

Take I: Croatian Record Industry on National, European and Overseas Markets up to the Mid
1950s

Take II: An Attempt to Reconstruct the Life of Croatian Shellac Records Observed from a
Twofold Commercial Perspective

ABSTRACT

Taking into account that a turning point in experiencing and creating music was the invention of the gramophone, and, subsequently, the evolution of record industry during the first few decades of the new millennium, it is only natural that a broad range of academic disciplines have found music record to be an interesting research subject and a field worth thriving on. Accordingly, the thesis proposal deals with the early Croatian music record industry from a commercial aspect, engaging ethnomusicological approach to scrutinize the relationship between record production, dissemination, and reception. More precisely, the proposed thesis will be analyzing the presence of three succeeding record companies situated in Zagreb – Edison Bell Penkala (est. in 1926), Elektroton (est. in 1938) and Jugoton (est. in 1947) – on the (inter)national market and in the media of the time. Through physical and digital archive work, which implies collecting the material and contextual information on domestic and foreign ground, the research will create a basis for further study which should assess the dynamics of music record production and dissemination based on available facts, particularly regarding Radio Zagreb as record companies' most important propagator. Afterward, grounding its theories on Assmann's concept of communicative memory, the research can undergo the main analysis of the information collected through extensive interviews with local and foreign collectors, as well as with the people that have had at least some part of their life marked by music records under study. While the results gained from observing the domestic and broader Yugoslav market should display the *modus operandi* and the reception in the case of small, localized record companies which operated outside of the large record industry, the study of the overseas market would likely focus on the partake that the displaced music took in the multicultural identity construction of diaspora communities with South Slavic origin in the United States. The purpose of the thesis is to offer a reconstruction of life of Croatian shellac records in the context of commercial importance, media dissemination, and public acceptance during their first four decades, as well as their "afterlife" in the hands of collectors.

THESIS PROPOSAL

Take I: Croatian Record Industry on National, European and Overseas Markets up to the Mid
1950s

Take II: An Attempt to Reconstruct the Life of Croatian Shellac Records Observed from a
Twofold Commercial Perspective

RESEARCH SUBJECT

This research project focuses on the early Croatian record industry centering in its capital city, encompassing the first part of the 20th century, when discographic industry started shaping its outlines to suit the context of a new mass media which emerged from technological progress. The subject will be studied from a twofold commercial perspective, having regard to the interconnection between the market actors – seller and consumer – and their mutual impact. The thesis proposal is encouraged by the most recent project at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb which started in February 2020. It represents the first instance of a systematic scholarly approach to the topic of record industry in Croatia carried out by the leading Croatian ethnomusicologists and musicologists. Apart from the obvious objectives of preservation, systematization, and dissemination of obtained knowledge, the project should disprove a statement found in the Croatian *Music Encyclopedia* that reads: “There was no gramophone industry in our country before the Second World War worth mentioning” (cited in Bulić 1980:139). The process of disproval calls for a broad variety of approaches in order to understand the historical, cultural, and aesthetic importance of recording industry in its early years, thus a wide disciplinary scope of the proposed thesis was envisaged. Analyzing the presence of three succeeding record companies situated in Zagreb – Edison Bell Penkala (est. in 1926), Elektroton (est. in 1938) and Jugoton (est. in 1947) – on the (inter)national market and in the media of the time, the thesis should attempt to offer a reconstruction of life of Croatian shellac records in the context of commercial importance, media dissemination, and public acceptance during their first four decades, as well as their “afterlife” in the hands of collectors.

After introducing the concept of the research and outline of the proposed subject, the following text will disclose main questions, research methodology and work plan serving as guidelines for the work. Finally, a summary of relevant literature should lead to the presentation of personal qualifications and research goals.

