics, acoustic performances, intermedial acoustic background⁵.

In 1990 was formulated the charter of Transmusic Comp, and on its basis, with the motion theatre “Boulder”, they established the legendary group SNEH(snow)-Group for the unconventional music. The goal of this company was to provide support for events, work and leadership, spread creative concepts, by that time politically oppressed. They tried to bring modernism to music and art to Slovakia.

The mature work of Peter Machajdik. Areas of activity

The most noticeable moment of his previous career was receiving the prestigious scholarship granted by the DAAD Künstlerprogramm in Berlin. The pro-

³ Ex Tempore, *Peter Machajdik*, [online], <http://www.sonicart.sk/archives/1301> [page visited on 8.10.2018].

⁴ P. Slabý, op. cit.

⁵ R. Rosenbach, *Transmusic Comp*, [online], https://monoskop.org/images/b/b7/Transmusic_Comp._%282011%29_-_Melos_Etos_bulletin.pdf. [page visited on 24.10.2018].

gramme supports around twenty artists, composers, instrumentalists, painters and other artists annually and it funds an execution of their work. Peter Machajdik received the scholarship on the basis of his application, whereby the key factors of his admission were his innovative approach to work with sounds and innovative ways of work. He came into company of artists like John Cage, Arvo Pärt, Gija Kancheli, Krzysztof Penderecki, Luigi Nono, Damien Hirst or Marina Abramović, who also took part in this programme⁶.

The life in Berlin provided Peter many new impulses, information and knowledge of different kind. He acquired prestigious contacts not just with the domestic, but also with the all-European and worldwide scene. The duration of the mentioned programme was four months. Shortly before its ending, he took part in the biggest festival of the programme, Grenzenlos, where was presented the Czechoslovak art. His music received a worldwide response. Different countries accepted him as their partner, and in Berlin, he became considered a their domestic composer. Meanwhile, in Slovakia there was a completely different atmosphere, yet limited and strongly influenced by politics and the state of society. As time went on, due to those career moments, Peter's work became respected and recognized not only worldwide, but also in Slovakia⁷.

Nowadays, his work is recognized all over the world. Peter's songs were played in huge concert halls worldwide (Berlin, New York, Calgary, Boston, London, Milan, Rome, Helsinki, Amsterdam, Gent, Beograd, Prague, Bratislava, Košice and many others). He cooperated with prestigious orchestras and soloists, including the Jánaček Philharmonic orchestra in Ostrava, Camerata Europea, Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Pomeranian Philharmonic Bydgoszcz, Cluster Ensemble, Quasars Ensemble. He also cooperated with the Serbian virtuoso violist Saša Mirković, the Polish-Slovak duo of accordionists Accosphere (Alena Budziňáková-Palus and Grzegorz Palus), Wieniawsky Philharmonic orchestra in Lublin, State Philharmonic Orchestra of Košice with the cooperation of Peter Breiner, the Italian harpist Floraleda Sacchi, the Ukrainian organist Olena Maceljuch, the American organist David di Fiore, the pianist Jordana Palovičov, the clarinetist Martin Adámek a Czechoslovak cabinet duo (Pavel Burdych – violin, Zuzana Berešová – piano). The last of the mentioned duos presented his composition *1-9-1-8*, dedicated to the centenary of the formation of Czechoslovakia, which was played on four continents more than 30 times and it belongs to the most played compositions by current composers at all.

Peter was awarded prizes several times during his career:

- in 1989, he received an award at the 16th International Luigi Russolo Competition of electronic music for the composition *...and the earth will delight* in Italy;

⁶ E-mail correspondence of Peter Machajdik with the author of the article [date: 11.10.2018].

⁷ K. Zbruž, *Peter Machajdik: S Karlheinzom Stockhausenom sa stretávam na hviezde Sirius*, [online], "Kloaka" 2011, No. 3, [https://monoskop.org/images/8/8c/Machajd%C3%ADk_Peter_\(2011\)_-_S_Karlheinzom_Stockhausenom_sa_stret%C3%A1vam_na_hviezde_S%C3%ADrius.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/8/8c/Machajd%C3%ADk_Peter_(2011)_-_S_Karlheinzom_Stockhausenom_sa_stret%C3%A1vam_na_hviezde_S%C3%ADrius.pdf), [page visited on 15.10.2018].

