


CHURCH MUSIC IN THE WRITINGS OF THE COMPOSER SRĐAN JAĆIMOVIĆ

UDC 783 Jaćimović S.

Danijela Zdravić Mihailović

University of Niš, Faculty of Arts in Niš, Serbia

ORCID iD: Danijela Zdravić Mihailović  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5510-6633>

Abstract. *The paper is written with the idea of presenting the theoretical work of the renowned Serbian composer, pedagogue, and producer, Srđan Jaćimović (1960–2006), more specifically his relation to church music, with reference to his selected works: On the Differences in the Tradition of Chanting between Byzantium and Serbia (2021), On Authenticity in the Music of the Serbian Church (1992), and On Contemporary Interpretations of Byzantine Church Music (1993). The central part of this paper is dedicated to presenting the key features of church chants in Byzantium and Serbia, taking into account the scale system, texture, type of melodic movement, consideration of consonance and dissonance, treatment of liturgical text, and the attitude to 'progress' in music. Additionally, the paper presents the composer's understanding of the authenticity of music in the Serbian church, taking into consideration the circumstances that influenced its development, while in the discussion of contemporary interpretations of Byzantine church music, Jaćimović addressed the problems caused by the work of Western Byzantinists due to inadequate transcription. The aim of the paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of substantial views of the composer regarding various aspects of Byzantine and Serbian church music, with a particular emphasis on the anomalies present in the interpretation of Byzantine church music.*

Key words: *Srđan Jaćimović, church music, Byzantine music, Serbian church.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The personality and work of Srđan Jaćimović (October 4, 1960 – May 10, 2006) are significant for Serbian art and culture on many levels. Unfortunately, the premature death of the composer ended his rich activity in various fields, although it is generally stated that he was a Serbian composer, pedagogue and producer. He completed his studies at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, at the Department of Composition and Orchestration, where he obtained

Received May 22, 2025 / Accepted July 5, 2025

Corresponding author: Danijela Zdravić Mihailović

University of Niš, Faculty of Arts in Niš, Kneginje Ljubice 10, 18000 Niš, Serbia

E-mail: dzdravicmihailovic@yahoo.com

his master's degree in the class of prof. Vlastimir Trajković. His pedagogical work is related to the Higher Music School in Niš (where he taught Harmony and Polyphony since 1987), and later to the Faculty of Arts in Niš. From 1995 to 2006, he was a producer for classical music recordings at Radio Belgrade.

The composer's opus Srđan Jaćimović consists of works of different genres: *Variations on a theme by Bartok for two pianos* (1981); *String Quartet* (1985); *Sonata for violin and piano* (1983); *Her Purple Haired Daddy* (1983); *La flamme de l'orange* for symphony orchestra (1987); *Scenes with a backward view* for symphony orchestra (1989); *Out of Poe*, cantata for two sopranos and electronics (1988); *Madrigal de la Honte* for mixed choir (1988); *What's going on?* for symphony orchestra (1990); *Three Movements* for Guitar Solo (1991); *Peace song, choreographic paintings* for soloists, large orchestra and choir (1993); *Trachinjanke*, a cantata by Sophocles for soloists, large orchestra and choir (1994); *Circles* for violin and piano (1995); *Seni* for piano solo (1996); *Movement for clarinet solo* (1997); the opera *Under the Sign of Mephisto*, according to Goethe (1997); *Small reg with a smell from the Russian land* for string quartet (1998); *Simple prayers* for choir a cappella (2000); *Six songs from the North* by Miloš Crnjanski for soprano and string quartet (2000); *Akathist to the Holy Apostle Andrew the First Called* for mixed choir.

As a composer, Jaćimović is represented on the CD edition of the *World Premiere* by TV Beograd and PGP RTS (1997). He composed theater music, and is the author of the orchestration of Brecht's songs published by PGP RTS (1998). TV Novi Sad produced a one-hour artistic portrait of Srđan Jaćimović (*Harmonija sfera*, 1996). In addition to the above, Jaćimović is also the author of the music for the film *White Suit* (1999), which was also released on compact disc.

