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SONEMUS FEST (2015–2018): FROM ‘SONIC BOOM’ TO ‘ICARUS’

Abstract: SONEMUS is an organization established in 2001 for the purpose of performing, promoting and educating in the domain of contemporary music. The SONEMUS Festival is the only festival of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that is the reason for its great importance for the development and expansion of 21st-century culture and art in the home country, as well as in the region of Southeast Europe. So far, a large number of projects have taken place under the name of SONEMUS, including a variety of concerts, workshops and lectures. From 2015 to 2018, the Society has registered four festivals of exceptional importance for musical life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Consequently, this article will review of the Festival's development over the past four years.

Keywords: SONEMUS Fest, Sarajevo, Contemporary music, Sonic Boom, Trancegression, DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION, Icarus

The Society of NEw MUsic Sarajevo – SONEMUS (Lat. – let us sound) is an association established for the purpose of performing, promoting and educating in the domain of contemporary artistic music with an emphasis on works of Southeast European composers who belong to the modernist aesthetic orientation. In addition, an integral part of the Society is the SONEMUS ensemble,¹ a performing group, i.e. a network of experienced musicians-associates whose number is not constant, which allows the ensemble to expand depending on the needs of a musical work. SONEMUS also organizes workshops, lectures and educational events in the domain of contemporary music (SONEMUS 2015).

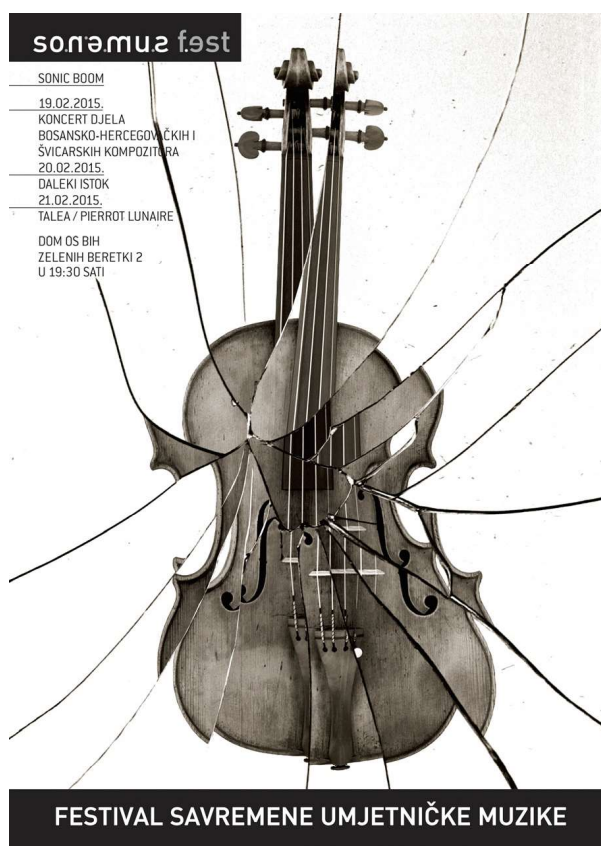
The story of SONEMUS begins in March 2001 with the Bosnian-Herzegovinian

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¹ Current members of the SONEMUS Ensemble (according to the latest festival in 2018): Hanan Hadžajlić (flute), Béatrice Laplante (oboe), Azra Ramić (clarinet/bass clarinet), Vedran Tuće (clarinet/bass clarinet), Gilles Grimaître (piano), Simon Klavžar (percussion), Violeta Smailović-Huart (violin), Esther Saladin (violoncello), Sophie Lücke (double bass).

premiere of Brian Ferneyhough's composition *Cassandra's Dream Song* at a workshop held at the Sarajevo Music Academy. After the workshop, which was the first public performance of SONEMUS, a series of 'New music' concerts began on November 2001. The idea emerged of a need for the establishment of an ensemble that would deal with performing contemporary music in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The initiators of this undertaking were Ališer Sijarić, a professor of composition and related subjects at the Sarajevo Music Academy, and Boris Previšić, a Swiss flutist who, in the words of Sijarić, was open to co-operation with a sensible-minded institution from Sarajevo (Sijarić 2002, 130–1).