- in 1992, Artist in Residence, DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm, Berlin;
- in 1999, Artist in Residence Künstlerhaus Schloß Wiepersdorf, Germany;
- in, 2003, Artist in Residence, Künstlerhäuser Worpswede, Germany;
- in 2004, Artist in Residence, Künstlerhaus Lukas, Ahrenshoop, Germany;
- in 2005, Ján Levoslav Bella Award from Musical Foundation;
- in 2011, Artist in Residence (international Visegrad Fund), Prague;
- in 2013, Artist in Residence, Judenburg, Austria⁸.

Peter Machajdik – characteristics of work

We can divide Peter Machajdik's work into a couple of time periods. Besides that, we can find many works in which we can see an intersection between these periods, especially easiness, playfulness and the effort to express ideas about good and beauty. Currently, he belongs to one of the most active Slovak composers. He handles instrumental and vocal music, film music, music for broadcastings, plays and dance performances or multimedial performances. In an interview, he admitted that he does not look for a specific idea in his work, because he considers every piece of work as a part of his own DNA. His compositions are the result of places where he walks, what and how he perceives, whom he meets or events that impress him. He is influenced by a variety of philosophies and religions, but not in a way of complete capture, but in a way that these things are an integral part of our world. He is looking for an inspiration also in ordinary things, for example the movement of grass by wind, the transformation of shadows on the apartment's walls, in mimicry of people, life stories and more⁹.

At the beginning, his work is constituted of small piano pieces, which he composed at an early age. One of his first bigger works was *Composition for Prepared Bike and Tape*, which became his work for the admissions to the study of composition at the VŠMU. During these years, he was inspired by the work of avant-gardists, who experimented with sound and forms, mainly John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and American minimalists. Within the international contest *Concorso Internazionale Luigi Russolo* in Italy, he was awarded a prize for the work *...and the earth will delight (... a zem sa bude tešit')*, which he composed on the order of Experimental studio in Bratislava. He tried to define his own style of work by attending master courses for composers, which he completed with the mentors Clarence Barlow, Konrad Boehmer or Dick Raazmakers in the Austrian city of Graz and the Dutch capital city, Amsterdam. In the 90s, his work established itself and found its admirers, at first in Germany and afterwards in the whole Europe and the USA. At the end of the 20th century, he presented his work

⁸ P. Machajdik, *Orchestrálna tvorba*, [online], <https://hc.sk/hudba/diela/>[page visited on 17.10.2018].

⁹ E-mail correspondence of Peter Machajdik with the author of the article [date: 11.10.2018].

also on the domestic scene. One of the first pieces was the composition *Five mirrors for accordion*, which he composed for his friend Boris Lenko.

The composition contains five parts. Each of them is an acoustic expression of a view into mirror, directed into five areas, which I have been trying to observe for a long time by now¹⁰.

In 2000, one of his best known works came out, which later became the main vehicle of the ideas of his next album – *Namah*. It means ‘greeting’, ‘esteem expressed by a bow’, in sanskrit. This work was composed in the winter of that year, in the city of Schwäbisch Hall, located in the south of Germany. As he claims: “At this time, I’ve been doing an inconspicuous gathering of aliquot tones and also other, almost inaudible acoustic phenomena into my music language.

From a simple harmony of composition composed for string orchestra and woodblock flows an absolute comfort, heartsease and while listening, the listener stops for a while and thinks not only about his existence, but also about the existence of the whole world, and even catches himself with a slight smile. The first premiere of *Namah* was part of the festival New Slovak music in November 2002¹¹.

