

## Croatian composers' diseases – biopathographies

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**Summary** – Presentation of the diseases among 25 significant croatian composers reveals some infectious diseases (tuberculosis, etc.) among the composers who had died young and some chronic non-infectious diseases (mostly malignant, inflammatory and cardiocerebral origin) among composers who died in old age. It is a part of the pathographic review of over 300 composers from the book »Diseases and destinies of famous composers«.

**Key words:** Croatia, composers, diseases

Croatians belong among »small« nations, but, according to our experience with the lexicon structure of some world-known dictionaries of musicology, about a dozen Croatian composers have been more widely reported of in such lexicons.<sup>1</sup>

Elaborating the pathographic data, we shall dedicate somewhat greater attention to only a handful of our narrowly selected, internationally recognized composers<sup>1,8,9,12–16</sup>.

We have some reliable data from the XVII<sup>th</sup> century about **Ivan Lukačić**, who lived in the city of Šibenik (1587–1648). More intensively studying his life, we learn more about the production of wine and olive oil than about other data (he was the prior of a Franciscan monastery). Judging by the year of death, we can not rule out that he died because of plague, i.e. either of the epidemics of pestilence or because of tumults, wars, famine, migration and other things.<sup>1</sup>

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**Vinko Jelić** (1596–1632) is known to have resided in Rijeka and worked as a musician in many parts of Europe, particularly while working as a priest in German-French Alsace. He seems to have met his death in Saverne in the frame of atrocities connected with the thirty-year war, contemporary famine, or even more probably of pestilence, which was rampant there at that time.<sup>1</sup>

In XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, **Lukša Sorkočević (Sorgo)** (1734–1789) from Dubrovnik, became famous. He suffered for a long time ailing of gallstones, which are known to occasionally accompany depressions, and he, suffering perhaps from both, committed suicide while working as the chief executive of the ragusan republic (knez) by throwing himself from the upper floor of his palast (since that time this window has been closed with a wall).<sup>11</sup>

His son, *Antun Sorkočević* (1775–1841), was also a gifted composer. He was the last ambassador of his city-state in Paris, and he died there of some chronic disease.

**Julije Bajamonti** was a great composer, physician and polyhistorian from Split (1744–1800). He was acting less as a physician and more as a musician, and the order of physicians reproached him. That is why he wrote and published in Italy the famous assay on physicians and music, stating in a very modern manner and with arguments, that medicine is no mathematics and that the patient should



Fig. 1. Julije Bajamonti

be approached in a humane and artistic way. He died relatively quickly and unexpectedly of pneumonia.<sup>1</sup>

**Ivan Mane Jarnović (Giornovicchi)** (?1745–1804) lived probably more than 60 years and was a world-renown violinist and composer, and he died suddenly while shooting pool (playing billiards), it is assumed that he died of a sudden heart attack or perhaps of cerebral hemorrhage.<sup>11,16</sup>

In XIX century **Vatroslav Lisinski** (Ignacius Fuchs) (1819–1854) was a prominent name among Croatian musicians. He lived in Karlovac, Zagreb and Prague, where he received his musical education. As a child, he fell and was badly hurt, so he hardly recovered and remained lame, although very adroit in adapting. The cause of that might also



Fig. 2. Vatroslav Lisinski

have been the lesion, perhaps even congenital dislocation of the hip or possible tuberculosis of that joint. Anyway, all his life, as a lawyer and as a musician, he lived in hard conditions, as a bohemian, suffered of frequent colds and had frequent febrile conditions, which suggest probable lung tuberculosis, which eventually spread to pleura and pericardium. He composed famous songs and two first Croatian operas. He did not succeed to settle down with family, and received a good deal of financial support from the cultural circle of Croatian nobility, but practically suffocated during the period of Bach's absolutism. He probably died of tuberculous pleuropericarditis with the pneumonia of tuberculous character.<sup>5</sup>

Mozart's relative – composer-organist *Petrus Jakob Haibel* died in Đakovo in old age. His wife – sister of Mozart's

wife Constanze sent (from Đakovo) a special detailed letter to her sister in 1824 to describe her view of the last days of Mozart's infectious streptococcal disease.<sup>2</sup>