Since 2001, the Society has had a large number of successful events, but in 2015 it expanded and SONEMUS took the form of a festival. Two key figures for SONEMUS are Azra Ramić (as CEO) and Ališer Sijarić (as artistic director of the festival), who are still highly active in their collaborations. From 2015 to 2018, the Society has registered four festivals of exceptional importance for musical life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily demonstrated by the fact that, by 2018, the Festival has inspired a number of other events related to contemporary music, such as concerts of improvisation and numerous lectures in this field. SONEMUS has also encouraged a number of young people to engage in composing and performing contemporary



Flyer of SONEMUS Fest 2015 – *Sonic Boom* ©
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and experimental artistic music. The titles of the festivals were *Sonic Boom* (2015), *Trancegression* (2016), *DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION* (2017) and *Icarus* (2018).

Sonic Boom

The first *great-story* festival was held in February 2015, with the title *Sonic Boom*. The three-day event took place in the Army Hall in Sarajevo and each of the three concerts were accompanied by a particular subject and/or works that followed the basic idea of the event. The concerts were performed by an ensemble made up of musicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Switzerland, guided by conductor and composer Jürg Wyttenbach.

The first concert was on February 19 and it was dedicated to works by Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Swiss composers. The concert's program included two premieres. The first was Hanan Hadžajlić's *Freezing Moon*, a product of the study of the relationship between human speech and music manifested through contemporary vocal and flute techniques; the second premiere was *The Impact of the analog synthesizer* by Dino Rešidbegović, which is based on a quotation from the preface of Mark Jenkins' book *Analog Synthesizers*. Through the topic of its text, the



SONEMUS Fest, *Sonic Boom*, 2018. © Vanja Čerimagić

composition evokes the idea of the treatment of analog synthesizers. In addition to the aforementioned works, the rest of the concert contained compositions by Jürg

Wytttenbach (*Una chica en Nirvana*), Beat Furrer (*Presto con fuoco*), Michael Jarrell (*Assonance III*) and Ališer Sijarić (*Innerhalb aller sprachlichen Gestaltung...*).

The next day of the *Sonic Boom* festival featured a programmatically titled concert – *Far East (Daleki istok)*. The concert's thematic aim was to show the sound connection between traditional Far East culture and contemporary musical expression through works by various composers. This evening's repertoire was rounded up by works of composers from Eastern Europe, with a special emphasis on works that include the accordion. Besides that, attention was also drawn to the “Gamelan trio” ensemble² who performed the traditional Indonesian gamelan music, *Bata Rubuh*. The composers whose works were performed were Toshio Hosokawa (*Melodia*), Hyunkyung Lim (*Windbrücke*), Toru Takemitsu (*Voice*), Isang Yun (*Intermezzo*) and Keiko Harada (*Midstream*).

For the final evening of the Festival, a special program was offered to the audience – a concert which unified two masterpieces of European music from the beginning and end of the 20th century: Arnold Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912) and Gérard Grisey's *Talea* (1986). Both compositions were performed by the SONEMUS Ensemble³ under the direction of the conductor Jürg Wytttenbach.



SONEMUS Fest, *Sonic Boom*, 2018. © Vanja Čerimagić

² Members of the “Gamelan trio”: Igor Magdalenić (bonang/salendro), Asep Supriadi (rincik, suling, vocal), Edo Golubić (kendang).

³ Members of the SONEMUS Ensemble in 2015: Jeanine Hirzel (mezzo-soprano), Hanan Hadžajlić (flute/piccolo), Azra Ramić (clarinet/bass-clarinet), Gilles Grimaître (piano), Violeta Smailović-Huart (violin/viola), Esther Saladin (violoncello).

Such a selection of repertoire for the last concert of SONEMUS' *Sonic Boom* Festival has left fragments of an idea of contemporary spirit and modern musical aesthetics among the local audience and has built a monument to twentieth-century music in Sarajevo.

Trancegression



Flyer of SONEMUS Fest 2016 – *Trancegression*.

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SONEMUS' festival in 2016 was named *Trancegression*. According to the program booklet, this program explored the world of musical hybrids that combine contemporary art music and various genres of pop music like psychedelic rock, trance, acid-house and similar. However, unlike typical hybrids that are deprived of their basic properties, the combination of musical genres sometimes generates new, authentic qualities which resonate in the interstitial (un)reality (SONEMUS Fest 2016a).