RESEARCH CONCEPT

Since the beginning of 2000s, when recording industry became accepted as a relevant academic subject worth studying through the lenses of a whole range of academic disciplines, it has been emphasized that the study should also draw attention to two aspects of musical practice that conventional music studies tend to ignore: technology and commerce (Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012:3). Inclining towards the latter, this research will deal with four markets through three different aspects. Narrowing down the huge potential of studies into music market, three researched aspects need to be bounded by defining concepts, hence the position, dissemination, and reception emerged as three focus points. Although marked as independent aspects, their correlation and reciprocity will be constantly taken into account.

The footing market implies a “local” or “national” one, bearing in mind federal context present in Croatia throughout the 20th century. Even though early Zagreb record companies were, in fact, the only relevant record companies in Yugoslavia by the end of the fifties (Ceribašić, 2019:149), it would be wrong to assume their equal reception on multicultural market of the “two Yugoslavias”, especially sharpened by the puritan politics of the NDH (the Fascist puppet state that existed during the WWII). To understand the relative importance of Croatian labels, it is reasonable to observe them on a broader international scene, assuming the European and overseas markets, particularly in the USA. One part of the research will thus include a diasporic niche, namely studying a partake that Croatian discography took in early immigrant record music in the United States. It will be done through observing a response of Croatian and South Slavic immigrant groups on three Croatian labels or their licensed recordings released by American companies during the first half of the 20th century, reflecting the identity politics embedded in music. Apart from the material located in the richest American sound archive of gramophone shellac records under Library of Congress and on the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., intended research will focus on the collections of certain American collectors with South Slavic roots, and possibly the living witnesses, or even

their descendants with second-hand testimonies. The latter could likely provide a simplified version of the impact that three record companies had on a diasporic community, observing particularly the aftermath this displaced music caused in respect to multicultural identity construction.

Even though there have already been some attempts of collecting musical, textual and historiographical material, mainly by music journalists, private collectors, archivists, and rarely musicologists (see Bulić 1980; Vuletić 2010), it appears that the state of research has only scratched the surface of, what it seems to be, a vast variety of musical genres and performers, covering Western classical, traditional, jazz and popular music. Thus, the project of the Institute rests on thorough archival work compiling and systematizing the material located in relevant archives, libraries, and museums throughout Croatia, presuming the largest findings in the capital city. It will strive towards the idea of a “complete collection”, but it would be misleading to follow the quote brought to my attention by Antti-Ville Kärjä – “If an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist” (2018:110). One of the main focuses of the proposed thesis will be on the sound archive of Croatian Radio, the successor of Radio Zagreb, the first radio station in Croatia, established in 1926. Its historical value has already been highlighted, contributing with thousands of unique documentary music recordings belonging to the Croatian cultural heritage (Radovinović 2014:197). This media will serve as a paradigm in presenting the chained relationship of production, dissemination and reception relating to the three Zagreb-based record companies under study. Newspapers, periodicals, and journals will presumably also be of great importance for the research, as they already proved to be as regards, for instance, the disclosing the first appearance of phonograph in Croatia in 1890 or the first recordings noted in Zagreb before the establishment of Edison Bell Penkala (EBP) record company in 1926. It would be interesting to examine how the three companies figured in press media, since the part of the record industry reception process can also be observed in marketing and other aspects of their presence in the press of that time.

OUTLINE OF THE SUBJECT

Just like Edison or Bell, Slavoljub Penkala was also an inventor displaying great interest in a new device in the world of invention. Continuing his work dating back in 1908 (Radovinović 2014:196), his record company has made a great deal recording music of

