

## Homage à Svetozár Stračina (3. 12. 1940 – 26. 2. 1996)



Svetozár Stračina was closely connected with folk music traditions which as a native from Turčiansky Svätý Martin he absorbed in his family home. Because the freedom both in life and creation were the top priorities for him, he hated commands and restrictions. And he liked biting, even ironic humour. But he was critical also towards himself, especially in his work. „*The sense of my happiness must be as pure as inspiration. If such a feeling does not come, then I am losing*”, he used to say.

### Youth with Music

Stračina's father was a calligraphist and his mother was a dressmaker. Already as a child he turned his attention to the sound of musical instruments. And so no wonder that his father bought him as a four year boy a Hohner button accordion, which was his first musical instrument. It led him to a music school in Banská Bystrica, where he learned to play also the piano from the age of ten. At the Conservatory in Bratislava he studied the accordion with Jan Ondruš and composition with Miloslav Kořínek. After his graduation he signed up to study musicology at the Philosophical Faculty of Comenius University. So in the years 1960–1965 he polished his philosophical attitudes to the arts through science.

### **From Alternative Theatre to the Film**

During his fifth year he left the school. He had already contact with practice as a composer; he did not need an official document of study. He began with scenic work for theatre plays, pantomime and poetry programmes...

He was particularly captured by avant-garde theatre scenes which bore the signs of an alternative production – theatre of images, pantomime theatre, poetry theatre. During this period he started to cooperate also with the later world renowned mime artist Milan Sládek.

He soon turned his attention to film. The medium of film gave him the opportunity to develop fantasy more extensively in connection with image, story and to confront his art with the requirements of creators-directors such as for instance Štefan Uher, Martin Hollý, but especially Martin Ľapák and Martin Slivka with their films and documentaries on the folklore theme. He composed music for more than 150 films, out of which 78 were feature films. In filmmaking he enjoyed applying motific work flowing from folklore sources, making use of musical instruments' sound: such as fujaras (shepherd's long pipes), fujara-trombita, pipes, cimbaloms, Jew's harps, bells but also various distant ethnics' instruments which he had in his collection.

### **Lúčnica (Slovak National Folklore Ensemble) and SLUK (Slovak Folk Art Ensemble)**

After the year 1962 he was attracted by the Lúčnica ensemble. The choreographer Štefan Nosál', at that time artistic director of the dance group, often took him on his research and collecting travels in the field. He created music to 28 choreographic scores for Lúčnica. Noteworthy are *Parobský tanec* (Boys's Dance - 1962), *Na obnôcke* (Night Horse Grazing - 1964), *Čirčianka* (1966), *Pri ľane* (By the Flax - 1968), *Vitaj jar* (Welcome Spring- 1975), *To je Lúčnica* (That Is Lúčnica - 1988). Stračina's music strengthened original forms and interpretation and stylistic expression without destroying the original shape.

Rivalry between artistic ensembles caused that S. Stračina was enticed by the professional SLUK ensemble. Its artistic director Juraj Kubánka belonged among the leading choreographers of this ensemble. He had high demands also on music to his stage dance compositions and that was an inspiration for the composer. During 1967–1999 Stračina created for SLUK 23 folk music compositions to stage settings and choreographies in symphonic clothing. Many of them deserve special attention as separate pieces of music. They include *Biela pl' na Váhu* (White Raft on the River Vah - 1973), *Goralská zima* (Goral Winter - 1976), *Pošudraky zo Zemplína* („Pošudrak“ Dances from Zemplín - 1978), *Družbovský z Letanoviec* (Groomsmen Dance from Letanovce - 1978), *Stínka a úval* (1980),

*Koňare z Raslavíc* (Stablemen from Raslavice - 1980), *Tatranskí orli* (Tatra Eagles -1980), *Zbujecky* (1984), *Pozdrav* (Greeting - 1986), *Haravara* (Hurly-Burly -1996-unfinished).

