

**IN-BETWEEN WAVES, REELS AND GROOVES:
ZAGREB PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS OF THE 1930s AND THE MENACE
OF MECHANICAL MUSIC**

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Abstract

The article explores the processes and changes to the everyday working lives and conditions of labour of the professional musicians in the turbulent years of the great economic crisis of the 1930s, exacerbated by the increasing presence of mechanical music (gramophone records, radio broadcasts and sound film) in the spaces and contexts previously reserved exclusively for the live music performances. Central to the author's discussion are the experiences, perspectives and evolving discourses of the interwar Zagreb musicians involved in the unionised struggle for better conditions of labour and dignity of their profession. By bringing their voices to the fore, the author aims to underline the Janus-faced nature of the technologies of mechanical

transmission and reproduction of music, and thus to contribute to the existing historiographies of local discography, film and radio by bringing to the fore the previously often omitted perspectives of ordinary working musicians directly affected by the changing realities of music labour market resulting from the introduction of the mechanical music.

Keywords: music as labour; mechanical music; gramophone records; radio broadcasting; sound film; musician's unions; musician's labour rights

Ključne riječi: glazba kao rad; mehanička glazba; gramofonske ploče; radio; zvučni film; sindikati glazbenika; radnička prava glazbenika

*Music escapes from musicians.*¹

As soon as the camera moves away from the curious passers-by crowding the street in front of the large windows of the popular Zagreb coffeehouse *Kavana Corso* and turns its gaze toward the bustling interior crammed with people and busy waiters, we catch a glimpse of a small orchestra playing for cheerful customers. The interior architecture of the space and the behaviour of the gathered customers suggest that the presence of musicians, unlike that of Josip Halla's camera, was at the time a ubiquitous and familiar component of the venue's everyday soundscape and *mise-en-scène*. Halla's *Kavana Corso* is one of the earliest surviving film footages of Zagreb.² Filmed in 1915, this two-minute silent short film provides a rare glance at one of the spheres of everyday social life of the city lived away from the trenches and battlefields of the Great War. The musicians shown in the film belonged to a circle of professional orchestral musicians earning a living by performing for diverse audiences in privately owned coffeehouses, restaurants and silent movie theatres scattered throughout the city centre. Although at the time gramophone was not a completely novel technology for the citizens of Zagreb (especially those from the middle and upper classes), in these types of venues music was exclusively performed live. Gramophone records, namely, still belonged primarily to the private sphere of musical entertainment engaged with in the privacy of one's home. The private owners of the aforementioned venues were thus some of the principal employers for the numerous freelance musicians of the city. The circumstances, nevertheless, significantly changed in the following decades when the spectre of mechanical music³ slowly started to overshadow the primacy of live music performance, causing detrimental ruptures in everyday working lives and already precarious conditions of labour of the freelance musicians in incessant search of (temporary or permanent) employment.

This article presents an attempt at exploring the processes and changes brought on by the increasing presence of mechanical music (gramophone records, radio broadcasts and sound film, in particular) in performance spaces and contexts previously exclusively reserved for live performances of music. Central to my discussion are the experiences, perspectives and evolving discourses of the

¹ Jacques ATTALI: *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, 115.

² The original film is archived by the Croatian Film Archives (Croatian Cinematheque) of the Croatian State Archives (CSA). It is available for public viewing on the official YouTube channel of the CSA through the following link: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0WIFo2KlAc>> (access 15 August 2022).

³ Although the term »mechanical music« could also be used to refer to the mechanical musical instruments historically preceding the technologies of electroacoustic sound transmission and reproduction, in this article I am using it in the same manner it was used by the musicians of the 1920s and 1930s, that is to refer to, primarily, radio broadcasting, gramophone records and sound film technology.

professional musicians struggling to make a living by playing music in the city of Zagreb in the challenging years marking the beginning of the global economic depression of the 1930s. Although they were the ones most directly affected by the changing realities of music labour market, their perspectives often remain occluded in the existing historiographies of local discography, film and radio broadcasting. In order to reach these perspectives, I engaged in a close reading of numerous articles appearing in the official bulletin of the Association of Musicians of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (*Jugoslavenski Muzičar*) in the first ten years of its existence.⁴ Although inevitably non-exhaustive and at times shifting between rather general and utterly individual perspectives, these articles nevertheless offer a rare and illuminating glimpse into changing perspectives, evolving discourses, nascent struggles, and, above all, concentrated efforts at arriving at the position from which persisting challenges of musicians' labour rights and social status could be publicly addressed and effectively negotiated.