various genres with local artists situated in Croatian National Theatre, encouraging the early production of composers, lyricists, and performers inspired by the idea of recorded sound. Following the Great Depression, and a few year gap required for the economy to rose up, a Slovenian couple established in 1938 a new company, Elektroton, expanding their previously existing business from Ljubljana to Zagreb. It was the second record company in Croatia with the produce of approximately 60,000 records annually (Bulić 1980:25). In contrast to EBP which to a significant degree based its work on producing local repertoire and, especially, relying on local performers, Elektroton almost exclusively released licensed records with British, Hungarian, German, Spanish, French, American and Italian songs popular at the time. With the establishment of NDH, its publishing policy changed to meet the requirements of a totalitarian state, changing also the main sources of licensed records. After the WWII, the property of collapsed record companies (both Elektroton and remainings of EBP) was nationalized in line with the socialist economic system, and this is how the third party, Jugoton, emerged in 1947. Taking advantage of an already established industry with an increasing audience, it gradually profiled into the record company with the largest commercial production in former Yugoslavia.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is known that the record industry on a global scale largely responded to the world-affairs, in regard to commercial value, repertoire, and “star” selection. However, taking into consideration a rather small crew, at least in their outset, which navigated the first three Zagreb record companies, and the dichotomy between domestic and foreign repertoire, several questions should arise. Which criteria were used when recording the local repertoire, ranging from very local to national to pan-Yugoslav, and which when selecting the foreign repertoire? What was the influence of foreign music and record labels on Croatian music production at the time, and which trends were followed? Were they a step behind the leading trends, and whether the trends were followed at all? Considering the size of the market additionally limited by language, what were the specificities of the Croatian companies, and what the similarities in comparison with similar-size record companies elsewhere, given the currently available case studies? What was the arrangement between owners and executives of the early record companies and music editors whose individual taste, according to available

sources, greatly influenced the selection? If so, was the Croatian music production actually impacted by a handful of people? Since EBP and Elektroton were privately owned and financed, in contrast to state-owned and financed Jugoton, how these different set-ups impacted commercial interests, as well as artistic and cultural ones? Should the number of produced records be considered as a valid proof of popularity among the people consuming that music or, rather, a series of other elements should be taken into account?

On the B-side of the commercial aspect of records, there is a reception of music by its “consumers”, perceived as an experience, not as a commodity with an emphasis on the expandable feature. When reconstructing the musical past on the foreground of collective memory, one should never neglect the existence of what Assmann calls communicative memory, created and shaped by the consumers themselves, resulting in oral history (Assmann 1995:126), as opposed to the written history, fixed in facts and striving for objectivity. While we are, as researchers, free to choose the face of the past in which we recognize our own present or future (cf. Bithell 2006:5), the risk of romanticizing, or even worse, of biased research in regard to the available data is rather grave, and its result will distort the actual reality. Given the age of the subject under study and its availability to a broader population at the time, finding living witnesses and consumers of the records, released particularly by the first two record companies, will be a challenging, but worthwhile task. Their testimonies will likely change the viewpoint created solely from the archive work. The alternative gateway into the aforementioned reality will be within the community of collectors and discophiles, engaging the qualitative research methods while conducting semi-structured interviews, as well as biographies and life stories. Their distinctive collections and great knowledge on the subject will most certainly bring forth a vast spectrum of research questions.

The more accurate the reconstruction is, the better will be the understanding of what Katz calls a phonograph effect. Simply put, it is any change in musical behavior – whether listening, performing, or composing – that has arisen in response to sound-recording technology (Katz 2010:2). Undoubtedly, as the research will be progressing, more and more “effects” will be brought forth. The question that is expected to emerge here pertains to the arguable idea of “Croatian sound” in discography, along with other ex-Yugoslav sounds, which might have evolved together with the record industry, and whose lineage should be perceivable today as well. This important aspect will be developed further after conducting an adequate analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

One can argue that the subject of this proposal is closer to the study of popular music, media studies, or even historiographic musicology, especially taking into account the percentage of archive work that will be present in the proposed research. Even so, as per broad definition of ethnomusicology which observes music within culture, music as culture, and music as a reflection of culture, beyond a purely sonic and historical perspective, this work will use the archive data solely in order to assess the cultural impact and importance that musical recordings had and still have within a society. Once completed, the thesis is intended to serve as one of the results of a quadrennial project on the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb. Finally, taking into account my previous studies and experience, the ethnomusicological approach to the research would certainly yield the best results.

