*Miloš BRALOVIĆ*

# The Avant-Garde Inspired by the Universe: Josip Slavenski's Cycle *Misterij* (*Mystery*) – Concept, Plot and Realized Parts*

## *Visatos įkvėptas avangardas. Josipo Slavenskio ciklo „Paslaptis“ koncepcija, siužetas ir įgyvendinimas*

Institute of Musicology, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Kneza Mihaila 36, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia
milos.bralovic@music.sanu.ac.rs

**Abstract**
Josip Slavenski (1896–1955), a composer born in Čakovec and later based in Belgrade, was a man of remarkable imagination. His lifelong interest in music and sound, as well as astronomy and fundamental sciences, inspired him in his early twenties (1918–1919) to conceive a large-scale cycle that he named *Misterij* (*Mystery*). This ambitious piece for soloists, choir and orchestra, with ballet, was envisioned to depict a grand cosmic force creating Chaos, followed by the emergence of stars, planets, the solar system, the Earth, life on Earth, and the spiritual evolution of humanity. The cycle, however, remained unfinished. In this article I present Slavenski's surviving sketches of the *Misterij* and draw connections between these and several completed works that correspond to the synopsis outlined in the sketches.
**Keywords:** Josip Slavenski, *Misterij* (*Mystery*), sketches, manuscript legacy, *Chaos* for full orchestra, *Symphony of the Orient*, *Voda zvira* (*Water Springs*), *Music 36*, *Music in Natural-Tone System*, *Music 38*.

**Anotacija**
Josipas Slavenskis (1896–1955), kompozitorius, gimęs Čakovecoje, o vėliau gyvenęs Belgrade, pasižymėjo nepaprasta vaizduote. Visą gyvenimą domėjęsis muzika ir garsu, taip pat astronomija ir fundamentaliaisiais mokslais, dvidešimties metų (1918–1919 m.) jis sumanė didelės apimties ciklą *Misterij* (*Paslaptis*). Šiame ambicingame kūrinyje solistams, chorui ir orkestrui su baletu turėjo būti vaizduojama didžioji kosminė jėga, sukurianti Chaosą, po kurio atsiranda žvaigždės, planetos, Saulės sistema, Žemė, gyvybė Žemėje ir dvasinė žmonijos evoliucija. Tačiau ciklas taip ir liko nebaigtas. Straipsnyje pristatomi išlikę Slavenskio *Misterij* eskizai ir nubrėžiamos jų ir kelių užbaigtų kūrinių, atitinkančių eskizuose pateiktą siužetą, sąsajos.
**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Josip Slavenski, *Paslaptis*, eskizai, rankraštinis paveldas, *Chaosas* simfoniniam orkestrui, *Oriento simfonija*, *Voda zvira* (*Pavasario vandenys*), *Music 36*, *Music in Natural-Tone System*, *Music 38*.

### Introduction: how a baker apprentice Josip Štolcer became a world-renowned composer Josip Slavenski[1]

This story begins with Josip Štolcer, later Slavenski (1896–1955)—a curious boy from Čakovec, Međimurje (now part of northern Croatia, but then within the Austro-Hungarian Empire). It was here, he started to discover the vast world around him. His father, Josip Štolcer senior, a skilled baker and amateur musician—specifically a zither player—stimulated his son's interest in music. He introduced young Josip to Beethoven's piano sonatas, through which he learned the basics of musical literacy, harmony, and form. His mother, Julija Novak, was often described as a living archive of Međimurje folksongs; many of which she passed down to her children—Josip and his four sisters. Listening to the church organ and bells, Josip became interested in sound as an acoustic phenomenon.

Upon graduating in 1910, Slavenski moved to the nearby town of Varaždin, where he worked in a bakery and prepared for an exam to become a skilled baker. While in Varaždin, two men noticed him and gave him his first serious music lessons. One of them was Ante Stöhr, a local music teacher, who taught Josip music theory; the other was Dragutin Simon, a local judge and skilled pianist, who gave him piano lessons. Simon also played numerous

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I would like to thank Ivana Medić PhD, for proofreading this article, and help with the translation of Josip Slavenski's notes.

canonical piano pieces for Slavenski, enriching his listening experience. Upon passing the exam for a skilled baker in 1913, his teachers sought to help him enrol in prestigious schools. The first was the Hrvatski Glazbeni Zavod (today the Croatian Music Institute) in Zagreb, where he was not accepted, and he could not obtain a scholarship because he was not born in Varaždin. The second school, which did accept him, was the Music Academy in Budapest, where he studied with Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) and Victor von Herzfeld (1856–1919), and where he met Béla Bartók (1881–1945). Although Bartók was not his teacher, Slavenski collaborated with him on folksong transcription, a skill he mastered there.

Slavenski's studies in Budapest came to an abrupt end in 1916 when he was recruited into the Austro-Hungarian army. He served as an infirmary in an eye hospital in Ploiești, Romania where gained extensive knowledge about eye diseases and optical instruments. Being interested in astronomy, his knowledge of optical instruments later led him to construct his own telescope. By the end of 1918, he had a significant number of finished pieces, including the piano suite *From the Balkans* (1917), Nocturno for orchestra (1916/1920), *Fugue in the Form of the Symphonic Poem* (1917).

After World War I ended, Slavenski returned to his hometown, Čakovec, where he worked in the family's bakery. He was given the opportunity to finish his studies in Budapest but declined (Slavenski M., 2006: 50). In late 1920, Slavenski obtained a scholarship for studies at the Prague State Conservatory, where he graduated in 1923 from the class of Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949) with one of his most famous works, String Quartet No. 1. This piece was performed within the festival of La Société internationale pour la musique contemporaine (SIMC / ISCM) in 1924, then held in Donaueschingen. Slavenski's success at the festival resulted in a contract with the Schott publishing house, signed in 1926. While studying in Prague, he began signing his name as Josip Štolcer-Slavenski. He added the name "Slavenski", meaning "The Slavic One" or "Of the Slavs" because he did not want to be mistaken for a German—although his family, the Štolcers, were of Slovenian origin (cf. Slavenski M. 2006: 57).

Upon returning from Prague, Slavenski briefly worked in Zagreb before permanently settling in Belgrade in 1924, where he lived until his death in 1955, aside from a short stay in Paris, where he moved after obtaining a scholarship during the school year 1925/1926. He studied at Schola Cantorum in the class of Vincent d'Indy (1851–1931).[2] In Belgrade, Slavenski worked as a music theory teacher at the Music School (now Mokranjac Music School) and as a music teacher in the Second Men's Gymnasium. In 1932, he adopted the alias Slavenski as his official surname. After the Music Academy in Belgrade opened in 1937, he joined as a music theory teacher in the Secondary Music School attached to the Academy. Following World War II, in 1945, he became a composition teacher at the Academy. In Belgrade, Slavenski wrote some of his most significant pieces: a suite for orchestra *Balkanophonia* (1927), Violin Concerto (1927), String Quartet No. 2 (1928), String Trio (1930), *Chaos* for full orchestra (1932), *Symphony of the Orient* (1934), *Music for Orchestra* (1936), String Quartet No. 3 (1930/36/38), *Music in the Natural-Tone System* (1937), *Music for Chamber Orchestra* (1938), suite for orchestra *Balkan Dances* (1938/40), *My Mother's Songs* for alto and string quartet (1940), *Symphonic Epic* (1945), *Octet 1950* (1950), *Rusyn Folk Dances*, a suite for chamber ensemble (1954).

Despite becoming a world-renowned composer after his success in Donaueschingen, and particularly after *Balkanofonia* was performed all over the world, Slavenski occupied a somewhat isolated position in Yugoslavia. As Eva Sedak stated, Slavenski's works "... followed and announced the laws which were not understood by the majority of his spiritual '*milieu*'" (Sedak 1984: 16). Slavenski's main supporter was his wife, Milana Slavenski (neé Ilić, 1899–1980), a Kruševac-born intellectual, with a diploma in English language and literature from Columbia University, New York (USA), and a specialization in the same field from the University of Cambridge (UK).

The development of Serbian art music in the first half of the twentieth century, considering all the sociopolitical changes, was rather slow, and dominated by national romanticism. Following centuries of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, the autonomous Principality of Serbia gained full independence in 1878 and was subsequently proclaimed a kingdom in 1882. After the two Balkan wars (1912 and 1913), the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia was significantly enlarged. At the very beginning of World War I, the Niš Declaration was signed in 1914, equating Serbia's liberation with the "liberation of Croatian and Slovenian brothers," and the creation of Yugoslavia. After the war, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established in 1918 and in 1929 it was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, up until its occupation by the Third Reich in 1941. In that same year, alongside the occupied zones, the Independent State of Croatia (a Nazi puppet state) was formed. In 1943, Federal Democratic Yugoslavia was proclaimed, with its first assembly convening on March 7, 1945. The last major sociopolitical change of that period was the formation of Federal Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia on November 29, 1945. The turbulent history of the first half of the twentieth century left its mark on culture, arts, and music. The nineteenth century was characterized by emancipation tendencies, mainly through the works of Josif Šlezinger (1794–1870) and Kornelije Stanković (1831–1865). Later, the number of schooled musicians augmented, culminating in the late

romantic works of Josif Marinković (1851–1931) and, most importantly, Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac (1856–1914). The interwar period was dominated by Mokranjac's students, whose musical language was late romantic: Petar Konjović (1883–1970), Miloje Milojević (1884–1946), and Stevan Hristić (1885–1958), however, to some extent they accepted certain impressionist and/or expressionist features. Slavenski became a part of Belgrade's musical life, as mentioned, in 1924. In the words of Ivana Medić, "[a]s an artist, Slavenski was developing at a much faster pace than the culture in which he lived and worked; he had no predecessors in Yugoslav music, and very few of his students can be regarded as his successors" (Medić I. 2021: 47). The reception of Slavenski's works could have been different, but "[w]hile [post-World War II] Yugoslavia did not belong to the Eastern bloc, it was still a peripheral communist country, thus its artists inevitably suffered from ideological prejudices during the decades of Cold War." (Ibid.: 52). The same could be said for the first half of the century, although the ideological circumstances were different. Among Slavenski's students, members of the so-called "Prague group" (namely Milan Ristić [1908–1982], and Ljubica Marić [1909–2003]) embraced the avant-garde tendencies of the interwar period (atonal music, quarter- and sixth-tone music, etc.) alongside more conservative composers like Stanojlo Rajičić (1910–2000), who were also negatively received upon returning to Belgrade after their studies in Prague in the 1930s. The development of Serbian music was interrupted by World War II, and the post-war years were dominated by socialist realism. In the 1950s, many of Slavenski's students consolidated their positions within the establishment. A similar trajectory can be observed in Slavenski's own career, particularly when considering the aforementioned works composed in the period 1945–1955.

Slavenski's supporters included composer and music critic Petar Bingulac (1897–1990), as well as Pavle Stefanović (1901–1985), music, literary, and theatre critic, very fond of Slavenski's works. After Slavenski's death, the main promoter of Slavenski's works was Milana Slavenski, alongside Bingulac and Stefanović and many other important Belgrade-based musicians.

### *Misterij*—the concept

Josip Slavenski conceived the concept of *Misterij (Mystery)* as early as 1918–1919, as a "simfonička opera" (symphonic opera) in two acts (cf. Sedak 1984: 237–238, fn. 21).[3] The first act was dedicated to the cosmological aspect of the world—the creation of the universe, stars and galaxies, solar system (planets and their satellites); the second part was dedicated to the development of life on Earth, up to the evolution of man, ending with, as he called it, the "spiritual evolution" of the human species, which starts with the first prehistoric communities and finds its peak in the communist, classless society (cf. ibid). As musicologist Eva Sedak states, Slavenski's concept of *Misterij* was developed into a macrocycle consisting of four large pieces: *Religiophonia*, *Pra-symphony* (Prehistoric Symphony, apparently lost), *Cosmogony* and *Chaos* (ibid: 237). Most of this cycle remained unfinished, except the seven-minute piece *Chaos* for full orchestra (1932), as an introduction to *Heliophonia*, and *Religiophonia*, later dubbed *Symphony of the Orient* (1934). Nevertheless, in this article, I will examine Slavenski's sketches for the cycle *Misterij* and present all the pieces that were written according to the sketches and likely imagined as parts of *Misterij*. However, aside from *Chaos* and *Symphony of the Orient*, musicologists have hitherto not considered them as parts of *Misterij*.[4] These works are *Music 36* for orchestra (1936), *Muzika u prirodnom tonskom sistemu* (*Music in the Natural-Tone System*, 1937), *Music 38*, also titled *Music for Chamber Orchestra* (1938), as well as Slavenski's choral miniature based on a folksong from Međimurje, *Voda zvira* (*Water Springs*, 1916).

* * *

The connections between music (music theory) and astronomy are not new. Beginning with Pythagoras, the relationship between music theory, acoustics, mathematics, and astronomy was understood through numerical principles. Further on, the concept of the *harmony of the spheres* emerged, persisting through the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. In the sixteenth century, Johannes Kepler, who discovered the laws of planetary motion, searched for the "harmony of the world," proposing that the planets and their distances conformed to musical intervals. In more recent times, Alexander Scriabin tried to connect these disciplines, but from a more philosophical perspective (cf. Peričić 1984: 5–6).

