

# Beethoven Off-Center: Introduction

TATJANA MARKOVIĆ\*

Abteilung Musikwissenschaft, ACDH – Austrian Center for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vordere Zollamtsstraße 3, 1030 Wien, Österreich

© 2020 Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest

The special edition of *Studia Musicologica* includes eleven contributions shedding light on the reception of Beethoven in the capitals of ten present-day countries through history: Ljubljana, Carniola (today Ljubljana, Slovenia); Pest before and Budapest after the Compromise (Ausgleich) of 1867, Pressburg (Bratislava) and Agram (Zagreb) in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; Belgrade, the Kingdom of Serbia; Sarajevo, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; Bucharest and other cities in the United Principalities of Romania, the Kingdom of Romania, Romanian People's Republic, Socialist Republic of Romania, Romania; Athens, the Kingdom of Greece; Nicosia, Cyprus; and Skopje, Yugoslavia and North Macedonia. The time span of research presented here is between 1811 and 2013 in imperial, socialist and post-socialist contexts. The dissolution of Yugoslavia and succeeding foundation of six independent countries was, in some cases, followed by one more national awakening one hundred years later and, thus, with one more expression of longing to belong to "Europe," which was related to performing compositions by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827). The contributions are classified in three main groups, with numerous interconnections: the first is related to Beethoven's symphonies, especially the Ninth Symphony, the second to the composer's only opera *Fidelio*, and the third is focused on the reception of Beethoven by music writers and other composers. The 100th anniversary of the composer's death is exemplified by the commemoration in Sarajevo in 1927. Finally, in a mosaic of indirect personal relations to Beethoven, the performance of his works and connections to topography of Agram/Zagreb, the last contribution speaks about the reception of the composer and his opus in Croatia.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, four nodes of the research network are presented in this volume, related to the coordinates *who*, *where*, *when* and *how*: the reception of Ludwig van Beethoven and his music in (South)East Europe considered through case studies in the time span of approximately two

<sup>1</sup> A profound study of Beethoven's reception in Croatia was published in 1941/1942 by Artur Schneider. See Artur SCHNEIDER, "Neostvaren boravak Beethovena u Hrvatskoj," *Sv. Cecilija* 36/3–4 (1942), 81–90; no. 5–6, 131–143.

\* Corresponding author. E-mail: tatjana\_markovic@icloud.com

hundred years (1811–2013) via a cultural transfer on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth.

Ludwig van Beethoven is not only a composer who belongs to the European musical canon – he himself is the embodiment of the canon as occupying a central place in music education, in the repertoire of pianists, chamber ensembles, and orchestras, or in the curriculum of musicological departments all over the world. Many of us entered the world of art music by listening to or playing Beethoven's music. His *œuvre* is, hence, a symbol of European cultural identity. Being “European” in the cultural sense still assumes the sound of Beethoven's music, as the *Ode an die Freude* with Friedrich Schiller's text in the finale of the Ninth Symphony (1824) is accepted as the anthem of the European Union, although Schubert, Chaikovsky and other composers also set these lyrics to music. By accepting the Western/Central European canon, i.e. Beethoven's music, Europe off-center became “European” in the sense of certain western cultural values. In Europe the 250th anniversary celebrations of Beethoven's birth, and especially in Vienna and other cities in Austria, as well as in Germany, show how the cult of Beethoven is still vital and important for national self-representation. Among them are (South)Eastern European countries which adopted the canon either through their imperial rulers or through the process of Europeanization, and adjusted it to their own self-presentation and technical needs and possibilities.

The title given to this volume is a result of a consideration of how to name the mesoregion under scrutiny in a satisfactory way to be geographically and historically acceptable from the point of its (self-)designation. Obviously, the traditional and new classifications of European regions and respective self-identification are not up-to-date to the travelling concepts of history as a discipline. More precisely, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia are nowadays included in South-east Europe according to contemporary historians. Also, the European Union regional policy assumes sixteen countries (fourteen of them with an entire territory) as Southeast Europe, with the addition of Austria:<sup>2</sup> Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. In this framework, the above-mentioned countries are divided into three groups: Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan-Mediterranean, and Danube Programmes. In this respect, “our” countries would belong to one or two of these groups: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia to the first; Cyprus, Greece and North Macedonia to the second, and Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia to the third one. This question becomes even more complex if we bear in mind that Southeast Europe has been used as a synonym for the Balkans, although in the latter case without Hungary, Slovakia, and Ukraine. This clearly exemplifies the problem of dividing – or, as Karl Kaser pointed out, “slicing” – Europe into regions defined