When in the 1970s the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer coined the term *schizophonia* to name the split between the original sound and its electroacoustical transmission and reproduction, he intended it to be »a nervous word«, related to schizophrenia and thus able to »convey the same sense of aberration and drama«.⁵ Although with a different aim and perspective, I hope to be able to capture both the aberration and the drama this rupture caused in the lives of the freelance musicians of Zagreb. If we were to accept Timothy Taylor's statement that the introduction of every new technology is inevitably »accompanied by a mixture of wonderment and anxiety«,⁶ then this paper could be read as an attempt at bringing forward the anxieties felt and expressed by the Zagreb musicians faced with new type of competition epitomized in the various forms of mechanical music.

Lives and Labour of Freelance Professional Musicians in the Interwar Zagreb

The Association of Musicians of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes⁷ was founded in 1923/1924 through a reorganisation and unification of the existing regional musicians' associations active primarily in the administrative and cultural centres of Zagreb, Belgrade and Ljubljana. As such it represented the beginning of

⁴ The bulletin was the Association's principal publication published monthly from 1923 to 1941. Its initial name, *Jugoslavenski muzičar*, changed to *Muzičar* from the January 1928 issue. Hereafter, I will be referring to it as either *Muzičar* or the Bulletin.

⁵ R. Murray SCHAFFER: *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester: Destiny Books, 1977, 90.

⁶ Timothy D. TAYLOR: *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology & Culture*, New York – London: Routledge, 2001, 201.

⁷ Following the renaming of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in October 1929, the Association changed its name accordingly into The Association of Musicians of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Hereafter, I will be referring to the organisation as the Association.

focused efforts at unionisation and active engagement with the issues of working conditions, labour rights and the social status of professional musicians at the state level. Throughout its existence (1923-1941) the Association's bulletin *Muzičar* participated in these struggles as the written archive of the Association's changing agendas, the primary medium of communication with the membership, the mediator in the process of their employment, as well as a sort of a testing ground for evolving initiatives and ongoing negotiations with private employers, state-funded cultural institutions and legislative bodies.⁸

The majority of the Association's members belonged to the circles of professional freelance (in the terms of the Association 'private') musicians and musicians permanently employed by theatres/opera houses and orchestras. Although the conditions of labour in opera houses were at times rather harsh, which occasionally resulted in strikes and boycotts of individual opera houses,⁹ these state sponsored institutions in principle allowed rather limited space for Association's involvement.¹⁰ The Association's efforts were therefore predominately focused on underlining the precarious position of freelance musicians and devising effective actions for its improvement.

Bulletin articles calling for solidarity of all members and active participation in their shared struggle paint a rather vivid picture of challenges freelance musicians were facing daily within their working environments. From the perspective of the Association's leadership, as well as their individual members, the position of freelance musicians was considered particularly vulnerable and therefore in need of immediate attention and action. Most of the freelance musicians were employed by the city's coffeehouses, restaurants, and silent movie theatres, and thus heavily dependent on the conditions their private employers were willing to provide. More often than not, this dependence resulted in long and – physically and mentally – strenuous working hours stretching out well into the night.¹¹ In

⁸ For a detailed history of the Association and its Zagreb branch, see Ivana ŠUBIC KOVAČEVIĆ: *Djelovanje Zagrebačkog podsaveza u Savezu muzičara Kraljevine SHS/Kraljevine Jugoslavije (1923-1941)*, in: Stanislav Tuksar – Monika Jurić Janjik (eds.): *Prvi svjetski rat (1914.-1918.) i glazba: skladateljske strategije, izvedbene prakse i društveni utjecaji / The Great War (1914-1918) and Music: Compositional Strategies, Performing Practices and Social Impacts*, Zagreb: HMD, 2019, 513-547, as well as Ivana VESIĆ – Vesna PENO: *Između umetnosti i života: o delatnosti Udruženja muzičara u Kraljevini SHS/Jugoslaviji*, Beograd: Muzikološki institut SANU, 2017.

⁹ The organisation of and participation in transnational boycotts of music institutions and/or venues in which the strikes or negotiation processes initiated by the employed musicians were ongoing, was one of the often used means of struggle for better working conditions. Announcements of the ongoing boycotts were usually published on the front page of the Bulletin and were meant to inform the members of their obligation to refrain from accepting engagements from the private or public employers listed in the announcement.

¹⁰ Jaroslav ŠIDAK: *Fondovi i posredovanje rada u sindikalnoj borbi I*, *Muzičar*, 6 (1928) 8, 1-2.