At first glance, Slavenski's *Misterij* might seem connected to Scriabin's *Mysterium*; yet, despite their similar names, the two concepts have little in common. Scriabin's *Mysterium* is based on theosophy, Russian Silver Age literature and religious mysticism. Slavenski's concept, although intuitively conceived, was inspired by the scientific progress during the first half of the twentieth century, which Slavenski himself tied with sound. The cycle *Misterij* was first imagined as a "symphonic opera" in two acts. Its plot was supposed to cover all the major events, starting from the beginning of the universe, the formation of the stars, the solar system, the formation of the Earth, the beginning of life on Earth, animals and plants, the human species, and ending in human spiritual growth. Slavenski wanted to establish a new scientific discipline that he named *astroacoustics* (or *astro-acoustics*), which was to be his own representation of natural phenomena and their connection with sound. After

consulting quantum physicist Nataša Vukašinović, a research assistant at the Institute for Nuclear Sciences Vinča, it is evident that Slavenski's conception of astroacoustics is not scientifically grounded. This conclusion was reached based on Slavenski's scarce notes and the insufficient scientific data they contain. Consequently, the reconstruction of these notes, as presented in this article, remains at the level of researching Slavenski's autopoietic discourse.[5]

In his notes, Slavenski defined astroacoustics as follows:

> Astroacoustic (Acoustics – Cosmogony). Astronomy is the most magnificent science, and music is the most magnificent art! Music is the sound manifestation of cosmic trembling in the same way the solar specter is an optical, and electricity physical manifestation. Everything is music! Life of living organisms, atoms, stars, and the universe is an eternal waveform movement between extremely small microcosmos and extremely large macrocosmos, that is of quadrillion ($10^{24}$) oscillations per second to quadrillion ($10^{24}$) seconds of age (solid matter). Expressed in music. (Slavenski, undated notes: s. p.)

Within Josip Slavenski's manuscript legacy, there is one notebook containing sketches for *Misterij*. The undated manuscript, possibly created during the 1930s, contains one of the conceptions of *Misterij*, alongside two proposed by Eva Sedak. In this manuscript, the cycle is titled *Козмофонија* / *Kozmophonia* with two large parts, *Хелиофонија* (*Heliophony*—Poem of the Sun) and *Виталофонија* (*Vitalophonia*—Poem of the Vitality).

On the back of the title page, Slavenski noted:

> In the endless cosmos, the eternal rhythm radiates, lives, creates and changes with its power the celestial bodies, whose rhythm in turn influences and creates the elements, micron [?] plants and animals. In this way, our solar system also experienced stronger and smaller waves of those rhythmic shocks and then one [illegible word] planet disintegrated into smaller asteroids. The repercussion of that blow destroyed Atlantis on our Earth, or humanity, and that's how the destruction of the world started. Our spirit alone survived that catastrophe, it rejoices in the life of the endless universe, it admires [illegible word], and the solar systems, full of elemental life, [illegible word] plants and animals with man together, whether he can feel, hear, see and understands the eternal dance of rhythm and harmony of the universe. (Slavenski, A sketch for *Cosmogonia* [*Misterij*] s. a.: s. p.)

The next page contains a somewhat more elaborate title: "Heliophonia, that is: The influence of the Sun on organic and non-organic life and their reaction (I. Heliophonia; II. Vitalophonia)", ending with a brief description: "A vision which tortured me since childhood, [and] fixed me to the scene, and orchestra (so the others have an idea about it)", (ibid.).

The synopsis of *Heliophonia*, here with the subtitle "The Universe," consists of fourteen parts:

1) Chaos
2) Awakening of Chaos
3) Consciousness of Chaos
4) Incarnation of Chaos (Protuberances)
5) Fight of Chaos
6) Victory of Chaos (Solar System)
7) Our Sun
8) Birth of Planets
9) Our Earth (Swinging and Dancing of the Planets)
10) Water Springs
11) Plants Are Growing
12) Animals Come to Life
13) Human Is Transforming
14) Ecstasy of Life – Apotheosis of Life (Brotherhood of Humans and Animals) (ibid.).

The *Heliophonia*, the first part of *Cosmogony* (that is, *Misterij*), should have covered the important events starting with the beginnings of the universe, to the development of the human species. The second part, *Vitalophonia*, with the subtitle "The Joy of Life," deals with human history in 7 parts:

1) Cult of the Universe—stars, sun (birth of the sun), moon, meteors
2) Cult of the Search for the Prehistoric Force and Spirit
   a) in fetishes
   b) in animals—the Egyptians (searching for the Spirit in Animals)
   c) in humans—the Greeks
   d) in gods—Buddhists, Christians, Islam
3) In Life
4) Man's Fury (the machines destroy the world)
5) Death of Life
6) Chaos
7) Reincarnation (ibid.).

Although one might draw a parallel to Scriabin's *Mysterium*, with the death of humanity through the exploitation of technology and machines, ending with a reincarnation process, in Slavenski's notes, there is no elaboration on this ending of the cycle. If *Religiophonia*, or *Symphony of the Orient*, represents the end of the cycle, an unanswered question arises: did Slavenski decide to remove the parts on the destruction of the world, the rebirth of Chaos, and final reincarnation? Instead, did he choose to end the cycle by finding the "Prehistoric Force and Spirit" in "Life," a theme found in the last movement of *Symphony of the Orient?*

On the following pages, Slavenski attempted to create a brief synopsis for each part of the cycle, but his set of notes remains unfinished. Descriptions are as follows:

1) Chaos

The very deep tones gradually come to life with completely incomprehensible movements and move away from the reality of that chaos, getting louder and louder, like some terrifying rumbling.

9) Our Land

Rocking and dancing of the mountains (hills), the dance of differently colored crystals → (*Water Springs*????)

The mystical buzzing of ethereal tones (and for the Sun) crystals change color and sound.

11) Plants grow (the Sun: green)

Crystals morph into various plants and trees (ibid.)

In another notebook, Slavenski defined the laws of astroacoustics regarding the chemical elements and their composition:

> Josip Slavenski: Astroacoustics
> notes
> 1) Positive numbers in mathematics go from zero (0) to the right +1 +2 +3 +4 +5... etc., hence the same as the upper harmonic tones (sous-partiels = Aliquot—tones)
> 2) Negative numbers go to the left of zero ...-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 etc., hence the same as the lower harmonics (sub-aliquots)
> 3) a hand-drawn demonstration with one tone (see Figure 1)
> 4) likewise, a hand-drawn demonstration of Hydrogen and its isotopes (see Figure 2)
> 5) Neutron (n) is a tone without harmonics (see Figure 3)
> 6) A simple nucleus of Hydrogen's (Hydrogenium) atom is an octave circling the prime tone, signifying lower and upper harmonics (see Figure 4)
> 7) Denton. The chemical nucleus of heavy Hydrogen (Denton) double octave circling + 2 aliquots (see Figure 5)
> 8) Tritium. The third (short-lived) unstable isotope of hydrogen, which is already transiting to Helium 3, i.e., the initial isotope appears from the first neutron (see Figure 6)
> 9) Helium as the initial isotope ($He^3$) strengthens the interval of the twelfth (+3 aliquots) (see Figure 7)
> 10) Helium as a stable element ($He^4$) with a secured double proton 3+4 aliquots (see Figure 8)
> 11) The final hitherto known isotope of helium ($He^5$) discretely appears next to +3 +4 + 5 (see Figure 9)
> 12) If Hydrogen isotopes have a similar function as the octave registers in the organ, ie. strengthening the fundamental tone of the first row with octaves, similar to the organ, the basic register of 8' (Principal 8') (H) is strengthened to the octave 4' (D), i.e., $H_2$ (Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics s. a.: s. p.)