<sup>2</sup> “In 2 countries only certain regions are eligible: in Italy these eligible regions are: Lombardia, Bolzano/Bozen, Trento, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia Basilicata, and in Ukraine: Cjermovestka Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast and Odessa Oblast.” See <[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/crossborder/operational-programme-south-east-europe-see](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/crossborder/operational-programme-south-east-europe-see)>, (accessed September 15, 2020).



as a fixed category.<sup>3</sup> Also East Europe<sup>4</sup> – applied mainly to the socialist countries belonging to the East Bloc – was not quite acceptable for the title of this volume, for the former Yugoslavia was socialist, but independent and not one of the Soviet satellite countries. Besides, Greece and Cyprus have not been included in this region. For that reason, here I am using the geographically and historically changeable category of mesoregion. In this respect the current title, “off-center,” should be understood only conditionally, since Pest/Budapest was certainly an imperial center in the nineteenth century.

The reception of Beethoven is investigated in the following countries, speaking of their present-day territories with their historical backgrounds: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. Chronologically, the first land where Beethoven’s works were played was Slovenia, i.e. Habsburg Carniola (1811), followed by Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Croatia within the Habsburg Monarchy, and the Principality of Serbia. Furthermore, it is continued in the interwar period (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and after World War II (Greece, Hungary, Romania) until the twenty-first century in Croatia, Cyprus and North Macedonia. The contributions are dedicated to specific case studies not well-known outside of their national musical historiography and, as such, they shed light on the history of European music off-center.

Understandably, Beethoven’s music was performed and praised first in the Habsburg part of the mesoregion, and then in the Ottoman provinces. The former group of lands shared imperial cultural practices as being deeply integrated into the Catholic Austrian, i.e. Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Orthodox lands struggled against the Ottoman rule and cherished their own traditional music as a part of their identity. After they imported nationalism from the West, the musical repertoire was focused on the Western musical canon, including Beethoven. For that reason, Greek musical life adopted music by Western composers later than other countries of the mesoregion and only discovered Beethoven in the twentieth century. In some cases, Beethoven’s music was imported via foreign rulers like the Austrians in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the British in Cyprus, as Fatima Hadžić and Georgia Petroudi demonstrate in their articles.

The reception of Beethoven and his œuvre in the mesoregion is signified by the emphasized heroic discourse, which was a basis for the cult of Beethoven construction. The music and the composer were sometimes regarded as “sacred,” as Jana Lašlavíková discusses the term in her contribution on Pressburg, among others. One more aspect of the reception can be identified off-center – the intriguing question of Germanness (Deutschtum) as a synonym of European-ness. The “heroic” music by the “hero” composer was taken as a symbol of Germanness as a universal value and an embodiment of the European musical canon. Reactions to the Germanic universalism ranged from acceptance and praise to rejection and the “defense” of national identity. Interestingly enough, the position of Beethoven as one of the most significant symbols of

<sup>3</sup> As Karl Kaser pointed out, “Sundhaussen’s concept was obviously more attractive to German academia because it paved the way to slice Europe into clear-cut historic regions and provides a seemingly new orientation: southeast, northwest, central, central-east, central-west etc.” See Karl KASER, “Disciplinary Boundaries in Question: Balkan Studies in a Globalizing World,” in *Balkan Studies: Quo vadis?*, ed. by Ursula REBER and Maximilian HARTMUTH, 2009, <<http://www.kakanien-revisited.at/beitr/balkans/KKaser2.pdf>> (accessed September 15, 2020). Holm Sundhaussen, namely, defined “historical region” as an essential category. For more details see Holm SUNDHAUSSEN, “Europa balcanica. Der Balkan als historischer Raum Europas,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25 (1999), 626–653.

<sup>4</sup> See *Beethoven-Rezeption in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. by Helmut LOOS (Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2015).



European culture was by no means endangered by an anti-German narrative, as in Croatia (Franjo Kuhač, 1834–1911) or in Vojvodina in the writings in Serbian journals and newspapers (Jovan Paču, 1847–1902; Robert Tollinger, 1859–1911). Moreover, in the post-socialist period there have been certain peculiarities in this sense: in order to create a distance from the Yugoslav past, Slovenian, Croatian, and recently also Bosnian musicologists emphasized their belonging to the Habsburg commonwealth. It is obvious in the contribution about Sarajevo, which supports Austrian and other historians' opinion that the Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was a "civilizing mission." The very act of performing Beethoven's music has been mentioned as one of the key "proofs," although the concerts of his music were attended by Austrian officials and not by local people. The process of Westernization or so-called Europeanization of the mesoregion assumed (a musical) institutionalization and an adoption of the West/Central European repertoire, especially in the (former) Ottoman provinces. In that sense, the inclusion of Beethoven's works in the repertoire of the newly established institution designated the entrance into "Europe."