In addition to the composer's oeuvre, Jaćimović also left two important books in the field of music theory: *Basics of polyphony technique*, University of Niš (1990) and *Introduction to the stylistics of harmony*, Niš, Higher School of Music (1992). His biography also mentions several theoretical writings, among which are "Reviews on the music of the Church in Byzantium: On contemporary interpretations of Byzantine church music", *Istočnik*, Belgrade, 1994, Third Program of Radio Belgrade; *On the authentic in the music of the Serbian church*, Dom kulture Studentski grad, Belgrade, 1993, Third program of Radio Belgrade; *On the differences in church singing in Eastern and Western Christianity*, SKC, Belgrade, 1995; "On the non-Orthodox in the music of the Serbian church", *Svečanik*, Belgrade, 1994, it must be emphasized that only three of the mentioned works can be found: "On the authentic in the music of the Serbian church", *Hrišćanska misao* 1 (1992); "On contemporary interpretations of the music of the Byzantine church", *Christian Thought* 3-5 (1993): 74-77 and "On the differences in the church singing tradition of Byzantium and Serbia", *Aperto nuovo* (2021): 34-39. Based on the available information about their publication, the author of this text has not been able to find the works "On differences in church singing in Eastern and Western Christianity", SKC, Belgrade, 1995 and "On the non-orthodox in the music of the Serbian church", *Svečanik*, Belgrade, 1994, so it remains questionable whether the available data is correct and whether the mentioned works were published at all.

2. THE WRITTEN WORD OF SRĐAN JAĆIMOVIĆ

In his writings about music, Jaćimović pays the most attention to Byzantine church music, as well as its relationship with Serbian church music (see list of references). In this regard, it is important to mention that at the beginning of the nineties of the 20th century in the territory of Belgrade, various aspects of church life are revived - "Orthodox temples are built, existing and newly built churches are painted, icon painting workshops are opened. In church architecture and iconography, the Serbian-Byzantine style dominates in this period. Existing church choirs gain more members, and new ones are founded (Blagojević 2005, 163).

In the nineties of the 20th century, the revitalization of the Byzantine artistic ethos caused conflicting reactions from clerics, believers, and some musicologists. While in the fine arts the attempts to restore "Byzantine" met with a positive reception, chanting based on templates from the Hilandar Neuma manuscripts, started a debate about "suitable" and "unsuitable" church music, which resulted in the presentation of the personal judgment of the holders of church authority about its status (Peno 2016, 161). The discussion about "appropriate" and "inappropriate" music was never conducted at the institutional church level, but the Serbian-Byzantine church music issue was discussed most often in live conversations of members of parish communities. "It was mentioned in various connotations, incidentally and with intention, in homilies, professional and occasional lectures. It was also found as the backbone of several sporadic writings by representatives of the Byzantine restoration, most of which are scientifically unfounded and inappropriately exclusive" (Ibid). Based on these data, it can be concluded that the question of "real" church music remained open, and that decisions about its authenticity and representation in liturgies and ceremonies were made by individuals.

In order to shed light on the views of the composer and theoretician Srđan Jaćimović, regarding the aforementioned issues, the paper will focus on several articles in which his relationship to the authentic in music can be clearly seen.

In his work "On the Differences in the Church Singing Traditions of Byzantium and Serbia", Jaćimović points out that the musical tradition of the Byzantine Church, which is known to us today almost exclusively through the singing tradition of Svetogorje, and the modern tradition of singing in the Serbian Church, are somewhat different, i.e. that these are two phenomena independent in origin and meaning. The author also points to the fact that in the text he tries to explain the differences in the traditions of Byzantium and Serbia, it is not possible to follow all the relevant facts, both those of a purely musical and technical nature, and those whose nature was conditioned by non-musical events. In any case, the comparison offered by the author will include all technical aspects of importance for the essence of distinguishing the musical-symbolic expression in the church chants of Byzantium and today's Serbia, but only in basic features. These aspects include: 1. system of musical scales, 2. musical texture (spatial configuration), 3. preferred type of melodic movement, 4. principled attitude in relation to the existence of the consonance-dissonance dichotomy, 5. relation to the liturgical text, 6. relation to "progress" in music.

1) Considering the system of musical scales, Jaćimović indicates that the music of Byzantium is a direct successor of the music of ancient Greece. The basis of the musical-technical system was taken directly, almost without any changes, from the ancient Greek musical system. Furthermore, the system of musical scales described by Aristotle's student Aristoxenus of Tarentum in the 4th century B.C. fully corresponds to the modern system of

musical scales of Byzantine music. This fact speaks very clearly about the continuity of the tradition of music that we call Byzantine: the time that has passed since the 4th century BC, until today, constitutes a tradition that is almost two and a half thousand years long. Unlike the system of musical scales that is in use in the contemporary singing of the Serbian Church (the scales in question correspond to the system of Western European scales: their basic feature is that within the musical interval the octaves contain twelve equal parts, the so-called equal temperament), the scales of the musical system of Byzantium are based on a far more sophisticated system of interval divisions. Instead of only twelve equal parts (intervals), in the Byzantine scale system, it is possible to divide the octave into 72 equal parts, or into a certain number (from 7 upwards) of parts, equally or very differently measured. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that from the end of the 4th century, in the western part of the Roman Empire, this musical system was drastically simplified, and from a large number of scales and scale possibilities, practically reduced to only one scale, which can be represented as a set of tones that produce white holes on the piano.