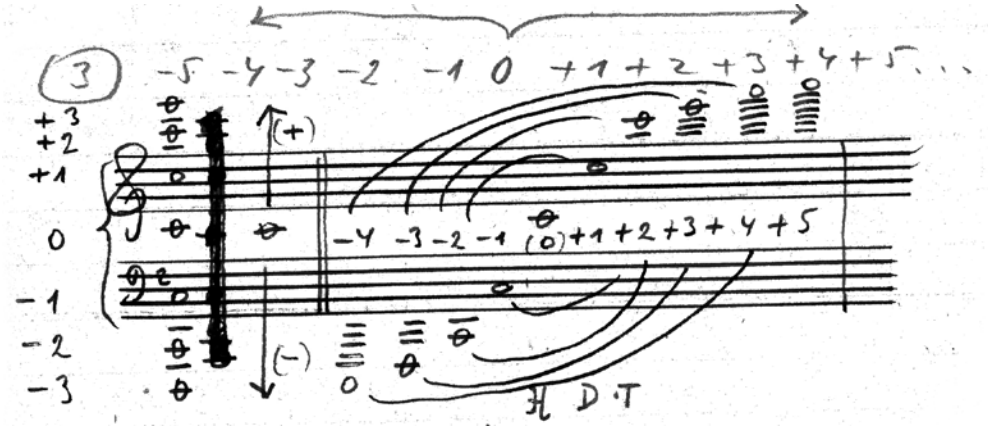


**Figure 1.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.[6]

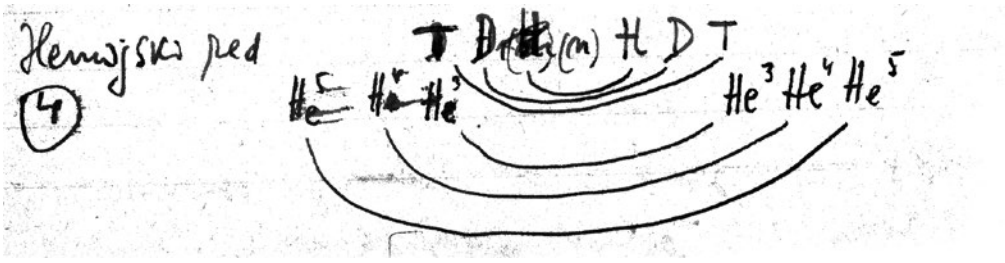


**Figure 2.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

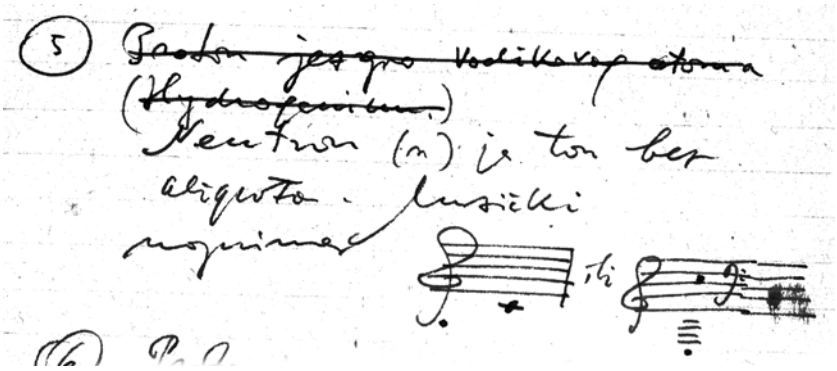

**Figure 3.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

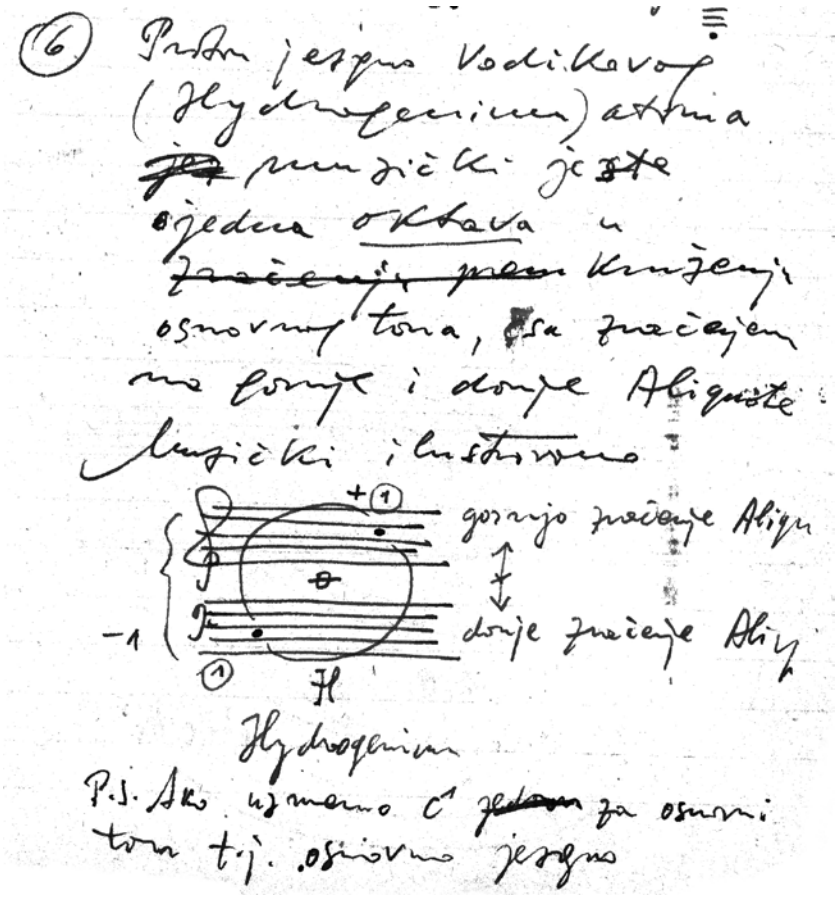

**Figure 4.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

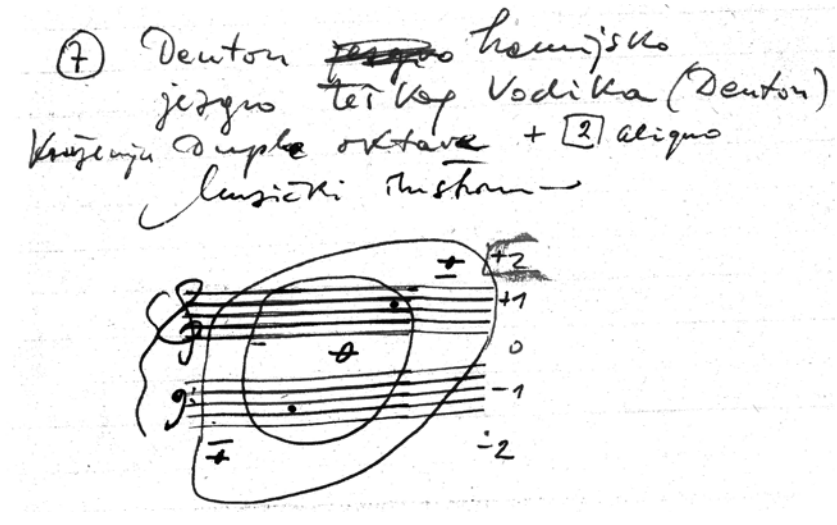

**Figure 5.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

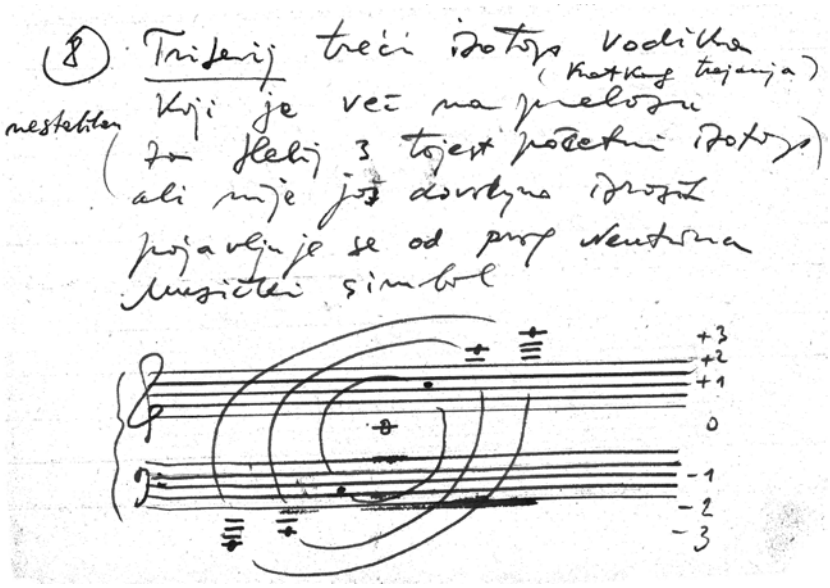


**Figure 6.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

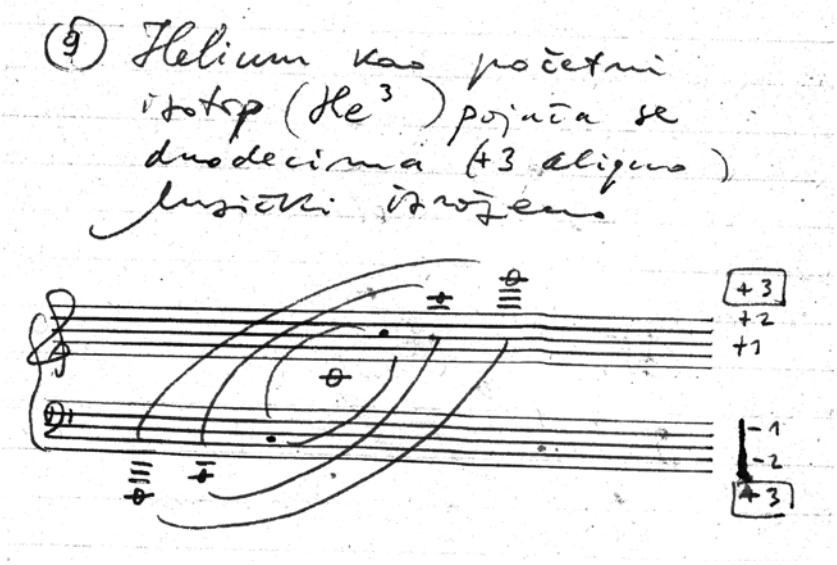


**Figure 7.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

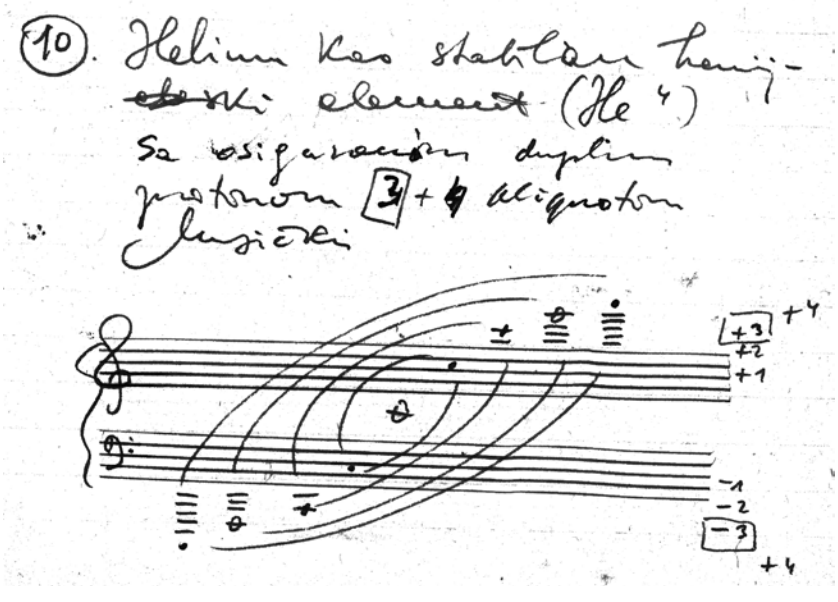


**Figure 8.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

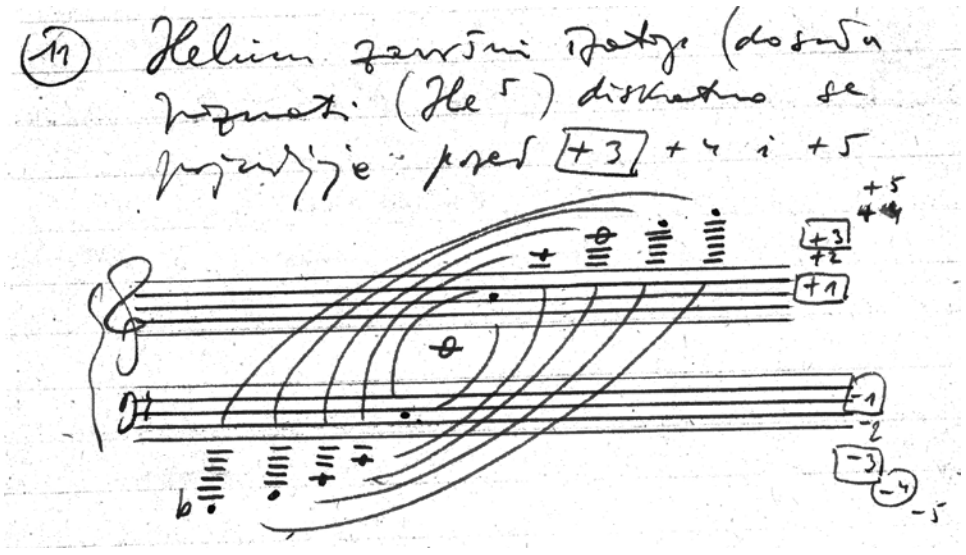

**Figure 9.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Astroacoustics, s. a.: s. p.

In other words, the atomic number of the element—that is, the number of electrons and protons it contains—is defined as the number of harmonics derived from the foundation tone. Thus, the chemical compound of celestial bodies, planets, satellites, asteroids, etc., can serve as a foundation for the sound, i.e., the vibrations that they produce. In this way, Slavenski developed a method for "translating" natural phenomena into music.[7] Furthermore, in his notes, using the same method, Slavenski tried to transcribe into music the sounds of earthquakes, explosions, and the explosion of an atomic bomb, as well as situated planets, radio waves, Röntgen rays, and cosmic rays, which he charted according to octave frequencies. The musical manifestation of these calculations will be presented in the following chapter.

### *Misterij*—completed parts

The sketches of *Cosmogony* presented earlier also contain the instrument list for *Heliophonia* (and presumably the whole *Cosmogony* / *Misterij*). These instruments are:

Mixed. choir (+speaking choir)
Completely free intonation chosen by experienced individual soloists
4 Traůtoniums ($C_4$ – $c^{10}$)
1 Hellertion
1 Electric Piano
Percussion: G. cassa, 3 Tymp. Kl. Tr. (+ cinella), kudum
1 Picc. 1 Fl, 1 Ob, 1 Eng. h. 1 Klar. 1 Bas kl. 1 Fg (1 c fagott)
4 corna, 3 tromp 3 Pos. (C. b. Tuba B)
Harfa, Celesta, Hylophone
Strings
Speaking [?] children's scene! (cf. Slavenski, Sketches on *Cosmogony* [*Misterij*] s. a.: s. p. See Figure 10).[8]

This instrument list also corresponds to the pieces mentioned in the previous chapter and connects them to the concept of *Misterij*. I will now examine them chronologically.

The earliest piece is a choral miniature of 23 measures, titled *Voda zvira (Water Springs)*, based on a folksong from Međimurje, composed in 1916.[9] The lyrics, although of folklore origin, contain a strong symbolistic value: two strong forces, water springing from a rock and a rose growing from

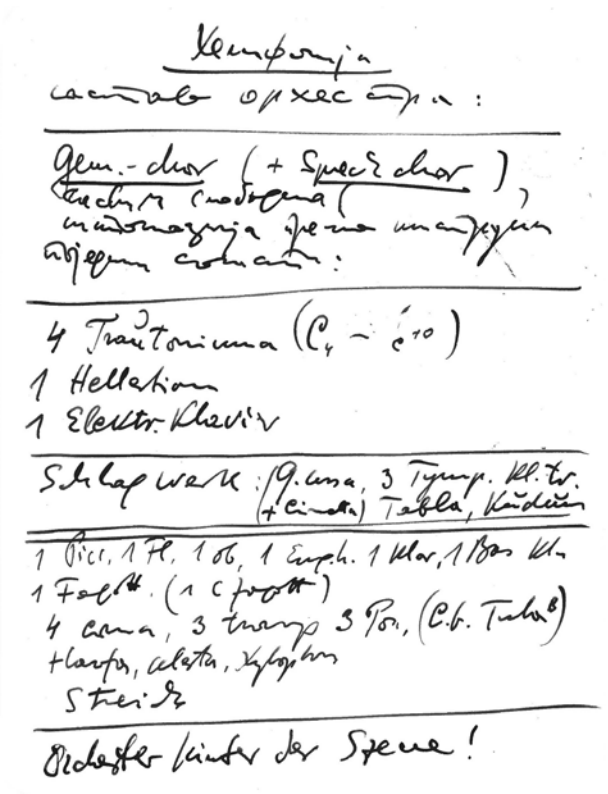

**Figure 10.** Josip Slavenski, Notes on Sketches on *Cosmogony*, s. a.: s. p.

its root fall deeply in love. The folk melody of the song is based on a pentatonic scale, centered around the tonic of C# minor.[10] The choral texture is based on the imitation of folksong in soprano and bass parts. Combined with inner, accompanying voices, the texture is seemingly homophonic, yet the ever-present textual polyphony reveals skilful voice leading. The harmony Slavenski composed for this song is primarily based on chromatic, descending fifth, seventh and ninth chords, with chords a third apart.

As Bingulac states, Slavenski called this song "My posthumous song," and wanted to compose a choral piece based on it (Bingulac 1966: 550). Next to the very intricate chromatic harmony, one of the most striking features of this choral miniature is its sound. The Međimurje folksong is in the bass part, sung *fortissimo* and *rubato*, in a high register, and the metric accents and time signature are adjusted to the textual accents. The first verse, *Voda zvira iz kamena, lepa, plavena (Water springs from a rock, beautiful, blue)* is sung both in bass and soprano parts, in imitation, while the second verse, *Raste ruža iz korena, lepa rumena (A rose grows from its root, beautiful, red)* is sung only in the bass part. The rest of the song's verses, based on the same pentatonic melody, are sung by the sopranos, with the accompaniment of the other voices, while from time to time, the bass line provides a counterpoint to the soprano part (see Figure 11). The element of tone painting in this song likely has its origins in echoing Međimurje folksongs from Slavenski's hometown Čakovec. Or, if not Čakovec, then, as Milana Slavenski wrote in his biography,

> [s]ummers in Zlatar [Croatia], his father's old hometown were the joys of his childhood. [...] There in Zlatar, under upper Ivančica, the boy Pepo [Josip Slavenski's nickname] spent his barefoot summers, abundant with unpredictable events and excitements. It was there, in the meadows, that he took care of turkeys, and, stepping on pebbles, or from a stone to a stone, following a little fish, he jumped over water, "cold, blue" (*Water Springs*) (Slavenski M. 2006: 19).