¹¹ Jaroslav ŠIDAK: *Socijalna zaštita muzičara u privatnim poduzećima*, *Jugoslavenski muzičar*, 4 (1926) 12, 1-2.

principle, they were paid for their work in daily wages, while weekly and monthly payment remained a privilege of a sort. Even if they were fortunate enough to be in a position to sign a written contract, it only rarely contained a reasonable notice period,¹² which in the case of even the shortest illness contributed to further existential insecurities.¹³ Unlike their fellow musicians in theatre orchestras, who managed to negotiate Mondays as their days of weekly rest,¹⁴ freelance musicians could not count on this basic labour right.

According to the articles in the Bulletin, the circumstances seemed to be even more unfavourable for the silent movie theatre musicians. They were at times pressured to play for up to ten hours without a break, crammed in small and poorly-lit orchestral spaces, which left permanent marks on their bodies and lasting effects on their overall wellbeing.¹⁵ Sundays, which for many other professions meant a day of weekly rest, were for the silent movie theatre musicians days of the most exhausting labour.¹⁶ In the words of Jaroslav Šidak – the Bulletin’s main editor from 1927 to 1930, and one of its most prolific contributors¹⁷ – these musicians were slowly becoming »mere machines conditioned by the pre-set fixed rhythms of work and rest«,¹⁸ while the aging of their bodies signalled the inevitable nearing of their retirement. Their old age, concluded Šidak, was »a desperate chapter of utter misery and destitution«.¹⁹

Additional challenge that the musicians faced was the seasonal nature of their employment. Nearing of the end of the winter season, in which the demand for live music performances at times exceeded the number of available musicians,²⁰ usually brought with it an intensive period of frenzied search of employment for the coming summer months. From the perspective of the Association’s members, the further threat to the security of their position came in the form of the »unfair«

¹² J. ŠIDAK: Fondovi i posredovanje rada u sindikalnoj borbi I, 2.

¹³ Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Obavezno penzijsko osiguranje privatnih muzičara?, *Muzičar*, 7 (1929) 3, 3-5.

¹⁴ J. ŠIDAK: Socijalna zaštita muzičara u privatnim poduzećima, 1.

¹⁵ J. ŠIDAK: Socijalna zaštita muzičara u privatnim poduzećima, 2.

¹⁶ J. ŠIDAK: Socijalna zaštita muzičara u privatnim poduzećima, 2.

¹⁷ Articles written by Jaroslav Šidak often summarized discussions and conclusions of official meetings of the various bodies of the Association or informed on developments in other European musicians’ unions. Many of his articles – especially those that offer rich and detailed insight into the intricacies of everyday lives and labour of local professional musicians – are, nevertheless, expressions of his own perspectives informed by the knowledge gained through deep involvement in the struggle for better and more just working conditions of his fellow musicians. For more information on his personal involvement and substantial contribution to the Association see Ivana ŠUBIC KOVAČEVIĆ – Damir AGIČIĆ: Jaroslav Šidak u glazbenom životu međuratnog Zagreba, in: Drago Roksanđić (ed.): *Zagreb 1924. – 1930. i 1945. – 1967. Društvo, kultura, svakodnevnica: Desničini susreti 2018.*, Zagreb: FF press, 2019, 79-93.

¹⁸ J. ŠIDAK: Obavezno penzijsko osiguranje privatnih muzičara?, 4.

¹⁹ J. ŠIDAK: Fondovi i posredovanje rada u sindikalnoj borbi I, 1.

²⁰ ***: Može li se kod nas govoriti o »konkurenciji stranih muzičara«?, *Jugoslavenski muzičar*, 3 (1925) 6, 1-2.

competition of other – »unorganised«, that is non-unionised – musicians. While the Association was welcoming to the composers, conductors, and musical pedagogues, it was decisively closed to, and at times openly hostile towards military musicians, »lower-class« folk musicians playing in *tamburica* ensembles, as well as towards the ensembles of Roma musicians. The latter two categories of musicians were often labelled as »anotal« (not versed in reading music notation) and abominated for playing without their pay fixed in advance, all the while relying heavily or exclusively on tips, which was considered especially distasteful and disrespectful to the profession of a (serious) musician.²¹

One of the recurring discussions in Bulletin's articles evolved around the (»uncontrolled«) influx of foreign musicians. Although in some circumstances their presence was a necessity, especially when they were versed in playing instruments not many of the local musicians played, they were also very often hesitant to join the Association and thus, unlike the Association's members, remained unbound by the established and closely guarded principles of employment. They, furthermore, tended to stay in the country only temporarily, predominantly during the summer months, which, as was mentioned before, represented a period of already fierce competition of local musicians over lucrative engagements in coastal and continental holiday destinations.

