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SAMO VREMŠAK: ARTIST AND PEDAGOGUE

Abstract: The article presents the latest research on the life and work of Samo Vremšak, a multifaceted musician, organist, choir conductor and teacher. It supplements the existing, mostly brief publications on Vremšak's life and professional activities, and is based on his privately owned personal archive. In addition, the existing studies of individual segments of the composer's oeuvre, as well as the list of his works from the family archive, were also considered in this research. The emphasis is laid upon Vremšak's artistic path as a conductor of the "Lira" society male choir in Kamnik, his career as a concert singer, and synthesis of his compositional oeuvre - especially his choirs, solo-songs, works for organs and vocal-instrumental compositions of a cantata character.

Keywords: education, performing, creativity, pedagogic work, Lira in Kamnik, baritone singer, composer, pedagogue.

Samo Vremšak was born on May 29, 1930 into a family of musicians living at Maistrova ulica 8 in a historic bourgeois house that remains the property of the Vremšak family to this day.¹ He was the son of the violinist, organist, singer, choir conductor and composer Ciril Vremšak (1900–1968), and Angela Vremšak, née Toni. Ciril acquired his musical education, among other places, at The Ljubljana Glasbena matica music school (musical association of professional musicians, connoisseurs and music-lovers). He worked as a bank clerk and was also conductor of the "Lira" male choir for many years (he conducted the choir from 1920 to 1962). He was a self-educated choir conductor who followed the lead of the renowned musicians Emil Adamič and Zorko Prelovec. In his compositions for male choirs, his vocal sentence is largely imbued with Slovenian music tradition and original melodies; his works thus remain frequently performed to this day.² His father's sister, Armeli (Eli), a teacher and a talented pianist, also played a part in Samo's introduction to the world of music. He once stated that, initially, he was not particularly interested in playing the piano and that in this regard he simply complied with his parents' wishes; later, however, he was grateful to them. He was of the opinion that his aunt Eli was a good teacher and a solid pianist.³ Nevertheless, the most important stimulus in Samo's music education was his father Ciril, who introduced him to choral music, singing, organ playing and composing. An excellent tenor, educated by Matej Hubad, his father sang in a local church choir during World War II. At that time Slovenian cultural activities in

1 The author acknowledges the financial support from the state budget by the Slovenian Research Agency (project No. P6-0376)

2 Accessible at www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi821223/, visited April 4, 2014.

3 Some biographical notes have been published on the life and work of Samo Vremšak (cp. www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi821356/, last visited Dec. 12, 2014 and www.leksikon.si/Oseba/OsebaId/46, last visited Dec. 12, 2014) as well as several short notes written on the composer's anniversaries and jubilees. The above mentioned notes came into being through interviews with the composer and his personal memories. Vremšak's legacy, which is kept in the family house in Kamnik and represents a fundamental source of the present study, has not been researched. This legacy has also not been arranged thematically (for this reason hereinafter the individual folders, with some exceptions, are not cited); nevertheless, it is an invaluable resource that will enable the review of existing publications. I would like to thank Vladka and Boris Vremšak most sincerely for their cooperation and assistance in preparing the articles in the present monograph, as well as for the possibility of examining Samo Vremšak's personal archive.

Kamnik were severely suppressed, and as a consequence the pre-war activity of “Lira” suffered. German occupiers permitted the singing of Slovenian songs only in the local parish church.⁴ During the war, Ciril Vremšak set himself seriously to composing and wrote several spiritual compositions.⁵ Samo learned about basic compositional elements while he was transcribing the scores that his father copied at home on the so-called “opalograph” duplicating apparatus. At the age of 13 he wrote his first composition for bass solo, mixed choir and organ, entitled *Jezus trpeči*, which was performed during the war.⁶ The composition is introduced with a 16-measure bass solo, a feature which is also noticeable in his later works. It has still not been established at what age Samo Vremšak started to play the organ; however, it is known that it must have been in his early youth and that he was a self-educated organist. After the war his father resumed the leadership of the “Lira” society male choir and also conducted the choir of the parish church at Štutna. Apparently he thought that his son, although a youngster, would cope well with the challenge of playing the organ during the mass. Hence, Samo began to play every Sunday in the Štutna parish church and occasionally in the church of the Franciscan Monastery; he continued to play in both churches for 6 successive years.⁷ Samo Vremšak’s devotion to the organ endured throughout his life. As a solo performer or an accompanist for soloists and various choirs, as well as an excellent improviser, he also played in the church of St. Primus above Kamnik and at Žale in Kamnik.⁸ It was certainly not a coincidence that he later dedicated a substantial part of his compositional works to the organ. It should also be noted that his admiration of Bach’s oeuvre had a significant impact on his compositional work.

