



*mario-osvin pavčević*

**PETER & NIGEL  
SHEPPARD SKAERVED CLARKE**

*Two renowned British artists and professors of the younger generation, the violinist Peter Sheppard Skaerved and the composer Nigel Clarke, were visiting Zagreb for a few times during the year 2000. The culmination and the final realisation of their project, invented and organized by the members of the members of the Zagreb soloists and co-founded by the British Council, has happened in a concert in the Croatian musical institute hall on 17th of October with the first performance of Clarke's piece "The Miraculous Violin" for violin and strings performed by Sheppard and the Zagreb Soloists. Previous visits were used to organize workshops with the ensemble of the Zagreb Soloists and with students of the Academy of Music as well as for the creation of this composition. The collusion of the experiment and the tradition, of the now and the history, inspiration and possibilities, invention and techniques, perception and substance, gave rise to an exceptional artistic event. Inspired by this way of creating and working, I have discussed about it all with both artists, "electronically", with a short time distance which has contributed to the steadiness after the first flush.*

#### **PETER SHEPPARD SKAERVED**

*M-O.P.: Reflections on your stay, workshops and concert in Zagreb - what was ordinary, what was extraordinary and exceptional?*

P.S.S.: The summer's visit's have been extraordinary for us on every. As we have been in Zagreb three times, Nigel and I have managed to really feel at home in this beautiful city. In many ways, the new piece, the concert, the whole thing are the result of our feeling of communicating with the musicians, the friends, and the whole feeling of the place. The new work had various manifestations following our first visit, the result of the first impressions, the art exhibitions we saw, the first conversations. For myself personally, each of the three visits this year revealed new aspects of the city, which I discussed with Nigel, and which buried themselves in the eventual performance. These range from the exhibition of the work of Mirsad Begic which I saw at the "Galerija Klovicevi Dvori" in Zagreb in July, which made a great impression on us both, to the Etruscan codex wrapped around the Zagreb Mummy in the Archaeological museum. I am fascinated by the layers of history and remains, be they Illyrian, Greek, Roman, Etruscan, Theban or Neolithic under the city.

This fascination was a vital part of the dialogue that I feel privileged to have had with the wonderful musicians of the Zagreb Soloists, plus the students, composers, professors, and teachers who have been part of this summer-long communication. It is very much thanks to the efforts of the wonderful Andjelko Krpan and his "family" of musicians that such an intimate conversation has been possible. I hope that the experience of the concert reflected this communication.

*M-O.P.: Is it necessary for you to give concerts, to enter the stage? Would it be satisfying for you as well to transmit the music together with your musical ideas only via records, which almost everyone can afford today? What is the influence and role of modern media on music? Can it substitute the standard form of concerts?*

P.S.S.: I believe passionately in the importance of the live event, the combination of pieces, musicians, audience at the right moment. The project for us would have meant very little if it had simply resulted in a recording. This is not because I do not believe in recording. I have personally made nearly thirty CDs, ranging from Telemann, Haydn and Schubert, to many recordings of new works written for me. Like many musicians of my generation, I have been profoundly influenced by the aesthetic of Glenn Gould, but this has actually strengthened my performance beliefs, as well as profoundly emphasising my belief in the role of recording. Unlike many musicians, I am able to choose whatever I record, so all of my recordings are related to performance and research projects. The concert and the recording studio are for me, mutually dependent.

I believe that classical music is in a period of deep crisis, where its function is questioned; however, unlike many others, this fills me with optimism, as I believe that art needs this sense of pressure and strain, and I am constantly shown an incredible richness of new music and interest in music. The kind of event that we saw the other night, where groups who don't usually play new music try experimental projects and present them to their regular audiences, give me huge hope. I work regularly in over 20 countries and I see such projects springing up all over the world, stimulated by the creativity of organisations like the British Council and the Institute Goethe.

