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#### ARTICLE

# MUSIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE: BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

*The author has reviewed and approved the final manuscript and affirms that there is no conflict of interest.*

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**KEYWORDS**

national identity, Central Europe, Slovakia, Slovak music, national movements.

**ABSTRACT.** Social systems undergo transformations, which in turn reshape prevailing conceptions of identity. These shifts could be observed in the past in the transition from monarchical cosmopolitanism – rooted in hierarchical hegemonies – to notions of national identity grounded in the self-definition of smaller groups within larger entities. In more recent contexts, identity has increasingly been framed within broader collective paradigms, reflecting contemporary global trends toward cultural convergence, exchange, dialogue and integration.

This study explores the role of music as a medium of national self-identification within the framework of nationalist worldviews. It examines how the cultural and political transformations of Central Europe – particularly the territory of present-day Slovakia – have shaped the functions and meanings of music in various historical contexts. By tracing developments from various medieval state entities through the Austro-Hungarian period, the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the communist era, and the emergence of Slovak independence after 1993, the study highlights key moments that illustrate the impact of major political shifts on the musical culture. Special attention is given to how Slovak composers responded to these changes and to the challenges posed by European and global cultural trends. Positioned at the symbolic crossroads between East and West, Slovakia offers a unique lens through which to examine the interplay of music, identity, and history in the region. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of sources within an interdisciplinary framework that combines musicological and sociological approaches, with an emphasis on the broader socio-cultural context.

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#### МАҚАЛА

# ОРТАЛЫҚ ЕУРОПАДАҒЫ МУЗЫКА ЖӘНЕ ҰЛТТЫҚ БІРЕГЕЙЛІК: ШЫҒЫС ПЕН БАТЫС АРАСЫНДА

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**Дәйексөз үшін**

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**ТІРЕК СӨЗДЕР**

ұлттық бірегейлік, Орталық Еуропа, Словакия, словак музыкасы, ұлттық қозғалыстар.

**Аңдатпа.** Әлеуметтік жүйелер трансформацияларға ұшырайды, бұл өз кезегінде бірегейлік туралы көптеген түсініктерді өзгертеді. Бұрын бұл иерархиялық гегемонияға негізделген монархиялық космополитизмнен үлкен құрылымдардағы кішігірім топтар құрған ұлттық бірегейлікке ауысу арқылы көрінді. Қазіргі әлемде бірегейлік мәдени конвергенцияның, алмасудың, диалогтың және интеграцияның жаһандық тенденцияларын көрсететін кең ұжымдық парадигмалар аясында көбірек қарастырылуда.

Пәнаралық көзқарастағы дереккөздерді талдауға негізделген және әлеуметтік-мәдени контекстті ескере отырып, музыкатану мен әлеуметтануды біріктіретін бұл зерттеу музыканың ұлтшылдық көзқарастар контекстіндегі ұлттық өзін-өзі анықтау құралы ретіндегі рөлін талдайды. Орталық Еуропадағы мәдени және саяси өзгерістер, әсіресе қазіргі Словакия аумағында, әртүрлі тарихи кезеңдердегі музыканың функциялары мен маңыздылығына қалай әсер еткені қарастырылады. Ортағасырлық мемлекеттік құрылымдардан Австрия-Венгрия кезеңі, Чехословакияның құрылуы, коммунистік дәуір, 1993 жылдан кейін Словакия тәуелсіздік алғанға дейінгі даму бақыланады. Саяси өзгерістердің музыкалық мәдениетке әсерін көрсететін негізгі сәттер белгіленген.

Мәтінде словак композиторларының еуропалық және жаһандық мәдени тенденциялардың сын-қатерлеріне реакцияларына ерекше назар аударылады. Словакияның Шығыс пен Батыстың символдық қиылысындағы позициясы музыканың, бірегейліктің және аймақ тарихының байланысын зерттеудің ерекше перспективасын анықтайды.