Trancegression comprised three concerts. The first of these, named *Acid Rain*, was held on April 14 in the Army Hall in Sarajevo. On this evening an interesting and varied program was introduced to the audience, including works by Ryszard Gabryś (*An die Freude*), Iannis Xenakis (*Tetora*), Pierre Boulez (*Dérive 1*), Ališer Sijarić

(*Cross Bowing*), Ricardo Eizirik (*Junkyard Étude II*) and Michael Gordon (*Acid Rain*). All works were performed by the “Gagliano”⁵ and SONEMUS ensembles under Robert Ames’ direction.

The next evening, a musical event was held under the title of Fausto Romitelli’s composition *Professor Bad Trip Lesson I*. At the very beginning of the concert, the *First Sonata* for piano by Pierre Boulez (1925 – 2016) was dedicated to the memory and honor of the composer’s life and work. In addition, another Romitelli work (*Trash Tv Trance*) was performed, as well as works by other composers, such as Beat Furrer’s *Aer*, Hanan Hadžajlić’s *No To You (Morgellon Love)*, *Elegant Spanking* by Daniel Zea and *Anamorfosi* by Salvatore Sciarrino. Thanks to the expertise of the SONEMUS ensemble⁵, the compositions were interpreted at the highest level of contemporary musical expression.



SONEMUS Fest, *Trancegression*, 2016. © Vanja Čerimagić

Guests of the *Trancegression* festival, members of the “Platypus” ensemble⁶, performed at the last event of this year’s series of concerts. The basis of the *Looney Tunes* concert program was chamber music – in particular, the chamber music of

4 Members of the “Gagliano” ensemble are Galya Bisengalieva (1st violin), Mira Benjamin (2nd violin), Zoe Matthews (viola) and Sergio Serra Lopez (violoncello).

5 In addition to the standard set up of the SONEMUS ensemble from 2015, the group also featured: Aleksander Gabryś (double bass), Ruben Mattia Santorsa (electric guitar), Zoe Matthews (viola), Alisa Sokolović (voice) and Henri de Saussure (electronics).

6 A group of Viennese (Austria) musicians consisting of Kaoko Amano (soprano), Elena Gabrielli (flute), Ingrid Zhegu (violin), Tomasz Skweres (violoncello) and Jaimie Wolfson (piano).

new complexity originator, Brian Ferneyhough (*Four Miniatures*) – as well as the renowned Austrian composer Bernhard Lang and his work for voice and piano from the *Songbook III*. The program also included compositions by Galina Ustvolskaya (*Grand Duett I*), Luciano Berio (*Sequenza III*), Ricardo S. Eizirik (*Observations I*), Fernando Riederer (*Hanabira*) and Daan Janssens (*Paysage Etude*). In addition to the above mentioned authors and works, great emphasis was placed on the two premieres of Bosnian-Herzegovinian composers: Belma Bešlić-Gál's piece *Slovo o vremenu* (A



SONEMUS Fest, *Trancegression*, 2016. © Vanja Čerimagić

letter about time), which relies on aesthetics, philosophy and the definition of art in its realistic view, and *X O*, Dino Rešidbegović's sound-image representing a familiar game known as tic-tac-toe, in which each of the three instruments has a special role (SONEMUS Fest 2016a-c). In conclusion, *Trancegression* was of great importance for the development of SONEMUS and left a considerable impact on musical life in Sarajevo.

DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION

As in previous years, so in 2017 the Festival made another new step forward. This year's edition of the Festival was called *DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION* and was held under the motto 'When immeasurable is measured by music'. The program consisted of three musical events scheduled from 7 to 9 April 2017, all held in the Army Hall in Sarajevo.

The Festival began with a concert by the pre-art soloists⁷ at which four premieres were performed, half of which were pre-art commissions. Premieres included works by Matko Brekalo (*identification<changeability>stagnation*) and Deniz Nurhat (*Kurkku*), while the commissions were Stefan Wirth's *Lieux*, a work written to an experiential plan as a sound archive framed in a kind of virtuality that is composed of pieces of the composer's memory, and *Septuor pour 13 sources*

sonemus fest

07.04.2017.