Until 2008, he composed 41 works for orchestra, soloists, instrumental or vocal groups and many more. At this time, he started his collaboration with the legendary guitarist of the band YES, Jon Anderson. It all started accidentally, when Jon was looking for collaborators for his new musical projects. Peter sent him one minute preview of his composition and, to his own surprise, he got a reply with an opportunity to send more of his music. After a short correspondence about music, Jon finally came to Bratislava, where he sang a couple of songs for Peter’s album *Namah*. You can find on this album also artists like the already mentioned Italian harpist Floraleda Sacchi, and also David Moss, Mayuko Kaida, Jozef Lupták, Ján Pöschl string orchestra and others. One year later, together with Jon Anderson, he prepared a performance for the 20th anniversary of the Fall of the Iron Curtain and also, they produced a song which resounded at the end of the documentary movie *Return of lynx* and was called *Cats alive*.

Another significant song is *Linnas* for piano, which had its premiere in Ľudovít Fulla Gallery in 2012 and was performed by Jordana Palovičová. It is interesting because from the prelude to the end, you need to sustain foot pedal held without change. Another popular piece is *Wie der Wind in den Dünen* (*As the wind in the dunes*) for fourteen string instruments, which he dedicated to Malta Ludin. We can say that these compositions especially represent the work of Peter Machajdík, his harmonic, melodic feeling and understanding of music.

As for the vocal work, he composed many songs for sole voice (cycle *Seven songs* for soprano and cello), but also glee choral songs. For example, the com-

¹⁰ P. Machajdík, *Peter Machajdík*, [online], <https://hc.sk/hudba/osobnost-detail/222-peter-machajdik>. [page visited on 17.10.2018].

¹¹ P. Zagar, *Peter Machajdik*, [in:] M. Jurík, P. Zagar, (ed.), *100 slovenských skladateľov*, Národné hudobné centrum, Bratislava 1998, s. 187.

position *Domine* that Machajdík, due to his indulgence in experimenting and minimalism, composes in the traditional way of spiritual music of old music masters¹².

The composition is made of a three-tone melody which, in the middle of the composition, he enhances by the descent of the scale from above to down. In the lyrics there is the always recurring verse: “Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise”, originally in latin. Among sacred works, we can mention in addition: *Si diligamus invicem* (2002), *Kyrie* (2011) and *Vita aeterna* (2018) for solo soprano, violin, tenor flute, piano and choir. The last one was composed for the Concert of composers from Ružomberok organised by the Department of music of the Catholic University in Ružomberok.

The model for that was St. Francis of Assisi’s prayer which was musicalized in the Italian original. It is an extraordinarily suggestive piece of work, with exposed soprano solo in a minimalist coloring of the choir that Machajdík enriched by the singing of birds and sounds of nature at the end, which is the example of how perfectly he grasps the atmosphere of the piece and the way in which he emphasizes the relationship of St. Francis with nature. The premiere took place in a synagogue in Ružomberok on 29th April 2018, with the performers: Mária Kizák (soprano), Marek Kizák (tenor flute), Rastislav Adamko (violin), Peter Machajdík (piano, electronics) and with the conductress Zuzana Zahradníková.

Peter Machajdík composed one stage work *Intimate music*, four compositions for a big symphonic orchestra, five works for chamber orchestra, two compositions for solo voice and orchestra, six compositions for orchestra and solo instruments, thirty-four works for solo instruments, four compositions for organ, many compositions for duos, trios, quartets, quintets, septets, and bigger arrays, eight compositions for vocal-instrumental arrays, music for choir with musical accompaniment and also a capella, fourteen electro-acoustic compositions, film music for four movies and he collaborated on five multimedial projects. His well-known, previously mentioned, contemporary composition is *I-9-I-8*, in remembrance of the 100th anniversary of the formation of Czechoslovakia, and it is one of the most played compositions of contemporary composers in the world¹³.

Besides his artistic work, he is also the author of didactic books and compositions for students. He closely collaborates with Ľ. Fulla Art School in Ružomberok. He cooperates also with flautists Natália Štupaková and Natália Hattalová, who perform his compositions regularly and who also represent themselves, their school and the city on nationwide competitions, where they received many awards¹⁴.