In all cases, the initial performances of Beethoven's compositions, especially the great last symphony, are followed by acclamations and self-glorification. While in Laibach and Pest his other symphonies were regularly performed earlier, the premiere of the Ninth was accomplished in the entire mesoregion much later than the other symphonic works. Katarina Bogunović Hočevar examines archival materials related to the performance history and practice of the Philharmonic Society, established in 1794 in Laibach. As her research shows, all Beethoven's symphonies were performed during the nineteenth century, from one to 76 years after their world premiere. Moreover, Ludwig van Beethoven was one of the honorary members of this society from 1819. The rich musical life of Pest-Buda in the nineteenth century was presented through Beethoven's symphonies. In the broader context, Pál Horváth discusses the performances of the Ninth Symphony, premiered in 1865, from different points of view including not only the concerts proper, but also the city's locations (the National Museum, the House of Parliament, the Redoute), the gender perspective of performers, as well as critics of the concerts.

The last Beethoven symphony was premiered in Belgrade in 1910 due to the efforts of Stanislav Binički (1872–1942), who came back to the homeland after his studies in Munich. A conductor of the military Orchestra of the Royal Guard (Orkestar Kraljeva garda), Choral Society Stanković and numerous individual musicians (members of the National Theater orchestra, music teachers and music amateurs), only he was able to accomplish this task, as Marijana Dujović explained in her article. The performance of Beethoven's symphony was chosen to open the International Skopje Music Festival, celebrating the international Day of Music on June 21 and marking the renovation of the city 50 years after it was almost completely ruined by a tragic earthquake. As a matter of fact, the premiere of Beethoven's last symphony in Skopje was a guest performance by the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra. Julijana Papazova considers this performance from the perspective of urban study theories and the Beethoven legacy in North Macedonia since the 1920s. Musical life in Sarajevo between two world wars and, in this framework, the musical events in 1927, when the centennial of Beethoven's death was marked, represented the focus of Fatima Hadžić's text. There were three concerts by the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra and a guest performance of *Fidelio* by Opera Ljubljana.

The *Eroica* marked the public commemoration of one of the greatest European conductors in the twentieth century, Dimitri Mitropoulos (1896–1960) as a hero of Greek culture. Mitropoulos died in Milan and, according to his wish, his body was cremated in Lugano in



Switzerland. Afterwards, it was transferred to Athens, where the theatrical event lasted three days. Alexandros Charkiolakis describes the entire ceremony in detail, including the performance of the “Funeral March” from Beethoven’s Third Symphony on this occasion. Athens experienced one more Beethoven work – this time *Fidelio* – as a symbol of heroism and also of resistance during the last days of the Nazi occupation.

Along with the above-mentioned case studies investigating the reception of performances of certain compositions through the activities of chosen institutions, or the celebration or commemoration of certain anniversaries, two studies provide an insight in terms of a temporal perspective into the changeable attitudes to Beethoven – in Romania by Florinela Popa and in Hungary by Péter Bozó. Popa follows the thread of the composer’s music in the Danube Principalities/Romania from the 1840s until today and convincingly shows how, for example, the opposite ideologies of fascism and communism, or of isolationism and capitalism, were reflected in the texts about Beethoven. The composer was seen as an embodiment of German racial superiority, the heroic revolutionary, or the combatant for social justice involved in the class struggle.

Contrary to the previous investigation of discourses on the composer through the history of Romanian musical culture, Péter Bozó demonstrates a multiplicity of perspectives on Beethoven in a single, interwar period. He analyses writings about Beethoven’s music by musicologist Dénes Bartha (1908–1993), composer Mihály Nádor’s (1882–1944) plan of the operetta *Beethoven*, and the well-known lecture on his piano sonatas by the pianist Ernst von Dohnányi (1877–1960), resulting in quite different portraits of the composer.

The reception of Beethoven as a composer, a superior human being, a “Titan,” as well as of his works, shows that he had a significant role in the mesoregional Europeanization, Westernization, and self-presentation, including different perspectives of “Germanness” either as a symbol of high European culture or as a threat to national identity. In all cases, it is characteristic of the heroic discourse, very often Romanticized, as it is still the prevailing practice today.

