

**Blerim Grubi and Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha, pioneers of classical music string practice of the Albanian community in Macedonia**

The Albanian community in Macedonia has a rather rich music tradition reflected mostly in the field of music folklore and tradition. This cultural heritage has been continuously maintained, developed and improved through various concerts and festivals. Consequently, this aids to the development of Macedonian cultural heritage as a whole, with its varieties stemming from the existence of several ethnic communities with different cultural characteristics. The cultural life of the Albanians in Macedonia has seen even greater improvements as of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the field of pop music and music for children.

Unfortunately, as far as classical music is concerned, the picture is different because the members of the Albanian community had not been involved in this field prior to the time of Macedonia gaining independence. This is why today there is still a lack of educated staff in this field and the number of classical musicians is almost symbolic. Nevertheless, in recent times there has been an encouraging development in that there is a growing interest of young Albanians to study classical music professionally at the Music High School and the Faculty of Music in Skopje. Although the number of students who have graduated from this Faculty is still small, from a qualitative aspect it is obvious that amongst some of these young musicians there are such that surpass the limits of Macedonia and have thus been recognized abroad. Hence, this paper focuses on the two most highly-acclaimed string performers who at the same time are excellent teachers: the violist Blerim Grubi and the violinist Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha.

Both artists have been present on the music scene in Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and outside of the Balkans for a longer period of time. They are the pioneers of string performance and teaching in the Albanian population in Macedonia. Blerim Grubi is the first Albanian student to graduate at the Department of String Instruments at the Faculty

of Music in Skopje, whereas although Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha comes from Kosovo and has been educated outside Macedonia, she has been living and working in Macedonia since 1992, at the same time continuing her activities in Kosovo. After Blerim Grubi, three other Albanian students have graduated from the Department of String Instruments in the violin section: Valon Kryeziu (the author of this text), currently teaching violin at the Music School “Ilija Nikolovski-Luj” in Skopje, Valon Ademi who is a post-graduate violin student at the Faculty of Music in Skopje, and Mimoza Kasapi who does not currently work as a musician. Apart from these graduated violinists, there is an increasing number of other students who study at the Faculty of Music in Skopje as well as in other schools in Skopje and Tetovo.

Writing about the artistic achievements of the internationally acclaimed musicians Blerim Grubi and Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha poses a special challenge, as in addition to being virtuosos in their instruments, they are also excellent teachers, superb chamber and orchestra musicians, as well as successful organizers of the music life in Macedonia and Kosovo.

A common characteristic which is the reason for their successful beginning in the field of music is that they both come from renowned music families. Blerim Grubi’s father, Gani Grubi, is one of the most prominent singers of traditional music in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and belongs to the first generation of Albanians singers in Macedonia in the post-war period. On the other hand, Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha’s parents are also famous musicians in Kosovo. Her mother Pranvera Badivuku is a well-known teacher and composer, while her father Hysen Badivuku is one of the first Albanian violinists in former Yugoslavia.

Blerim Grubi was born in Skopje in 1965. He completed his elementary and high school music education in the Music School “Ilija Nikolovski – Luj” in Skopje under the guidance of professor Paskali Nikolov. Upon his graduation from high school, he enrolled at the Department of Strings studying viola with professor Ljubomir Gospodinov. He was an exceptionally active student and represented Macedonia at many music events and meetings of the Music Academies of the former Yugoslav republics. In

1999 he completed his post-graduate studies in viola at the same Department. He took part in many international courses and masterclasses, such as the masterclass in Siena, Italy in “Academia Chigiana” in 1995 with the famous violist Yuri Basmet. Immediately upon receiving his MA he began working in the Macedonian Philharmonic where he quickly took the position of first viola. At the same time he worked as professor of viola at the Faculty of Music in Prishtina, and in 2004 accepted a position at the State University in Tetovo. He and Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha are two of the key figures who helped the establishment of the Kosovo Philharmonic in 2000, where he is also first viola.

Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha was born in 1967 in Prishtina. She began her music education in her hometown at a very early age. She graduated from music elementary and high school in Prishtina under the guidance of the well-known violinists Blagoja Dimchevski and Pavel Vernikov. In 1989 she earned a diploma in violin from the Moscow State Conservatory “Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky” under the guidance of the renowned professor and violinist Eugenia Tchugayeva. Apart from the exceptional work in her professional advancement, in this period she also played in the chamber orchestra “Ensemble XXI” from Moscow, performing multiple times in many European countries. Immediately after graduation, she continued her post-graduate studies at the same institution and with the same professor, successfully completing them in 1991. In the search for continuous progress, in 1993/4 she carried on her studies in the Hochschule fur Musik in Detmold, Germany under the guidance of professor Young Uck Kim, whereas in August, 1994 she attended the masterclass of professor Uto Ughi in Sienna, Italy.

Her extensive solo career notes many performances at various international competitions such as the Violin Competition “J.S.Bach” in Leipzig, 1992, International Violin Competition “Rodolfo Lipizer” in Gorizia, 1996 and the International Violin Competition “József Szigeti” in Budapest, 1997. In 1992 she was named professor of violin at the Music Academy in Prishtina and she currently holds this position as well as the position of first violin of the Kosovo Philharmonic.

What makes these two artists special is their wide and diverse repertoire ranging from the baroque period to 20<sup>th</sup> century music. In addition, Grubi and Badivuku-Hoxha's repertoire is characterized by the numerous authors they perform as well as the genres of works, covering concerts, classical sonatas, baroque sonatas and partitas, as well as works for virtuosos.

It is not by accident that Blerim Grubi is considered one of the best violists in Macedonia and the region. His civilized tone, high level of artistic maturity, his extreme poeticism and virtuosity are only encountered in great performers. There are works in his repertoire that are considered the most prominent achievements in viola music, encompassing a variety of stylistic periods and forms.

Grubi had performed viola and orchestra concertos such as Telemann G-major, Stamitz D-major, Bach c-minor and Bartok's Concerto for Viola and Orchestra. Bearing in mind that viola concertos are not so common, Blerim Grubi's repertoire has been enriched by two composers from the region. One of them is the young Macedonian composer Soni Petrovski, whereas the other is the composer from Kosovo Esat Rizvanolli. As far as composers from Macedonia are concerned, Grubi has performed works by Tome Manchev, Tomislav Zografski, Risto Avramovski and Ljubomir Brandzolica, thus contributing to the recognition of Macedonian music. This indicates that he handles with the same dexterity the "pearls" of classical music and the works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the viola and piano sonatas he has performed Sonata in A minor "Arpeggione"-Schubert, Sonata op.147-Shostakovich, Sonata op.11-Hindemith, Sonatas in Eb Major & F Major-Brahms, and Sonata in D minor-Glinka. He has performed with the pianists Marija Vrshkova, Misbah Kaçamaku (Kosovo), Rick Shaw (USA), Hermina Samardzhiska, Arjana Grubi, Maja Kastratovic and Derek Han (USA).

Regarding other viola works, Grubi's repertoire includes pieces such as Marchenbilder op.13-Schumann, Concertpiece-Enescu, Hebraique Suite-Bloch, Three Solo Suites op. 131d-Reger and Valse Sentimentale op.51-Tchaikovsky. These works

speaking of the level of his artistic and technical interpretation. He has worked with many conductors from Macedonia and abroad such as Conrad van Alphen (Holland), Angel Shurev (Macedonia), Raffaele Tiseo (Italy), Alexandar Lekovski (Macedonia), Ermir Krantja (Albania), Oliver Balaburski (Macedonia), Le-Phi-Phi (Vietnam), Borjan Canev (Macedonia) and Sasha Nikolovski (Macedonia).

As a member of numerous chamber ensembles he has performed in many European cities, for example with the *Couperin Ensemble* in 1994 in Strasbourg, France, with the Deltmond Chamber Ensemble in Germany in 2002 and with the Macedonian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra in Espinho, Portugal, in 2005.