The rapidly changing labour conditions and growing insecurities of the musical profession brought on by the ever more prominent manifestations of the global economic crisis were in the late 1920s further exacerbated by the increasing presence of mechanical music, creeping into the spaces of previously exclusive live performances of the city's freelance musicians.

The Encroaching Menace of Mechanical Music

A greater presence of Bulletin articles addressing the increasing competition of mechanical music coincided with the onset of the great economic crisis, whose effects were becoming ever more palpable in almost all aspects of everyday life of Zagreb at the very end of 1920s. Assessing the potential consequences of the omnipresence of mechanical music, one of the articles published in the May 1929 issue of *Muzičar* warned its readers of the spectre of mechanical music haunting the globe and causing considerable anxiety to professional musicians worldwide. Although at the time it still wasn't considered to be of any immediate threat to local musicians' livelihoods, it was, nevertheless, slowly and almost imperceptibly entering the public sphere: »Its arrival didn't cause any thunderstorms, it didn't deprive any of the employed musicians of their earnings, it didn't even earn any

²¹ See more in ***: Jedna sramota za muzički stalež, *Muzičar*, 9 (1931) 4, 1.; and Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Povodom drugog redovnog kongresa Savezne Uprave, *Muzičar*, 6 (1928) 4, 1-2.

serious space in the daily press, because in our gramophone age, to whose psychosis even the professional musicians fully surrendered, the mechanical music cannot stir any considerable interest, unless it was to appear in the form of sound film, that today arouses understandable curiosity.«²² It is precisely this naturalisation of the technologies of sound reproduction (the fact that they don't represent anything extraordinary anymore but have instead become a staple ingredient of everyday life) that in Šidak's opinion should be considered particularly dangerous when it comes to the future of the musical profession.

Despite an increasing number of articles warning of the imminent danger of mechanical music – both those written by local authors and those reporting on the official standpoints of existing European musicians' unions – the changing circumstances, at least initially, didn't seem to cause any serious distress. Although Šidak cautioned about the new trend of introduction of gramophones into the places of formerly exclusively live music, he also bitterly concluded that this trend didn't face any resistance: »The authorities do not have a problem with it, musicians are not screaming against it, the public is not protesting. Everyone seems to receive this novelty indifferently – as something that just is and must be.«²³

As could be concluded from the sources cited above, the gramophone was by the 1920s so ubiquitous in Zagreb that even the musicians perceived the period as the gramophone era. The first stores selling gramophones and gramophone records appeared in Zagreb already at the beginning of the 20th century. The fact that in 1927 the first local Yugoslav company Edison Bell Penkala started to operate in Zagreb, might have further contributed to the overall feeling of the gramophone's omnipresence. As far as they were listened to in the privacy of one's home, they didn't seem to compete for attention with the live performances of local musicians. Problems emerged when, compelled by economic reasons, even the most prominent of live music venues – which previously proudly announced live music performances they were able to provide for their customers (see Figure 1) – started to replace their musicians with records played on gramophones: »In today's era of gramophone prosperity, when one can hear electro-dynamic machines blasting and splitting ears from countless corners, it should not come as a surprise that many privately-owned venues feel compelled to provide this kind of pleasure to their guests. That this happens in second- and third-rate establishments, small coffeehouses, and buffets, is to an extent understandable, considering their financial inability to hire even the smallest of orchestras. But when one of the biggest coffeehouses of Zagreb ('Medulić'), in which the 'world's greatest orchestras' perform the electro-dynamically most sensational programs, is leading the way, and has been doing it for two full years without even a single voice of opposition

²² Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Mehanička muzika kod nas, *Muzičar*, 7 (1929) 5, 1-2.

²³ J. ŠIDAK: Mehanička muzika kod nas, 2.

from its large audience – then this becomes a fact worth of serious consideration, especially when it comes to the question of mechanical music and the attitudes of audience towards it.«²⁴



Figure 1: Street sign of the Zagreb *Kavana Bristol* (Vlaška street) announcing its daily »concerts«. Photographed by Vladimir Horvat in 1929.²⁵

Just one year before the Edison Bell Penkala company was founded, Zagreb musicians were confronted with one more type of competition – the radio. News of the potential peril of radio, negative experiences of European and American musicians acutely aware of the immediate consequences of the advent of radio into coffeehouses, bars and restaurants, as well as news of unionised actions planned to effectively deal with this new form of »mechanical music menace« appeared on the pages of *Muzičar*, already in 1925.²⁶ A short article published on the front page of the same issue appeared to be a warning of a sort, that the possibility of similar scenarios happening in Zagreb should not be considered as far-fetched as it initially might seem.²⁷

²⁴ Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Snizite takse za namještanje orkestrara!, *Muzičar*, 8 (1930) 1, 3.