After finishing elementary school, Samo Vremšak enrolled in the economics secondary school in Ljubljana (the so-called technical school of economics) and graduated from it in 1948. Even though secondary music school had been his first choice, he finally decided on economy, as he had not yet attained an adequate level of music ability. As he was not interested in economics, he took private music lessons in Ljubljana to prepare himself for a musical career, taking piano lessons with Marijan Lipovšek and music theory with Srečko Koporc.⁹ At the age of 18, he was much more self-confident and determined about his choice of profession and enrolled in the Secondary Music School in Ljubljana, attending music theory and singing courses. He graduated from music theory ahead of time, in three years, and from singing in 1955. His rapid progress was due to his strong ambition to acquire a musical education, and the contribution of two of his professors, Lipovšek and Koporc, who played an important role in guiding him academically. In 1951 Vremšak enrolled at the Academy of Music to study conducting and composition. Later, he also studied solo singing, but decided to discontinue the study of conducting after two years. During the first year he studied composition in Marijan

4 Samo Vremšak »Spomini na očeta. Ob stoletnici rojstva Cirila Vremšaka (1900–1968)«, *Kamniški zbornik* XV (2000), p. 199.

5 Cp. : www.leksikon.si/Oseba/OsebaId/16 (last visited Dec. 12, 2014).

6 Cp. Marijan Gabrijelčič, »Samo Vremšak, vsestranski glasbenik«, *Glasbena mladina* (1990), l. XX, št. 7/8, p. 13; Marjeta Gačeša, »Samo Vremšak skladatelj, pevec, zborovodja in glasbeni pedagog«, *Naši zbori* (2001), 51(1), p. 4.

7 Cp. Matic Romšak, »60 let življenja z glasbo«, *Kamniški občan*, 25. 6. 1990, p. 5. France Štefanec, »Skladatelj Samo Vremšak posvetil življenje glasbi«, *Mohorjev koledar 2005*, Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 2004, p. 223.

8 Janez Majcenovič, »Samo Vremšak (1930–2004)«, *Naši zbori* (2005), 55(1), p. 12.

9 Matic Romšak, op. cit., p. 5.

Lipovšek's class and then in Marjan Kozina's class, graduating in 1956 with a performance of the 1st movement of *Simfonija za veliki orkester*, which he later completed. In the 1950s the Department of Composition in the Academy of Music Ljubljana was heavily influenced by a group of rather traditionally-oriented professors, led and perhaps even directed by Lucijan Marija Škerjanc. His aesthetic and compositional principles affected a great many students, although some of them, as composers, later pursued their own, even avant-garde, paths – which were generally ignored by Škerjanc, who foremost advocated developmental continuity. He surrounded himself with composers who shared his point of view and assigned them to the chairs of theoretical subjects and composition. These professors were: Marjan Kozina, Karol Pahor, Blaž Arnič, and Matija Bravničar. Samo Vremšak absorbed these traditional, safe approaches to composing and based his lifelong creative output upon them. Throughout his heterogeneous oeuvre, he demonstrated a fundamental mastery in classic compositional techniques that he complemented with a touch of originality and contemporaneity. He did not care much about experimenting with dodecaphony, aleatorics or other principles, most probably owing to his particular gift – the ability to realize his musical imagination through the prism of tonal music with rich diatonic and chromatic alterations. Although traditionally inclined, Vremšak was more strongly attracted to the company of fellow progressive students and tried to seize the Modernist stream of Western Europe under the influence of Jurij Gregorc, a professor at the Secondary Music School in Ljubljana. In 1953 they founded the so-called “Klub komponistov” (Composers Club) as a form of protest against the obsolete educational approaches at the academy, which were causing a rift between the students and professors at the composition department. The main initiator of the progressive young musicians' movement was Ivo Petrić, who gathered around him a circle of talented students, such as Alojz Srebotnjak, Darijan Božič, Milan Stibilj, Samo Vremšak, Marijan Fajdiga, Marko Žigon, Igor Štuhec and Lojze Lebič. Among the most important objectives of their society was the public performance of student compositions, the authors of which tried to follow Western musical culture: they implemented modern compositional methods that had already been implemented in Europe and America into their works, however they saw fit. The works Samo Vremšak presented in the concerts of the Composers Club, such as *Sonatina za klavir*, *Trije preludiji za klavir*, and his first solo-songs, were less modern in comparison with other compositions.¹⁰ Vremšak's musical personality did not seek extreme novelties, which was somewhat curious, as he was initially taught harmony and contrapunct by Srečko Koporc, who was regarded as a modern-oriented composer and excellent contrapuntist and had been mentored by Marij Kogoj. Koporc studied at the Neues Wiener Konservatorium with Schönberg's student Egon Lustgarten and graduated in 1929 in Prague, where the progressionist Josef Suk taught, as well as Alois Hába, known as the father of quarter-tone music. Koporc's pre-war style was predominantly Neo-classical and expressionistically audacious; however, in the 1950s he attempted to compose with the dodecaphonic technique, although only for a short time. He was well educated in music theory and an insightful researcher. After the war, until 1948, he gave private lessons in music theory and after

