

INTERVIEW

Interview: Croatian Organist Ljerka Ocic-Turkulin

Ljerka Ocic-Turkulin, a Croatian, is Yugoslavia's leading classical organist, who came to America from her native city of Zagreb (the capital of Croatia), as a member of the Croatian Art Forces, to win support for Croatia's independence struggle against Serbia. She gave concerts in Florida and Maryland, playing both classical pieces and Croatian compositions, concluding with an appeal for the United States to recognize Croatia's independence.

Ocic-Turkulin was born in Zagreb, Yugoslavia in 1960, where her family has lived for six hundred years. She graduated in 1982 from the Academy of Music in Ljubljana, where she studied organ under Prof. Hubert Bergant. Later, she studied in Paris, Kiev, and Rome. She has given concerts in Europe, Japan, and Russia. This is her second trip to America.

Her husband, Hrvole Turkulin, is a professor of forestry at Zagreb University. He recently returned from a scholarship in London to join the reserves in defense of Croatia.

The interview was conducted for Fidelio by Marianna Wertz, vice-president of the Schiller Institute, on Sunday, Nov. 24, 1991.

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Fidelio: The Schiller Institute has issued a Call to Found an International Committee to Save Croatia, calling on Western nations to recognize the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. What is your view of the American role in Croatia's struggle, and what are you seeking from the West?

LO: We need recognition of our independence. We also ask for concrete support, like troops; or just not to have the embargo anymore. Because it is actually a battle between David and Goliath, and we don't have equipment and weapons to defend ourselves.

Fidelio: Do you know that the media

in the U.S. say this is a civil war?

LO: I don't think it's either a civil war or an ethnic war, in that sense. Actually it's a battle between a communistic system and democracy. Therefore, we expect the support of Europe and the rest of the west.

Fidelio: In an interview with the Baltimore Sun, you mentioned atrocities committed against Croatians by the Serbian-controlled Federal Army. Can you say something about this?

LO: All the other nationalities have left the Federal Army, so now it's just a Serbian army. They are attacking all around. They are trying to destroy everything. The main targets are churches, monuments, schools, and kindergartens. They have destroyed almost two hundred churches.

Destroying a Cultural Identity

Fidelio: Why target churches?

LO: The main thing that they proclaim is that wherever one Serb lives, that is Serbia. They want to destroy our cultural identity.

Fidelio: Is that why you decided, as a musician, to use your talents to try to defeat them?

LO: Yes. We are trying to fight in our way, because we have a culture, we have a tradition, and we have to preserve our art, our treasure in that sense.

I, as a musician, didn't know how to behave in such terrible circumstances and I felt very *unuseful*, so I joined the Croatian Art Forces and we try to fight in our way. That means we are organizing concerts all around. We had some concerts during the battles in Osijek, in a cathedral which had been attacked before. The symphony orchestra went there and they performed the Beethoven Eroica Symphony.

I'm going to play also in that cathe-



EIRNS/David McVey

Ljerka Ocic-Turkulin.

dral on my way back. We are trying to do such things to support the morale of the people there, and we think that nobody can destroy the whole nation. Somebody will survive, and they will be witnesses for future generations.

Fidelio: How has the response been to your concerts in America?

LO: So far, I've had concerts in Florida, and I spoke each time at the end of the concert. I think the American people can understand what's going on. I think a lot of disinformation is going around, because Serbia has built a very strong lobby here in the past seventy years.

Fidelio: They have Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

LO: They also have Helen Bentley (R-Md). She proclaims herself a Chetnik—she's proud of it. It's very hard to fight against such a thing, because Croatians haven't had a chance to speak freely in the past.

Fidelio: Are you speaking freely in your concerts?

LO: Yes, I'm trying. But even the churches where I'm playing in Baltimore, had threatening phone calls, saying they were Serbians and demanding to know how the church could give the opportunity to somebody from Croatia—who is killing children and such things—to give a concert here.

Lessons of the Art of 1492

Fidelio: That story was untrue, and Reuters News Service retracted it.

LO: Yes, I was sure that it was untrue and I spoke about that all over. But, unfortunately, some people had already read or heard that, and it's tough to counter it.

Culture and Politics In a Time of Crisis

Fidelio: In Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis is head of state and he's a musician. In Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel is president, and he's a playwright. How do you see this growing trend of newly freed nations in Eastern Europe calling on cultural figures to give political leadership in this time of crisis?

LO: It's amazing, because under the communist system, musicians and artists were in a terrible position. Writers couldn't express their feelings, their fears, the experiences that they had under the communist system, so a lot of them, in our country, were jailed, just because of their opinions. It's hard for me to express this in English, but [voting for cultural figures] is a way to express the free spirit that was preserved in the circumstances we passed through.

Fidelio: What program have you chosen for your concerts here?

LO: It depends always on the organ. In Florida, I included one of the Croatian composers, and I played one elegy, a very sad composition, because my mood was sad. It was full of folk elements of our country. I also played Romantic and Baroque music.

Here in Baltimore, because of the type of organ, I played Baroque music, but always at the end of the concert I played a piece from the St. Matthew Passion of J.S. Bach, in memory of all the children and civilians who have been killed in the war.

Fidelio: I'm sure that's had a good effect on people.

LO: I think so. I hope that in this kind of expression, a musical kind, people can understand much more about our feelings, and can share them with us. We are grateful for every move that you make here in America.

In celebration of the Quincentary of the Discovery of America by Columbus, the National Gallery of Art mounted a glorious exhibit entitled "Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration" this past autumn. Although not about history as such, this exhibit of over 600 objects from the Mediterranean world, east Asia, and the Americas in the half-century around 1492, provided the crucial clue for evaluating not only the past but where we are going today. The clue is the necessity of progress. Therein, we find beauty.

Although the exhibit, on view only in Washington from Oct. 12, 1991 to Jan. 12, 1992, has now closed, several hundred thousand visitors took advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. A handsome 672-page catalogue published by Yale University Press and the National Gallery (\$45 paper, \$59.95 hardbound) remains.

The Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century, which unified art and science as never before, was the response of Western Christendom to the terrifying challenge of uncontrolled nature—in this case, epidemic disease, the Black Death, which wiped out as much as fifty per cent of the urban population in many parts of Europe, including the proud city of Florence, Europe's banking capital, in 1348.

In the decades leading up to 1492, theoretical and applied science were brought together in a republican political movement which gave birth to momentous breakthroughs in technology:

the discovery of perspective in painting, the development of anatomy as a science, a revolution in navigation, the invention of printing, revolutions in mapmaking and astronomy. The art of not only Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, who were both thriving artists in 1492 and whose works crown the exhibit's first, European section, but of many other geniuses on display here—Piero della Francesca, Botticelli, Uccello, Donatello, Brunelleschi, Pollaiuolo, even Michelangelo—celebrated the creative power of the unique individual to make such discoveries, and the willingness of political leaders to organize society so as to realize these inventions to change the physical world.

Renaissance Image of Man

We see that celebration of the individ-



Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of a Lady with an Ermine (Cecilia Gallerani), c. 1490.