2) The spatial configuration of Byzantine music, in common musical terminology known as 'texture', consists of two structural elements: the melodic line to which the text is entrusted, and the tone in the deep register (ison), which lies all the time. Jaćimović reminds that folklore melodies are often accompanied by one or two tones that lie all the time, or occasionally change. However, this type of texture is absent, except sporadically, in all Western music, not even in modern Serbian music, while the existence of ison is one of the basic characteristics of Byzantine music. The ison represents the central point, the center of gravity, the objective point of support for the melody sung by the singer above the ison (also, it should be noted that the ison does not carry a text). The relationship between these two elementary elements of Byzantine music, the ison and the sung melody, is clear, both in the musical and technical sense, as an interval and tonal relationship; in the psychological-musical sense, as the satisfaction of the need for a point of support, which is expressed during the perception of music; as well as a symbolic representation of the theological postulates of Orthodox Christianity.

3) Looking at the preferred type of melodic movement, Jaćimović points out the differences related to the type of melodic movement; in most western music, including contemporary Serbian church music, in the basic musical technique called "voice leading", in the relationship between jumps in the melody and its gradual movement, priority belongs to gradual movement. How different it is from Byzantine music is evident from the very terminology of Byzantine music: the name for a jump in a melody is - pneumata, and for a gradual movement - somata.

4) In relation to the dichotomy of "consonance" and "dissonance", Jaćimović reminds us of the possibility of two or more tones sounding at the same time, describing their meanings as "sounding together" and "not sounding", that is, as tones that can sound simultaneously, and those that cannot. According to him, this dichotomy does not exist in the musical system of Byzantium, because a musical system very rich in intervals (several different types of all basic musical intervals - fourths, fifths, thirds, octaves, etc., as opposed to only one or possibly two interval variants in Western music), did not set divisions of this type.

The formation of the basic principles of Western church music, i.e. the creation of the "consonance-dissonance" dichotomy, followed the establishment of the scale system and the elimination of the ison used in Western Christianity, approximately in the 9th century. On the one hand, a narrow interval group was declared consonant and generally acceptable, while, on the other hand, certain consonance (dissonance) became undesirable and accompanied by

symbolic splitting; dissonances are even named after the "prince of this world" (devil's quarter). In the system of Byzantine music, tones that sound simultaneously are not tones that are in a harmonic relationship. Their completely different structural roles in the musical system mean that, even though they are heard at the same moment, the tone that lies motionless in the *ison*, and the tone that carries the dynamic (kinetic) energy of the melody, belong to separate perceptual (and musical-technical) plans: the *ison* is always heard (and listened to) in a different way, in relation to the sung melody, as if it comes from "from somewhere below", or as if it surrounds it from all sides. According to Jaćimović, the path to the re-establishment of dissonance is particularly interesting, because the entire course of development of Western music (from the 10th to the first decades of the 20th century) is based precisely on the gradual reincorporation of dissonant intervals into the system of musical aesthetics.

5) The differences in the treatment of the text of Eastern and Western Christian music are observed through two aspects: the horizontal aspect, which represents time in music, and the vertical aspect, which refers to spatial configurations. The horizontal aspect of text treatment in Byzantium music directly follows the natural way of pronunciation, i.e. reading of the liturgical text. On the contrary, in Western music, starting from the 11th and 12th centuries, numerous techniques of "working with the text" were developed: repetitiveness, segmentation, superimposition, translation, etc., which deform the sound (and therefore the meaning) of the text. How many church councils in the wing of the Western, Catholic Church, were dedicated to this problem. The last solution they came to is a return to the original way of singing - in accordance with the natural pronunciation of the text, as evidenced by the editions of the Vatican Edition from the beginning of this century. However, the impacts that were made in the previous historical course are irreversible.