10 Accesible at: www.lira-kamnik.si/zbor03_03.html (last visited Dec. 14, 2014).

worked as a professor.¹¹ Marijan Lipovšek, the first of Vremšak's mentors at the Academy, was moderate in style. Being a former student of Josef Suk and Alfred Casella, his compositions from the beginning of 1950s reveal his inclination toward the neoclassical style; only later did he incorporate modern elements in his work. As for Marjan Kozina, his compositions were even more moderate in terms of style than Lipovšek's. He studied at the Viennese academy with Joseph Marx, who claimed that tonality was a natural law. Later, he studied at the Prague conservatorium with Josef Suk, who was an adherent of expressionist melos.¹² Samo Vremšak absorbed the virtues of his professors, yet he gradually forged his own individuality in composition. In general, his works were founded upon a traditional mentality - after all, he was a master of classic musical sentence - but on the other hand, they are exceptional in harmonic diversity, original in composition and persuasive in expression. Vremšak did not want to create any other way. Despite the classic baseline and shift from tonal centres, his free comprehension of the musical sentence is also noticeable in his work; his vocal pieces, however, reveal a strong connection with poetic and prose forms. His *Sonatina za klavir* was published in the score book issued by the members of Composers Club on its fifth anniversary in 1958. In Pavle Merku's view of Vremšak's work, he points out that it had the tonal design and chromatic satiation of the Late Romantic period, as well as sudden modulations in the style of Prokofjev, characteristic of the second decade of the 20th century; still, he recognized Vremšak's talent and appraised his sensibility as regards musical problems.¹³ In the beginning of the 1960s, a large section of the above-mentioned society became part of the progressive music group "Pro musica viva", which tried to seize the most contemporary trends of Western Europe, although Vremšak was not among them.

Samo Vremšak decided to study singing after his father, who recognized his abilities, encouraged him to do so. As a talented singer with a vocal range of tenor and baritone, he started to study solo singing as well, but interrupted his studies because of military service after obtaining a bachelor's degree. He resumed his studies in 1957 and graduated from the Academy in 1960 under the mentorship of professor Ado Darian (1895–1966), who had studied in Vienna and was an internationally renowned tenor, opera and concert singer. From 1945, Darian worked as a professor of singing at the Academy of Music. Like Julij Betetto, the spiritus agens of solo singing teaching, Darian trained a strong contingent of excellent opera and concert singers. After having acquired both diplomas, Samo Vremšak committed himself to composing, conducting "Lira" in Kamnik and concert singing; he also worked as a teacher. Between 1957 and 1963 he taught a broad range of subjects at the Secondary Music School in Ljubljana, such as harmony, score playing, piano as a non-core subject, vocal technique, and conducted a girls' choir. Perhaps this was the choir he wrote the composition *Mračna Jesen* (text by Črtomir Šinkovec) for, as it was his very first work written for such an ensemble. In 1963 the composition was published in *Grlica* magazine. After passing the professional exam in theoretical subjects at the Academy in 1959, he started to work there part-time. In order to devote all his energies to his artistic career, he also worked as a freelancer for two years

11 Cp. Darja Koter, *Slovenska glasba 1918–1991*, Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2012, p. 125. The author also refers to extensive literature.

12 Ibid. p.178–186

13 Pavle Merku, »Naši najmlajši«, *Naša sodobnost* (1958), 60(12), p. 1133.

(1963–1965). During this time he conducted the APZ Tone Tomšič (Academic Choir Tone Tomšič) for two months, was a member of “Lira” in his hometown and of the Komorni zbor RTV Ljubljana (Radio and Television Slovenia Chamber choir), and was also active as a composer and concert singer. As a performing artist, he recorded for the Radio Ljubljana Archive. Among a number of solo-songs that he recorded for this institution, the most remarkable were the world premiere performances of Marij Kogoj’s compositions. He claimed that this period of his life was fulfilling and successful. After he remarried in 1965, he accepted a teaching post at the Fran Albreht Elementary School where he worked as a music teacher for eight years, conducting children and youth choirs at the school, writing compositions for respective choirs and publishing them in *Grlica*. Despite his manifold capabilities and numerous accomplishments in all aspects of his career, he did not feel completely satisfied. As he said, he was constantly searching for new challenges and waiting for the fulfilment of his dream: a post at the Academy of Music.¹⁴ Being a proficient musician, in 1973 he was offered the post of music consultant by *Zveza kulturno-prosvetnih organizacij Slovenije* (the Association of Cultural and Educational Organizations in Slovenia), which he accepted. This part of his life, however, he never commented upon in public.

The records of Vremšak’s conductorship of the “Lira” choir in Kamnik are much more eloquent. Under his leadership, the choir developed to the level of the most prominent choirs in Slovenia and gained an international following. Accordingly, in 1975, he was invited to take over the conductorship of the Philharmonic choir. In the same year Marijan Gabrijelčič became the artistic director of the institution and announced certain modifications in programme and organization - first of all, exposing the orchestra to an international audience. At the very beginning of his new employment, Vremšak most probably had no inkling that the Philharmonic choir would exist for only one more season. It should be emphasized that in previous articles about Vremšak, it was stated that he worked as a conductor of the Philharmonic choir between 1975 and 1978, whereas the latest research has indicated that this information is incorrect. As is evident from the printed concert programmes and from other documentation, the choir were still performing during the 1975/76 season, although none of these appearances was of particular significance, and then the choir disbanded.¹⁵ Among their most significant independent concerts of the last season was the 6th concert of the Red Series in May 1976, conducted by Vremšak, in which the ensemble presented rarely performed works of Renaissance authors, such as Lasso, Gallus, Palestrina and works of some lesser-known Polish composers of the time. For the most part, Vremšak had selected polyphonic works, which seemed to indicate a distinct inclination toward the compositional technique that he was utilizing. The second part of the concert was dedicated to the most prominent Slovenian composers of choir music: Vremšak had selected some of the most significant or rarely performed works of Emil Adamič, Marij Kogoj, Janko Ravnik, Karol Pahor, Lucijan Marija Škerjanc, Srečko Koporc and Vilko Ukmar. At the concert, the choir also gave the first performance of Vremšak’s work *Rdeče nebo* based upon the text by Branko

¹⁴ Matic Romšak recorded some personal memories of Samo Vremšak at his 60th anniversary. Cp. M. Romšak, »60 let življenja z glasbo«, *Kamniški občan*, June 25 1990, p. 5.