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#### СТАТЬЯ

# МУЗЫКА И НАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ: МЕЖДУ ВОСТОКОМ И ЗАПАДОМ

*Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи и заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.*

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**Ключевые слова**

национальная идентичность, Центральная Европа, Словакия, словацкая музыка, национальные движения.

**Аннотация.** Социальные системы подвергаются трансформациям, которые, в свою очередь, меняют большинство представлений об идентичности. В прошлом это проявлялось в переходе от монархического космополитизма – основанного на иерархической гегемонии – к национальной идентичности, формируемой меньшими группами внутри больших образований. В современном мире идентичность все чаще рассматривается в рамках широких коллективных парадигм, отражающих глобальные тенденции культурной конвергенции, обмена, диалога и интеграции.

В настоящем исследовании, основанном на анализе источников в междисциплинарном подходе и сочетающем музыковедение и социологию с учетом социально-культурного контекста, анализируется роль музыки как средства национального самоопределения в контексте националистических взглядов. Рассматривается, как культурные и политические изменения в Центральной Европе – особенно на территории современной Словакии – влияли на функции и значение музыки в разные исторические периоды. В статье прослеживается развитие от средневековых государственных образований через Австро-Венгерский период, создание Чехословакии, коммунистическую эпоху до обретения независимости Словакии после 1993 года. Выделены ключевые моменты, демонстрирующие влияние политических изменений на музыкальную культуру.

Особое внимание в тексте уделено реакциям словацких композиторов на вызовы европейских и глобальных культурных тенденций. Позиция Словакии на символическом перекрестке Востока и Запада определяет уникальную перспективу для изучения взаимосвязи музыки, идентичности и истории региона.

## Introduction

In the era of globalization and digitalization, the musical identity of Central Europe is undergoing significant transformations. From the Middle Ages to the present day, the Central European region, including Slovakia, has been a constant meeting point between Eastern and Western cultural influences. This dialogue has often been accompanied by conflicts but also by mutual enrichment, shaping its political, social, and artistic identity.

Article examines how musical production has evolved over the centuries, with a particular focus on the national movements of the 19th century, both World Wars in Europe, and the period of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Special attention is given to the question of how national musical elements were used to support ideological narratives and what role they played in the process of nation-building in present-day Slovakia.

The territory of present-day Slovakia has belonged to several administrative units over the past two millennia. From *Samo's Empire* (c. 623–658), established by a Frankish merchant, through the grouping of Slavic magnates known as *Great Moravia* (c. 833–906/907), the *Kingdom of Hungary* (1000/1001–1918) founded by King Stephen I the Great of Hungary, *Austria-Hungary* (1867–1918) under Habsburg rule, and later, following the dissolution of Central European monarchies, the foundation of *Czechoslovakia* in 1918, to the eventual emergence of independent Slovakia in 1993 at the end of the 20th century. The fundamental question, therefore, is: How was musical culture in the territory of Slovakia shaped by foreign cultural and political influences, and in what ways were these influences reflected later in the formation of Slovak musical identity?

This study applies a qualitative analysis of sources, with a primary focus on the evolution of musical life in the territory of present-day Slovakia. The methodological framework combines historical-analytical and comparative approaches, grounded in an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates musicological and sociological viewpoints. Particular emphasis is placed on contextualizing musical phenomena within their broader socio-political and cultural frameworks. The study primarily utilizes secondary sources, including publications and analytical studies by Slovak authors.

## From Pannonia to Austria-Hungary: The Historical and Cultural Background of Present-Day Slovakia Over the Centuries

Despite the fact that the earliest history is shrouded in a haze of insufficient sources, we know that already in the 3rd century AD, Romans encountered Scythians, Dacians, Celts, and Sarmatians in the area of the Carpathian Basin. Later, they faced invasions by Germanic tribes – Vandals and Goths. All these events, along with the later dominance of the Huns in this region, led to the collapse of the Romanized public administration and the gradual decline of Roman culture. Later, the Huns penetrated as far as Western Europe; however, the death of Attila (453) accelerated the fall of their empire. Later, the Lombards (526/527–546/547) became a subregional power, surrounded by other ethnic groups such as the Gepids and Slavs. In the second third of the 6th century,