Blerim Grubi

The reviews of Blerim Grubi's performances state the following:

"... Blerim Grubi presented a program full of works which represent a concert realized on a very high technical level, exhibiting extreme music maturity and a cultured artistic feeling. He astounded us with the highly cultured tonal product of his viola, full of

a calm virtuosity coming from the civilized approach towards the stylistic characteristics of music performance.” (B.Ortakov, Nova Makedonija, 1989)

“Blerim Grubi, an exceptional musician comprising all the positive meanings of this notion: musicality, a serious technical level, a beautiful and nurtured tone, performance concentration and condition: he managed to fulfill his role as a soloist without any problems.” (V. Chuchkov, Večer, 1994)

“What is truly fascinating is Blerim Grubi’s fantastic articulation, his civilized approach towards the music matter: characteristics of a virtuoso of the highest rank...” (D. Janevski, Radio Skopje, 1994)

“The violist Grubi has now accumulated a large amount of artistic realizations not just at home, but also internationally...” (S. Piraj, Bota Sot, 2005)

Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha is an artist with extraordinary potential and impeccable performance of a wide repertoire covering important violin pieces. Her solo career notes the performance of almost all well-known violin concertos such as J. Brahms D-Major, Symphonie Espagnol by E. Lalo, Wieniawski d-minor, Sibelius d-minor, Tchaikovsky D-Major, Mozart A-major and Bach E-Major. She has also performed the concerto for violin and orchestra “Concerto Fantasia” by the Macedonian composer Risto Avramovski. From the several successful performances of this concert the most notable was that of the Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien “ORF” at the opening of the International Ohrid Summer Festival in 1998.

From the violin and piano sonatas she has performed the Beethoven sonatas D-Major op.12, E-flat Major op.12, F-Major op.24, G-Major op.30 and G-Major op.96, the Franck Sonata in A-Major, the Prokofiev Sonata No. 2 in D-Major op.94, the Brahms Sonata No. 3 in D-minor op. 108, the Robert Schumann Sonata No. 1 in A Minor op.105 and E. Elgar e-minor op. 32. One of her most successful performances was that in Tuupovaaran in Finland in 1991, where she performed the five above-mentioned Beethoven sonatas. She has also worked with many renowned pianists such as Koji

Okamoto ( Japan), Teuta Pllana (USA), Santi Calabro (Italy), Marco Grisandi ( Italy), Derek Han (USA), Stefan Wirth (Switzerland) and Maja Kastratovic (Macedonia).

Apart from the concerts and the sonatas, Badivuku-Hoxha's repertoire includes a large number of works for virtuosos such as pieces by Sarasate, Wieniawski, Kreisler, Paganini, Debussy, Bartok, Saint Saens and Ravel. Her faultless technique and mature artistic approach are the key components of her ability to perform with great ease works such as all Paganini's *Capriccios*, *Introduction & Rondo Capriccioso* by Saint Saens, *Caprice Basque* by Sarasate, *Caprice Viennois* by Kreisler, *Tamborin Chinois* by Kreisler, *Polonaise* by Wieniawski, *Tzigane* by Ravel, and *Habanera* by Sarasate. She has also performed many other works by domestic authors at the Days of Macedonian Music Festival, including Stojan Stojkov, Tome Manchev and Risto Avramovski.

Her solo career abounds with cooperation with many conductors such as Silviu Pantiru (Romania), Tadeusz Kozlowski (Poland), Imre Toplak (Serbia & Montenegro), Lygia O'Riordan (Ireland), Ermir Krantja (Albania), Doron Salomon (Israel), Nikolaj Zhlicar (Slovenia), Raffaele Tiseo (Italy), Pavle Deshpalj (Croatia), Milen Nachev (Bulgaria), Vyachislav Prosolov (Novo Sibirsk), Fabio Bernoni (Italy), Le-Phi-Phi (Vietnam), Alexandar Lekovski (Macedonia) and Sasha Nikolovski (Macedonia).

Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha has also had many joint performances of concerts for several instruments with renowned artists. Some of these performances are the Concerto for Piano, Violin and Cello C-Major op.56 by L.V. Beethoven with the pianist Lejla Haxhiu- Pula and the cello player Antonio Gashi, the Concerto for Violin and Cello a-minor op. 102 by J. Brahms with Antonio Gashi and the J.S. Bach Concerto for two Violins in D-minor with Leonid Pejsahov. She has also performed as a guest performer at several recitals of recognized artists, such as those of Pavel Vernikov and D. Han in Prishtina and the recital of the Philippine pianist Raul Suniko. Together with Pavel Vernikov she performed Bach's Concerto for two violins at the New Year's Concert of the Kosovo Philharmonic in 2001.



Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha

The following reviews assert the artistic and interpretational level of Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha:

“...Sihana`s concert at the Belgrade Scene in Kolarac was estimated as the star of the evening. She interpreted the music of H.Wieniawski as a highly skilled artist with extraordinary artistic performance. (*Borba*, December 31,1986, Belgrade)

“...Miss Sihana Badivuku, has chosen a very demanding program such as: *The Legend* of H.Wieniawski, *Capriccio Basque* of P. Sarasate, Sonate no. 3 the solo ballad for violin of E. Isayia and the Concert Rhapsody *Tzigane* of M. Ravel. The young artist, with her distinguished performance and talent managed to add great knowledge, temperament and expression to this program. (*Pobjeda*, July 5, 1989)

“...With her performance of the Sibelius concerto, she has shown that thanks to her technique, she belongs to the mostly talented musicians of our country. Sihana characterizes the sensibility that includes what is necessary for the expression of deep

dramatic romanticism, especially with her lyric and mild sound in pianissimo but also tempere and strong fortissimo. (R. Rudi, *Flaka*, February 14,1992)

“The wonderful musician’s Sihana Badivuku’s performance techniques perfectly fit the poeticism and spiritual lyricism of music. Her interpretation was at the same time poetic and refined, without an outward glow, yet not insisting and inwardly profound. Her advanced technique, understanding and absolute merging with music made her performance of the concert one of the most memorable events of the season...” (V. Kolarovska-Gmirja, *Nova Makedonija*, February, 1992)

Doron Salomon, the renowned Israeli conductor stated:

“...Ms. Badivuku has an extraordinary sense of phrasing and produces a sweet sound. Her intonation is perfect and she is blessed with a charming stage personality.”

Among other things, Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha and Blerim Grubi are also connected through the long-term cooperation which began at Sihana Badivuku’s arrival in Macedonia. This cooperation has resulted in many successful concerts, masterclasses and joint performances in many chamber ensembles such as the string trio “Kosova” and the chamber ensembles “Vivendi” and “Musica Bacanica”. One of the most successful events were the performances with the ensemble “Vivendi” in Barcelona and Ljubljana in 2000, the performances with “Musica Balcanica” at the International Ohrid Summer Festival in 2003 and the performance with the string trio “Kosova” in 2003 and 2004 in Zagreb. Together they usually perform Mozart’s *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin, viola and orchestra. The following is the review of this performance:

“With yesterday’s performance of W.A.Mozart’s *Sinfonia Concertante*, through their outstanding interpretation, Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha and Blerim Grubi demonstrated a high level of artistic professionalism, once again reaffirming they are great artists of international value...” (B.Ajdini, *Flaka*, 27 February, 1994)

Apart from *Sinfonia Concertante*, they jointly performed the works *Passacaglia* for Violin and Viola by Handel-Halvorsen and Duo for Violin and Viola in G Major kv. 423 by W.A.Mozart.

In addition to being top performers, Grubi and Badivuku-Hoxha are also organizers of music events in Kosovo and Macedonia. Blerim Grubi is one of the artists who established the Society of Albanian Music and Dance Artists in Macedonia and he also established the Multi-Culti Festival in Skopje. Together with Valon Kryeziu they organized several concerts and recitals of young talented Albanians in Macedonia. Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha is also Director of the Festival for Chamber Music “Kosova Kamer Fest” in Prishtina and is a board member of the “Ars Kosova” foundation.

In the end we would like to emphasize that Blerim Grubi and Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha’s successful international artistic careers serve as an example and motive for other young musicians from the Albanian community in Macedonia.