²⁵ The original photograph is a part of the Vladimir Horvat Collection archived by the Photo Documentation Collection of the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia under the inventory number: MKM, FKB-172.

²⁶ ***: Konkurencija radio-aparata, *Jugoslavenski muzičar*, 3 (1925) 7, 60.

²⁷ ***: Zar radio-konkurencija u Zagrebu sa strane vlastitih članova?, *Jugoslavenski muzičar*, 3 (1925) 7, 58.

Radio Zagreb started its broadcast on May 15, 1926. In the first days of the broadcasting, the usual daily programme lasted for around two hours and, according to the existing daily newspaper announcements and reports, more than half of that airtime was dedicated to music performed live in the small upper-town studio or reproduced from gramophone records.²⁸ Although the report on the first two months of the radio's broadcasting proudly highlighted the names of a number of distinguished Zagreb musicians taking part in the programme, it seems that the high fees they demanded for their participation proved to be a challenge to the station's limited budget. In the days immediately following the first public broadcast the station's editors and staff started visiting Zagreb's live music venues in search of financially more sustainable solutions.²⁹ In the coming months the station managed to successfully organize live transmissions from several public events happening in the city centre, and by November 1926 live transmissions became almost a daily component of the radio programme. From then on, the microphones of Radio Zagreb were moved to all sorts of spaces – from churches, concert halls, and theatres, to coffeehouses and cabarets.

The threat that radio broadcasting posed to the livelihoods of the city's professional freelance musicians was at least twofold. Immediately following the first broadcasted programme of the Radio Zagreb, a »radio-fever« of a sort spread through the city, seeping from private homes into public spaces, among others also the ones in which musicians earned a living. Initially, before the advent of stronger loudspeakers, the radio was listened to primarily through the headphones. Attentive to the newest trends grabbing the attention of their customers, some of the most popular Zagreb coffeehouses made a commercially driven decision to introduce the possibility of following the radio programme from the comfort of their establishment's space.³⁰ Hoping to attract a larger number of guests interested in the news and entertainment provided by the Zagreb radio station, *Kavana Medulić* invested in 1926 in numerous sets of headphones hanging from the ceiling above all of their tables. As could be seen in the Otto Antonini's illustration (Figure 2) appearing on the cover of the magazine *Svijet* in July 1926, such interventions into the coffeehouse's interior seemed to stir quite a buzz with the Zagreb public interested in newest of fashions. As was the case with gramophone records, the introduction of headphones, (and later radios) into the spaces

²⁸ See Nikola VONČINA: Radio Zagreb 1926-1941: prilozi za povijest radija u Hrvatskoj, *Zbornik trećeg programa Radio Zagreba*, Zagreb: Radio Zagreb, 1986, 43-44.

²⁹ Their quest for suitable musicians, at least as far as the musicians performing popular music genres were concerned, seemed to be short and successful, since the published programme of the May 17, 1926 broadcast already announced »lively dance music« played by the Radioquartet Rosbroj. For more details on the process of selection and the Radioquartet Rosbroj see N. VONČINA: Radio Zagreb 1926-1941: prilozi za povijest radija u Hrvatskoj, 45-46 and Aldo FOŠKO: Violinist Otto Rosbroj (1894-1962) i njegova uloga u počecima jazza u Zagrebu, *Arti musices*, 48 (2017) 1, 85-87.

³⁰ See N. VONČINA: Radio Zagreb 1926-1941: prilozi za povijest radija u Hrvatskoj, 62.

of live music performance, provided considerable anxiety among the Association's leadership. The main problem with both forms of mechanical music lies in the fact that playing records and/or reproducing radio broadcasts didn't result in any additional taxes for the owners of the venues. The presence of live music performed by salon orchestras, on the other hand, was considered a form of luxury and thus subjected to unreasonably high »live music« taxes. A significant discrepancy in taxation policies proved to be detrimental to the precarious position of freelance musicians. Encouraged by the popularity of records and radio, and the decrease of their expenses its introduction resulted in, venue owners soon started to consider the commercially more viable solutions.



Figure 2: Otto Antonini, *Zagreb on the Wave 350*.
Cover of the magazine *Svijet*, 24 July 1926.