The research will engage fieldwork and archive work, such as visiting the archive in Štrigova in the first year of doctoral study, whose fund is mainly composed of record collection of the Radio Zagreb, or joint archive work in relevant museums, libraries and archives throughout Croatia during the first two years of the study. Apart from several relevant individuals who will be selected from (inter)national society of collectors and discophiles, I hope to conduct interviews with some of the last remaining witnesses of late Elektroton and early Jugoton records within and outside Croatian borders during all three years of the study. This will make up an important part of the proposed research. As a part of the Institute's project, a 14-day training is planned in the second year of the study at two institutions in Washington DC: Library of Congress and Smithsonian Institution. Besides gaining access to the valuable and rich primary material, this training will help to get acquainted with all aspects of a scientifically-based approach to the problems of the record industry and its application in practice.

During the first year of the study, the research will undergo an intensive physical and digital archive work collecting the material and contextual information in Croatia, on the territory of Yugoslavia and wider, striving to create a foreground for further research on the market dynamics of the record companies under study. The main focus will be archive located in Štrigova with the record collection of Radio Zagreb, as well as newspapers, periodicals, and journals of the time found in Zagreb libraries. Other relevant archives, libraries, and museums will be covered by the joint work envisaged within the Institute's Project. The

archive work will extend to the second year, particularly concerning the overseas market. By the end of the second year, the research should have a firm written reconstruction of the life of shellac records observed from a commercial angle, providing a factual truth on the market size, mutual domestic and foreign music influences, and the relationship between record market, advertisement, and promotion, particularly via radio broadcast. The third year of the study should deepen the research on the last, the most important aspect taken from consumer's eyes. This should complete the reconstruction of the early Croatian music record's life observed within the commercial context. It assumes performing and simultaneously studying the interviews led during the first and second years of the study with collectors and people that have had at least some part of their life marked by music records under study. During this period, the thesis should be coming to an end, observing the intertwining and codependency of the three aforementioned concepts – position, dissemination, and reception.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

One of the first who undertook research on the discography in the region of ex-Yugoslavia before WWII was Dario Bulić. In his master thesis (Bulić 1980) he briefly analyzed the work of the three Zagreb companies and brought an incomplete, but helpful list of records released within the period in question. Another notable master thesis dealing with the cosmopolitanism, regionalism, and popular music of the same period appeared only in 2011 (Lučić 2011; see also Lučić 2004). Two Ph.D. theses addressed the Croatian record industry as their secondary subject (Miholić 2009; Radovinović 2014). Croatian discography within the context of Yugoslav communism was studied by Dean Vuletić (Vuletić 2008; Vuletić 2010) and few others (e.g. Franičević & Bošnjaković 1984), which will be beneficial for the research into the first 15 years of Jugoton. Only a few works focused on certain genres within the studied period (e.g. Kajkavian songs in Mirnik 1996; military bands in Kraker & Mirnik 2018).

When observing the larger picture on a global scene, one of the first indications of the importance of systematically studying gramophone records was *Historical records* (1936) by Roberto Bauer, a discography of opera recordings made before 1907. It took almost two decades for an institutionalized discipline to finally observe the record industry as a research

