
DALMATIAN NATIONAL BRASS-BANDS AND INDENTITY

LOCALITY

The history of the coastal region of Dalmatia, that is of the geographical area of the southern Croatian Littoral does not have its origin in mythological legends and fantastic stories. Each epoch realized material and spiritual proofs of its existence. Each period in history left us some memories. Because of that this region was and will be the place of continuous attraction where art has never been separated from life, and where life has been testifying all the time about living musical practice of its inhabitants for centuries.

CONTINUITY

Among the societies that had meaningful influence in musical history of Dalmatia there are still active brass-bands known and recognized as Narodne glazbe. They have been working for decades due to the fact that there have always been young people, and fresh impulses of given social conditions as well as the enthusiasm and support of Dalmatian inhabitants.

The first reports on the existence of brass-bands in Dalmatia dates from the first half of the 19th century. It was a time when there were initiatives to form musical bands modelled on the Austrian military bands. Amateur musicians at the time mostly performed as parts of educational organizations and reading-clubs of that time. After that that played music as Banda civica, Banda cittadina, Banda comunale ... - City Band. The adjective national was added to the most of those bands at the time of the National Revival regarding the political events at the time.

Dalmatian musical amateurs could reach their musical ideas only in collusion with their surroundings, complementing with it for the benefit of the living existing culture. In spite of the fact that they were active in times of more or less stressed political uncertainties and antagonisms, mostly in difficult economical conditions in relatively small social environment where every social turbulence was more felt, members of the brass-bands undoubtedly succeeded in manifesting their continuity vitally and strongly throughout the 19th and 20th centuries respecting instinctively the history of their surroundings.

Brass-bands established mainly during the 19th century lived through all the hard times together with their localities. As centers of musical life they brought up young people to be prepared for the expanse and beauty of the art, enabling many

people of good will to prove themselves as useful factors in their surroundings, making everyday life easier for inhabitants and building bridges among people.

...MORE THAN MUSIC...

Through decades, some of them for almost two centuries, National brass-bands passed and survived through different social and political periods. Whenever music bands of the time knew how to connect thoughts and needs of their members, and organizational forms to events of the time, ideas with realizations and when their activities were suitable for the time and the occasions, and reflection of the social milieu they were at the head of, they were fulfilling their purpose. Musical societies of this type still participate today in the weaving of the social reality of the ancient little cities on the Croatian coast of the Adriatic sea. Today it is possible to recognize only a fragment of the enormous will and the abundance of the emotions woven during the whole voyage of our National bands. They survived foremost thanks to the passion and enthusiasm of the bandmen, conductors, presidents, and then all others who dedicately devoted themselves to the creation of the true story that we are at present able to see as a big picture from all its aspects as well as analyse with a lot of love, affection and respect for all the ladies and gentlemen who found themselves in these societies and impressed on them a flash of their creative life.

If we take brass-bands into consideration just as a musical phenomenon we will make their history lame, their social tasks in which are reflected and recognized the elements of human connections, the expressions of social and general cultural deliverance, school of tolerance, the examples of coexistence... - in short their social role. If we examine their curriculum vitae, singular to every living being, only for the purposes of the exploration of the artistic achievements, independent from ethical and sociological values, we will make incomplete the whole understanding, especially the understanding of their important human dimensions and functions, tasks and messages. Musical message, which has been presented by Dalmatian musical amateurs to their fellow-citizens for centuries, is to skilled researcher a communication channel used for transportation of swarms of denotations and connotations, emotional charges, rational and irrational meanings, explicit and implicit... Underneath musical quotations, regardless of their sometimes superficial quality on the surface and pathetic kitsch, there is only the bottom of the truth. We can reach it by recognizing the music as a way of communication among people, by identifying in its activity multiple symbolic meanings and by questioning of the multi-layering of musical mission "in culture or as culture". Therefore by consulting and studying statutes, programmes, accounts, chronicles, onset of seriousness of proclaimed aims in special political and social circumstances, connection to the everyday life, presentation of the ideals, wishes and aspirations of the individuals in a particular social situation, different testimonies ... we are able to assemble the characteristics that testify to the changes in the

activity of a musical movement depending on the interest according to the certain circumstances which differ and express different social experiences. Out of this and respecting it originated many stories about many popular brass-bands. These stories which are historically formulated in accordance with the previously mentioned and further on with the development of the economical situation, in correlation with the demographical changes, wider historical events which had significant repercussions in smaller communities, testify about human will, persistence in creating and maintaining of tradition with constant manifestation of the living aspiration for self-preservation and restoration. At the beginning of the 21st century National brass-bands from Dalmatia went through noticeable changes which is a quality of every living organism. Many characteristics and elements which marked their life and musical expression in previous decades disappeared. Musical expression and their organizational structure has gone partly to the new different directions which correspond with the time and space.