the Avars invaded the Carpathian Basin and managed to organize the Avar Khaganate in this territory. The unrest of the subjugated Slavs later led to the formation of a supra-tribal Slavic union – the *Samo's Empire* (623). After Samo's death, the empire broke up into smaller units, and the Avars once again came to the forefront. However, defeats by the Franks and internal conflicts accelerated their downfall. In the last quarter of the 8th century, ideal conditions arose for the formation of a political structure of the Upper Danube Slavs and Moravians. (Kónya 10–18) Despite the various ancient cultures that at certain times inhabited the territory of present-day Slovakia in this distant past, their more substantial influence on the formation of later musical culture remains highly questionable or has not yet been sufficiently explored, primarily due to the lack of sources.

By the 9th century, Western Christian influences had begun to interact with the emerging state of *Great Moravia*. The initial wave of Christianization led by the Frankish-German clergy, centred around Metz–Aachen and Salzburg–Passau, soon found itself in conflict with a second Christian impulse coming from Constantinople (Rybarič, "Hudobnokultúrna problematika Veľkej Moravy" 16). During this dynamic period of cultural, political, and religious development in the 9th century, two distinct liturgical traditions and languages coexisted in *Great Moravia*. The Latin liturgy, along with Gregorian chant, was promoted by "Western" Frankish missionaries, especially among the elite. However, services conducted in a foreign language were likely alienating for the general population (Veselovská et al. 16). Among the locals, the Slavic liturgy with roots in the East was likely more acceptable; however, the geographical extent of its practices remains debatable. In Nitra, for example, where the Frankish priest and later bishop Wiching resided, the Latin liturgy was used. In a papal bull, *Industriae tuae* (880), Pope John VIII (d. 882) granted Great Moravian ruler Svätopluk (c. 830–894) the right to celebrate the liturgy in Latin if he or his nobility wished (Rybarič, *Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku* I 24). However, with the death of saint Methodius in 885, the Great Moravian Slavic liturgy came to an end. Despite the fact that his successor, Gorazd, was doctrinally sound from a Latin perspective, the pro-German orientation of the elite led to the eventual prohibition of the Slavic liturgy. Consequently, Slavic priests were forced to leave *Great Moravia*. (Rybarič, *Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku* I 24) Western orientation prevailed.

After the fall of *Great Moravia* (c. 906/907), the territory of present-day Slovakia was integrated into the *Kingdom of Hungary* around the year 1000. Initially under the control of the Přemyslid dynasty and Bolesław the Brave (c. 967–1025), it gradually came under Hungarian influence from 1025 onward (Kónya 45–48). By the 12th and 13th centuries, conditions for the development of musical culture were relatively favourable. As the wealthiest feudal institution, the Catholic Church played a significant role in shaping musical direction in the *Kingdom of Hungary*. Until the Reformation, the Catholic Church maintained a monopoly over religious, political, and cultural affairs. (Rybarič, *Dejiny hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku* I 25)

Amidst all these developments, significant political and military events were unfolding. As early as the 14th century, the Ottoman Empire began its incursions into Europe, with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 serving as a major milestone. The Ottomans then gradually expanded into the Balkans, occupying Serbia and Bosnia before decisively

defeating the Hungarian forces at the *Battle of Mohács* in 1526. This battle, which resulted in the death of Hungarian King Louis II of Hungary (1516–1526), opened the door for further Ottoman advances into Hungary (Kónya 182–187). By 1541, the Ottomans had captured Buda (modern-day Budapest, Hungary), taking control of central Hungary, while Transylvania (part of present-day Romania) became an Ottoman vassal.

The Habsburgs, in turn, controlled the western and northern parts of the monarchy. The Ottomans held Buda for over 140 years, until its liberation in 1686 during the *Great Turkish War* (1683–1699). With the recapture of Buda, the Ottoman expansion into Central Europe gradually halted, culminating in the decisive *Battle of Vienna* in 1683, where the Ottoman forces were defeated by a Christian coalition led by Polish King John III Sobieski (1629–1696). Following this defeat, the power of the Ottoman Empire in Europe declined significantly (Kónya 196–203, 323–325, 318).