The choral piece *Voda zvira* was one of the first musical embodiments of the great forces of nature and the Earth that Slavenski felt in his childhood and considered worthy of his mighty *Misterij*.

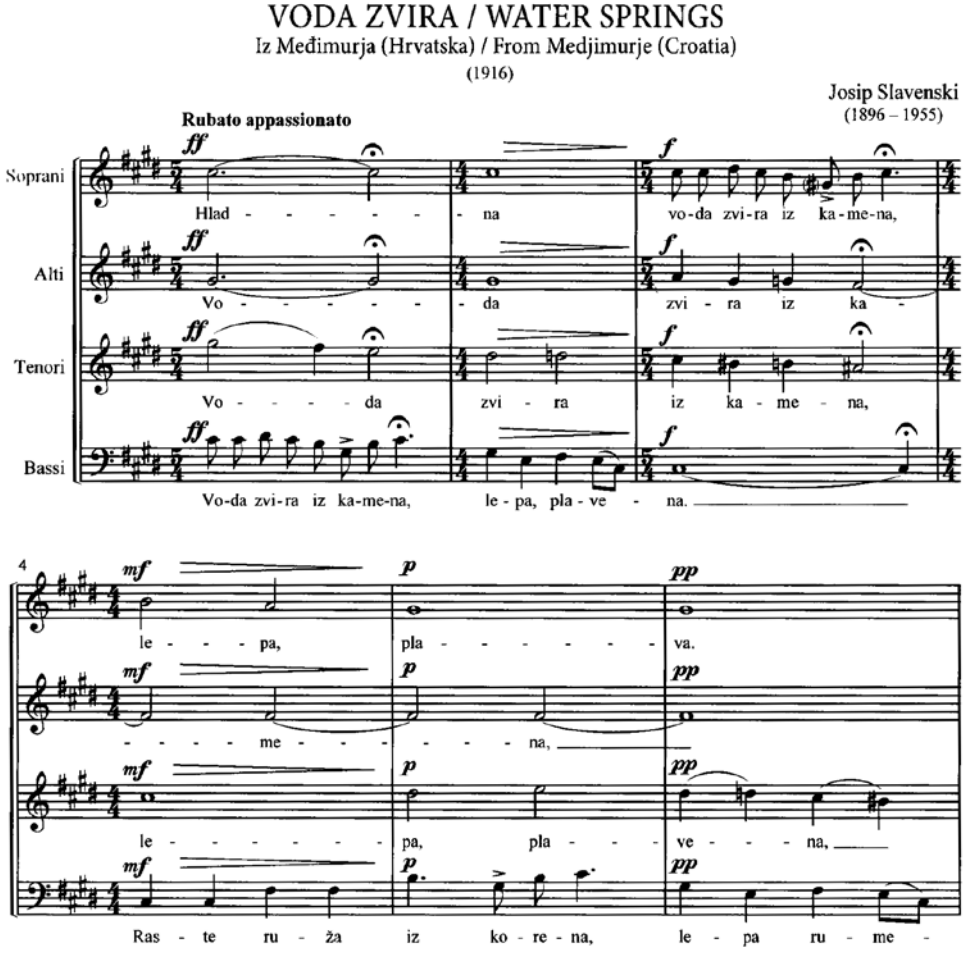


**Figure 11.** Josip Slavenski, *Voda zvira* [*Water Springs*], Rubato appassionato, mm. 1–6.

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The next work is *Chaos* for full orchestra—the only piece directly connected to *Misterij*.[11] The piece was imagined as the introduction to *Heliophonia*. As one of the most intricate Slavenski's compositions, *Chaos* is based on different musical materials. Similarly to *Voda zvira*, this is a monolithic orchestral piece, based on an accumulation of orchestral layers. The base of this piece is a pedal tone $C_0$, held from the beginning to the end of the piece. In his astroacoustic research and concept, Slavenski calculated the frequency of 1Hz as the frequency of the Sun. Slavenski turned towards chemistry, relating the atomic number of an element to the number of harmonics in the aliquot row. If the Sun is mostly composed of Hydrogen with atomic number 1, that would correspond to the frequency of 1Hz.[12] The frequency of 1Hz or, in music notation $C_{-4}$. Since this frequency is not audible to the human ear, Slavenski transposed it to approximately 16Hz, or the deepest tone of the organ, subcontra C ($C_0$). The second layer is the kettle-drum part, consisting rhythmically of triplets and quavers, and melodically of the infra-pentatonic set E-flat, B-flat and C. This tone row refers to a folksong of Međimurje titled *Tu za repu, tu za len* [*Grab the beet, grab the flax*].[13] The third layer of *Chaos* is a twelve-tone row (C-D-F-E-F#-Eb-Cb-Ab-Db-Bb-A-G) played in the organ part five times, each time transposed a fifth up and dissolving into a twelve-tone cluster.[14] The fourth layer is formed in the strings, and it consists of the twelve-tone row played in triplet figuration, where the first note in the series serves as a rhythmic pedal. The final, fifth layer of *Chaos* is a modal Dorian theme in the woodwinds polyphonically developed with a modal countersubject, first presented in the right-hand organ part (see Figure 12).

Throughout the piece, the five layers are interchanged between the orchestral groups. Finally, the segmented twelve-tone row appears in sextuplets, in the woodwinds and horn parts, and simultaneously in various transpositions. Slavenski marked this layer as "protuberances, on the surface of the Sun" (Sedak 1984: 212). The piece ends with a twelve-tone cluster.

*Symphony of the Orient* was completed in 1934. It consists of seven movements: "Pagans," "Jews," "Buddhists," "Christians," "Moslems," "Music," and "Song of Labor". Regarding the synopsis of *Misterij*, *Symphony of the Orient* would correspond to the second part, "Vitalophonia—Joy of life," section 2, "Cult for the search for Prehistoric Force and Spirit". Looking at the two last movements, "Music", and "Song of Labour," they do not have direct analogies to the synopsis of *Misterij*. It is, in fact, possible to assume that Slavenski dropped the idea of the destruction of the world and offered the idea of music as his own religion, and labour as a final triumph of humanity. In the score of *Symphony of the Orient*, on the title page of the movement "Music," Slavenski noted that "music is above all religions" (Slavenski M. 2006: 125). Regarding the last movement, Milana Slavenski states: "This movement is a glorification of working men's victory. A simple form of a folk round dance in a hearty and cheerful mood of a folk festivity which takes place in the final movement of the symphonic cantata, [...] in this apotheosis of work and comradeship, the composer sings and shouts a victory song of working people tied by friendship" (ibid).

Similarly to *Chaos*,[15] the first movement of *Symphony of the Orient*, "Pagans" is a canon in xylophone and timpani parts, based on the permutation of the same infra-pentatonic set from the song *Tu za repu, tu za len* (a whole step and a minor third: C, D, F, see Figure 13).

Two soloists (a tenor and a bass) and a male choir sing in "non-articulated" pitches, gradually adopting the tone row. Slavenski added a new pitch, tone E, to the row near the end of the movement, which, in terms of tone painting, to some extent simulates the "discovery" of a new element to the simple melodic line in religious ecstasy.

The second movement, "Jews," is based on an octatonic scale centered around the tone E. It consists of three sections (mm. 1–73, 74–131, and 132–141). The first section opens with a harp motif playing the octatonic scale in E, with woodwinds gradually layering and creating a polyphonic, vibrating texture (see Figure 14).

The somewhat isolated harp part contains a 19-measure model, which is identically repeated three times, while the fourth and fifth repetitions are changed to create the first culmination at the end of the section. The second section contains the text of *Kaddish*, a Jewish prayer for the deceased, performed by the solo baritone doubled in unison by the bass clarinet or English horn, followed by the responses in the mixed choir. The model in the part of the harp is fragmented and gradually disappears. The polyphonic layer in woodwinds, absent since the beginning of the second section, returns in the m. 94. The last section is the response of the choir to the prayer (text: "Amen"), in stretto.

The pentatonic melodic material abandoned in the second movement (in favor of the octatonic scale) returns in the third movement, "Buddhists" in four sections (mm. 1–97, 98–147, 147/8–202, 202–248). Although this movement is based on a full pentatonic scale in Db major (Db, Eb, Gb, Ab, Bb), Slavenski underlined the (transposed) pitches corresponding to the *Tu za repu, tu za len* song (Db, Eb, Gb) in the solo viola, and in the later sections the timpani part, and on an ostinato in the celesta part. The first section is based on the gradual layering of the woodwinds, similarly to the previous movement (see Figure 15).

Starting from measure 56, a firmer texture appears: woodwinds create a vibrating ostinato (still with rhythmically independent parts), the xylophone takes over the celesta ostinato, while the strings play a pentatonic subject doubled in the fifths and octaves. Starting from the second section