6) The relationship to the development of the technique of religious artistic expression, to the progress in music and pictorial representation in the church, in Byzantine Christianity, and the relationship to the same in the West, Jaćimović illustrates with a quote from Georgi Ostrogorski: "While in the West, sacred painting serves to evoke a certain religious feeling and a pious state of the soul, with its picturesqueness and subjective interpretation of the represented person, to that extent the Orthodox icon is a means of communion between the one who prays and God, the Mother of God, or saints". Focusing on "causing" feelings by means of artistic expression (in the West), determines the artistic expression itself in the direction of developing the "effective" in art, and is directly related to artistic technique. As a result of such practice, hierarchically higher levels, of an aesthetic, ethical or religious nature, inevitably lose their importance, and the unhindered growth of technical means arises, quite naturally, by itself.

Jaćimović further points to the fact that the development of musical art in Western Europe in the last fifteen centuries had an extremely turbulent course, and that the music of Byzantium is almost the same today as it was (approximately) that long ago. In this connection, he underlines that it is not possible to give a clear answer to this question, but it is possible to refer to the sacred meaning of singing in the church, and its symbolic expressive nature. According to his opinion, Byzantine music has the unfortunate fate in our cultural space, that until a few years ago it was not talked about at all, that it was not sung, and that its existence was known only to a narrow circle of people, made up primarily of connoisseurs and experts, either from the ranks of the clergy or from other professions. If his thesis is correct, that a single perfect and complete artistic expression is "sufficient and necessary" for complete and perfect spirituality, and if that expression can

still be found today in the centuries-old music of Byzantium, it is to be believed and hoped that, in due time, it will be sung again in all churches.

In addition to the presented problems, Jaćimović also devoted a lot of attention to the question of the authenticity of music in the Serbian church (*On Authenticity in the Music of the Serbian Church*, 1992), considering the circumstances that influenced its development. He believes that the spiritual, ideological aspect is contained in the view that only those iconography, church architecture and church music that are "rooted in the tradition of the church art of Byzantium - they are the authentic expression of the spiritual reality of Orthodox Christianity. All the rest are delusions or heresy" are authentically Orthodox.

In the same paper, Jaćimović talks about the "double historical contamination of Serbian spirituality, conceived immediately after the great migration of Serbs in the 17th century, to the regions under the rule of Austria" considering that the main reason for part of the aforementioned contamination is based in the newly created civil Serbian environment, and is contained in "Serbian uncritical acceptance of the material goods of the European West, and with them completely non-Orthodox Western cultural goods." The second direction of the influence of Western culture, according to Jaćimović, took place internally, and was embodied in something for which only Serbs can be responsible: "in the gradual, long-term and persistent substitution of authentic Orthodox church art, in the citizenry already adopted by the profane art of the West. In this process, Serbian iconography and the architecture of Serbian churches suffered to a great extent. The authentic Orthodox music of the Serbian Orthodox Church was completely destroyed." In addition, he concludes that the process started by the overwhelming majority of Orthodox churches was not ended by the disappearance of the authentic music of the Eastern Orthodox Church. On the contrary, it was followed by the denial of its very existence and the distortion of its authenticity, at the formally highest theoretical-scientific level, and, unfortunately, most of the premises established by the action of these scientific circles were accepted in our environment. "The authority of Western science has made the knowledge of Byzantine music here, even in the circles of specialists - both in the Church and in profane professions, only sporadically present today, and mostly in a form that does not correspond to reality." According to him, "ecclesiastical architecture and iconography in Serbia, thanks to the 'visibility' of its material forms, to a certain extent and with great hardships and accompanying resistance, experienced a restoration. As far as Orthodox music is concerned, material monuments, although less 'visible', also exist, primarily thanks to the unextinguished tradition in Greece and the efforts of Greek musicologists who live and work in the mother country. In our country, however, in order to restore Byzantine chant, it is necessary to first interpret these material values Orthodox music regains its original content." The admonishing text with his own observations and experience that Jaćimović publishes definitely tries to show more closely the status of Orthodox music in Serbia at the end of the 20th century.

In his work "On contemporary interpretations of the music of the Byzantine church", Jaćimović talks about the unity in the specific tradition that exists in the musical description and experience of the world, from the time of ancient Greece to today. He points out that the interpretation of tradition is, as a rule, ideologically colored, and that the subjective interpretation of the validity of the interpretation is always subject to questioning.