Unlike the private venue owners, radio and gramophone companies were for quite a long time not perceived as serious employers of freelance professional musicians. Even if they were able to secure an engagement in the gramophone company or radio studios, musicians received only a one-time fee for the time spent in the studios and could not count on any revenues from the record sales, mechanical reproduction or radio broadcasts of their performances. Above all, the chance of getting the opportunity for these types of engagements was very often reserved only for a minority of them. For those privileged few, nevertheless, the fee received for one or two hours of performance in the radio programme often exceeded the average daily wage for considerably longer performances in coffee-houses and restaurants.³¹ As the programme of the radio station grew in length and became more demanding in the sense of time needed to be filled with music, the conditions abruptly changed. Especially problematic in this context were the frequent evening live transmissions from coffeehouses which employed professional salon orchestras. This was done almost exclusively without musicians' consent, with the assumption that they didn't need to be additionally compensated for the broadcasts. The reasoning behind this practice lay in the presumption that these transmissions didn't demand any additional work of the musicians, and that the compensation for this work was already provided by the venue's owner. According to the Association's viewpoint, the money saved by the radio station was considerable. Through this sort of arrangement, the station was able to receive hours of dance music programme for free, performed by orchestras far larger than they normally could accommodate and pay for in regular studio broadcasts. This practice was fiercely attacked and openly denounced on the pages of *Muzičar* as an especially slick and unjust system of indirect exploitation of musicians' labour. It also raised acute awareness of the urgent need for dedicated efforts towards the negotiation of the performers' rights in the realm of mechanical music reproduction.³² Times were undoubtedly ripe for this issue to come to the fore.

The most severe and immediate impact of mechanical music proliferation on the lives and livelihoods of freelance professional musicians, nevertheless, came in the form of sound film technology. Sinister and disturbing news about the rapid introduction of sound film and the devastating effects of the »sound film psychosis« on the lives of thousands of silent movie theatre musicians world-over, started to appear on the pages of *Muzičar* in 1928. Despite the fact that articles published in the Bulletin reported on almost 50% of New York music theatres switching to sound film and thus dismissing their orchestral musicians and similar things happening in largest European movie theatres,³³ Šidak's article in the October 1929

³¹ See Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Cvijeće s naših livada..., *Muzičar*, 6 (1928) 10, 1.

³² J. ŠIDAK: Cvijeće s naših livada..., 2.

³³ See Paul DEUTSCHER: Mehanička muzika i orkestralni muzičari, *Muzičar*, 7 (1929) 2, 3-4.

issue, calmly informed the readers that, when it comes to the threat of sound film in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, musicians can »rest assured«. ³⁴ Just a few weeks after Šidak's reassuring article, the Zagreb Olimp movie theatre announced the first screening of a sound film in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia taking place in its newly equipped hall. The success of both the MGM's *White Shadows in the South Seas* and the new sound film technology superseded even the most optimistic predictions. Immediately after the premiere, the Olimp theatre dismissed all its musicians, and many other theatres soon followed. ³⁵ By July 1930, all of the largest movie theatres in Zagreb had entirely switched to sound film, which consequently led to the complete disappearance of the silent movie theatre musician profession. ³⁶ Although the overall number of movie theatre musicians in Zagreb was not large, with even the biggest of orchestras rarely exceeding twelve musicians, a few dozen musicians left without employment in the middle of the winter season, when most of the places available to freelance musicians had been filled, posed a considerable challenge to the increasingly unstable market for musicians' labour. ³⁷

The bitter taste left in the mouths of Zagreb musicians by the increasing competition of mechanical music was probably most vividly epitomized in the words of an anonymous musician protesting the use of gramophone records in radio broadcasts: »Machine in the machine – gramophone record in the microphone – the double attack on the musician. The gramophone record – that does not think, nor feel, does not need to eat nor drink – should be eliminated from the places in which it acts as merely a cheap surrogate for the living musicians, who do have feelings, but – unfortunately – have a stomach, too.« ³⁸

Canned Salmons by Trout Brooks: Final Thoughts

Read from today's perspective, the words emanating from the pages of *Muzičar* in the times of growing economic crisis, exacerbated for musicians by the threatening presence of mechanical music, might at times seem exaggerated, over-anxious, and needlessly pessimistic. They, nevertheless, in many details – particularly their tone, sentiment and intent – faithfully mirror myriad pages of similar

³⁴ Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Prijeti li nam opasnost od ton-filma?, *Muzičar*, 7 (1929) 10, 2.

³⁵ Jaroslav ŠIDAK: Ataka tonfilma, *Muzičar*, 7 (1929) 11, 3-4.