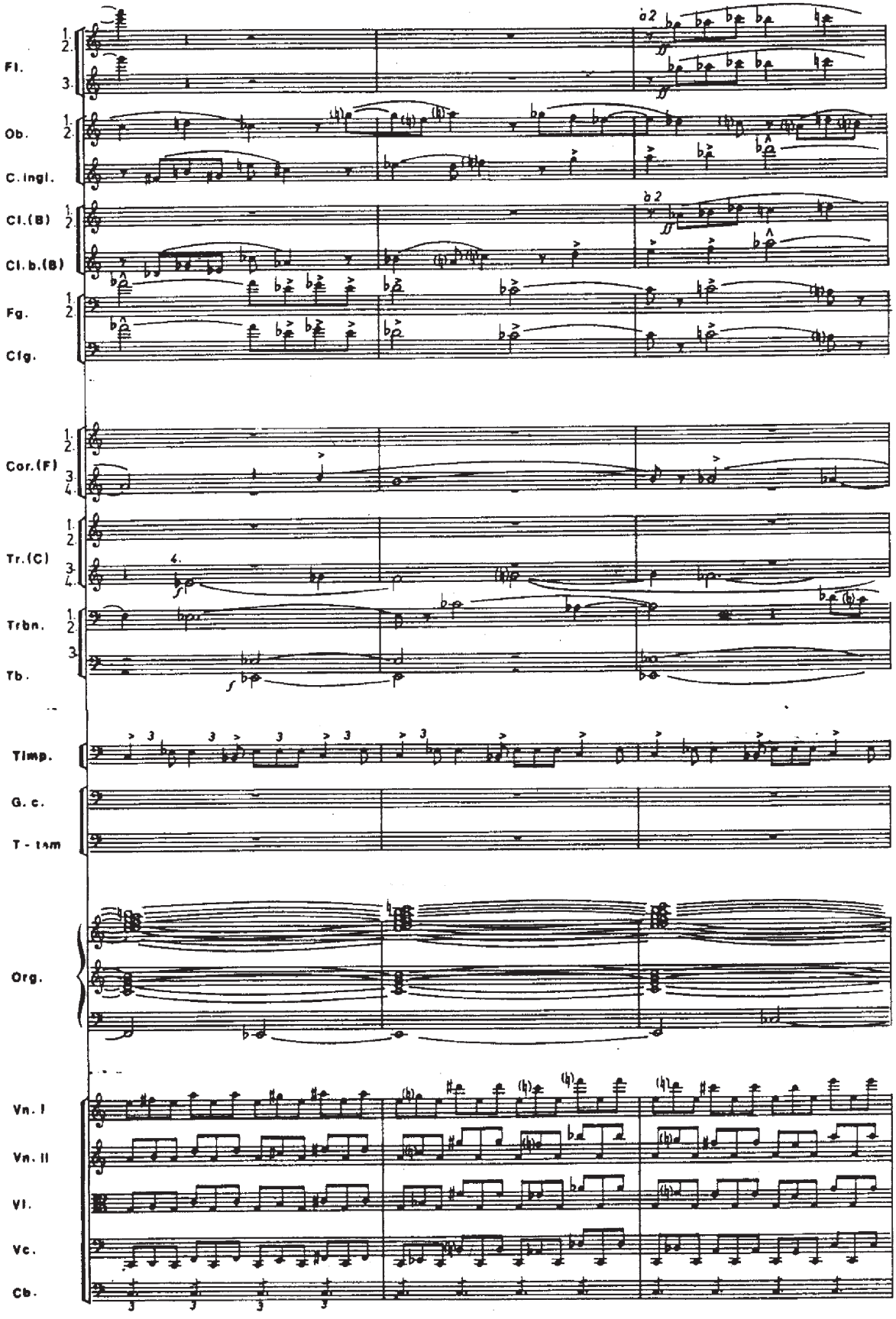


**Figure 12.** Josip Slavenski, *Chaos* for full orchestra, Allegro agitato caotico (poco a poco stringendo), mm. 72–74.

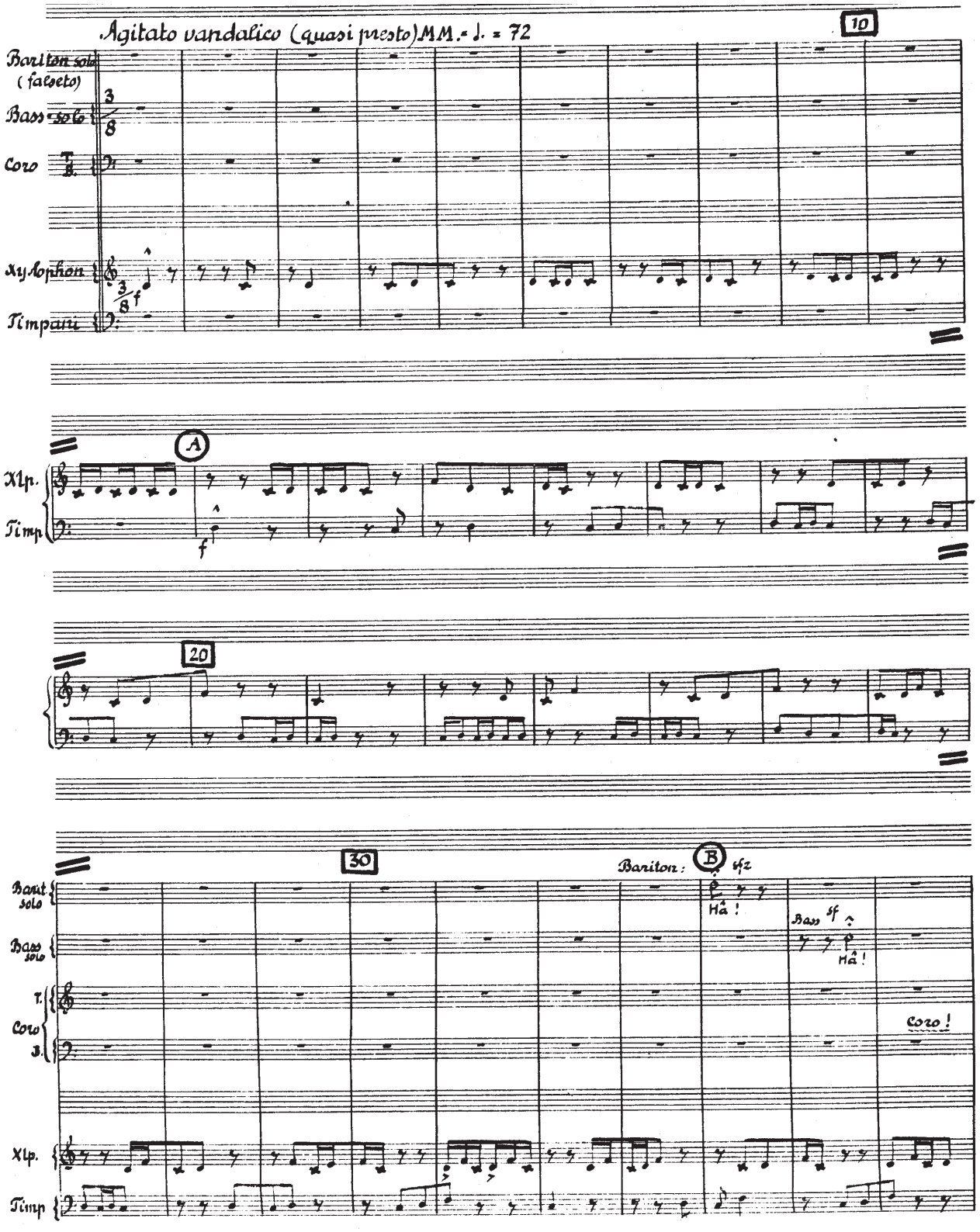


**Figure 13.** Josip Slavenski, *Symphony of the Orient*, "Pagans", Agitato vandalico (quasi presto), dotted crochet = 72, mm. 1–36.

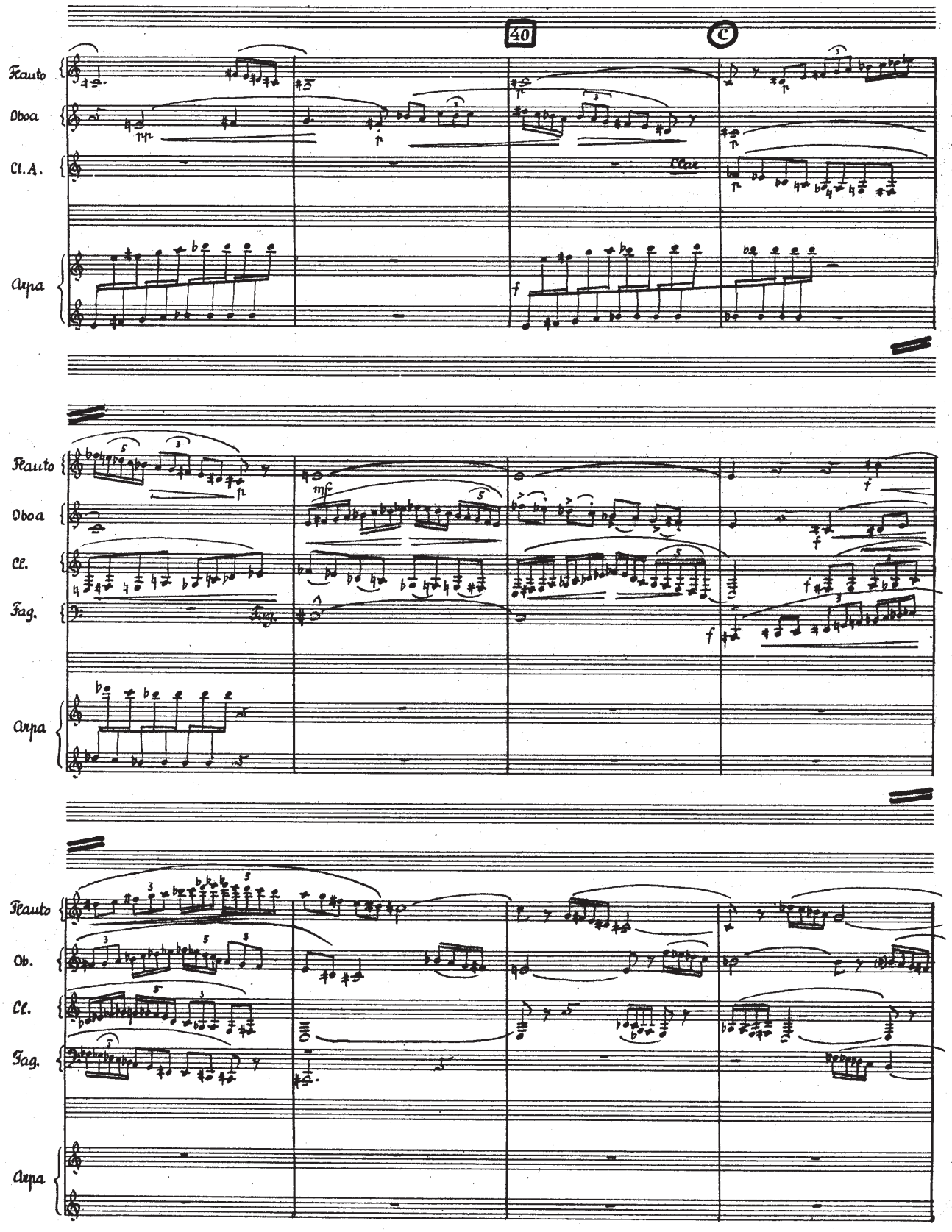


**Figure 14.** Josip Slavenski, *Symphony of the Orient*, "Jews", Andantino, crochet = 80, mm. 38–49.

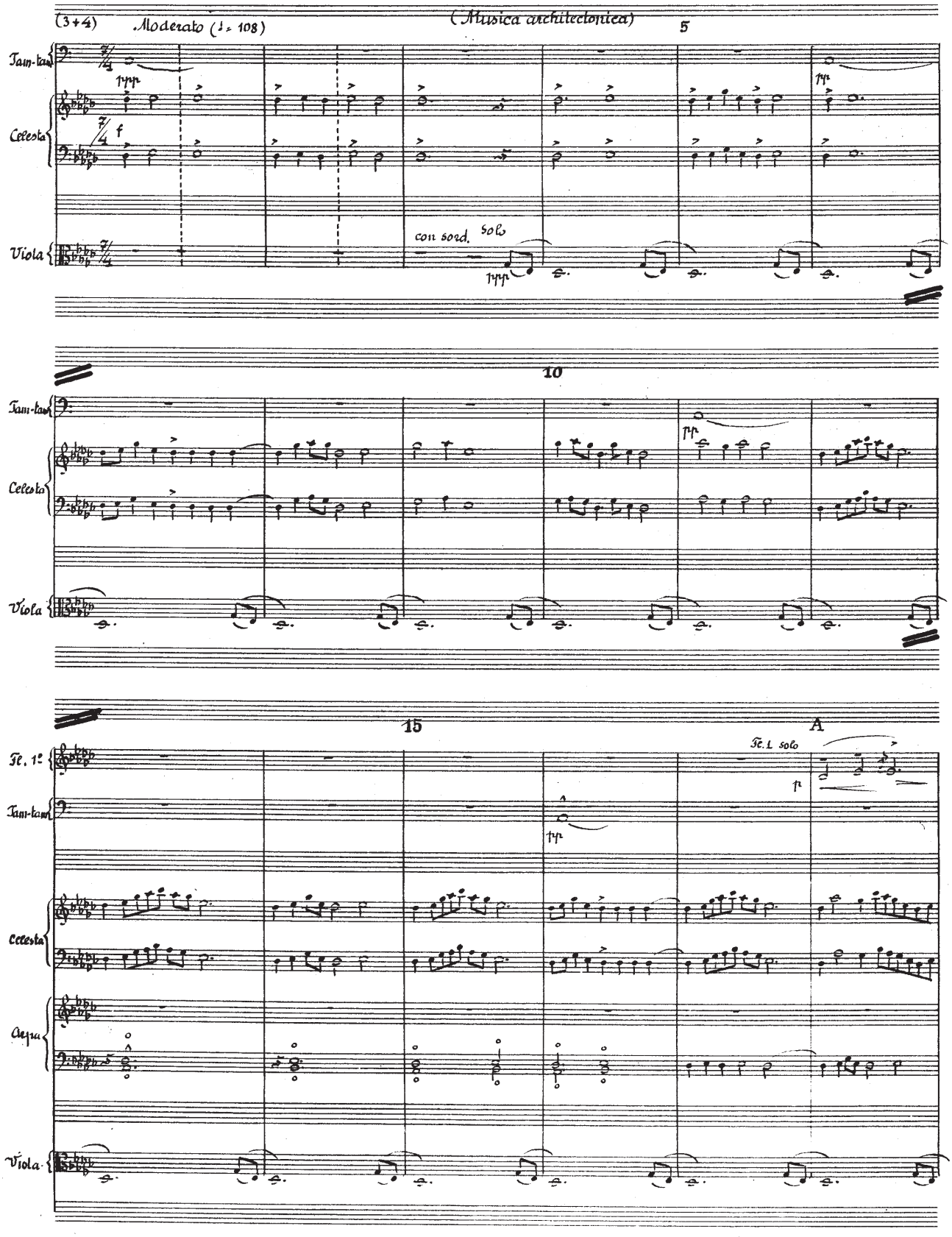


**Figure 15.** Josip Slavenski, *Symphony of the Orient*, "Buddhists", Moderato, crochet = 108.

and the introduction of the vocal parts (solo bass and male, later a mixed choir), the text of a Buddhist mantra appears: *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṁ*. The pentatonic scale (and the key) changes with each section. The solo and choral bass parts sing the mantra on the Bb and C pitches, responding to each other. The choral tenor part is singing the mantra on a full pentatonic scale (C, Eb, F, G, B) gradually expanding and contracting it "horizontally" (C-Eb-C, C-Eb-F-Eb-C, C-Eb-F-G-F-Eb-C...), thus systematically changing the number of repetitions of the mantra. At the end of the section, the solo bass sings the mantra. The third section is marked with the appearance of the female choir and another change of the tone row (C#, E, F#, G#, B). Instead of "horizontal" expanding and contracting, the repetitions of the mantra are controlled with the "vertical" layering and de-layering of parts. Like the previous section, the mantra is sung by the solo alto. The final section brings together all the layers, with the brass section playing pedal chords and the mixed choir singing the mantra in unison (scale: C-D-E-G-A), with an infra-pentatonic layer in the timpani part, based on a *Tu za repu, tu za len* song.

Concerning the form, the movement "Christians" is identical to the previous two. It consists of modal thematic material with pedal chords, while the double bass part is based on the folksong pitch set. Although the movement is based on Dorian mode, in the vocal parts, there is the underlining pentatonic scale. The text of the movement is from the catholic mass (*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*), while the melodic material refers to the Byzantine chant. The three verses of the text separate the movement in three parts (mm. 1–30, 31–50, 51–82), the first two being in Dorian mode in D, while the third is in Dorian mode in B.