It is particularly important that Jaćimović warns that Western science denies the continuity of the tradition in both its key points: in the connection between the music of Antiquity and Byzantium, and in the extension of the Byzantine tradition in the post-Byzantine period. Also, he states that the literature of Greek authors is almost never

mentioned in the modern scientific literature of the West, thus establishing in the West "the factual existence of only and exclusively that interpretation that arose as a result of the research of Western experts." He sees the notation system and numerous transcriptions as one of the biggest problems, referring to the Russian Byzantologist Evgeny Gertsman, who rightly concludes that it is not possible to judge the scale sequences of Byzantine music based on their transcriptions made in modern Western notation. The reason is that the modern music notation does not allow recording the interval values of thirds, fourths or even smaller tonal divisions, which means that hundreds of transcriptions of Byzantine music, which were created in the last fifty years under the auspices of Western Byzantology, have little or no value. "They are imprecise to such an extent that all analysis derived from them is completely worthless and invalid, and the damage done by Western Byzantologists to the study of Byzantine music has yet to be assessed."

3. CONCLUSIONS

Nevertheless, Jaćimović optimistically concludes that one should believe that, if the way of Byzantium is indeed an allegorical embodiment of the way of Christ, Byzantine music will be fully resurrected illuminated by light. After all, it is probably not a coincidence that in Byzantium they considered that one of the Greek words for the tone "phoni" was formed by shortening the expression "light is the mind" - "to fos einai noos".

By presenting the most important observations through selected works, we have attempted to clarify Jaćimović's relation to the music of the Byzantine and Serbian churches, but also to uncover, via his critical stance towards the contemporary interpretation of Byzantine music, numerous inconsistencies. These facts hold special significance, and owing to his comprehensive demonstration, they remain an important reminder of the 'mutilated' contemporary practice, but also a possible guideline for revisions and new insights.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This paper was created within the project *Musical heritage of Southeastern Serbia, contemporary creativity and education of taste (O-10-17)*.

REFERENCES

- Jaćimović, S., (1992), „О аутентичном у музици српске цркве“, *Хришћанска мисао* 1, 187–194.¹
- Jaćimović, S., (1993), „О савременим интерпретацијама музике византијске цркве“, *Источник: часопис за веру и културу*, Год. 2, бр. 5, 145–151.²
- Jaćimović, S., (2021), „О разликама у традицији црквеног певања Византије и Србије“, *Aperto nuovo*, 34–39.
- Благојевић, Г., (2005), „О рецепцији црквене византијске музике у Београду крајем 20. и почетком 21. века (или како је Стеван Мокрањац постао ‘старији и српскији’ композитор од Стефана Србина)“, *Гласник Етнографског института САНУ* 53, 153–171.
- Gagić, V., (2014), *Bibliografija legata profesora Srđana Jaćimovića*, Univerzitet u Nišu, Fakultet umetnosti, Referalni i istraživački centar umetnosti, Niš.
- Пено, В. С., (2016), *Православно појање на Балкану на примеру грчке и српске традиције – између Истока и Запада, еклисиологије и идеологије*, Музиколошки институт САНУ, Београд.

¹ The same text was published in the volume *Srpska Vizantija* (ed. Bojan Jovanović), Dom kulture Studentski grad, Novi Beograd, 1993.

² The same paper can be found in the journal *Hrišćanska misao* 3–5, 1993, 74–77.

CRKVENA MUZIKA U NAPISIMA KOMPOZITORA SRĐANA JAĆIMOVIĆA

Rad je napisan sa idejom da se predstavi teorijski rad poznatog srpskog kompozitora, pedagoga i producenta, Srđana Jaćimovića (1960–2006), odnosno njegov odnos prema crkvenoj muzici na osnovu izabranih radova: „O razlikama u tradiciji crkvenog pevanja Vizantije i Srbije” (2021), „O autentičnom u muzici srpske crkve” (1992) i „O savremenim interpretacijama muzike vizantijske crkve” (1993). Centralni deo rada posvećen je predstavljanju vitalnih odlika crkvenog pevanja Vizantije i Srbije, koje uzima u obzir lestvični sistem, fakturu, tip melodijskog pokreta, razmatranje konsonance i disonance, tretman liturgijskog teksta i odnos prema ‘progresu’ u muzici. Pored toga, u radu se predstavlja i kompozitorovo shvatanje autentičnosti muzike u srpskoj crkvi, uz razmatranje okolnosti koje su uticale na njen razvojni put, dok u razmatranju savremene interpretacije muzike vizantijske crkve Jaćimović govori o problemima koji su uzrokovani radom zapadnih vizantologa usled neadekvatne transkripcije. Cilj rada jeste da se na jednom mestu ponudi prikaz najznačajnijih stavova kompozitora kada su u pitanju različiti aspekti vizantijske i srpske crkvene muzike, sa posebnim osvrtom na anomalije koje poseduje interpretacija muzike vizantijske crkve.

Ključne reči: *Srđan Jaćimović, crkvena muzika, vizantijska muzika, srpska crkva*