¹⁵ Cp. archival material of the Slovenska filharmonija (Slovenian Philharmonic). However, there is no folder entitled “Samo Vremšak” there. I would like to thank the archivist Mateja Kralj for her help in locating resource materials.

Rudolf.¹⁶ Furthermore, Samo Vremšak and Branko Rajšter were mentioned as conductors of the choir for Mozart's *Requiem* (KV 626), which they performed in the same season.¹⁷ Although the vocal ensemble was no longer active the next season, Vremšak worked for the Philharmonic as a concert singer and archivist until the beginning of 1978.¹⁸ In February of the same year he left this position by mutual agreement and took over the professorship at the Academy of Music, for which he had long prepared. In fact, after the completion of his habilitation procedure, the University in Ljubljana offered him the title of docent for the following subjects: harmony, contrapunct, solfeggio, instrumentation and general bass. Initially, he worked as a professor of solfeggio, but he later gave lectures also on music theory subjects and solo singing as a non-core subject. He worked as a professor from 1988 until he retired in 1995 and then lectured part-time. Vremšak was known as an extremely dedicated pedagogue with an aptitude for discovering exceptionally talented students, who had to meet his high standards. One of his students wrote about him that "...he was a very interesting personality, a good critic, he was witty, often restless and stormy, a remarkable and very sophisticated conversation partner."¹⁹ He was notorious for his exactitude and conscientiousness and he expected nothing less from his students; however, he was stingy with praise. Most of the time he would express his approval or praise as if to say: "So-so...good enough." The students who attended his solo singing and vocal technique classes will always remember that. Often they were in awe of him, as he expected a good prior knowledge from the students of solfeggio, harmony and contrapunct. Nevertheless, over time it was generally stated that "Samči", as he was secretly nicknamed (a nickname coined by his friend Hubert Bergant), was actually a good-natured and good-hearted man. He showed a more personal attitude toward students during individual tutoring in general bass, when he often took time to engage in conversations about a variety of music topics or generously advised the students about their future professional path.²⁰

After the war Ciril Vremšak reassembled the "Lira" choir. In 1948 his son joined their ranks and stayed as a singer until the 80th anniversary choir concert in 1962. In the same year Ciril Vremšak had to abandon conductorship due to poor health, and handed over the reins to his son. In the early years of Samo's leadership, young singers prevailed in the choir, which allowed the conductor to pursue and ultimately achieve more ambitious goals. The choir made progress by way of a carefully combined repertoire and continuous vocal training and education. One of the most faithful followers of the "Lira" choir, composer Blaž Arnič, encouraged Samo to aim higher and to start attending national and international competitions. After careful consideration, Samo enrolled the choir in the international contest in Arezzo and won an enviable second place. Vremšak considered it the choir's greatest success, although the choir notched up many important awards in the following years, such as in the *Naša pesem* contest in Maribor ("Lira" was awarded three silver and a bronze plaque) and in the radio contest *Naši zbori pred mikrofonom*

¹⁶ Accessible at *Koncertni list Slovenske filharmonije*. Slovenska filharmonija, 1975/1976. Printed concert programme <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-NNJD3L5Y> (last visited Nov. 9, 2014).

¹⁷ Accessible at *Koncertni list Slovenske filharmonije*. Slovenska filharmonija, 1975/1976. Printed concert programme <http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-OEC8EDGE> (last visited Nov. 9, 2014).

¹⁸ Documentation relating to this period of Vremšak's work at the Slovenian Philharmonic is very deficient.

¹⁹ Andrej Misson, »In memoriam Samo Vremšak (1930–2004)«, *Naši zbori* (2005), 55(1), p. 13.

²⁰ Cp. Veronika Šarec, »Orgelski opus Sama Vremšaka«, *Kamniški zbornik* (2006), l. XVIII, pp. 74–75.

(between 1971 and 1973 the choir successively took first place).²¹ They made successful guest performances in several European cities and hosted international choirs in Kamnik. The choir received excellent reviews and commendations. The repertoire of the "Lira" was exceptionally varied, as it comprised the compositions from the period of Gallus up to contemporary Slovenian composers, as well as original folk song arrangements.²² Vremšak was able to select cogent compositions that matched the choir's capabilities, resulting in an effective sound. He dedicated some of his own compositions to the choir, such as *Napis na velikem zvonu pri sv. Joštu* (An Inscription on the Large Bell at St. Jošt) and *Pevcu* (To the Poet), both based on the text by France Prešeren. During Vremšak's conductorship, one of the most prominent features of the choir was the thematic concerts in honour of individual composers or dedicated to selected themes. The brilliant vocal technique of the choir generated a stable choral blend and balance, clean intonation, careful diction, excellent phrasing and musical persuasiveness.²³ Under Vremšak's leadership the choir also recorded two LP records entitled *Hodil po zemlji sem naši* (1977) in *Gremo v Korotan* (1983). The singers admired Samo Vremšak and were extremely devoted to him, even though he was known for his rigorousness and consistency. It was said that he was a brilliant chronicler, storyteller, a vigorous and sharp collocutor, and last but not least, an excellent imitator of distinct characters and personalities.²⁴ In 1972 he received the Gallus' plaque for his long conductorship of the "Lira".