PRE-ART

PRE-ART SOLOISTS (CH)

08.04.2017

CI CKWORKS

SONEMUS Ensemble (BIH/CH)

09.04.2017

NEOFONIA

Neofonia Ensemble (SI)

DOM OS BIH

ZELENIH BERETKI 2

u 19:30 SATI



Design: www.ideologija.ba

DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION

Flyer of SONEMUS Fest 2017 – DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION. © Anur Hadžiomerspahić

⁷ The *pre-art* organization and soloists have been active since 2001; their domain is the promotion and performance of contemporary artistic music, as well as orders and premieres of contemporary music composers. The *pre-art* soloists are: Boris Previšević (flute), Matthias Arter (oboe/bass oboe), Raphael Camenisch (saxophone), Vladimir Blagojević (accordion), Gilles Grimaître (piano), Tobias Moster (violoncello) and Aleksander Gabrys (double bass).

by internationally-renowned composer Vinko Globokar, which represents different individual dramatic situations (interpretations of the meanings of which are left to the audience). The soloists also performed *Transfiguration* by Marijana Janevska, Michael Roth's *Die Zunge des Gletschers* and Matthias Arter's *Medusa, Fuga a 5 voci*.

Clockworks, the second concert of the Festival, was marked by an appearance from SONEMUS ensemble⁸, which, under the direction of Edo Mičić, presented the *Kammerkonzert* for 13 instruments, a masterpiece of the great contemporary



SONEMUS Fest, *DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION*, 2017. © Vanja Čerimagić

composer György Ligeti. At the same event, the audience witnessed a performance of Marko Nikodijevič's *Music Box*⁹, which directly refers to Ligeti. Also included in *Clockworks* program were Martin Jaggi's *Plod On* and Ališer Sijarič's *Noise Prevails*, a work inspired by the production of the tone or harmonic spectrum that is to be 'eaten' by the as the work progresses.

A concert by the Slovenian ensemble "Neofonia"¹⁰, led by Steven Loy, brought three world premieres of new works by prominent contemporary composers Uroš Rojko

8 For this specific purpose, the standard set up of the SONEMUS ensemble was supported by the *pre-art* soloists and Branko Mlikota (clarinet), Igor Lazič (horn), Admir Vračo (trumpet), Matthew Gee (trombone), Karmen Pervitič (percussion), Zlatan Božuta (harpichord/keyboards), Diego Ramos Rodriguez (violin) and Sophie Wahlmüller (viola).

9 The full name of the work is *Music Box / Selbstportrait mit Ligeti und Strawinsky (und Messiaen ist auch dabei)*.

10 "Neofonia" is an ensemble from Ljubljana (SLO) consisting of Elena Gabbrielli (flute), Valentina Štrucelj (clarinet), Jože Bogolin (percussion), Klemen Golner (piano), Matjaž Porovne (violin) and Igor Mitrovič (violoncello).

(*Neofonia*), Urška Pompe (*And, through and over everything*) and young Bosnian-Herzegovinian flutist and composer Hanan Hadžajlić, whose composition *Homo ex machina – Hommage à Ligeti* is interpreted as micro-polyphonic mechanical music for acoustics instruments. In the last SONEMUS event of the *DIS/C/LOC/K/ATION* Festival, works by Tristan Murail (*Treize couleurs du soleil couchant*) and Christophe Bertrand (*Le Chute du rouge*) had their premieres in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The “Neofonia” ensemble also performed *CUTE*, a piece composed by Dieter Ammann, one of the most significant contemporary Swiss composers.

sonemus fest

KONCERTI:
Petak, 20.4.2018.

SONEMUS ENSEMBLE
Subota, 21.4.2018.

JUGENDSTIL
Polaznici SONEMUS
radionice za
mlade muzičare

**BOŠNJAČKI
INSTITUT**
Muja Mustafe
Bašeskije 21
u 20:00

IZLOŽBA
16.-30.4.2018:

ANUR HADŽIOMERSPAHIĆ
SONEMUS PLAKATI
2001-2017

ART DEPOTARS AEOI
Centar Skenderija
Dom mladih,
Terezija b.b.,
Sarajevo

ICARUS

Design: www.dizajnigija.ba

Flyer of SONEMUS Fest 2018 – *Icarus*. © Anur Hadžiomerspahić

ICARUS

The Bosniak Institute in Sarajevo was the center of this year's SONEMUS Fest, held on 20 and 21 April 2018. As stated on the festival flyer, the motif of this edition of SONEMUS is the multiplicity of the ancient myth about Icarus. This famous story, drawing a man through different states and feelings such as lust, courage, resurrection, will and the desire for freedom and, ultimately, destruction is characterized by its dynamic development, escalation and final decline, symbolically depicted by wing movements and a grim and fatal finale in which the feathering floats on the roiling surface of the sea (Sijarić 2018).