Three parts of the movement "Moslems," "Adan," "Taksim," "Ilahi," are based on two interchangeable oriental scales, F-G-Ab-B-C/C#, and D-Eb-F/F#-G. The first part, "Adan," contains a pedal tone G (choral part and strings), with a nasal solo tenor voice singing "Allahu Akbar". The second part, "Taksim" consists of an asymmetric dance rhythm with repetitive patterns in the drum part. Woodwinds and harp parts create a vibrating ostinato layer, similar to the previous movements. The distinctive feature of this part is polymetric, which appears between the layers (see Figure 16). The third part, "Ilahi," is identical to "Taksim" but with a male choir and fuller orchestration.

In terms of the compositional techniques, the movements "Music," and "Song of Labour" are like the previous movements. Instrumental "Music" contains three sections (mm. 1–86, in D, 86–134, in C#, and 134–249, in Eb). All the sections are based on an eight-part canon in Dorian

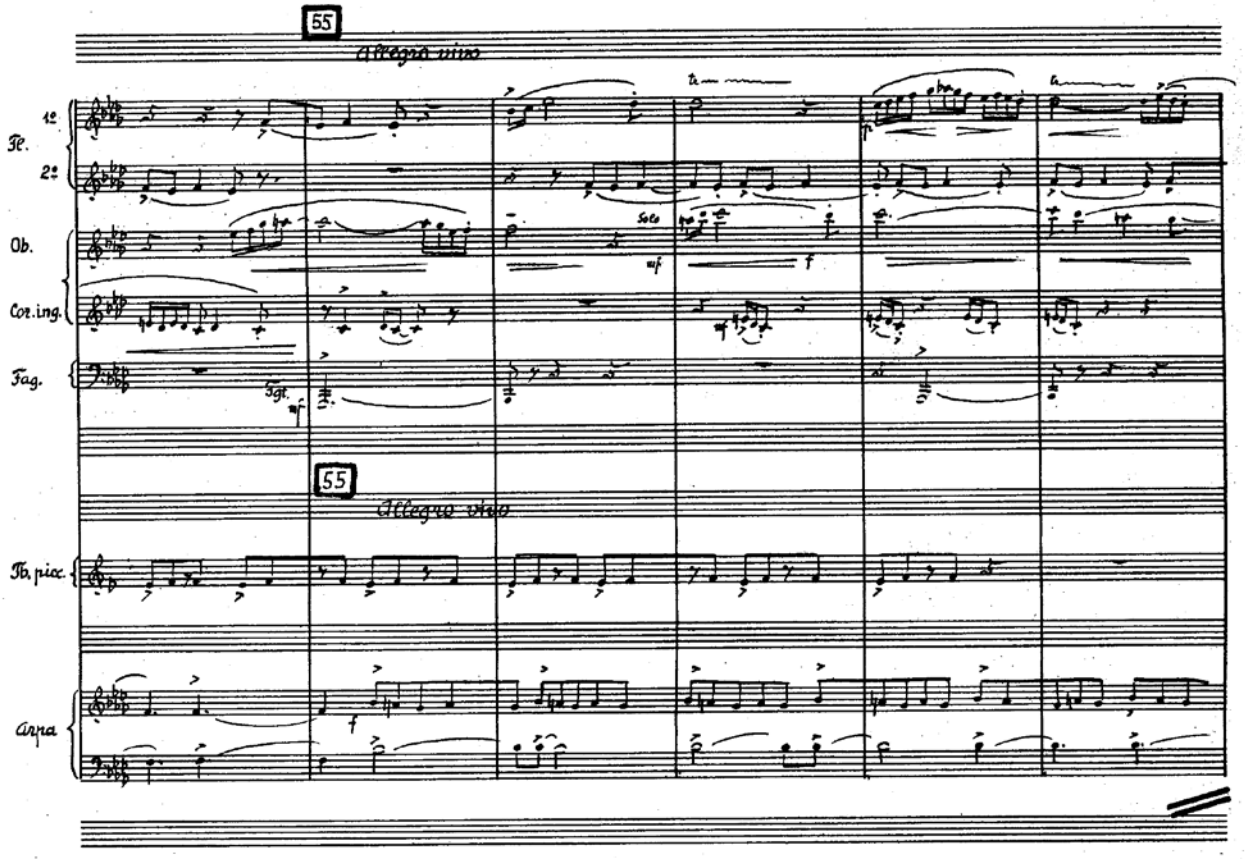


**Figure 16.** Josip Slavenski, *Symphony of the Orient*, "Moslems", a tempo—Allegro vivo, mm. 49–59.

mode, with occasional eleven or twelve-tone clusters, with always present pitch set of *Tu za repu, tu za len* song. Slavenski himself wrote the lyrics of "Song of Labour," the final movement of the symphony.[16] The form of the movement is a song with verses and refrain, with a middle, polyphonic part, and a triumphant coda (verses are in A major, refrain in B minor, the polyphonic middle part modulates, and the song ends in C major). Interestingly, the folksong motif is expanded from a fourth to a fifth (for example, A-B-E in B minor) to conform to the classically tonal musical language.

*Symphony of the Orient* ends with the everlasting energy of life and its triumph. The three pieces we are going to discuss in the next part of the text, written after *Symphony of the Orient*, correspond to the previous segments of *Misterij*. This leaves us to the assumption that this great ode of life is the end of the cycle. Perhaps the parts Slavenski reserved for the great catastrophe, man's fury and destruction of the world, return of Chaos and a great reincarnation were still to take place in his (and our?) future.

***

The following three pieces were created in three consecutive years—1936, 1937, and 1938—and were not considered possible parts of the cycle *Misterij*, although they could, alongside *Voda zvira*, find their place in the cycle. This idea derived from the fact that the instrument list for *Misterij* contains electroacoustic instruments, more precisely, four trautoniums, corresponding to the instrument list for *Music in the Natural-Tone System*. Regarding the two other pieces, which chronologically surround it, they share many thematic resemblances with *Music in the Natural-Tone System*, as well as with *Chaos*, and *Symphony of the Orient*.

Starting from the earliest of the three, *Music 36*, also named *Music for Orchestra*, the relationships between the three works mentioned in the synopsis of *Misterij* are explored. The subtitle of the piece, *Music of Harmony and Disharmony* refers to two parts: *Andante pastorale* and *Allegro vandalico*.[17] The parts, or movements, are to be performed *attacca*, and the formal analysis proposed in the preface to the score is based on the entire piece. The synopsis of this rhapsodic form is as follows:

Part I
A (mm. 1–38),
B (mm. 39–60),
B1 (mm. 61–95),

Part II
C (mm. 96–104),
B2 (+D +C, mm. 105–128),
B3 (+D, mm. 129–144),
B4 (+D +C1, mm. 145–156),
E (+D +C1, mm. 157–167),
B5 (+D, mm. 168–177).[18]

The element that connects this piece with *Misterij* is its thematic material. *Music for Orchestra* opens in Db Major, with two ostinato patterns (although somewhat rhythmically different from those found in the previously discussed pieces) based on the infra-pentatonic set from the song *Tu za repu, tu za len* (Cb, Db, Fb). This piece, like all the others, is based on pentatonic themes and themes in Dorian mode, corresponding to the folksongs of Međimurje (like *Voda zvira*, see Figure 17). Although a diptych, the piece is based on a constant crescendo (dynamic, orchestration, texture, etc.), similar to *Chaos*. The thematic material of this piece is closer to some movements of *Symphony of the Orient* (such as "Christians" or "Music"), given the lack of the twelve-tone row used in *Chaos* and the two subsequent pieces.

*Music in the Natural-Tone System* was composed a year after *Music for Orchestra*. It represents possibly the most experimental piece in Slavenski's opus. Slavenski became interested in microtonal music during his stay in Prague, where, while studying, he met Alois Hába, with whom he became friends, and they discussed quarter- and sixth-tone music. Slavenski also experimented with microtonal music through his folklore research, and his first microtonal folklore transcription is dated as early as 1920. He transcribed a two-part singing from the region of Dalmacija (present-day Croatia), and the song was *Lipa piva* (*The Willow is Singing*, see Figure 18).

His research of microtonal folklore culminated in a never-fully realized piece *Music in the Natural-Tone System*. Just like *Music for Orchestra,* and *Music for Chamber Orchestra* we shall discuss later, it is written in two parts. The first part is written for Bosanquet's sixth-tone harmonium, with 53 tones in an octave. Similarly to the song *Lipa piva*, this part is a simulation of a two-part non-tempered singing, with a few chords which appear in the coda of the piece, marked *Agitato* (see Figure 19). The movement is dated 10 Nov/1937, with a note: *Bosanquets instruments j[o]uer e[st] très facill[e]* [sic!] (*Bosanquet's instruments are easy to play*).

The second part is written for four trautoniums, which correspond to the electrical instruments Slavenski assumed for *Misterij*, but in a smaller range ($C_0$–$C_3$, $C_2$–$C_4$, $C_3$–$C_6$, $C_4$–$C_7$), and timpani. This piece is based on the aliquot row, starting from the same $C_0$ pedal in the fourth trautonium as found in *Chaos*, while each of the three other trautoniums plays a modal, folk-like subject starting from a certain harmonic. The third trautonium starts an octave higher from the fourth, on a second harmonic (m. 3). The second starts from the eighth harmonic ($C_3$ m. 29), and the first on the sixteenth harmonic ($C_4$ m. 38). Starting from m. 52, the twelve-tone series with a rhythmic pedal from *Chaos* appears in the third trautonium, soon to be taken over by the others (see Figure 20). The timpani part plays an ostinato, like the one that appears in *Chaos*, in the timpani part, m.