As a vocal soloist, Samo Vremšak particularly distinguished himself in the concert sphere. He was one of the few graduates of the Academy of Music who decided to devote themselves to concert singing. The Academy educated a fairly large number of solo singers, but on the whole they decided on careers in opera. As a baritone, Vremšak was a member of two important vocal ensembles: the Komorni zbor RTV Ljubljana (Chamber Choir of RTV Ljubljana) from 1960 to 1967 and from 1978 the Slovenski oktet (Slovenian Octet) led by Samo Nanut. During that time the Slovenian Octet gave a number of concerts and also recorded a medley of Slovenian toast-songs in which Vremšak proved successful as one of the soloists. His abilities were best expressed in the popular folk song *En starček je živel* from Lower Carniola.²⁵ Throughout his life, Samo Vremšak was very fond of spiritual music, even though he spent the better part of his life exposed to the communist mentality, which, in Slovenian society also, was wholly opposed to sacral art. The end of socialist Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia brought several changes, one of which was a more relaxed view toward sacred music - reflected also in the concert sphere. As a result, for almost a decade and a half from 1994 onwards, Vremšak directed the Musica Aeterna festival in his hometown; he performed there on a regular basis with the ensemble Slovenski pevci sakralne glasbe (Slovenian Singers of Sacred Music), which he both founded and conducted. The festival, which featured the performances of several renowned artists from Slovenia, became an important part of musical life in Kamnik. In

21 Cp. memorial miscellany dedicated to the centenary of the society: *Lira 1882–1982* (texts by: A. Čebulj, M. Žontar, S. Vremšak), Kamnik: Kulturni center, 1982, pp. 41–42.

22 Cp. Samo Vremšak, »Umetniška in programska usmeritev LIRE v 110-letih njenega obstoja«, *Lira 1882–1992*, op.cit., pp. 45–71.

23 Leon Engelman, »Kultura petja. Koncert kamniške Lire v Ljubljani ob 90-letnici njene ustanovitve – Skrivnost uspehov na mednarodni ravni«, in: *Lira 1882–1982*, op. cit., p. 49.

24 Janez Majcenovič, »Im memoriam: Samo Vremšak (1930–2004)«, *Naši zbori* (2005), 55(1), p. 12.

25 Boris Pangerc, *Slovenski oktet*, Ljubljana: Tiskarna Hren, 2007, p. 78.

this sphere as well, Samo Vremšak proved himself to be an excellent artistic director.²⁶ Being a baritone soloist, a performer with excellent technical expertise and an outstanding musical ear, he performed a majority part of the standard repertoire, appeared in cantatas and oratorios and in independent recitals. His performance achievements received excellent reviews, wherein, among other things, his technical impeccability, excellent diction and musical perfection were especially highly praised.²⁷ His operatic success grew gradually throughout the decades, reaching a peak in the mid-1990s, when he was entering the autumn of his life. The traditional values expressed in his compositional works were also expressed in the conventional choices he made in his artistic solo and chamber programme. In general, (most) contemporary European works were ignored in his repertoire; however, he frequently performed solo-songs written by his Slovenian contemporaries and colleagues.²⁸ In addition, he seldom appeared as an opera concert performer, with the exception of his contribution to the following project, which enjoyed enormous public success: the performance of the operatic concert *Boris Godunov* by Modest Musorgski, with an international cast in Vienna, conducted by Lovro Matačić.²⁹ One of his first and most notable piano accompanists was Jakob Jež, while the most renowned among them was Leon Engelman, known as a sensitive and successful chamber musician. The duo Vremšak-Engelman recorded a number of solo-songs for the Radio Ljubljana Archive; they were the first in Slovenia to perform the entire vocal cycle of *Swan Song* by Franz Schubert. In 1990 they accomplished another remarkable achievement by performing no less than 48 anthological compositions of Slovenian solo-songs in three consecutive evenings in Kamnik. It was an amazing project, still worthy of respect today. As a soloist, Vremšak appeared in the more important cantata projects of the Slovenian Philharmonic and of the Consortium Musicum choir, as well as in festivals such as Slovenski glasbeni dnevi (Slovenian Music Days), Revolucija in glasba (Revolution and Music), Kogojevi dnevi (Kogoj's days) and in concerts organised by the Društvo slovenskih skladateljev (Society of Slovene Composers), and so on.³⁰ A number of his singing achievements were released in the *Musica Slovenica* collection. He often cooperated with the organist Hubert Bergant, who was his friend and also from Kamnik, and his colleague at the Academy of Music. Together they performed numerous works from domestic and foreign repertoires, even organising thematic concerts, which they adapted to the individual concert events. As for their performances of spiritual and sacral music, they represented a special tandem. They also performed some of Vremšak's own compositions.³¹

Samo Vremšak often emphasized that he was more attracted to composing than any other music-related activity. He had been active as a composer since his youth, and left behind hundreds of original compositions and arrangements, featuring elements of the Late Romantic, Neo-Baroque, Neo-Classical and Expressionist periods – a reflection of

²⁶ Accessible at <http://castni.nakamniskem.si/vremsak/glasbenik.php> (last visited Dec. 12. 2014). Documentation with printed concert programmes of the ensemble is accessible in Samo Vremšak's personal archive.