However, the Habsburg Empire also faced internal turmoil. Against this backdrop, Protestantism, influenced by the Reformation, began spreading from present-day Germany in the 16th century, introducing the ideas of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). Protestantism quickly gained support, particularly among the lower nobility, townspeople, and intellectuals, with German and Hungarian populations in cities playing a significant role. In response, the Catholic Church, supported by the Habsburgs, launched the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century to suppress Protestantism. Under the reign of Leopold I (1657–1705), Protestants were persecuted, their churches seized, and many preachers put on trial. Despite these repressions, the Evangelical Church survived, particularly in noble regions and areas controlled by Protestant landlords (Kónya 224–235). The turning point came with Emperor Joseph II's Patent of Toleration in 1781, which granted religious freedom to Protestants (Kónya 432–434). As indicated by two significant 17th-century Protestant music collections from Levoča and Bardejov, Protestants in Upper Hungary (present-day Slovakia) had access to contemporary Baroque trends spreading from the German-speaking lands.

During the Classical period, the Slovak population in *Kingdom of Hungary* predominantly lived in rural areas, while cities played a crucial role in shaping musical culture. The main influences on Slovak urban centres came from Vienna, Germany and the Czech lands, from which many musicians migrated for economic reasons. The multinational composition of cities and the orientation of the local nobility toward Vienna and Budapest meant that musical events, including dances, concerts, theatre performances, and church music, featured contemporary repertoire, albeit with a slight delay. However, no distinctly local musical characteristics emerged during this period. (Múdra 15, 18)

### **The Twilight of a New Era: The Prelude to the Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy**

Against the backdrop of 19th century social developments, the desire for self-identification emerged in Upper Hungary, following the example of other European nations. The catalyst for this movement was undoubtedly the *Great French Revolution* (1788–1789), which demonstrated that the centuries-old monarchical order in Europe could be disrupted and transformed. However, in the territory of present-day Slovakia, these tendencies became evident only in the mid-19th century.

The Slovak movement sought cultural and political emancipation within *Kingdom of Hungary*, where Magyarization and centralization dominated. A significant document in this effort was the *Žiadosti slovenského národa* [Demands of the Slovak Nation] (1848), which called for Slovakia's political autonomy within Hungary. However, after the *Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867*, the situation for Slovaks worsened further (Kováč et al. 73). Hungarian authorities initiated a systematic policy of Magyarization, which resulted in the closure of Slovak schools (1874) and the suppression of the Slovak cultural institution *Matica slovenská* (1875) (Kónya 620).

Despite these obstacles, the Slovak movement persisted through cultural and political activities. Over time, Slovaks increasingly leaned toward cooperation with Czechs, leading to the emergence of the Czechoslovak idea. This vision culminated after *World War I* (1914–1918) in 1918 with the dissolution of *Austria-Hungary* and the establishment of *Czechoslovakia*.

### Music and National Identity in the Territory of Present-Day Slovakia in the 19th Century

The idea of national self-awareness and a degree of self-governance within a system is a noble concept. However, in practice, it encounters the challenge of identity formation. Today, we recognize that the nationalist concept, closely linked to European-centric thinking in classical music of this period, brings with it various issues and stereotypes. When examining Slovak identity in classical music, we face a significant challenge, as the earlier works of composers exhibited almost no distinctly Slovak characteristics. Music was largely under the stylistic influence of either the Church or the aristocracy, which favoured "Western" contemporary trends. Another indisputable factor is the issue of quality, which was typically ensured by long-standing compositional schools that trained skilled composers within a given region. Additionally, the Germanic tradition of musicological research and its tendency to define quality through the achievements of Germanic composers placed Slovak music at a disadvantage.