### **Cooperation with Radio**

At the folk festivals and competitions he was often disturbed by the lack of inspiration. He was more attracted by authentic expressions rather than not very successful ensembles' stylizations. Sometimes he had some remarks also to the cycle "Treasury of Folk Music" broadcast on radio (author O. Demo), but he was also able to bring suggestions. Svetozár Stračina made a closer contact with the radio only after the launch of the international radio competition Prix de Musique Folklorique de Radio Bratislava (1970). At the beginning his attitude was sceptic. But when he found out that the competition raised the profile of folk music recordings within European radio stations context, he strained his attention. He started to cooperate as a composer and took advantage also of the Electro-acoustic experimental studio. Year after year he came with new motifs. Noteworthy are *Starie oravskie nuoti* (The Old Orava Tunes) for solo violin (Miroslav Dudík), *Beluškov cimbal* (Beluška's Cimbalom) for solo cimbalom (Tibor Kováč), *Reč pastierska* (Shepherds' Speech) – solo for shepherds' long pipe-trombita (Jozef Peško), *Kraviarky z Oravy* (Cowgirls from Orava Region) for a trio of female singers (P. Ganobčíková, A. Hulejová, A. Vargicová), *Parobské z Horehronia* (Boys' Songs from Upper Hron Region) for solo singing (Ján Ambróz) and many others. Usually he first recorded orchestra background and then in the experimental studio he recorded on a multi-track tape-recorder many thematic elements for soloists – violinists, cimbalom players, trombita players as well as singers. The work with sound came afterwards – in cooperation with the top technicians Ján Janík and Ján Backstuber - he included sound effects, equalized, transformed, mixed... In the years 1970–1985 he created 17 compositions for radio and he gained 10 awards at the Prix de Musique Folklorique de Radio Bratislava, thus becoming the most-awarded composer in the history of the competition. In these compositions he brought a specific trend in the folk music treatment which is often named as "Stračina-like".

/ The competition was interrupted in 1993 and since 2003 the Slovak Radio under the auspices of the EBU continues in organizing the competition Svetozár Stračina Grand Prix./

## **Festivals and music and publishing activities**

Stračina's cooperation with leading folk festivals in Východná, Detva, Myjava, etc. was remarkable. He created jingles for most of them. He had a significant share in design and realization of the edition of *gramophone 2-4 albums by the OPUS Publishing House devoted to the traditional music of Slovakia's regions entitled Panorama of the Slovak Folk Music Culture / Orava Region (1978), River Hron Region (1981), Liptov Region (1983), Poľana Region (1986), Kysuce Region and Terchov Valley (1992) /*. The recordings were made in cooperation with the Slovak Radio Regional Studio in Banská Bystrica under supervision of Juraj Dubovec. Stračina created with him also a radio cycle "*Composer and Folk Music*" (1992–1993), which Dubovec published in a book entitled "*Composer and Music Heritage – Talks with a Music Composer*".

## **Folk Song**

Svetozár Stračina considered folk songs perfect works of art. He often leaned over it and wondered how to touch it, preserve its beauty and not to spoil a jewel refined by time.

*„It happens to me that I have a transcript of a song at my disposal. I analyse it tone after tone. I decipher it bar after bar. I find out exact phrases. I measure its duration, I analyse its tonality, its harmoniousness, I compare various variants, interval sequence... I recognize it, its history... And suddenly I start to think about it helplessly... I perceive how beautiful, how perfect it is... I can only hurt it... Only then, after a one line quotation I have the courage to substitute its musical environment in similar spirit, the smell of the environment similar to the one from which I have taken it”.*

Ondrej DEMO

(the author was an editor at Czechoslovak Radio in Bratislava in the years 1953 – 1989 and a founder of the Prix de Musique Folklorique de Radio Bratislava Competition)

## **Literature:**

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Photo: The State Scientific Library – literary and music museum in Banská Bystrica