²⁷ Cp. Vremšak's personal archive, folder with printed concert programmes and reviews. Kept by Vremšak family in Kamnik. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Vremšak family for permission to inspect Samo Vremšak's legacy.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Leon Engelman, »Ob 70-letnici Sama Vremšaka«, *Kamniški zbornik* XV (2000), p. 28.

³⁰ Vremšak's personal archive, folder with printed concert programmes.

³¹ Ibid.

his personal preferences rather than any strict stylistic deliberation. He wrote compositions for a variety of instrumental, vocal-instrumental and vocal ensembles, except for opera, and created an extensive oeuvre of shorter and more comprehensive works; his music is expressive, full of musicality, imitative and rich in harmony. Vremšak often expressed himself in a polyphony and polyrhythmic style and used to base his compositions upon folk songs, processing their motifs in a persuasive variational style. He was a master of musical forms, or as Leon Engelman said: "*Musical form serves him as a wisely designed and unique mould in which he pours a musical work of art.*"³² He expressed himself over a range of fields and created in various forms - from the simple poetic form to skilled fugues and comprehensive sonatas, symphonies or cantatas. In his early years, he garnered acclaim with his piano works. The most prominent among them was the *Sonatina* (1953), which attracted the attention of the international public for its formal, harmonic and pianistic originality. There is no piano concert in his oeuvre; however, his *Concertino za klavir in godala* (1961–63)³³ is quite close to such a form. Vremšak's works for piano (altogether he wrote around 10 pieces) came into being during his studies (1947–1958) and rank among his shorter polyphonic pieces³⁴ as regards their form. As for chamber music, he wrote several compositions, which he had worked on for decades, mostly intended for his friends and colleagues. A typical feature of this part of his oeuvre, most probably created for everyday purposes, is the diversity of ensemble.³⁵ Even though he wrote predominantly for traditional groups, he especially enjoyed composing on order for new and unusual instrumental ensembles. These compositions allowed him to prove his proficiency in the acoustic and technical capabilities of an individual instrument. Even though these works may appear momentary, he essentially created a line of brilliant concertant pieces. Some of these works appear in editions of the Society of Slovene Composers; for example: *Sonatina in due tempi za rog in klavir* from 1979, *Sonatina za trobento in klavir* from 1978, and *Arietta in scherzino za trobilni kvintet* from 1986. Most of the scores were issued as manuscripts. Among his original ensembles are also compositions for chamber ensembles with organ, such as *Concertino za orgle in trobilni kvintet* (1987) or *Koncert za orgle in godala* (1983). The string quartet, otherwise almost an obligatory element in every oeuvre, is represented in Vremšak's by a single piece that he wrote in 1976, defined by Leon Engelman as an example of a symbiosis of classic form and extended tonality.³⁶ Since his youth, Vremšak had felt an affinity for the organ, to which he devoted solo pieces or compositions for diverse ensembles. He liked to create his organ pieces after the examples of skilled Baroque forms, such as passacaglia, fantasia, suite and single, double or even triple fugue. Vremšak shunned tradition in these works, making a significant contribution to contemporary organ music; most of them were published within the editions of the Society of Slovene Composers or by the Astrum publishing house. Several world-premieres of Vremšak's organ works were performed by Hubert Bergant, who played them regularly to Europe audiences, thus becoming the first musician to present Vremšak's oeuvre globally. Vremšak's most important works in this

³² Leon Engelman, »Ob 70-letnici Sama Vremšaka«, *Kamniški zbornik* (2000), Vol. XV, p. 28.

³³ Ibid., p.29.

³⁴ Cp. a list of Vremšak's work in form of legacy inventory that includes manuscripts and printed material. The list was put together by Vladka Vremšak. Datations of compositional works have been added in accordance with composer's notes.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cp. L. Engelman, op.cit., p. 29.