subject, thanks to Alan Danielou who published a catalogue of recorded Indian classical music (1952) with the assistance of UNESCO. The second half of the 20th century saw revived interest in using commercial recordings as sources for ethnomusicological research. As aforementioned, on the threshold of the new millennium, the whole range of academic disciplines showed interest in studying record industry from various angles. Several ethnomusicological works resounded in the discipline, such as work on Bulgarian surviving folk music recordings studied by Dimov (2005), Greek rebetiko music on recordings by Pennanen (1999), and Balinese gamelan music by Herbst (2012) (Gronow 2014:43). Works of Pekka Gronow will serve as a comparative example within proposed research, in the context of smaller countries and record companies outside the large record industry. While the relationship between identity and music, market and music, as well as the role of sound archives (see Nettl, 1964; Seeger, 1986) has hitherto been reflected in numerous ethnomusicological works, as far as I know, very few ethnomusicological works have researched the record industry specifically from the commercial angle (see Gronow 1983), observing the dynamic of the market in regard to the socio-political context of the time and place. Regardless of the genre scope and commercial value of the music, this research strives to analyze cultural identity shaped and enhanced by recorded music, displaced, portable, repeatable, and tangible.

RESEARCH GOALS

Finishing the study of Ethnomusicology in 2017 on Zagreb Music Academy under the supervision of Professor Naila Ceribašić, I had a chance to experience the challenges of dealing with recording production throughout the 20th century. While studying so-called Yu-Mex genre which emerged at the end of the forties inspired by Mexican movie music, as well as while working on a master thesis when I searched for the earliest versions of the song *Zadarski tanac*, tailored into a representative tradition of Zadar, the availability of the early records showed as a major issue. Thus, apart from increasing the visibility and availability of the material and raising the awareness on Croatian recorded heritage, the main objective of this research is to understand the evolution of a local record industry in respect to its commercial aspect, ranging from domestic context to overseas diasporic communities, and to understand its phonograph effect to these days.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Assmann, J. (1995). Collective Memory and Cultural identity. *New German Critique* 65: 125-133.
- Baker, C. (2010). "Death to Fascism isn't in the Catechism": Legacies of Socialism in Croatian Popular Music After the Fall of Yugoslavia. *Narodna umjetnost* 47/1:163-183.
- Bithell, C. (2006). The Past in Music: Introduction. *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15/1: 3-16.
- Bulić, D. (1980). Diskografija u Jugoslaviji od 1918. do 1941., MA thesis at the Music Academy, University of Zagreb.
- Ceribašić, N., Zdunić, H., Čaleta, P., Jerković, M., Božić, I., De Bona, M., & Zečević Bogojević, K. (2019). Sevdalinka i Zagreb do kraja 1950-ih: pokušaj rekonstrukcije. *Narodna umjetnost* 56/1: 149-191.
- Frith, S. & Zagorski-Thomas, S. (2012). *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.
- Gronow, P. (2007). Inventing Recorded Music: the Recorded Repertoire in Scandinavia 1899–1925. *Popular Music* 26/2: 281-304.
- Gronow, P. (1963). Phonograph Records as a Source for Musicological Research. *Ethnomusicology* 7/3: 225-228.
- Gronow, P. (1983). The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium. *Popular Music* 3: 53-75.
- Gronow, P. (2014). The World's Greatest Sound Archive. 78 rpm Records as a Source for Musicological Research. *Traditiones* 43/2: 31-49.
- Kärjä, A.-V. (2018). Historiography and the Role of the Archive. In S. Baker et al., *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage*, 108-117. New York: Routledge.
- Katz, M. (2010). *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press [Revised Edition].

- Lučić Andrijanić, K. (2011). Kozmopolitizam, regionalizam i popularna glazba u Hrvatskoj 1918. - 1941., MA thesis at the Music Academy, University of Zagreb.
- Lučić, K. (2004). Popularna glazba u Zagrebu između dvaju svjetskih ratova. *Narodna umjetnost* 41/2: 123-140.
- Radovinović, Ž. (2014). Zaštita zvučnih zapisa hrvatske glazbene baštine postupkom digitalizacije, Ph.D. thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb.
- Vuletić, D. (2008). Generation Number One: Politics and Popular Music in Yugoslavia in the 1950s. *Nationalities Papers* 36/5:861-879.
- Vuletić, D. (2010). Yugoslav Communism and the Power of Popular Music, Ph.D. thesis at the Columbia University.