A crucial element in shaping Slovak national identity within Hungary was the collection of folk songs. Important collections appeared as early as the first half of the 19th century, such as *Písňe světské lidu slovenského v Uhřích* [Secular Songs of the Slovak People in Hungary] (1823, 1827) by Pavol Jozef Šafárik (1795–1861) and *Národné zpievanky* [National songs] (1834, 1835) by Ján Kollár (1793–1852). Later, from 1880 onwards, the *Slovenské spevy* [Slovak songs] anthology was published. However, incorporating folk songs into classical music raised questions of artistic quality. How should this material be treated? Could harmonizing a folk song or quoting it within a composition sufficiently demonstrates European-level artistry?

One of the first composers to engage with this challenge was Ján Levoslav Bella (1843–1936). While he is often associated with the *Slovak national revival movement*, his early musical language was shaped by the pursuit of contemporary "perfection" as embodied by Germanic music. This is evident in works such as his symphonic poem *Osud a ideál* [The Fate and Ideal] (1874), influenced by Liszt, and his opera *Kováč Wieland* [Wieland the Smith] (1926), based on a libretto by Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Ján Levoslav Bella also composed numerous songs in German, often setting texts by Heinrich Heine

(1797–1856).

The realities of life within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy are reflected in his compositions such as his *String Quartet No. 2* in E Minor “Hungarian” (1871) and *Fantázia na motívy Rákociho pochodu* [Fantasy on Theme from the Rákóczi March] (1871).

However, Bella also created works with Slovak or broader Slavic themes, including *Staroslovenský Otče náš* [The Lord’s Prayer in Old Church Slavonic] (1861), *Slovenské štvorspevy I, II* [Slovak Four-Part Songs] (1864), *Variations on the Slovak Folk Song “Pri Prešporku na Dunaji”* (1866), *Modlitba svätého Cyrila na sotnách* [Prayer of Saint Cyril on the Deathbed], (1863), and *Variations on the Slovak Folk Song “Letí, letí roj”* (1872).

All these aspects highlight the complex position of a composer educated and operating within the monarchical educational system, grappling with questions of identity and the search for an adequate mode of expression and artistic quality.

### Self-Identification and the New Perception of Art in the 20th Century

The re-establishment of music education and cultural institutions after the dissolution of *Austria-Hungary* in 1918 aimed to create a functioning system in Slovakia, particularly in Bratislava, to train musicians and composers for the newly formed *Czechoslovakia*. Over time, the so-called *Slovak National Modernism* emerged, characterized by an effort to synthesize European musical trends with national elements. Composers drew inspiration from folk music while also employing modern compositional techniques.

Figures such as Mikuláš Moyzes (1872–1944), Viliam Figuš-Bystrý (1875–1937), and Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský (1881–1958) fulfilled the ambition of self-identification, while Frico Kafenda (1883–1963) and Alexander Moyzes (1906–1984) produced compositional output motivated by processes of acculturation (*Chalupka, Cestami k tvorivej profesionalite* 21). Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, other composers came to prominence. Eugen Suchoň (1908–1993) and Ján Cikker (1911–1989), sought to create an authentic Slovak musical language that reflected national identity. They drew from the remnants of Romanticism, the rising influences of Impressionism and Expressionism, and later Neoclassicism (*Chalupka, Cestami k tvorivej profesionalite* 87, 94). This movement culminated in the creation of the first Slovak national opera, *Krútnava* [The Whirlpool] (1941–49) by Eugen Suchoň (Zvara), as well as other significant works by Alexander Moyzes and Ján Cikker.

Following *World War II* (1939–1945), the political system shifted under Soviet influence and the communist regime. Under Zhdanov’s doctrine, composers were expected to adhere to an absurd triad: folklorism, optimism, and accessibility. Works such as the folk cantata *Zdravica Stalinovi* [Salute to Stalin] (1949) by Ján Cikker, *Banícka kantáta* [The Miners’ Cantata] (1955) by Ladislav Burlas (1927–2024) and allegedly *Bolševický signál* [Bolshevik Signal] (?) by Ivan Hrušovský (1927–2001) were created under this ideological pressure (*Zeljenka* 239). Composers faced a difficult choice: refusal or defiance could lead to complete isolation. Despite these “obligatory exercises,” many composers continued their personal creative pursuits, focusing on themes that did not provoke political controversy.