regard are *Sonata quasi una fantasia* (1968), the expressionistically designed *Triptihon* (1971), *Tema con variazioni* (1976) which he considered one of his most cogent compositions, *Koncert za orgle in godala* (1983), performed as a world-premiere in the Red Series of the season 1985/86,³⁷ and *Koncert za orgle in orkester* (1991). The last two of the above-mentioned compositions most probably came into being thanks to Hubert Bergant; at the time of their writing, an astounding concert organ in Cankarjev dom (Slovenia's largest cultural and congress centre) stimulated the creation of great organ pieces. The most prominent among Vremšak's sacred vocal compositions for organ and mixed choir are masses and psalms, as well as pieces such as *Missa latina per coro e soli a cappella* (1993), and one of the last in this oeuvre *Christus factus est*.³⁸ Vremšak was a master of cantata and oratorio for smaller and larger ensembles;³⁹ in these two musical forms he reached a singular peak of compositional creativity. In the works of a predominantly spiritual character, there are also carefully selected texts originating from diverse cultural environments, and of various contents and forms. The following are especially worth of attention: *Šest pesmi Horaca* for mixed choir, woodwind quintet and timpani (1986), *Voznica* for male choir, mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra (1973), the composition *Žalosten je velki kejden* for mixed choir, soloists and orchestra, based upon the text of Slovenian folk prayers, *Canticum cantucorum Salomonis* for mixed choir and brass quintet, *Exercitus grandis nimis valde* or A Mighty Army for soloists, choir and orchestra, dedicated to the victims of post-war massacres, which earned resounding ovations at its world-premiere in 1995 at Cankarjev dom.⁴⁰ Vremšak's *Requiem* (1995) was especially admired by professional and lay public. Its world-premiere was conducted by Mirko Cuderman and held in the church of St. Jakob in Ljubljana within the Vocal Series of the Slovenian Philharmonic in the 2000/2001 season, with joint choirs, Philharmonic orchestra and soloists: Irena Baar, Mirjam Kalin, Marjan Trček and Janko Volčanski.⁴¹ Vremšak defined this composition as his "Creative Credo".⁴²

Among his more extensive orchestral works, Vremšak himself accentuated his second (1973) and third symphony (1989); the first he completed soon after graduation from the Academy in 1958, *Sonatina za godala* (Sonatina for Strings, 1966), *Adagio* for grand orchestra (1987) and *Simfonieta in modo classico in due tempi* (1988).⁴³ There were quite long intervals between the formations of the symphonies, hence the diversity of styles. Basically, they are ranked among the fundamental symphonic works of Slovenian creativity in the second half of the 20th century. Since the first symphony marked Vremšak's debut in the sphere of symphonic music, its style is Neo-Romantic. The second one was described as harmonically bold and dramatic and was dedicated to Vremšak's late father. Formally, the symphonies are associated with a classic form of symphonic character, with contrapunct and modality at the forefront, while the tonality freely expands

³⁷ Cp. Slovenian Philharmonic, *Koncertni listi* (printed concert programmes).

³⁸ Cp. E. Škulj, *Leksikon cerkvenih glasbenikov*, Ljubljana: Družina, 2005, p. 388; for a more complete list of such compositions compare the list of score material which is in possession of the family.

³⁹ Cp. list of compositions, wherein 12 pieces are enlisted in the column entitled Vocal-instrumental Compositions.

⁴⁰ The piece *Exercitus grandis nimis valde* met with resounding reception of the public. Cp. L. Engelman, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴¹ Cp. Slovenian Philharmonic, *Koncertni listi* (printed concert programmes).

⁴² M. Gačeša, op.cit., p. 3

⁴³ See the transcription of discussion between Marjeta Gačeša and Samo Vremšak at his 70th birthday, published in *Naši zbori*. Cp. M. Gačeša, op. cit., pp. 2–4.

from traditional restraints; rhapsodic diversity stands out, as does the approximation of an organ sound.⁴⁴ Even though Vremšak did not always follow current compositional vogues, he gradually released himself from traditional restraints and started to reach toward modern compositional means, but with serious reflection and moderation; yet, he worked above all independently and with a style that is hard to define. His solo-songs belong among his most cogent compositions. Many of them were written for baritone; however, he also wrote some for soprano - in all probability they were composed for his daughter, Irena Baar (1958–2006). His solo-songs expressed a variety of moods, from the lyrical to the epic and dramatic. Beside the piano accompaniment to his solo-songs, he would add organ, chamber or even orchestral accompaniment. Choosing the texts for his compositions, he would decide on persuasive depositions that he found in various sources from the Antique period up to modern Slovenian literature. The key to Vremšak's music was poetic expression; it often directed him towards expressivity and away from tonality into a recitative manner, tonal painting and a persuasive symbiosis of context-related and metric character of the literary material upon which it was based. Among his most frequently performed works are the cycle *Osem pesmi iz ciganske poezije* for soprano and piano, 1982, *Šest ljubavnih elegij rimske pesnice Sulpicije* for mezzo-soprano, flute, gong and piano (1981), *Tri balade Petrice Kerempuha* for baritone and piano (1983) and *Štiri Balantičeve pesmi za glas in klavir*.⁴⁵ Most of these compositions were performed by Vremšak himself and his daughter Irena; other performers appeared very rarely. It should also be noted that even though many of the compositions were recorded for the Radio Slovenia Archive, they are not accessible to a wider public. It is Vremšak's choir compositions that truly stand out in his entire oeuvre. He wrote compositions for choirs throughout his life and created a rich collection of choir pieces for adult and youth vocal ensembles. Most of the compositions for adult choirs were published in the periodical *Naši zbori* and in other editions of ZKOS (Association of Cultural Organizations of Slovenia), while his youth choir works were issued in the magazines *Grlica* and *Glasba v šoli*. Due to his expert judgment of choral sound and the vocal range of children and adult voices, his choir compositions still enjoy wide popularity and are frequently performed by amateur or professional vocal ensembles. For his artistic compositions, he decided on cogent texts, principally those of Slovenian authors, for example: Alojz Gradnik, Josip Murn - Aleksandrov, Srečko Kosovel, as well as of modern authors like France Balantič, Kajetan Kovič, Ivan Minatti, Tone Kuntner, Svetlana Makarovič, Neža Maurer and many others. He tended to choose social, epic, and lyrical motifs. Vremšak confirmed his talent for choral sentence formation, with the emphasis on the natural characteristic of the individual voices in compositions that he created early in his life and which remain extremely popular: *Vetri v polju* (S. Kosovel, 1952), and then in many other pieces, such as *Žanjica* (F. Kozak, 1951), *Škrjanček* (M. Golar, 1969), *Pesem hrepenenja* (1971), *Prihod* (A. Gradnik, 1974), *Noč brezupna* (I. Cankar, 1977), *Orel in smreka* (A. Gradnik, 1977), *Maj ob Soči* (I. Minatti, 1984), *Tri Katulove pesmi* for mixed choir (1984), *Pelin žena* (S. Makarovič, 1992), *Zadnji čas pred zimo*, *Zasuta usta* (both based upon the texts of F. Balantič, 1992); however, especially prominent in this segment of his work are six songs based upon the texts of Tone Kuntner for male choir (1994). Even though his