The so-called era of Zajc is clearly marked by his name. **Sir Ivan Zajc** (1832–1914), was born in Rijeka, where his father was the choir-director. His son had to succeed him, so he studied music at the Conservatory in Milan. Because of his success, his career there was almost assured, but because of his parents' death, he had to return to Rijeka, where he acted as a conductor, orchestra leader (concertmaster), pedagogue, and ever more as a renowned composer. This is where he also defined himself regarding his patriotic feelings. He went to Vienna in 1862 to improve, and was also considerably successful, mostly as an operetta composer. There, he socialized also with Croatian students – with the Croatian cultural circle generally. They kept inviting him to return to Zagreb, and he actually returned in 1869/70 in capacity of the director of the new Croatian opera and of the music school of the music. He improved Croatian music life, and he is known not only for his compositions for voice solo, but also for his operas (more than 1000 compositions). At the old age he started to narrow his performing activities, and keeping secret his few heart troubles, he died practically in his sleep in 1914.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 3. Ivan pl. Zajc



Fig. 4. Franjo Krežma

**Antun Vanaš** (1867–1888) was promising a lot as a young musician; he was believed to be the greatest Croatian composing talent after Lisinski. He was getting his education in Vienna and Paris in a somewhat bohemian manner and in unfavorable hibernal conditions. Massenet noticed his great musical gift. He composed several compositions for choir and for voice solo, and died of tuberculosis after several years of ailing.<sup>4</sup>

**Franjo Krežma** (1862–1881) was an extraordinarily gifted violinist, a world sensation, successor of Paganini, also a composer of a few successful works. He died unexpectedly of meningitis, after a middle ear inflammation, which he got in a draught during a concert rehearsal.<sup>1</sup>

In XX century, between two world wars, the musical life successfully devel-

oped further. Among the composers, we emphasize the known composer **Blagoje Bersa** (1873–1934). Born in Dubrovnik, he was educated and active in Zagreb and Vienna, where he was also very successful. He was successfully working until the end of his life when he suddenly fell ill with jaundice from a swelling in the right belly part which turned out to be a disturbance of the bile duct function and metastatic cancer changes in liver. Soon after an unsuccessful surgery, he died.

*Dora Pejačević* (1885–1923), known composer died after childbirth, of consequences of postpartal fever and kidney-related complications with death from uremia.<sup>1</sup>

**Fran Lhotka** (1883–1962) is a renowned composer and pedagogue, Czech



Fig. 5. Dora Pejačević



Fig. 6. Jakov Gotovac

by ancestry. He died at old age of bile-ducts cancer with a metastasis in the lungs.<sup>1</sup>

**Krešimir Baranović** (1894–1975), renowned composer, conductor and pedagogue, was educated in Vienna and acting in Zagreb and Belgrade. He died at more advanced age having fallen ill relatively suddenly of lung troubles which were clinically diagnosed as lung cancer and he died thereof.<sup>1</sup>

**Jakov Gotovac** (1895–1982) was a very popular and significant conductor and composer, who became known worldwide after a series of compositions, and especially after the opera »Ero s onoga svijeta«. Basically of good health, but to some extent hypochondriac, being lonely at his old age he liked to socialize with physicians, although having relatively

little small health troubles. Before his death, he suffered ever more frequent lung troubles, with edemas of legs and eventually also of lungs, and he died in his sleep, probably because of a heart failure.<sup>7</sup>

**Josip Štolcer Slavenski** (1896–1955) was a great composer of Jewish ancestry who lived in Belgrade during a part of his life. He lived an orderly and quiet life, but before the age of 60, he was abruptly troubled with disturbances of digestion with impaired breathing. As the situation worsened he was hospitalized in Internal Clinic in Belgrade where the diagnosis was made of cancer of biliary ducts in liver with metastases in lungs. After the operation, he was recovering with difficulties and while being nursed at home, soon after, he died.<sup>1</sup>