*M-O.P.: How comes that you have chosen the violin as the medium of expressing the art and yourself?*

P.S.S.: It is not easy for me to talk about the violin. I can tell you why I love the piano, or which are my favourite flutists or clarinetists, but the violin is so personal that it is difficult to say what I love about it. Perhaps that is the answer. I have never been able to sing - my colleagues will tell you that, and the violin is the closest to the human voice that I know, with the most astonishing possible range of colour and inflection, and following on from that the best story-telling medium that I know.

*M-O.P.: You have an enormously large repertoire and quite a wide range of interests. On the other hand, musicians nowadays are specialized and trained for a certain musical period, style and way of interpretation. What do you think about this kind of specialization as a trend or maybe necessity today?*

P.S.S.: I guess that I agree with you about the specialisation. And I would say that I am a specialist. But that I have many specialisms, be the Beethoven 1792-1812, the solo music of Telemann, the period practice of the early twentieth century, Russian violin music in St. Petersburg in the 1880's, Mozart and Michael Haydn 1772-1775... etc.

I do not know a great artist who did not have various specialisms. I think that there is a healthiness in the trend, as it moves us away from the notion of musicians simply applying their manner of playing to whatever they play. I am involved in the training of young musicians all over the world, through my teaching and lecturing at the Royal Academy of Music and the London College of Music, as well as my master classes and workshops - everywhere, I encourage

students to think for themselves, to ask the difficult questions about music - the most interesting and difficult of which is the “Why?” - which leads to specialised and complex questions which range from the historically detailed to the philosophically speculative and the spiritual. The danger that I have witnessed is that musicians have forgotten that music is one of the lively arts, that is not merely reproductive and decorative, but a questing, searching discipline that sits happily beside the other sciences and arts in its constant state of rediscovery.

*M-O.P.: Why are you so much interested in contemporary music, young composers? When did that begin? Is that music really nice or only interesting for you? Does it belong to “fine arts” at all?*

P.S.S.: I cannot imagine being an artist who does not exist in the now. Being a painter, a composer and a writer myself, it is impossible not to engage with the artists and arts of my time. I am just as interested in modern painting as modern music, and will cheerfully admit that the painting of Gerhard Richter or Enzo Cucchi has had just as big an impact on my art as any composer - but then I would be forced to say that so has the semiotics of Eco, the novels of Mark Helprin, Margaret Atwood, the installations of James Turrell... but none of these are any more important than the impact on me of say tech sketches of Guercino, the architecture of Oskar Loos, the nordic light in the paintings of Anna Archer etc.

I do not believe that any real beauty is “nice”. The prettiness that lies on the surface of Mozart or Schumann often can be a way that people avoid listening or (as performers) revealing the deep trouble or searching that lies within. I often will programme Mozart next to Ligeti, not to give the audience

respite from the “modernism”, but to show all art is engaged on the same voyage of discovery. In that way, I wonder if I have a dangerous notion of the “fine arts”.

I am sitting at the desk in my living room. At my back is our collection of novels, that stretches from Defoe to Anne Rice. In the room are a number of pieces of art, that include an 18th century engraving of Lotte and Werther, two large post-modern canvases from Azerbaijan, some abstract work by an Icelandic artist, a copy of a 19th century Thorvaldsen sculpture from Denmark, Balinese puppets, Alaskan dolls, Javan shadow puppets, a Disney Pinocchio sculpture, masks from a modern Korean theatre production, an enamelled 19th century Indian samovar, modern Italian blown glass, shells from the beach in Montenegro, wooden models of Viking longships, and a metal sculpture by one of the leading British artists of the 1960’s, Hoskyn.

This random sample is a useful portrait of my musical and interpretative beliefs. We live in an unprecedented age of availability of ideas and movement. Living in London, I am blessed with a constant cultural cross-fertilisation (Last night my wife and I went to see 16th century British portraits at 7 pm, had a Chinese meal at 8, and were watching an American film by 9). The musical world works like this for me. It is not confusing, but it is definitely changing and the ground is happily never solid under my feet.