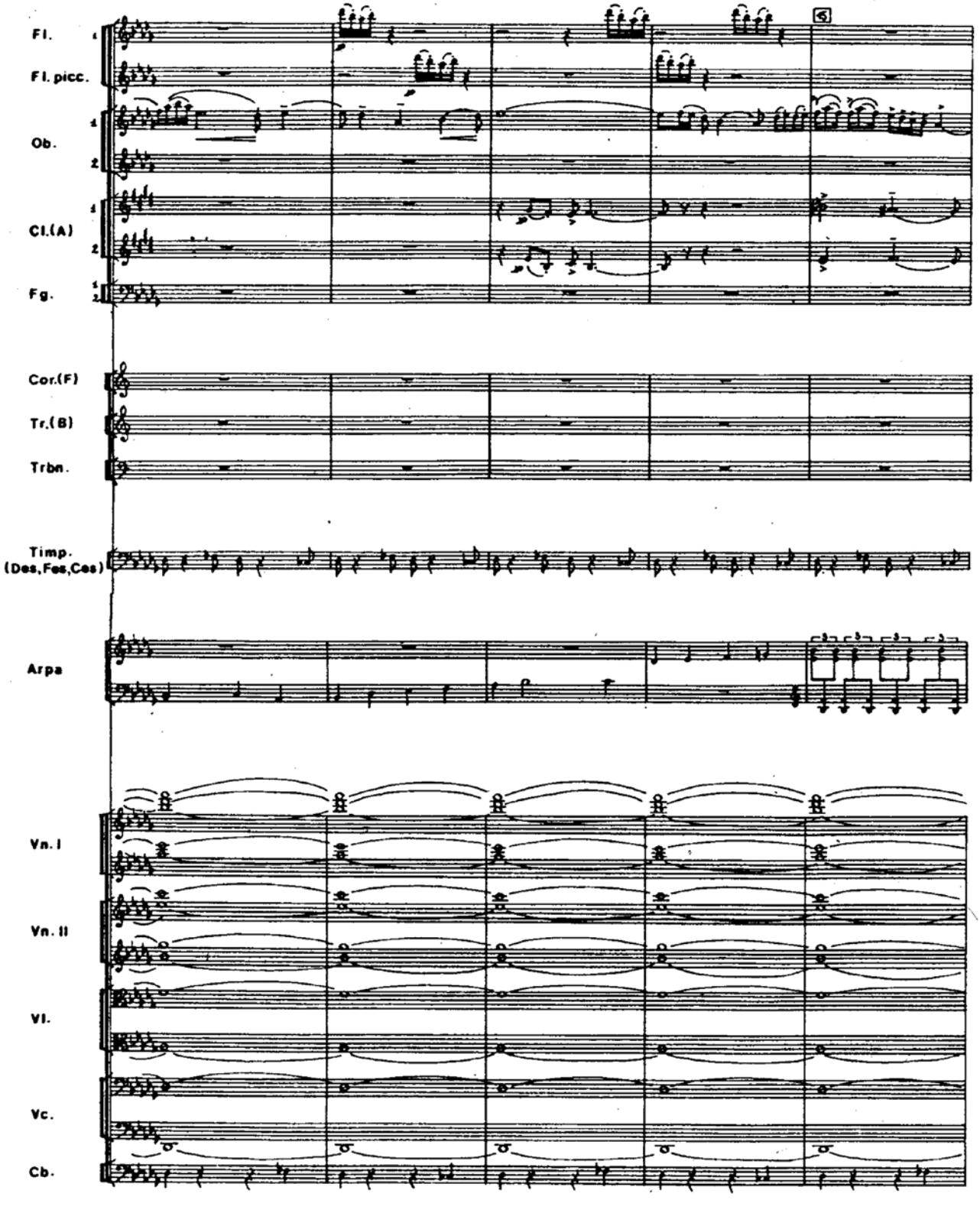


**Figure 17.** Josip Slavenski, *Music for orchestra* (*Music 36*), Andante pastorale, crochet = 72, mm. 11–15.

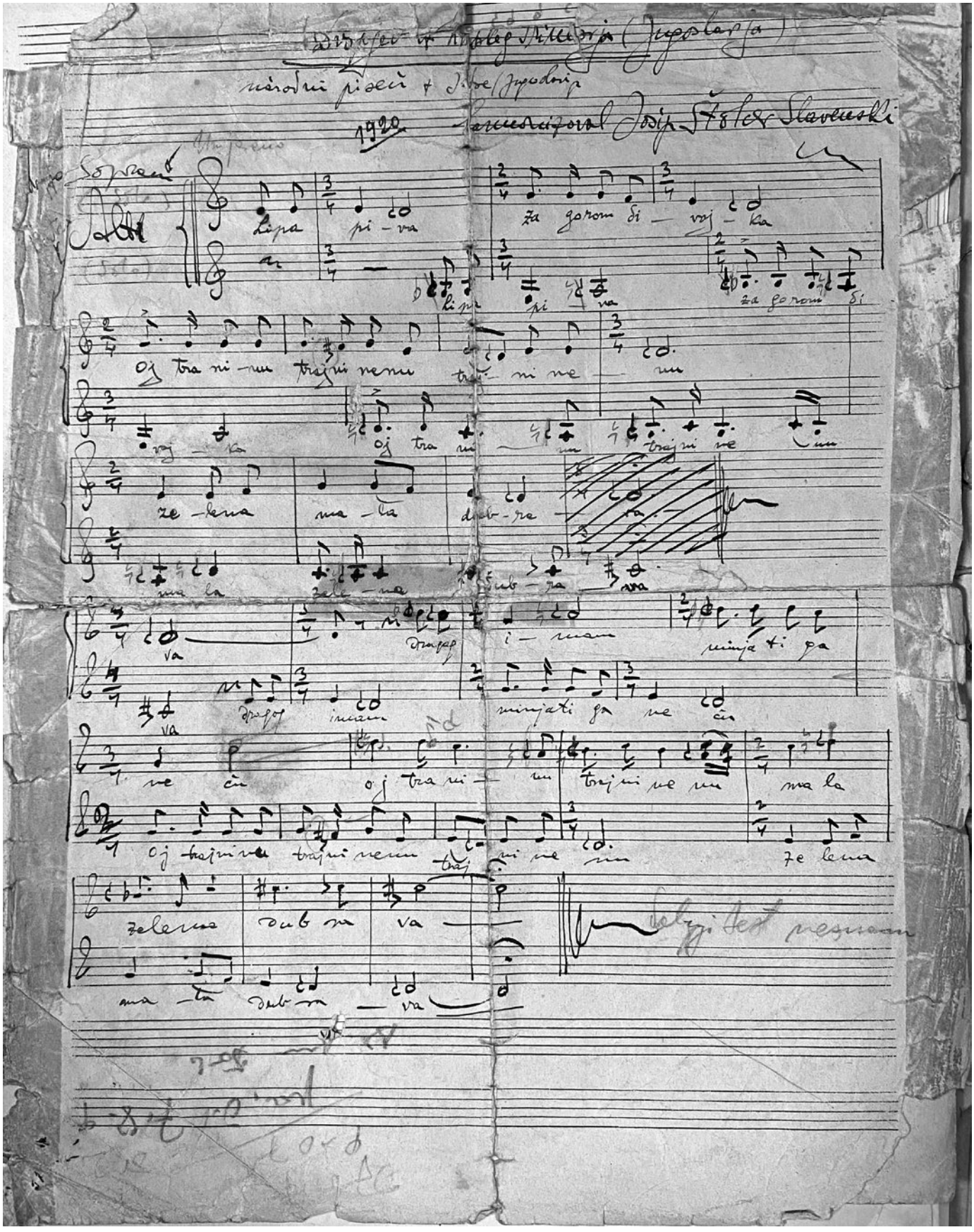


**Figure 18.** Josip Slavenski, *Lipa piva*, first version.

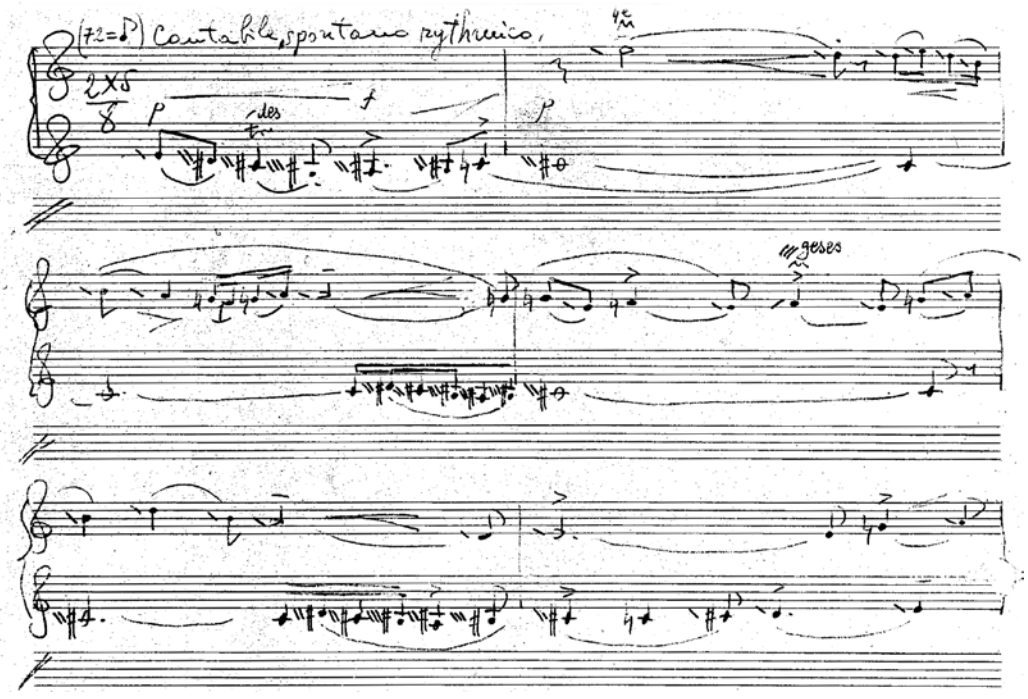


**Figure 19.** Josip Slavenski, *Music in the Natural-Tone System*, Part I, Cantabile, spontaneo rhythmico, mm. 1–6.

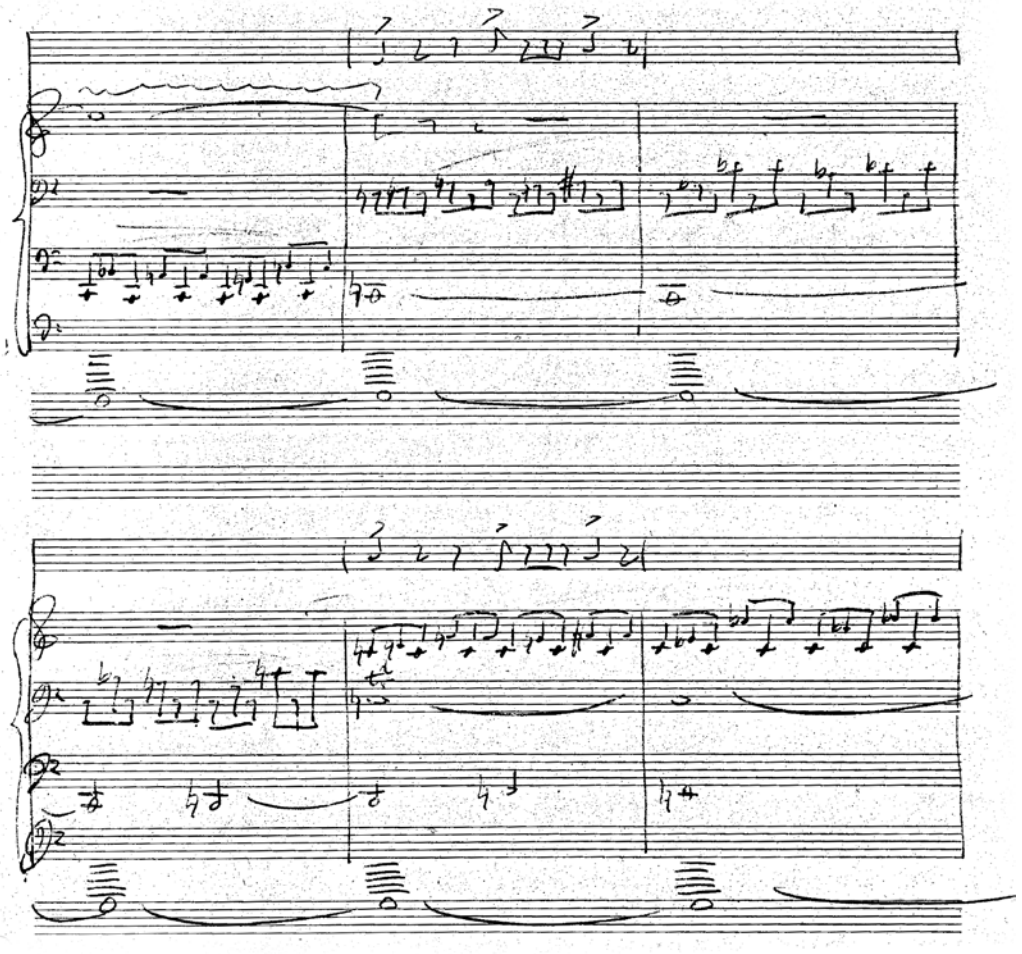

**Figure 20.** Josip Slavenski, *Music in the Natural-Tone System*, Part II, Molto dinamico, mm. 54–59.

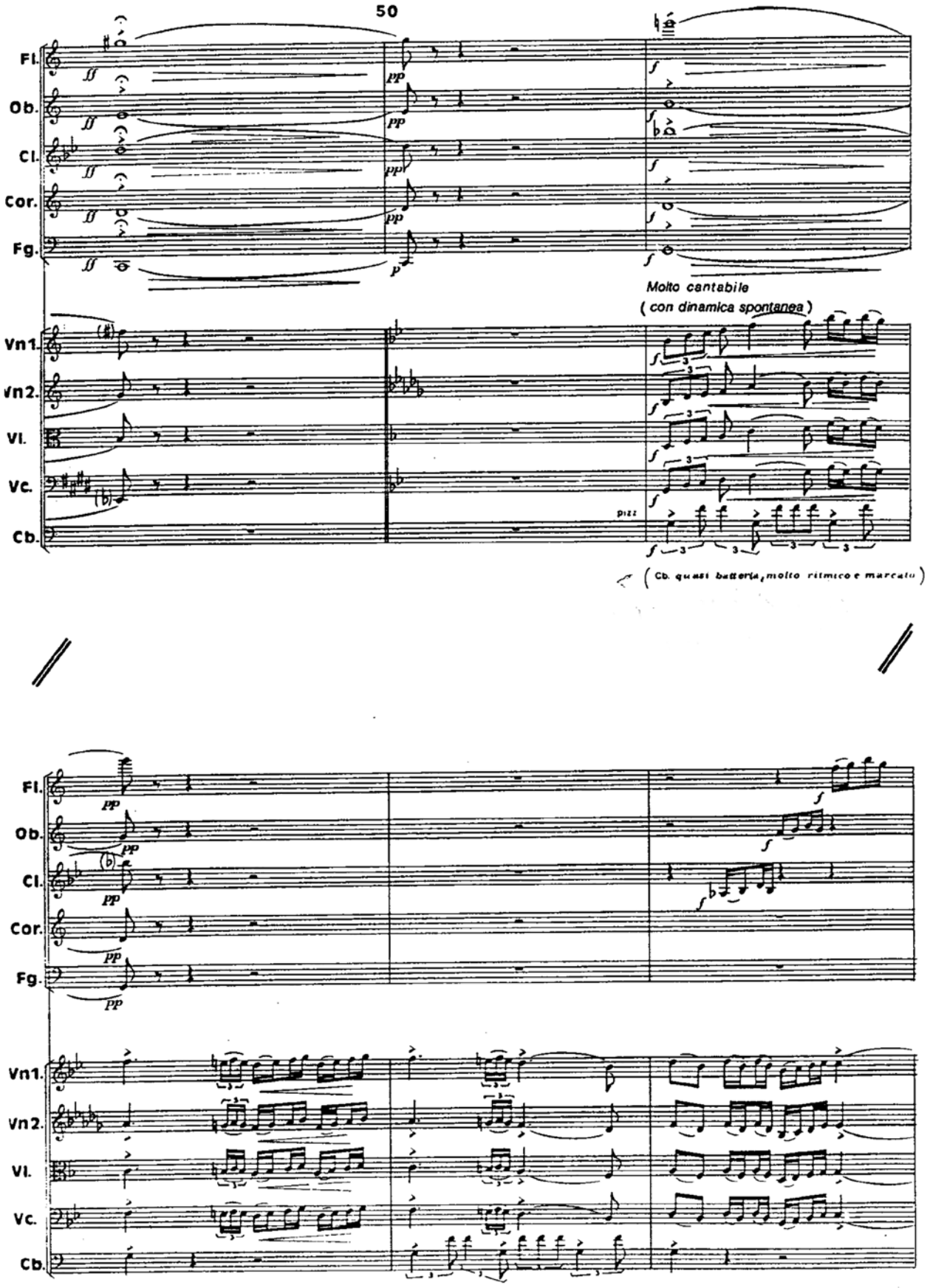


**Figure 21.** Josip Slavenski, *Music for Chamber Orchestra* (*Music 38*), Allegro ma non troppo—Molto cantabile, mm. 49–54.