By the late 1950s and 1960s, a new generation emerged receptive to modern European music trends, with a strong orientation toward *Darmstadt School*.

This so-called *New Music* was seen as a progressive force, and young composers considered it a crucial element in the future development of classical music. Their efforts to introduce new compositional techniques culminated in several significant works in the 1960s, including *String Quartet No. 1* (1964) by Ilja Zeljenka (1932–2007), *Cluster-dynamika-glissando* [Cluster-Dynamics-Glissando] (1964) by Ladislav Kupkovič (1936–2016), *Monumento per sei milioni* (1964) by Peter Kolman (1937–2022), *Piano Sonata* (1965) by Ivan Hrušovský, *Music for 12 String Instruments* (1965) by Juraj Pospíšil (1931–2007), *Transformácie* [Transformations] (1967) by Roman Berger (1930–2020), and *Cisárove nové šaty* [The Emperor's New Clothes] (1966), an opera by the young student Juraj Beneš (1940–2004). In 1964, the *Hudba dneška* [Music of Today] interpretative association was founded under the leadership of Ladislav Kupkovič. Thanks to Peter Kolman and Jozef Malovec (1933–1998), an experimental studio was established in the Bratislava radio in 1965, producing early electroacoustic music for films. The *Smolenice Seminars* (1968–1970), modelled after the summer courses in Darmstadt, brought major figures such as Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007) and György Ligeti (1923–2006) to Slovakia (Chalupka, *Slovenská hudobná avantgarda* 422–427). In addition to the avant-garde current, this period also reveals an inclination toward traditional approaches in European music. This tendency is exemplified by Dušan Martinček's (1936–2006) *Dialogues in the Form of Variations* for piano and orchestra, a work strongly influenced by traditional forms and the poetics of Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) and Sergej Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) (Chalupka, *Slovenská hudobná avantgarda* 341, 346).

The 1968 *Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia* ushered in the period of "normalization" in 1970. The state ideology assigned negative attributes to "New Music" and its compositional language. According to the official doctrine, certain compositional techniques (such as dodecaphony and electroacoustic music) were rejected, international contacts were limited, and efforts were made to establish a sense of generational continuity within Slovak music of the 20th century (Chalupka, *Generačné a štýlové konfrontácie* 348–365). The realization that opens cultural activities would no longer be possible in Slovakia led some composers and performers to emigrate. Others withdrew into internal exile or practiced self-censorship (Chalupka, *Slovenská hudobná avantgarda* 109–110). On the other hand, in this period, we also find composers like Július Kowalski (1912–2003), Zdenko Mikula (1916–2012), Tibor Andrašovan (1917–2001), Bartolomej Urbanec (1918–1983) and Milan Novák (1927–2021) who responded positively to the challenges posed by the era of "normalization", and created politically correct and engaged works (Chalupka, *Generačné a štýlové konfrontácie* 377).

The late 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of a new generation of composers influenced by postmodern ideas. The question of returning to tradition, defining the roots of one's own culture, and revisiting past values as part of the Slovak music identity resurfaced. Postmodernist composers revived traditional compositional techniques (such as tonality), looked back to European music history, and embraced the minimalist and repetitive music trends from Anglo-American composers like Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Debates also emerged about stylistic purity in the blurred boundary between "classical" and "popular" music, particularly in a context where state-sponsored and cultivated artificial music had become an isolated and barely communicative social phenomenon (Chalupka, *Slovenská*

*hudobná avantgarda* 64). This generation is represented by authors such as Norbert Bodnár (\*1956), Iris Szeghy (\*1956), Peter Breiner (\*1957), Vladimír Godár (\*1956), Peter Martinček van Grob (1962–2021). Among other composers grappling with the narrative of postmodernism (sometimes characterized as the second wave) (Chalupka, *Generačné a štýlové konfrontácie* 797) are Martin Burlas (\*1955), Peter Zagar (\*1961), Daniel Matej (\*1963), and Marek Piaček (\*1972).

