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Gornji Milanovac, Serbia, 17–18 December 2020**

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THE THIRD CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL *BLISS* “250 YEARS WITH LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN”

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In his famous text named *The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto*, written in 1913, Luigi Russolo stated:

We futurists have all deeply loved and enjoyed the harmonies of the great masters. Beethoven and Wagner have stirred our nerves and hearts for many years. Now we have had enough of them, and we delight much more in combining in our thoughts the noises of trams, of automobile engines, of carriages and brawling crowds, than in hearing again the *Eroica* or the *Pastorale*.

At this moment, one century later, it seems like we are rushing into the concert halls eager to hear the music of Ludwig van Beethoven – to which we are referring here as one of the symbols of the classical music tradition – in order to actually get away from the ‘noises’ of everyday life. It is not an exaggeration to say that the whole music world was impatient of listening (about) Beethoven’s music during 2020 particularly, long configured in advance as a continuum for an extensive and continual celebration of 250 years since the birth of the “great master”. The Third Chamber Music Festival *BLISS* was primarily conceived as

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a part of this worldwide and large-scale *Beethoven Project*, the project which, unfortunately, did not take on the desired dimensions. Instead of bars full of the unique music expression emanated in Beethoven's symphonies, string quartets, piano sonatas, and other notable works, we were firmly surrounded with the significantly different, highly pitched 'intonations' of words such as pandemic, COVID-19, coronavirus, infection, disease, new wave, lockdown, and so forth.



The BLISS Association had to behave in such an environment, i.e. the 'new normal'. Hence, the original idea about the four-day festival, which would be held in Gornji Milanovac (Serbia) during the summer of 2020, was involuntarily left behind. Nevertheless, the irrevocable desire to make homage to the oeuvre of one of the most important composers in the history of music bravely lead to the 'alternative' path – eventually, the Third *BLISS* Festival was held on December 17 and 18, within a semi-virtual sphere.

Namely, the concert program of the first festival day was pre-recorded in the studio of the *Reflection* band from Gornji Milanovac and was released online

(via the BLISS Association Facebook Page) on December 17, precisely on the day of Beethoven's birth or baptism. The Festival was opened by the most popular composer's sonata for violin and piano, precisely Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major, Op. 24 (1800/1801), the blueprint of author's love for nature – his inspiration and refuge – transposed into notes. The "Spring Sonata" was followed by the first of three "Razumovsky" String Quartets – String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59, No. 1 (1806), peculiar by its orchestral/symphonic *écriture* and intended for "a later age", according to Beethoven's own words.

The next day (December 18) was reserved for the live concert, held in the Hallway of the Main Hall of the Cultural Centre Gornji Milanovac. Since the number of guests was limited for the sake of the epidemiological measures, the concert was streamed as well through the YouTube platform. Interestingly, it had the same dramaturgy as the previous one – the violin sonata preceded the

string quartet. The repertoire included the Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96 (1812), one of the examples of the gentle, lyrical facet of Beethoven's personality, as well as the 'visionary' String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132 (1825), known for the "Holy Song of Thanksgiving of a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian mode" apparent in the third movement.

Therefore, during the festival days the members of the *BLISS* Ensemble (Bojana Đolović – violin, Jelena Rubaković – viola, Aleksandra Bengin – violoncello, Milica Predolac – piano, Milica Kovrija – violin) led us, chronologically, through the different creative periods (early, middle, and late) and paradigms (from classical to romantic), thus illuminating the various types of Beethoven's music: music of the nature (Op. 24), music of the future (Op. 59, No. 1), music of the inner life (Op. 96), and music of the gratitude (Op. 132).

Observing the profile of the third Festival issue, Bojana Đolović, the founder and the director of the *BLISS* Festival, asserts:

The *BLISS* Association, faced with the conditions caused by the pandemic, had to deal with a completely different organizational spectrum regarding the realization of the Festival. Generally speaking, the effort, previously invested in advertising in order to get the greatest possible response, was switched to the sharing of links for the concerts, mainly via social networks. The focus was moved from enlarging the audience to playing without the audience in front of us (the first day), or reducing the number of visitors (the second day). Since there was no opportunity for the guest appearances of foreign musicians, the concerts were held by our artists exclusively. Also, the challenge to promptly master the non-playing skills appeared as an important novelty, including the choosing of the proper microphones and lighting for the recording process, the type of the digital format broadcasting, etc. The Program Booklet was printed in a reduced circulation, because its digital form had primacy.

Taking everything into account, this edition of the *BLISS* Festival set a task that I had to 'solve' with due honor to Beethoven's genius, but having always in mind the mentioned circumstances and restraints. My conclusion would be very unique: art resists unfavorable times. In fact, the *BLISS* Festival was founded in 2017 with the very goal to remind of the essence of the (music) art and its power over time – it lasts in accordance with this initial idea and resists all the variances that arise globally and, evenly, within ourselves. Even in the middle of the pandemic, a well-coordinated team of musicians, musicologists, designer, and art devotees was enough to displace the reality (at least for a moment) and to revive Beethoven in the year of the great jubilee in the City of Gornji Milanovac.

Adjustment of the Festival's setup strongly resonated with the contemporary frameworks. This redefinition inevitably implied perfecting the musicians' interdisciplinary competences, according to the prototype of the 21st century musician/artist figure. Although a young one, the *BLISS* Festival is already keeping pace with the times in which it exists. In this particular case, it also meant the coherent cooperation of all artists involved in the realization of the Festival, who come from the fields of performativity, creativity, and theory. Aside from the interpretation of Beethoven's music, the meaning of the author's life and work was underlined by the graphic design virtue of Miloš Radosavljević, who – in a visual domain – skillfully 'engraved' the word *bliss* in Beethoven's mind, subtly suggesting that his music is imbued with the ideas of the Enlightenment. The same applies to the texts published in the Program Booklet, written by musicologists Igor Radeta ("Ludwig van Beethoven – A Revolutionary Spirit in the Music Mind") and Marija Tomić ("Program Notes"), respectively.

The aforementioned individuals are at the same time the directors of the *BLISS* Festival and/or the members of the Organizing Committee, which is unique and a feature of the great importance considering this Festival and beyond. Their endeavors were recognized by the Municipality of Gornji Milanovac, the Cultural Centre Gornji Milanovac, and, significantly, by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Belgrade, whose support enabled that the glorification of the quarter of a millennium of Beethoven's art within the Third *BLISS* came true. Bearing in mind the surrounding, disadvantageous socio-cultural context, this Festival indirectly reminded us to the composer's life full of struggle, that is, the numerous internal 'revolutions' as a consequence of hearing loss and a gradual immersion in the world of silence, from which came the hope of healing and finding the freedom throughout the music, i.e. its transformative power that maintains the faith in life. In that sense, we can say that, symbolically, the third *BLISS* Festival acquired a truly heroic character.

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