

***Roza Nolcheva***

**Artists stay local-  
Artist Management Trends in the Republic of  
Macedonia**

- General conditions for managing artists in Macedonia

In an artistic world mainly dictated by the practices common for the culturally more developed professional environments with longer classical music traditions, it must be said that it has become a world of managers, Intendants, artistic directors who tend to shape the artistic world in what is a very much a market economy governed style.

In Macedonia, unfortunately those marketing principles are not yet implemented and the classical music organizations are still very much dependant on the subsidies given by the Government and the Ministry of Culture.

With only two large performing institutions (The National Opera and Ballet and the National Philharmonic) there are not many opportunities for the growing number of qualified musicians who finish their education at the Faculty of Music.

Macedonian classical music artists struggle as they find their way into the saturated music market, finding their own means to perform as much as possible in the country and outside of it. In this struggle they are hardly ever being helped by the departments of institutions whose job would be to establish, nourish and promote Macedonian musicians as part of both their domestic and foreign activities.

The classical music institutions in the Republic of Macedonia have been facing a great challenge since the change of general cultural policies in 1991.

In the period of 15 years the Institutions have been encouraged by the state to make certain changes in the way they govern, market and promote Macedonian music and

musicians. The transition of culture is still well underway with some things still very much relating to old practices.

A serious lack of essential marketing and managerial approach is common for the work of government-funded institutions, this having its most direct impact on domestic artists and audiences.

This paper is going to present certain observations that directly relate to the current trends in the artist management and marketing in Macedonia, since it is one of the cultural diseases obviously suffering from chronic neglect.

In historical terms, there are only two music institutions that have been constantly working for a longer period of time. The Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra (founded in 1964) and the Macedonian National Opera (founded in 1947) and Ballet (founded in 1949)<sup>1</sup> are the only performing ensembles that have received continuous funding by the Government, and thus they have been able to establish strong grounds for unprecedented existence.

Other chamber orchestras and ensembles have been present on the Macedonian music podium but have had a short activity span, often not surpassing the period of 10 years of continuous working.

With only 3 concert spaces in Skopje and a very few concert halls throughout the Republic, there are limited opportunities for musicians to appear in recital.

When Norman Lebrecht published a book by the name “When the music stops- Managers, maestros and the corporate murder of classical music”<sup>2</sup> in the title he suspended in its essence what the world of classical music has become. Apart from nourishing culture and artistic qualities and values- it has now become very much business, it is very competitive and entrepreneurial and it is a fact that not everyone can cope with the new rules of play in the game of music.

As a matter of fact Lebrecht defines the music business as:

---

<sup>1</sup> The Macedonian Opera and Ballet was until 2004 one institution. Since 2004 it has separate management, still sharing one orchestra and being managed by one General Manager.

<sup>2</sup> Lebrecht, N., *When the music stops-managers, maestros and the corporate murder of classical music* (Simon & Schuster Ltd.), London, 1997.

1. The commercial exploitation of musical works and artists by means of publishing, performing, recording, touring etc.
2. The collective term for companies engaged in the above

In Macedonia artist management for classical musicians does not exist. The Government used to fund Macedonia Concert, which did have as one of its assets the promotion of Macedonian musicians. This company only existed with breaks for several years, and exactly when Macedonia declared its independence in 1991, and the operation of such agency would have been considered crucial-it ceased to exist.

So, on the private side of things, Macedonian artists are left on their own, since in Macedonia there is no practice of existence of classical type artist management agencies.

In the former Yugoslavian Federation almost every Republic had its own concert agency that took care of concert and artist promotion, which in many ways has helped at that time Yugoslavian artist in their establishment in a wider music frame.

In some of the countries these old concert agencies still operate very successfully (Jugokonzert-Serbia and Montenegro, Zagreb Konzert Management –Croatia etc.)

Also, in Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro there is a growing practice of new smaller private artist management agencies, concert agencies, event management agencies as well as concert agencies which work organize festivals, promote artists exclusively for larger ensembles and also use the necessary contacts to promote domestic artists abroad. That clearly shows recognition of the new trends of artist management in the world, and the necessity of their implementation in the countries of Eastern Europe.