³⁶ See ***: Popis bioskopa sa tonfilmskim aparaturama, *Filmska revija*, 4 (1930) 14, 1 and VRK.: Na nizbrdici... Očajno stanje u muzičkom zvanju, *Muzičar*, 9 (1931) 6, 1-2.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of the complex circumstances surrounding the advent of the sound film technology in Zagreb see Mojca PIŠKOR: The MGM Lion's Ominous Roar: (New) Technologies and the Disappearing Profession of Silent Movie Theatre Musicians in Croatia of the Late 1920s, in: Dagmar Abfalter – Rosa Reitsamer (eds.): *Music as Labour: Inequalities and Activism in the Past and Present*, London – New York: Routledge, 2022, 52-65.

³⁸ ***: Borba za gramofonske ploče u radiu, *Muzičar*, 9 (1931) 12, 2.

publications appearing in the countries of the Global North at that time.³⁹ Above all, they are the precious sources which allow us to observe (from a safe temporal distance) the intricate process of discursive enveloping of the mythical battle of Man vs. Machine played out in the sphere of music.

The experiences, thoughts, and doubts of musicians I tried to bring to the fore in this article enable us, it seems to me, to catch the moment between the »splitting of sound from its maker«⁴⁰ and the onset of copyright regulations that »sutured records to compositions, closing the gap between them in which the musician had for a moment been audible«.⁴¹ The musicians' reflections incited by the seeming impossibility of peaceful coexistence of labouring musicians and various forms of mechanical music seemed to, at least on the pages of *Muzičar*, be perpetually drifting between optimistic manifestations of technological voluntarism and dire expressions of utter technological determinism. Discursive excursions into voluntarism appeared in the shape of the utmost confidence that »the mechanical transmission of music could never replace the living musician«,⁴² because there never could have been »any emotional affection between the listener and the machine«,⁴³ which will eventually – »as soon as curiosity is satisfied«⁴⁴ – lead to the final defeat of mechanical music and glorious triumph of live music and musicians performing it.⁴⁵ Full-blown cases of technological determinism are, on the other hand, probably most vividly epitomised in the passive surrender and nihilistic conclusion of P. Deutscher's article appearing in the February 1929 issue of *Muzičar*: »But, what are we to do when faced with the progress of science and technology? What could we do? Nothing, absolutely nothing!«⁴⁶

The occasional outbursts of optimism seemed always to be shadowed by persistently stubborn unwillingness to allow for the possibility of coexistence of

³⁹ For detailed histories of the struggle of European and American musicians and musicians' unions against the mechanical music see, for example, Preston J. HUBBARD: Synchronized Sound and Movie-House Musicians, 1926-1929, *American Music*, 3 (1985) 4, 429-441; Elizabeth FONES-WOLF: Sound Comes to the Movies: The Philadelphia Musicians' Struggle Against Recorded Music, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography*, 118 (1994) 1-2, 3-31; Howard ZINN – Dana FRANK – Robin D. G. KELLEY, *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001; Martin CLOONAN – Matt BRENNAN: Alien Invasions: the British Musicians' Union and Foreign Musicians, *Popular Music*, 32 (2013) 2, 277-295; John WILLIAMSON – Martin CLOONAN: *Players' Work Time: A History of the British Musicians' Union, 1893-2013*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.

⁴⁰ R. Murray SCHAFFER: *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 90.

⁴¹ Marina PETERSON: Sound Work: Music as Labor and the 1940s Recording Bans of the American Federation of Musicians, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86 (2013) 3, 796.

⁴² A. B.: Štetuje li muzičar od mehaničkog prenosa muzike?, *Muzičar*, 8 (1930) 11-12, 3-4.

⁴³ ***: Da li je muzičarski stalež osuđen na izumiranje? Jedno optimističko razmatranje, *Muzičar*, 9 (1931) 7, 3-4.

⁴⁴ P. DEUTSCHER: Mehanička muzika i orkestralni muzičari, 3.

⁴⁵ ***: Novi život? Nove nade? Nove mogućnosti?, *Muzičar*, 10 (1932) 7, 1-2.

⁴⁶ P. DEUTSCHER: Mehanička muzika i orkestralni muzičari, 4

mechanical music and living musicians. The mere idea seemed to be as incongruous as John Philip Sousa's analogy of »canned salmon by a trout brook«. ⁴⁷ Such perspectives should not come as a surprise if we take into consideration Pfaffenberger's argument that modernism in essence »represents a struggle to find a stable ground of being within the promise and peril of science and technological development«, while the technology as such is seen through the modernist lens »as both creator and destroyer, as agent both of future promise and of culture's destruction«. ⁴⁸