**Rudolf Matz** (1901–1988) was a renowned cellist, pedagogue, conductor and composer. In his sixties, he started ailing and had a light cerebral stroke. As a »socialite« he did not have substantial liver troubles. Becoming of more and more delicate health, he increasingly preferred company of physicians and his last preoccupation was leading the choir of Zagreb physicians. With the time passing, he started to have increasing congestive heart troubles and light to more severe cerebral strokes. The abdominal cancer was not confirmed with certainty (in spite of some results of CT examinations of abdomen). In his very old age, he was ailing constantly and was intensively clinically treated- He died of chronic cardio-cerebral failure.<sup>10</sup>

**Božidar Kunc** (1903–1964) was a renowned pianist and composer who was tightly connected also with the carrier of his sister, the famous singer Zinka Kunc Milanov. Living close to her in America, having married late in his life, partially overloaded with concerts, he died suddenly of a heart attack.<sup>3</sup>

**Ivo Tijardović** (1895–1976), renowned operetta composer, was healthy throughout his life, but as an octogenarian, he started wasting away because of the increasing digestive disturbances. He was diagnosed with cancer of the gullet, practically inoperable,. An operation was performed, which did not help him much,



Fig. 7. Ivo Tijardović

but at least prevented his dying of hunger. As the situation worsened, he died in the hospital the same year.<sup>1</sup>

After the Second World War, there was some further development of the musical life in Zagreb and Croatia, as the modern tendencies made themselves felt in the organization of Zagreb Biennale.<sup>1</sup>

**Boris Papandopulo** (1906–1991), renowned many-sided musician, conductor and composer suffered in his old age of diabetes and Parkinson's disease. Since childhood, he was severely hard of hearing in one ear, what he persistently suppressed and kept secret from his circle. At the end of his life, he started to fail more and more, a diagnosis of stomach cancer was made, and he could not take any food, so he faded away and died, remaining almost conscious to the very end.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 8. Boris Papandopulo

**Ivan Brkanović** (1906–1987), renowned composer, was suffering in his old age of Parkinson's disease and prostatic gland cancer. He got nephrosclerosis and in the context of renal effects, died of uremia.

**Bruno Bjelinski** (1909–1992) was a known composer and conductor. In the old age, ten years before his death, he suffered his first heart attack, which affected him deeply, but of which he pretty well recovered. Few years before his death he had somewhat more serious second heart stroke, and shortly before his death he recovered with difficulties from the third heart attack. He went to a health resort, recuperated to some degree and, while talking to somebody, passed away abruptly without difficulties.<sup>3</sup>

**Stjepan Šulek** (1914–1986), a renowned composer, violinist and peda-

gogue, was active until his old age and died suddenly of a heart attack.<sup>3</sup>

**Natko Devčić** (1914–1986) was a renowned composer and pedagogue. With the old age, came ever increasing troubles, due to the heart weakness and uncomfortable cardiac stases with disturbed and impaired breathing, bronchitis and repeating pneumonias. After a prolonged treatment, including hospitalizations, he died in the context of this condition.<sup>1</sup>

**Milko Kelemen** (1924–), great composer, is alive and in good shape and good health, and he is 90 years old. He is included in this report only because he, in one article, humorously described thirty-odd diagnoses made for him by physicians, but he nevertheless feels relatively well, is working and travels. He has no intention to fall seriously ill, unless something suddenly »betrays« him.



Fig. 8. Milko Kelemen

On this subject, he wrote an entire pathographic article and gave us permission to publish that as an interesting medical-biographic fact.<sup>1</sup>

**Igor Kuljerić** (1938–2006) renowned composer, conductor, pianist, intermittently of delicate health during his life. Signs of digestive system cancer broke out suddenly and despite all therapies, he died within few months.<sup>1</sup>

## BOLESTI HRVATSKIH KOMPOZITORA – BIOPATOGRAFIJE

**Sažetak:** Prikaz bolesti 25 značajnih hrvatskih skladatelja ukazuje na neke zarazne bolesti (tuberkuloza, itd.) rano umrlih skladatelja te na kronične nezarazne bolesti – uglavnom maligne, upalne i kardiocerebralne naravi skladatelja umrlih u starijoj dobi. To je dio patografskog prikaza o preko 300 skladatelja u knjizi »Diseases and destinies of famous composers«.

Ključne riječi: Hrvatska, skladatelji, bolesti

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