¹² P. Machajdík, *Orchestrálna tvorba*, [online], <https://hc.sk/hudba/diela/> [page visited on 17.10.2018].

¹³ P. Machajdík, *Portfólio*, [online], <http://machajdik.weebly.com/cv.html>. [page visited on 14.10.2018].

¹⁴ M. Kizak, M. *Rajecká hudobná jar 2015*, [online], http://zusruzomberok.sk/blog1/?jwid=jw1&bid=blog1&wid=jw1_comp_BlogModule_0&g=comp_BlogModule_0&bid=blog1&aid=36. [page visited on 8.10.2018].

He is well informed about performances of his works worldwide, because his every score contains the notice:

Please send information about any live performance(s) of "NAME OF COMPOSITION" before the performance(s) to: "E-MAIL ADDRESS".

Currently, he is composing *Concert for accordion and symphonic orchestra*, which will have its premiere next year; also *Cello sonata* for a soloist of Slovak philharmonic orchestra; furthermore, he is planning *Viola concert* for his friend Saša Mirkovič. He is intensively following the domestic and foreign music scene. Among the older music generation, he is impressed by the work of Vladimír Godár and partially Peter Zagar. Among the young music generation, he likes the work of the American composer Missy Mazzoli, Christopher Cerrone and Bryce Dessner, Slovenian composer Nina Šenk and the composers from Slovakia – Samuel Hvozdič and Peter Javorka¹⁵.

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¹⁵ E-mail correspondence of Peter Machajdik with the author of the article [date: 11.10.2018].

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Kompozytor Peter Machajdik – życie i twórczość

Streszczenie

Słowacki kompozytor, muzyk i organizator wydarzeń muzycznych na żywo. Urodził się w Bratysławie w 1961 roku. Tam też studiował ekonomię na Uniwersytecie Ekonomicznym. W latach 90. uczestniczył w kursach kompozytorskich w Amsterdamie oraz Grazu. Po ich ukończeniu był uczestnikiem programu DAAD Artists w Berlinie. Jego muzyka była wykonywana w wielu krajach Europy, Ameryki i Azji. Współpracował z najbardziej znanymi orkiestrami i zespołami oraz solistami: harfistami, organistami, wiolonczelistami, altowiolistami i innymi artystami. W swym dorobku posiada wiele dzieł kameralnych, orkiestrowych, elektronicznych oraz multimedialnych. Jego twórczość uhonorowana została wieloma zagranicznymi nagrodami. Obecnie mieszka w Ružomberoku, gdzie pracuje jako niezależny kompozytor. Artykuł przedstawia jego życie, prace i sposób myślenia o muzyce.

Słowa kluczowe: Peter Machajdik, kompozytor, dzieła, współpraca, muzyka, współczesna muzyka słowacka.

Peter PEKARČIK

Katolícka univerzita v Ružomberku

Skladateľ Peter Machajdík – život a tvorba

Zhrnutie

Slovenský skladateľ, hudobník a organizátor hudobného života. Narodil sa v Bratislave v roku 1961. Študoval ekonómiu na Vysokej škole ekonomickej v Bratislave. V 90 - tých rokoch sa zúčastnil viacerých skladateľských kurzov v Amsterdame, či Grazi. Po týchto kurzoch získal štipendium DAAD Artist Program v Berlíne. Jeho hudba zaznela v mnohých krajinách Európy, Ameriky a Ázie. Spolupracoval so známymi orchestrami a ansámbľami, sólistami, harfistkou, organistami, čelistami, violistami a inými. Jeho tvorba zahŕňa širokú škálu komornej, orchestrálnej, elektronickej hudby a multimediálnych diel. Počas kariéry získal viacero ocenení po celom svete. V súčasnosti žije v Ružomberku a pracuje ako skladateľ na voľnej nohe. V príspevku chceme predstaviť jeho život, jeho dielo a spôsob jeho hudobného myslenia.

Kľúčové slová: Peter Machajdík, skladateľ, dielo, spolupráca, súčasnej slovenskej hudby.