In Macedonia an attempt like that is done by the Alea concert management whose main activity is to act as mediator and promoter in the areas of art and culture. At the moment Alea concert management takes care of 2 singers-mainly representing them in Macedonia (Ana Durlovski and Igor Durlovski) and fully manages the Chamber orchestra “Alea”.

With the current situation in mind, Macedonian music artists have no possibilities for professional representation, and are forced to build and develop their own careers. This often is not a very good practice since without the necessary contacts, networks and

guidance they are unable to even start booking their own live work in the region, let alone somewhere else.

Music artists in Macedonia can either find employment as orchestra musicians/singers in one of the two mentioned Ensembles, they can decide to have a career as pedagogues or become free-lance musicians. This last category is least exploited first of all because here is not much space for those artists who want to have professional careers as performers first of all because of the size of the music market in Macedonia. It must be said that there are not many free-lance musicians who can/will make a living without actually having a full time paid job in one of the subsidized music institutions.

In the past 15 years, unlike the artists from many neighboring countries and countries in the region, the classical Macedonian musicians—apart from a very few have not been able to practice their art outside of Macedonia.

The ones that have actually managed to perform in other countries are usually those who for the sake of their careers decide to leave Macedonia and live and work in another country<sup>3</sup>.

This comes as a result of the working relations that are established in the classical music sphere in Macedonia.

The Macedonian Opera for example is still working on the principle of employed soloists—which means once they have been employed most of them remain on the pay roll of the institution until their retirement.

Another aspect to be taken into account is the inability of Macedonian institutions to make long term planning (at least one season ahead)—which also makes it impossible for artists to consider any engagements on the long-run, which would be the case with any western music institutions, which now plan 3-4 years ahead.

With the long-term responsibilities towards their main institution, Macedonian opera singers are bound to build their careers on the only existing domestic stage.

---

<sup>3</sup> Such artists are: Boris Trajanov-baritone, Blagoj Nacoski-tenor, Igor Durlovski-bas, Ana Durlovski-soprano, Elena Misirkova-Loza-piano etc.

Even if they manage to appear as guest soloist in foreign opera houses that has been accomplished by their own means: personal contacts, personal auditions etc, and this engagements are always in the closest geographical proximity and on very short terms.

- Managing singers

In the case of the vocal soloists, most of whom are employed full or part time at the Macedonian National opera, the only chance these artists would be heard by foreign promoters would be if the whole ensemble of the Macedonian opera tours a production –and such occasions are rare.

In the past 5 years (since 2000) the Macedonian opera has made 2 guest appearances in Sofia and Belgrade with 2 productions.<sup>4</sup> These 2 tours of the whole ensemble were the only chances for Macedonian opera singers to appear in foreign countries as part of the strategy of the National Opera house to promote itself and Macedonian artists abroad.

However, since 2004 the Opera has established a practice for smaller chamber formations such as the trombone quartet, or the orchestra only with its soloists (performed at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival) and instead of the whole ensemble traveling abroad-they say this is a more cost effective way of promotion.

This is a relevant move forward in the change of general house policies, since there has been quite a long period of time in which the Macedonian opera did not tour at all.

In terms of marketing, the Macedonian opera and ballet made an attempt to promote their soloists by printing artist cards on the backs of which are the biographies and repertoire of the relevant soloists.

However those cards are of not much use to foreign promoters, since they can only get a hold of them if they come directly to the Macedonian Opera, or are delivered to them by an artist himself/herself. It doesn't seem that the Opera and Ballet have created a substantial strategy of how to make best use of these promotional cards, and gain

---

<sup>4</sup> In 2002 “La Forza del destino” at the National Opera in Sofia (Bulgaria)  
In 2004 “Turandot” at the Sava Center in Belgrade (Serbia and Montenegro)

feedback from prospective promoters. Also, some of the information on the cards is inconsistent, not translated in English and out of date which makes them quite unusable after a certain period of time.