MANIFESTATION OF THE SOUND AND REPERTOIRE

Testifying about themselves by their practical role in social entirety, National brass-bands have brought to the surface repertoire recognizable in characteristic sound manifestation of marches and patriotic songs, dances and folk musical examples, operatic arias and symphony music, operetta - tunes and hit songs. This manifestation of the sound, recognizable today, partly as the traditional mark of a specific way of interpretation, has its origin in the human character of the people from the Mediterranean part of our country, which can be easily discerned if we open slightly and just in passing the collective memory of the citizens of coastal and insular Croatia. Love for the art and music and affection for the homeland together with the knowledge that there is no good and beautiful reality without the sacrifice and self-denial resulted in a characteristic adorning our bandsmen, past and present, and that is: whenever the music plays it does not play to please an individual - mayor, or some city official, priest and so on , but it plays for all the music lovers, without exceptions, with equal enthusiasm in different social and political situations, and always primarily to contribute to the good reputation of its place, town or city. This joy of unselfish participation in the weaving of the musical culture, has been shared through past decades until now between the bandsmen and their fellow citizens as well as everyday life. The repertoire of the brass-bands was influenced by a number of factors: social-cultural and political situation of specific periods; expertise, taste and the ambitions of the bandmasters; technical and musical levels and preferences of the bandsmen and on a lesser scale the musical taste of the entire population of the particular places, towns and cities. In relation to this during the time of the National Revival, in the second half of the 19th century, the repertoire always consisted of the patriotic songs and other pieces from Civil Croatia of the time; some bandmasters preferred the pieces of Italian composers while others made their repertoire completely out of the works of Slavic authors - in the first place

this depended on the place of their education. Immediately after World War II mass songs are the most often performed, and recently poppourries as well as Croatian patriotic songs like earlier but of more modern origin. During the last decades pop music and modern dance music have become more present on the repertoire of these societies, and we are witnesses to the fact that so called serious music slowly but definitely yields to other musical styles. There are also works by other less known authors: romances, waltzes and marches. Brass-bands by their work highly influenced the formation of the musical world of the citizens. They also influenced the formation of certain levels of folk music, and they are also parts of the folk entity of their homeland.

MEMBERS

Members and citizens brought together in their brass-bands, played an important role in the spreading of the national awareness, education and culture. That characteristic of the Society has been preserved, sometimes in spite of more strongly marked crisis, throughout the whole time of their existence. Up to this day these musical entities brought up thousands of musical amateurs, some of which became respected professionals.

The structure of members of brass-bands during their years-long productive work mainly depended on social, political and material circumstances. In the beginning of their existence members of these musical societies as a rule came from wealthy civic-craftsmen families. The rest of the population, mostly of laborer's origin was not interested in practice of music at the time. They were primarily preoccupied with agriculture of low type. Furthermore, economic dependence on the land-owners made this part of the population unsympathetic to organised amateur musical activity. In the time of the National Revival the Societies brought together citizens regardless of their class differences. Therefore in the seventies of the 19th century there were commoners among the bandsmen. This correlation remained more or less the same until the thirties of the 20th century. At that time more and more farmers and laborers started to join in. After World War II, judging by the preserved lists, brass bands mainly consisted of farmers and laborers. Other professions were less present. Lately there have been more students and highly educated people.

MANAGEMENT

As there are hard times in every lifetime so there were hard times and crises and serious situations in the lifetime of the National brass-bands which threatened their existence. In these circumstances the management of the society showed its importance. Creativity, wisdom and the ability to find the best solution for the National brass-band in difficult situations were the qualities shown by members

of the management many times. It was not always easy to strike a happy balance between wishes and possibilities, between theoretically possible and practically possible to be realized by an organization consisting of many members where human component is of the crucial importance. By sharing with their bandsmen positive and negative impulses surrounded by all the protagonists of the co-existence whether from the milieu of their origin or as accepted newcomers, they found the pleasure that National brass-band always gave to the loyal ones – joy of feeling as a living part of your town.

BANDMASTERS

Bandmasters, “maestros“ of brass-bands were one after another enormously patient musical enthusiasts who stimulated, by their efforts, others to work, accuracy and respect of music as well as of musical instruments. It was not easy for them. In some cases particularly because they were markedly towering above their surroundings thanks to their talent, hard work and knowledge. Therefore it was necessary to put an enormous effort on many occasions not to make the fact that the two main factors – bandmaster and bandsmen – almost exclude each other in the creation of the musical awareness by their musical concepts, result in lack of proportion to the hard work invested in it. They were never properly financially rewarded for their hard work. But, that is an old story, historical and at the same time topical and up-to-date. Naturally, it does not break the mood created by the comfort of pleasure because of continuous unselfish music making of diligent conductors, but it emphasises the role and value of the bandmasters of Dalmatian towns and cities who managed not to give up on their way to the 21st century in harmony with their social and cultural milieu.

ONLY THE BANDSMEN...

Only the bandsmen know how much sacrifice and patience is required for an honest relationship to your colleagues and the society as a whole. Only the bandsmen know the extense of the physical strain caused by taken obligations, and it is considered normal never to talk about your sacrifice in a big way. Only the bandsmen know that it is not easy to be a harmonious part of such communities always through different and demanding circumstances even in short time periods. Only the bandsmen know that belonging to a society of this kind brings a lot of pleasure but it is not always easy to permanently accept others and be accepted, to remain patient with the one who does not master musical tasks with the same ease or to put up with the one who obrusively forces his own superiority. Only the bandsmen know that the one among them without the feeling for the passion of music and the weight of every, not only his own, sacrifice becomes superficial and finally a burden to himself and the whole society. Then his participation in

the weaving of the amateur being disrupts the society in the same way that tunes played in a wrong key disrupt the harmony of works which have been, thanks to God, presented to Croatian people in this part of our country. These exemplary teams, groups of unusual enthusiasts, whose only reward for their hard work are their concerts and few social acknowledgements, and who are so closely connected to their immediate native region, can and should continue with their noble task in spite of frequent hardships. Above-mentioned will acquire the onset of seriousness only if local social and political factors return love offered through bandsmen themselves in a dignified and special way. On the contrary there is a thin line to the possible devastation of the artistic achievement of music-making of our bandsmen and their noble role. Only the bandsmen know how to overcome the bitterness in such a case... and that is more than music...