The first concert, thematically named Icarus, was opened by *Trawl*, one of Richard Barrett's most significant compositions. The premiere of Ališer Sijarić's



SONEMUS Fest, *Icarus*, 2018. © Vanja Čerimagić

piece *Sul movimento delle ali* or *About wing movements* followed the Icarus' motif and 'poured the spirit of freedom' into the Bosniak Institute's Hall. Antoine Fachard's music represents a relatively new phenomenon in 'music for the connoisseurs', so the premiere of his work *Athroïisma*, performed by members of the SONEMUS ensemble under the direction of Gregory Charette, captivated the audience. The composition *La Chute d'Icare* or *Fall of Icarus*, written by one of the most important composers of our time, Brian Ferneyhough, symbolically completed the first night of the *Icarus* edition.

The second concert from SONEMUS' Icarus edition was named *Jugendstil*

and featured some of Sarajevo's young contemporary music performers. The local as well as the foreign members of the audience enjoyed the rendition of Olivier Messiaen's *Quatour pour le fin du temps*, in which students of Sarajevo Music Academy performed the seventh movement – *Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps* (Tangle of rainbows, for the Angel who announces the End of Time). The second item on the program was *Drei kleine Stücke* (Three little pieces), a piece by a famous Austrian composer and representative of the Second Viennese School – Anton Webern. Subsequently, Dino Rešidbegović's piece *R.N* for clarinet,



SONEMUS Fest, *Icarus*, 2018. © Vanja Čerimagić

horn and violoncello was performed under the direction of Fuad Šetić, followed by György Kurtág's *Bagatelles* op. 14. The audience were particularly impressed by the interesting and tempting musical patterns in a laudable performance of Hanan Hadžajlić's *Ex Machina III*. The penultimate piece of the program, Pierre Boulez's *Derivé*, was performed by the guests of the festival and students of the Sarajevo Music Academy.¹¹ In the finale of this event, the minimalist work *In C* by the famous composer Terry Riley was performed, which ended the 2018 edition of the SONEMUS Festival.

This SONEMUS Fest was dedicated to the recently deceased Anur

¹¹ Students of the Academy who have performed at the concert: Andrea Boltek (flute); Armin Smriko, Ilma Čagalj, Branko Mlikota (clarinet); Zuhra Melić (horn); Amna Hujčić, Anja Rajić, Emina Džanović (violin); Selma Hrenovica, Anela Pašanbegović, Nejla Komar (violoncello); Dženis Mrkonjić (double bass); Mirza Gološ, Marko Stojanović, Ivan Perković, Zerina Šabotić (piano); Antonio Vincek and Muharem Osmanagić (accordion).

Guests of *Jugendstil* were Dunja Crnjanski (piano) and Ines Ljubej (percussion).

Hadžiomerspahić (1971–2017), a longtime collaborator of the festival, artist and designer, a man who from the very beginning was one of the masterminds behind SONEMUS in the form of the artwork, designs, flyers and posters accompanying the story since 2001. In this honor, an exhibition of all the SONEMUS posters (2001–2017), for which Anur Hadžiomerspahić is credited as designer/artist, was held as part of the festival. The exhibition was open for visitors from 16 to 30 April 2018 at the Art Depo Ars Aevi gallery in the Home of the Youth in Sarajevo (SONEMUS Fest 2018c).

Conclusion

SONEMUS Festival, the only festival of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is very important for the development and expansion of 21st-century culture and art in its home country and the surrounding countries as well as Southeast Europe. It is a unique opportunity to link knowledge and people living in different parts of the world and a real indicator that music brings together people with different opinions and ideas. Festivals of this type are essential for music students and their progress, especially the workshops and concerts where they can learn about new techniques and tendencies in music of their time. In addition, SONEMUS aims at performing new works of contemporary artistic music, that is, works of living composers, which is also an aspect of promoting contemporary art and culture. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Association of SONEMUS could move their story on and expand their scope in the foreseeable future.

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