



*Sounding Stereotypes. Construction of Place and Reproduction of Metaphors
in the Music of Goran Bregović*

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Summary

This dissertation explores the labelling of the Balkans in the popular/world music realm, through a case-study revolving around the music of Goran Bregović, the self-declared Balkan music composer. Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 discusses the Balkan label as a repository for various preconceptions that have accumulated over the centuries. In addition, it examines the ways the Balkans are reproduced as a spatial reference, both in the minds of their inhabitants as well as the worldwide consumers of Bregović's music. Like many other marginal territories, Southeast Europe was imagined as inherently alien and has served as a target of the centre's projections and fantasies. Internalising this alien image, Bregović created a successful marketing persona, by tapping into well-known stereotypes that have been present in many Western European everyday discourses for at least two centuries. Migration of his music, from rock via film to world music – but also from traditional music, via commodified music intended for domestic (ex-Yugoslav) markets, to that same music being used to reinvent and represent the Balkans in Bregović's international performances – reveals the process of shifting meanings together with changing audiences and circumstances of performance.

Chapter 3 reviews Bregović's career, his early years already anticipating his later compositional and marketing techniques. A related pillar of Bregović's international image, next to the Balkans, is his representation of Roma and his identification with the romanticised image of Gypsies. In a similar way to Roma musicians who strategically adopt just a segment of the whole spectrum of Gypsy preconceptions, Bregović engages with those stereotypes that help market his music more successfully. His readiness to take over Balkan and Gypsy stereotypes serves an important purpose, that of justifying his compositional and ethical choices, particularly when it comes to musical borrowing and recycling as his preferred compositional techniques. Musically, what Bregović offers under his name (and Balkan label) is an array of sounds rearranged so as to sound exotic, not unlike the way exotic sounds had been constructed for centuries within the realm of classical music. In other words, his music invokes those elements of Balkan music traditions that conform to the international audiences' stereotypical perception of the region, and meets their expectations of what Balkan music should sound like.

A secondary goal of the analysis carried out in Chapters 4 and 5 is to examine the musical features of Bregović's "Balkanised" sound, music purposefully arranged so as to sound like authentic Balkan music. This is accomplished by comparing multiple versions of his tunes which were targeted at different inter- and transregional markets. While the

extra-musical context of Bregović's music reflects the position of the Balkans as the European "outsider within" (conveying an alien, yet intimately familiar space), musically the Balkan/Gypsy label connotes a high propensity towards stylistic cross-fertilising, likewise attributed to (a tacitly assumed interpretation of) regional history. Bregović's incessant recycling is furthermore open to the application of the memetic paradigm. This aids in discussing the varying success of his many reworked versions, due to their interaction with their specific environments.

In later chapters the delicate dynamics between Bregović's image as a traditional musician on the one hand, and a postmodern creator of a commercial commodity on the other, is discussed. Having to negotiate between these two positions, sometimes hardly compatible, he engages in an intricate role-play with his diverse audiences. He presents himself as an exponent of traditionalism and authenticity in one context, and an empowered (rule-breaking) voice of the postcolonial margin in another. His double positionality enables him to be simultaneously *in* the culture (its authentic representative) and *outside* that culture (its curator and interpreter), and consequently smooth over issues of ownership and appropriation. Importantly, assuming of the role of a traditional musician enables him to pursue his recycling technique: his ever-rearranged tunes, which might be open to criticism if presented in context of an autonomous artistic agency striving towards constant originality, retain their value (and declared authenticity) when marketed as folk music.

Bregović's frequent references to Gypsy brass players and Bulgarian singers, as well as his usage of centuries-old musical labels of otherness, trigger a learned response with his international audiences. Through exposure to repeated usage of these labels in other circumstances, these audiences have become used to what Balkan music should sound like. Bregović's active engagement with the Balkan image creates a feedback loop with his international listeners, which importantly extends beyond his music and applies to all musics labelled as Balkan. Among the transregional world music audiences sensitive to issues of globalisation and postcoloniality, he is lauded for supposedly giving voice to this particular European margin, and for embarking on multicultural and multiethnic projects committed to promoting intercultural dialogue and intraregional reconciliation. On the other hand, instead of empowering peoples from the margin to challenge and transcend the old binary view of the Balkans as Europe's internal Other, Bregović replicates the appropriating attitude coming from the centre, which in effect perpetuates the existing (marginal and stereotyped) position of the region.