131. This part also contains the infra-pentatonic folksong motif, which in various transpositions appears in the modal subjects played by first, second, and third trautonium. The manuscript is followed by a short synopsis for each movement, explanation of signs for micro intervals, and a brief set of exercises titled "tonika-solfa" method, for playing electroacoustic instruments.

The last piece discussed here, and the last by chronology is *Music for Chamber Orchestra* (*Music 38*). This piece is by its formal features close to a sonata form. It starts with two pentatonic ostinatos in the cello part (pitches: C#, D#, G#), and in the double bass part (E, G, A, D). The first subject is in Dorian mode in E, played by the clarinet, m. 8. Starting from m. 51, the same ostinato pattern present in *Music in Natural-Tone System*, (second part), appears in the double bass part (while other strings play the main subject, see Figure 21).

The second subject appears in the horn part, m. 89, also in the Dorian mode, with a tonal center B. The development (m. 114) starts with an ostinato in the double bass part, based on infra-pentatonic set from the folksong *Tu za repu, tu za len*, on the same pitches used in *Chaos* (Bb, C, Eb), but with a rhythmic configuration present both in *Chaos* and the opening of *Music for Orchestra*. The recapitulation (m. 157) of the movement is played in the woodwinds and horn parts, polytonally, with a pedal tone C in double bass and a twelve-tone row from *Chaos* with a rhythmic pedal, played in the strings. The second subject (m. 187) is repeated in C, in the horn part, while woodwinds and strings play the twelve-tone row interchangeably, followed by a short coda.

The three pieces presented many similarities with each other, as well as with other pieces discussed and the synopsis of *Misterij*, possibly corresponding to the part of the cycle dedicated to the creation of life on Earth. Unfortunately, there is no written evidence to support this, so it remains a hypothesis based on the analysis of the pieces. The recurring motifs in these works include the (infra)pentatonic pitch sets and Dorian mode, both related to the folklore of Međimurje. Deep "chaos-infuriating" pedal tones (mostly $C_0$), long ostinato patterns creating vibrating layers of the texture, and the "nucleus" from where it all started—the aliquot row, as well as the same twelve-tone series—connect all of the discussed works.

## Conclusion

The mystery of *Misterij* remains unresolved, as there are still missing and unrealized parts. Regarding the conception of the cycle, *Chaos* for full orchestra should be the opening piece, while *Voda zvira*, *Music for Orchestra*, *Music in the Natural-Tone System*, and *Music for Chamber Orchestra* should form the end of the first part of the cycle, dedicated to the formation of the Earth and its life. *Voda zvira*, a choral miniature based on a folksong from Međimurje, is sung by the great forces of Earth, water and plants, which can be understood as a symbolic representation of the great force of love. The three pieces composed in the late 1930s correspond to the interaction between the living world (plants, animals, humans) and the unpredictable forces of nature. The use of electroacoustic instruments in *Music in the Natural-Tone System* may refer to the development of man and technology, although this piece is greatly influenced by the idiom of Međimurje folksongs. *Symphony of the Orient* is dedicated to the spiritual development of man, and it corresponds to the majority of the second part of the cycle. The sounding of the great Chaos, the ultimate force and its battles and creations in the first part of *Misterij* remain unknown, and the same also applies to the end of the cycle. If *Symphony of the Orient* is the end of the cycle, one could argue that Slavenski changed the conclusion; if not, we may even be speaking of a future (possibly our own future) that remains for Slavenski to imagine or discover.

An artist such as Slavenski was rather unique in the former Yugoslavia, and so was this concept for a piece of music, possibly with ballet. As Katarina Tomašević states, "Subjective feelings of belonging to nature and cosmos as the broadest and the most exciting context of artistic creation represents the key moment of disagreement of modernist creators, and traditionally oriented 'Europeans'. The relations between the national tradition and the tradition of Europe were key to the disputes between Josip Slavenski and Miloje Milojević in music, or Stanislav Vinaver and Bogdan Popović in literature" (Tomašević 2009: 168). For example, Milojević negatively criticized Slavenski's mostly conventional choral piece *Molitva dobrim očima* (*Prayer to the Good Eyes*), performed for a concert of Yugoslav choral music on April 11, 1926, claiming it was unnaturally difficult, without enough features to be called artistic (cf. Bralović 2021: 599). In 1934, *Symphony of the Orient*, then named *Religiophonia*, was negatively received among the Belgrade critics as non-inventive, not socially engaging enough, confusing, etc. (cf. Slavenski M. 2006: 127).

Slavenski's works could have been the result of his search for an expressive archetype (ibid.: 167; see also: Medić M. 1995). *Misterij* is a visionary concept, but in a practical sense, feasible to be fully realized on stage, albeit at great expense. Slavenski's untimely death at 59 left us with an unfinished story of great cosmic, natural, human, musical, and above all, life forces—an incomplete autopoietic discourse, which to some extent remains a mystery.

## References

1 The bibliographic notes given in the introductory part of this article are mostly based on: Sedak 1984; Slavenski M. 2006; and my own research of the archival sources.

2 Milana Slavenski, the composer's wife, noted in his biography that the only document of Slavenski's stay in Paris was about him enrolling in Schola Cantorum, the class of Vincent d'Indy on January 1, 1926 (cf. Slavenski M. 2006: 67).

3 Sedak provided a list of dramatis personae, and a synopsis of the original two-act symphonic opera as conceived in 1918–1919, without a direct reference to Slavenski's manuscript legacy. She points to the 1981 article by Mijrana Živković, where the same document(s) is (are) described (cf. Živković 2014: 34). I myself worked on Josip Slavenski's manuscript legacy preserved in the Library of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade from November 2017 to February 2019, where the text of *Misterij* is kept. Nevertheless, in this article I use the latter version of the synopsis. Although unfinished, it contains more information on *Misterij*, here titled *Cosmogony*.

4 On motivic resemblances in Slavenski's works see: Milanović 2006.

5 The discussion took place on May 8, 2024 at the Institute of Musicology SASA.

6 All autographs from the Josip Slavenski's manuscript legacy kept at the Library of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade are reproduced with the permission of the copyright owner.

7 It is evident that Vlastimir Peričić used these notes to describe the foundation of Slavenski's astroacoustics in his 1984 article titled *Josip Slavenski i njegova astroakustika* [*Josip Slavenski and His Astroacoustics*] (see Peričić 1984).

8 The mention of trautonium in the sketchbook dates it to the 1930s. The instrument was publicly presented in Berlin in 1930, and Slavenski bought it while staying in Frankfurt in 1936 (cf. Sedak 1984: 252).

9 This piece, like many other Slavenski's choral pieces, has a piano version, composed in the same year. Lyrics: *Voda zvira iz kamena, lepa, plavena, hladna studena / Raste ruža iz korena, lepa, rumena / Drugi ljudi nam velijo da smo zaljubljene. / Ja ti želim, draga moja, da se zaljubimo. / Ja te ljubim z čistog serca, dok bum na svetu / Boli moje mlado srce kej je zaljubljeno*. [*Water springs from a rock, beautiful, blue, chilling, cold / The rose grows from a root, beautiful, red / Other people tell us we are in love. / I love you from my pure heart while I am on the Earth / My young heart in love hurts.*]

10 Petar Bingulac wrote about the role of the pentatonic scale in this composition. For his full analysis see: Bingulac 1966: 551–553.

11 Eva Sedak states that *Chaos* was imagined as both the beginning and the end of *Misterij*. To prove this, she claims that a sketch containing 55 measures of *Chaos* was found alongside a letter written at the time when Slavenski composed a *Fugue in the Form of the Symphonic Poem* (1917), and sketches for an unfinished Symphony (Sedak 1984: 212). On *Chaos* and other symphonic pieces discussed here see Grujić 1984.

12 Therefore, Helium, with atomic number 2 would correspond to frequency of the foundation of 1Hz with its first harmonic, at 2Hz, etc.

13 In his first piano suite *Sa Balkana* [*From the Balkans*], composed during the seven-year-long period, 1910–1917, Slavenski composed its final movement "Drmeš iz Međimurja" ["The Međimurje Drmeš Dance"], basing it on the *Tu za repu, tu za len* folksong. More specifically, the opening signal on the infra-pentatonic set becomes an ostinato for the main subject (folksong) of the movement. Also, it is worth noting that this is also the second song of the cycle *Pesme moje majke* [*My Mother's Songs*], for solo alto and string quartet (1940), which Slavenski also titled as his String Quartet No. 4.

14 For more information about the use of twelve-tone rows in Slavenski's works see: Vasiljević 2006.

15 This part of the text concerning the analysis of *Symphony of the Orient* is based on: Bralović 2019.

16 The lyrics are: *Rad, pokret, život / Stvara radost, krepi mladost večito! / Drugarstvo snaži duhove! / Drugarstvo stvara podvige! / Slava radu! Slava pokretu! Slava Životu!* [*Labour, movement, life / creates joy, refreshes youth, always! / Comradeship enforces spirits! / Comradeship creates accomplishments! Glory to labour! Glory to movement! / Glory to life!*].

17 This two-part form, or a diptych of two separate movements, is found in many of Slavenski's works (String Quartet No. 1, Piano Sonata, and other solo, chamber and orchestral pieces, some of them discussed in this article), titled *Pevanje* i *Igranje* [*Singing* and *Dancing*].

18 For a more detailed analysis see: Peričić 1985: 10–11.

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**Santrauka**

Josipo Slavenskio ciklas *Paslaptis* (*Misterij*) buvo sumanytas 1918–1919 m., po Pirmojo pasaulinio karo grįžus į gimtąjį Čakoveco miestą. *Paslaptis* buvo įsivaizduojama kaip didinga vizija apie milžiniškas kosmines jėgas, sukūrusias Chaosą – visų visatos dangaus kūnų šaltinį. Ji apėmė Saulės sistemos, Žemės ir jos gyvybės sukūrimą iki pat žmonijos ir civilizacijos raidos. Straipsnyje daugiausia dėmesio skiriama *Paslapties*, greičiausiai parašytos XX a. trečiajame dešimtmetyje, siužeto santraukai. Joje pristatoma trumpa šio ciklo įžanga, instrumentų sąrašas ir dvidalė struktūra. Šiame dokumente taip pat pateikiama *Paslapties* pabaiga, kurioje žmogus ir mašinos sunaikina pasaulį, atgimsta Chaosas ir įvyksta didysis persikūnijimas.

Trys kūriniai, tiesiogiai susiję su *Paslaptimi*, pagal siužeto santrauką, yra *Voda zvira* (*Pavasario vandenys*), chorinė miniatiūra (1916), *Chaosas* simfoniniam orkestrui (1932) ir *Oriento simfonija* (1934). Kiti trys straipsnyje aptariami kūriniai santraukoje neminimi: *Muzika orkestrui* (Music 36, 1936), *Music in the Natural-Tone System* (1937) ir *Muzika kameriniam orkestrui* (Music 38, 1938). Juos įtraukiau dėl didelio panašumo į pirmuosius tris kūrinius. Jie turi bendrą muzikinę medžiagą, pavyzdžiui, gilius pedalinius tonus, dvylikos tonų eiles, pentatonines melodijas, dorinės dermės melodijas ir kt. Pentatoninė ir dorinė dermės grindžia Međimurje liaudies dainas, kurias Slavenskis išmoko ankstyvuoju savo gyvenimo laikotarpiu. Studijuodamas Budapešte ir Prahoje jis išsiugdė stilių, giliai įsišaknijusį muzikiniame folklore, ir polinkį kurti individualią sferų muziką. Šią nuo seniausių laikų žinomą koncepciją Slavenskis siekė plėtoti per savo astronominius tyrimus ir sąsajas su muzika, pasitelkdamas šiuolaikinius ansamblius (pvz., simfoninį orkestrą) ir naujai sukurtus elektroakustinius instrumentus.

Remiantis Slavenskio užrašų ir juodraščių analize, lieka neaišku, ar ciklo pabaigoje jis atsisakė pasaulio sunaikinimo idėjos, ar ją pakeitė gyvybės šlovinimu *Oriento simfonijoje*, kūrinyje, kuris atitinka kai kurias paskutines ciklo dalis. Tarp visų jo kūrinių nėra jokių *Paslapties* pabaigos pėdsakų – nei jo užrašuose, nei užbaigtame muzikos kūrinyje, kuris atitiktų Chaoso atgimimą ir galutinę reinkarnaciją.

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