But then there is the question of composers. I have always believed that meeting composers would be like meeting or working with a prophet. The funny thing is, that I still do. Whether they are young or old, for me, the composer holds the key to the source of my art, so I will do anything to get close to them. This has meant that I have had the opportunity to get close to many of the

greats, such as Messiaen, Henze, Tippett, Rochberg, Penderecki, but also to be close to the greats of my own generation, to be close to them as they begin their explorations, and hopefully contribute to that. So for me, my work with geniuses such as Nigel Clarke or Jorg Widmann is the most powerful thing I do, as if working with the voices, the thinkers of my age and my world. As an interpreter, I have nothing to say, but can give these powerful creators voice, and for me there is no greater pleasure than that.

#### NIGEL CLARKE

*M-O.P.: Reflections on your stay, workshops and concert in Zagreb - what was ordinary, what was extraordinary and exceptional?*

N.C.: I found the musical mood of Zagreb to be very refreshing with an artistic life that seemed to be vibrant. I also found the young composers and instrumentalists whom Peter and I met at the workshops to be talented and as good as any amongst leading musical countries in the Western world. It was impressive to think that a city with a relatively small population could fill two concert venues on the same night. I wish this could be said for London!

*M-O.P.: Have you ever written a piece which was not meant to be interpreted on the concert stage? Would it be satisfying for you to transmit the music together with your musical ideas only via records, which almost everyone can afford today? What is the influence and role of*



*modern media on music? Can it substitute the standard form of concerts? How do you see the future of the classical evening concert performance?*

N.C.: I have in fact written music that was not destined for the concert stage, as I have worked on a number of large-scale film projects. For me a composition project is only finished when the work ends up with its definitive performance on disc. There are both positive and negative influences of modern media on music. On the negative side, it is a rare sound engineer that can capture the live experience of a performance on disc. On the other hand, from the listeners point of view every conceivable type of music is available to experience on disc without too much effort or cost. I am very pessimistic about the future of classical music in the traditional concert setting. This is a question I would be very happy to write a whole article about as it is very complex and I think that my answer would end up quite controversial.

*M-O.P.: For which ensembles and for which instruments have you composed already? Why the particular interest in collaborating with strings? Do you play any instrument yourself? Can everyone follow your musical ideas? How much of your ideas depend on the interpreter?*

N.C.: I have been very lucky as a composer to work with many great instrumentalists both in Britain and abroad. I also believe that it is important to work with less able musicians in amateur music making. For me to work with a great chamber ensemble like the Zagreb Soloists has been a rare opportunity and a highlight in my composition career. For this I will always be grateful to Peter Sheppard Skaerved, Andjelko Krpan, the Zagreb Soloists and the British Council who co-founded the project. These players are truly world

class with a sense of musicianship that is becoming lost in our modern world. I would go as far as saying that I felt I was experiencing a living part of musical history with values that are fast disappearing. The triumph of this project has been to be able to try out ideas with Peter and the ensemble before completing the commission. Certainly without the input of this great ensemble the work would not have been anything like the finished product. It is always rewarding when a musical experience brings friendship, which I feel this project has done. For the short time our paths crossed, I felt part of their team. Sadly, it will be a long time before I find another group of musicians that extend their friendship to such a degree. Back home my friends must be tired of me exulting the virtues of Croatia, Zagreb and of course The Zagreb Soloists!

*M-O.P.: Where do you find the inspiration - in the music itself, or from the outside? Where do the roots of your music lie? How would you define the style of music composed at the end of the millennium? Is the actual moment in the world interesting for the art creators?*

N.C.: The driving force for my composition is probably insecurity and a sense of trying to prove myself from past failures. Inspiration is always easy to find when working with great musicians. It is hard to answer the question what style of music is now composed as music has moved off in many different directions. My honest belief is that it is not interesting to be an artist working within a serious art form at this moment in time. There are too many commercial interests in the West such that serious art finds it hard to be noticed amongst a sea of mediocrity.