### Independence After 1989: A New Chapter for Slovakia

At the end of the revolutionary year 1989, the fall of the communist regime brought about a fundamental shift in the socio-political landscape. The new society declared artistic freedom, leading to the establishment of various festivals that placed contemporary Slovak music in dialogue with its European counterparts. With the emergence of new socio-political conditions, the postmodern generation embraced greater artistic freedom, turning to themes that had long been sidelined.

A significant revival also occurred in Christian sacred music, which had been suppressed under the previous regime. Composers Mirko Krajčí (b. 1968), Ľuboš Bernáth (b. 1977), and Lukáš Borzík (b. 1979) represent the new generation developing in this direction.

At the turn of the millennium, a generation emerged seeking its own identity, supported by the freedom of the democratic space. One of the interesting projects was the association Soozvok, which brought together young people from the same generation – Peter Groll (b. 1974), Lucia Koňakovská (b. 1975), Marián Lejava (b. 1976), Lucia Papanetzová (b. 1978) and Boško Milaković (b. 1973). Among the prominent authors of this generation with a European presence are Ľubica Čekovská (b. 1979) and Ivan Buffa (b. 1979).

Another generation, characterized by the search for its own path and identity in a globalized world, connected with new trends and the exploration of digital technologies, is represented, for example, by the artists' collective *Hurhaj*, under whose name Miroslav Tóth (b. 1981), Marián Zavarský (b. 1986) and Alexander Platzner (b. 1988) were presenting their work. They also contributed to the project *Composition Laboratory*, which featured works by various young composers – Anton Jaro jr. (b. 1978), Matúš Wiedermann (b. 1982), Robert Kolař (b. 1983), Lucia Chútňková Džubáková (b. 1984), András Csefalvay (b. 1986), Matej Sloboda (b. 1988), Lenka Novosedlíková (b. 1989), Dominik Kopcsay (b. 1994), Peter Javorka (b. 1993), Patrik Kako (b. 1998), Marek Fóra (b. 2001), Tomáš Molčan, Milan Olšiak, Martin Lang, Lukáš Roth, Marek Kundlák, Ladislav Pálmai, Filip Krišš, Lukáš Zelenák, Aleksandra Gudková, Tereza Jaďud'ová, Viktória Kürthyová. Promising young composers who have recently gained recognition abroad include Samuel Hvozďík (b. 1993), Haimoni Balgavá (b. 1994), and Tímea Hvozďíková (b. 1998).

### Conclusion

Building identity in today's global world represents a serious challenge. Under the framework of personified Hegelian dialectics, we can observe a recurring process in musical art over the centuries, thesis, antithesis, and subsequent synthesis. Over time, this movement accelerates, mainly through the sharing of information and the notional exchange

of generations. Social systems change, and with them, perspectives on identity also evolve. From a monarchic cosmopolitanism tied to a hierarchy of hegemonies, through national identity characterized by the self-identification of a smaller group within a whole, to a renewed perception of broader contexts of collectives and their subsequent combination and symbiosis in the form of modern global tendencies.

The history of the territory of present-day Slovakia has been marked by continuous external influences – political, cultural, and religious – that have significantly shaped its identity. As early as antiquity, this region served as a meeting point for diverse ethnic and cultural groups, from Romans and Celts to Avars and Slavic peoples, laying the foundation for later cultural stratification. Strong influences came from two major civilizational poles: Frankish missionaries and, later, the Latin liturgy represented the Western Christian influence, while the Byzantine mission of Constantine and Methodius introduced a distinct Slavic and Eastern spiritual model. After the fall of *Great Moravia*, the territory became part of the *Kingdom of Hungary*, which was later incorporated into the *Habsburg Monarchy*. Over the centuries, Slovakia was profoundly shaped by Hungarian statehood. The Catholic Church, as a key bearer of education and culture, held a dominant position for centuries; however, in the 16th century, this model was disrupted by the spread of Protestantism from the German lands. During the Classical period, musical culture in Slovakia was largely imported. Urban centres were predominantly shaped by the German-Austrian repertoire and by the migration of musicians from Vienna, Prague, and other German-speaking cities. As a result, no distinctly local musical features developed during the 18th century or the first half of the 19th century. The Slovak cultural space thus functioned primarily as a recipient of foreign influences which, although locally adapted, were seldom transformed into an authentic cultural expression.