One of the most important issues raised by the discourses on mechanical music being shaped on the pages of the Bulletin is the question of the difference that physical presence of musician's body makes to the essential meaning and value of music listened to and experienced, as well as the question of the need of remembering of the schizophrenically dis-membered entities of sound and its maker. Acutely aware of the real existential consequences this rupture caused to their lives and profession, the musicians of the 1930s were in no doubt that their listeners will not (forever) »want only to hear the music, but will also want to see it«, ⁴⁹ or, put differently, that (eventually) they will want to experience it with both »their eyes and ears«, which consequently led them to the conclusion that »by mechanisation music becomes mere industry, and thus loses its very essence«. ⁵⁰ By underlining the tension between musical work as object and as practice, they also, in a way, pointed their fingers at, in Marina Peterson's words, »uneven formations of value around the status of music as commodity or labour« ⁵¹ – the same labour that has »long been occluded in the history of negotiations over where value of music resides«. ⁵²

Pfaffenberger warns us that »assuming technological determinism is much easier than conducting a fully contextual study in which people are shown to be the active appropriators, rather than the passive victims of... technology«. ⁵³ By

⁴⁷ In his well-known 1909 article celebrated American composer John Philip Sousa lamented the proliferation of mechanical (canned) music and ridiculed the absurdities of its advertising in the following words: »... the ingenious purveyor of canned music is urging the sportsman, on his way to the silent places with gun and rod, tent and canoe, to take with him some disks, cranks, and cogs to sing to him as he sits by the firelight, *a thought as unhappy and incongruous as canned salmon by a trout brook*«. John Philip SOUSA: The Menace of Mechanical Music, *Appelton's Magazine*, 8 (1906), 278-284. [emphasis: M. P.]

⁴⁸ Bryan PFAFFENBERGER: Social Anthropology and Technology, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21 (1992), 495.

⁴⁹ A. B.: Štetuje li muzičar od mehaničkog prenosa muzike?, 3.

⁵⁰ P. DEUTSCHER: Mehanička muzika i orkestralni muzičari, 4.

⁵¹ Marina PETERSON: Sound Work: Music as Labor and the 1940s Recording Bans of the American Federation of Musicians, 794.

⁵² Marina PETERSON: Sound Work: Music as Labor and the 1940s Recording Bans of the American Federation of Musicians, 793.

⁵³ Bryan PFAFFENBERGER: Social Anthropology and Technology, 512.

focusing attention to the metaphorical B sides of gramophone records, the undercurrents of radio waves, and the negatives of moving pictures, I have tried to underline the Janus-faced nature of the technologies of mechanical transmission and reproduction of music, all the while hoping not to lose from sight the musicians of Zagreb who, in the challenging times of the 1930s, were just starting to find ways of becoming »active appropriators«, rather than »passive victims« of the technologies fundamentally changing their lives and professions.

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*Sažetak*IZMEĐU VALOVA, VRPCI I BRAZDA: ZAGREBAČKI PROFESIONALNI
GLAZBENICI 1930-IH I SABLAST MEHANIČKE GLAZBE

Članak je pokušaj interpretacije višeslojnih procesa transformacije radne svakodnevice i uvjeta rada profesionalnih glazbenika u turbulentnim vremenima velike gospodarske krize tridesetih godina 20. stoljeća koja je bila dodatno produbljena sve većom prisutnošću mehaničke glazbe (gramofonskih ploča, radijskih programa i zvučnog filma) u prostorima koji su prethodno bili isključivo rezervirani za izvedbe glazbe uživo. Početak dvadesetih godina 20. stoljeća vrijeme je prvih ozbiljnijih pokušaja sindikalnog udruživanja profesionalnih glazbenika u cilju zajedničke solidarne borbe za bolje uvjete rada i širi društveni ugled glazbeničke profesije. Središnja je organizacija jugoslavenskih glazbenika međuratnog razdoblja bio Savez muzičara Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, a njegovo mjesečno glasilo *Muzičar* središnjim je izvorom istraživanja na kojemu počiva ovaj rad. Iskustva, perspektive i diskursi međuratnih zagrebačkih profesionalnih glazbenika koji se oblikuju u člancima *Muzičara* fokusom su analiza i interpretacija koje donosi ovaj članak. Apostrofirajući njihove glasove, autorica nastoji pridonijeti nijansiranijem razumijevanju »Janusova lica« tehnologija elektroakustičkog prijenosa i reprodukcije glazbe, a time i širenju perspektiva postojećih historiografskih opisa lokalne diskografije, filma i radija, u kojima su življena iskustva »običnih« glazbenika – preko čijih se života izravno prelamaju dalekosežne posljedice uvođenja novih tehnologija – nerijetko marginalizirana ili u potpunosti izostavljena.