44 A more detailed analysis of the second symphony is included in the article by Ivan Florjanc.

45 Cp. Vremšak's legacy: the archive of performances of his works.

first choral pieces are rather moderate in style and predominantly tonal, the years added harmonic sharpness to the musical sentence of his later works. He would dramatize the musical sentence in accordance with the context of the poem and intensify the expression, even entirely omitting tonalities and metric stipulations. The latter is evident in his compositions for all types of ensembles, including youth and children's choirs, which he treated with great sensitivity. He composed the majority of his works for them based upon the texts of modern poets, such as Neža Maurer and Danilo Gorišek. As a rule, Vremšak respected the natural ambitus of children's voices. Being fond of folk customs, rites and songs, he also produced several adaptations and their number is comparable to that of his original pieces. He was very exact in citing the origin of every song, as well as the name of the respective recorder. He had a special affinity for certain Slovenian regions; hence he enjoyed a special bond with the choirs from Austrian Carinthia. In his long cooperation with the renowned conductor of the mixed choir "Rož", Lajko Milisavljevič (1943–2002), he wrote several adaptations of songs that originated from the rich cultural heritage of Slovenian Carinthia; one of them was the cycle of seven compositions entitled *Ziljska ohcet*. The other more prominent and often performed among Vremšak's adaptations of folk songs were *Zeleni Jurij*, *Voznica*, *Sonce gre za gorou*, *Še rož'ce so žalovale Ko bi Zilo noj Dravco*, *Kranjčičev Jurij*, *Bom pa zlezu na češnjo*, *Ženka mi v goste gre* and many others.⁴⁶ The adaptations were often written for diverse ensembles.

Samo Vremšak was productive almost until his last breath. He received a number of significant awards and acknowledgments for his work, such as the Yugoslav Radio Television award in 1974 for the choral composition *Pesem hrepenenja*. In 2002 he received the Kozina award for his compositional oeuvre by the Society of Slovenian Composers, while in 2004 he was granted honorary citizenship of Kamnik municipality. He died and is buried in his home town.

⁴⁶ Samo Vremšak carefully managed his archive in which the important sources of information on the performances of his works are kept.



Slika 1: Koncert Kluba komponistov v mali dvorani SF, 1955.



Slika 2: Samo Vremšak z Markom Žigonom in profesorjem Marjanom Kozino po diplomskem koncertu, 1956.



Slika 3: Nastop z mladinskim zborom OŠ F. Albrehta, Kamnik, 1967.



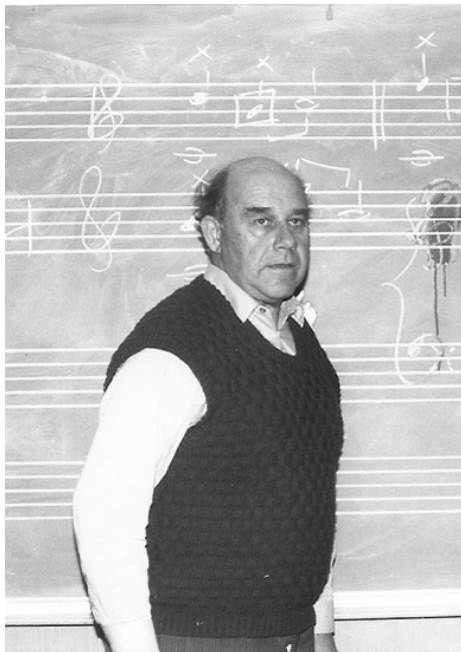
Slika 4: Samo Vremšak solist na koncertu z Liro Kamnik.



Slika 5: Zborovodja v Slovenski filharmoniji, 1975/76.



Slika 6: Nastop v Kamniku z Leonom Engelmanom, 1990.



Slika 7: Samo Vremšak kot profesor na Akademiji za glasbo.



Slika 8: Za orglami v cerkvi v Ljutomeru, 1987.