Music in the territory of present-day Slovakia developed in the 19th century under conditions of absent independent statehood and strong influence from foreign political and cultural structures. The identity that began to form during the national revival clashed with the reality of monarchical centralism, linguistic inequality, and the dominance of Western musical traditions. In an environment where musical life was governed mainly by ecclesiastical and aristocratic institutions, cultivating an autonomous Slovak musical language proved difficult. Musicians were mostly educated in cosmopolitan centres and composed according to the aesthetics of contemporary European taste, which further complicated efforts to articulate a Slovak identity. The Slovak element entered music only indirectly – primarily through folk song melodies. The collection of folk songs as part of the national revival project thus became a crucial step in establishing a specific cultural memory and aesthetic. At the same time, however, it presented composers with the challenge of how to transform this material into a form that could meet the standards of developed European music.

The history of Slovak music in the 20th and 21st centuries, represents a dynamic process of cultural identity formation amid constantly shifting political, social, and aesthetic conditions. In the first half of the 20th century, following the dissolution of *Austria-Hungary*, a need emerged to develop a national musical culture that would reflect the Czechoslovak state framework. During this period, Slovak national modernism

began to take shape. The work of its composers was marked by efforts to synthesize European compositional techniques with the local folk heritage. In the following decades – particularly in the 1930s and 1940s – Slovak music increasingly sought an authentic national expression. This pursuit culminated in the creation of the first Slovak national opera, *Krútnava* (The Whirlpool, 1941–49) by Eugen Suchoň, and in the emergence of prominent composer personalities.

After *World War II*, the development of the arts was shaped by the ideology of the communist regime, which – under pressure from the Soviet model – enforced the aesthetics of socialist realism. Musical production was required to conform to the demands of political propaganda, resulting in works with overt ideological content. Nevertheless, many composers succeeded in preserving their individual artistic expression, often through metaphor, non-ideological subject matter, or by retreating into formally complex structures. In the 1960s, a strong avant-garde generation emerged, introducing influences from the *Darmstadt School*, electroacoustic music, and new compositional techniques. The Slovak music scene temporarily opened to European trends, as evidenced by the establishment of an experimental studio at Slovak Radio and visits from prominent composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and György Ligeti. However, the 1968 invasion by Warsaw Pact troops ushered in a repressive period of “normalization.” Avant-garde music with a Western European orientation was officially rejected, and compositional tools such as dodecaphony and electroacoustic music were labelled as decadent. Some artists emigrated, while others withdrew into inner exile or adapted to the new conditions through compromise. At the same time, conformist works that supported the regime were also produced. Nevertheless, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a new generation of composers who engaged with postmodernist ideas. Their works were characterized by a return to traditional forms and tonality, while remaining open to popular genres, minimalism, and Anglo-American influences.

The fall of the communist regime in 1989 marked a fundamental turning point. The newly gained freedom brought about a plurality of directions, themes, and aesthetics. Opportunities for international exchange expanded; new festivals, composer collectives, and independent initiatives emerged. Spiritual themes, digital technologies, intermedia projects, and hybrid genres came to the forefront. Younger generations of composers emphasize individualism, the redefinition of tradition, and critical reflection on identity in a globalized world. Slovak music is thus gradually evolving into a multi-layered phenomenon, integrating national, European, and global influences. It creates a space for dialogue between past and present, between the local and the universal, thereby acquiring new meanings within the context of contemporary artistic discourse.

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