- Managing instrumentalists

In the case of instrumentalists the situation is even more alarming. Given the sheer quantity of concert activities and existing ensembles and ???to the number of instrumentalists that graduate from the Faculty of Music, Macedonian instrumentalists have even fewer chances to appear as soloists with a Symphonic or a Chamber Orchestra in the country, and abroad. In Macedonia they often manage to give recitals, but in order to comply with the supply and demand for classical music in Macedonia, promoters tend to create as much diversity into the programming as possible.

In terms of promotion with the help of Government funded institutions, the instrumentalists are linked to the Macedonian Philharmonic as the only permanent orchestra. The situation with the Philharmonic orchestra is a little different than the Opera, so the whole ensemble and the Chamber Orchestra of the Macedonian Philharmonic since 2000 have given 19 concerts out of the Macedonian borders.

10 of those concerts were with the Chamber Orchestra of the Philharmonic, and the remaining 9 were of the whole Orchestra.

However, it must be noticed that not all mentioned concerts promoted Macedonian conductors and soloists – 5 of the concerts included foreign instrumentalists, and 3 concerts included foreign conductors.

The information provided by the relevant institutions who deal with concert promotion (Culture and Information centre, Directorate for Culture and the Arts, Macedonian Philharmonic) is insufficient and do not satisfy the requirements of the ever-changing marketing world of classical music.

Season brochures are not available any information for the concert of the Philharmonic Orchestra can be obtained only by announcements in the daily newspapers and posters.

- Information on Macedonian classical music artists

Part of any marketing strategy today would be providing sufficient information about a product. In the case of artists this information can be in different forms: audio, video or written information.

Today one of the most important information resources for promoters, managers and artists alike is the worldwide web.

The research shows that there is very little information about Macedonian classical music artists on Internet.

Both Macedonian Philharmonic and Macedonian opera have web-sites, but none of them contains biographies or any other information about the employed soloists or Macedonian musicians that have performed with the relevant ensemble.

The Macedonian philharmonic web-site (<http://www.macedonianphilharmonic.com.mk>) contains very little or none information about musicians, and their concert diary is updated monthly. There is no full season announcement and for prospective promoters there is no chance to find out about events that are due in a longer time period, which makes it very difficult for planning.

The Macedonian opera web-site (<http://www.mnt.com.mk>), however contains such information as scarce details about current performances (and that is only for the current production) and the history of the Opera. The web page is only in Macedonian, which makes it of not much use for foreign promoters and agents.

It does not contain any singers or conductor biographies and updating is not frequent, and when it happens it is mostly on the “current repertoire” page.

Opera base ([www.operabase.com](http://www.operabase.com)) contains information about Opera institutions on this site-on the Map of Europe-Macedonia does not exist. All main former Yugoslavian countries have registered at least their most important Opera houses, and the web-site which is used by many promoters does include contact details for the only Macedonian opera, it is just more difficult to find it.

However the day to day practice here in Macedonia also points to the negligence the Marketing departments of government funded institutions show in their work in promoting artists.

A more aggressive marketing approach is a necessity for the Macedonian institutions that deal with classical music. This remark comes after analyzing the current trends in the marketing of these institutions and acknowledging the fact that it has not changed any of the assets since 1991.

The National programme for Culture 2004-2008 has recognized this need and has noted that the lack of such organization directly impacts Macedonian culture

It would benefit both artists and institutions alike. In many ways Macedonia does not exist on the Musical map of Europe. We are fortunate enough to have certain musicians and composers to work very hard in their professional careers to change this situation, and build awareness for the Macedonian music, develop possibilities and use their personal contacts to promote Macedonian musicians in foreign countries.

With great regrets, it must be concluded that many very talented musicians who have won numerous prizes at International competitions are forced to abandon their ideas for performing careers and take upon teaching or become orchestra musicians.

In conclusion, the current artist management trends in Macedonia show that very little attention is paid to the promotion of artists outside of Macedonia, and the relevant institutions struggle to find the right means of presentation, promotion and marketing of the high quality musicians that work and perform in Macedonia.