List of Blerim Grubi’s performances:

**Recitals:**

- Meetings of the Music Academies, Ljubljana, 1988
- International Festival “Skopsko Leto”, 1989,2005
- International Ohrid Summer Festival, 1989
- Meetings of young string musicians “Franjo Krezhman”, Osijek, 1989
- Academic Meetings, Prishtina, 1990
- Recitals in Skopje and Kumanovo, 1991
- Meetings of Music Academies, Sarajevo, 1991
- Recital for “UNICEF”, Skopje, 1991
- Recital within the postgraduate studies in Skopje, 1994
- Days of Macedonian Music Festival , Skopje, 1988, 89, 90, 91, 2001, 2003, 2005
- “Brahms Evening” within the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Faculty of Music, Skopje, 1997
- “Schubertiade”, Skopje, 1997
- Recitals in Skopje and Tetovo, 1998

- “Këngë Jeho” Festival, Struga, 1997, 98, 99
- International “Muzina” Festival, Ljubljana 2000
- “Kosova Kamer Fest”, Prishtina, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005
- Recital in Tetovo, 2005
- Festival “RE MUSICA”, Prishtina ,2006

**Performances with orchestras:**

- Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 1994, conductor: Angel Shurev
- Albanian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Tirana, 1994, conductor: Ermir Krantja
- The Youth Philharmonic of Macedonia, Skopje, 1996, conductor: Oliver Balaburski
- Faculty of Music Symphonic Orchestra, Skopje, 1998, conductor: Sasha Nikolovski-Gjumar
- Tirana Chamber Orchestra, Skopje, Tetovo,1999, conductor: Aleksandar Lekovski
- Tirana Chamber Orchestra, Prishtina, conductor: Raffaele Tiseo
- Macedonian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Skopje, 2002, conductor: Borjan Canev
- Kosovo Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Prishtina, 2002, conductor Le-Phi-Phi
- Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 2003, conductor: Borjan Canev
- Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 2003, conductor: Conrad van Alphen
- “United” Philharmonic, Skopje, 2003, conductor: Aleksandar Lekovski
- Kosovo Philharmonic, Prishtina, 2003, conductor: Bujar Llapi

List of Sihana Badivuku-Hoxha’s performances:

**Recitals:**

- International Ohrid Summer Festival 1985, 88, 95, 98, 2003, 2004
- Tuupovaaran, Finland, 1991
- Tetovo, 1992
- Roccalumera, Italy, 1993
- Prishtina, 1994
- Skopje, 1996

- Varna Festival, 1995
- “Heracleian Evenings”, Bitola, 1996
- St. John the Divine, New York, 1998
- Saloon 19.19, Skopje, 1999
- “Interfest”, Bitola, 1999
- Days of Macedonian Music Festival, Skopje, 1997, 98, 99
- “ISCM” Festival, Tirana, 1998
- Gubbio Festival, Italy, 1999
- Java e Bahut, Prishtina, 2000
- Contemporary Music Festival “Muzina”, Ljubljana, 2000
- “Kosova Kamer Fest”, Prishtina, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005
- Saloon 19.19, Skopje, 2004
- “Days of Music” Festival, Herceg Novi, 1989, 2005

**Performances with orchestras:**

- TV Prishtina Symphonic Orchestra, Prishtina, 1984
- Nish Philharmonic, Nish, 1986
- Belgrade Philharmonic, Belgrade, 1986
- Macedonian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Ohrid, 1988
- Ensemble XXI, Cork, Ireland, 1989
- Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 1994, conductor: Angel Shurev
- Albanian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Tirana, 1994, conductor: Ermir Krantja
- Youth Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 1996, conductor: Oliver Balaburski
- MKC Mandolin Orchestra, Skopje, 1997, conductor: Ramadan Shukri
- Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien “ORF”, 1998, Ohrid
- Faculty of Music Symphonic Orchestra, Skopje, 1998, conductor: Sasha Nikolovski-Gjumar
- Tirana Chamber Orchestra, Skopje, Tetovo, 1999, conductor: Aleksandar Lekovski
- Tirana Chamber Orchestra, Prishtina, conductor Raffaele Tiseo

- Macedonian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Skopje, 2002, conductor: Borjan Canev
- Kosovo Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Prishtina, 2002, conductor: Le-Phi-Phi
- Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 2003, conductor: Borjan Canev
- Macedonian Philharmonic, Skopje, 2003, conductor: Conrad van Alphen
- Kosovo Philharmonic, Prishtina, 2003, conductor: Bujar Llapi
- “United” Philharmonic, Skopje, 2003, conductor: Aleksandar Lekovski
- Kosovo Philharmonic, Prishtina, 2004, conductor: Fabio Bernoni
- Albanian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Tirana, 2004, conductor: Le-Phi-Phi
- Kosovo Philharmonic, Prishtina, 2005