Sounding stereotypes: Construction of place and reproduction of metaphors in the music of Goran Bregović

Marković, A.

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3. From WB to WFB: Artistic Biography of Goran Bregović

This chapter presents Goran Bregović’s biography, focusing on selected elements from his career that spans almost 40 years, and covering the period until 2010. Bregović was born in 1950 in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (henceforth SFRY or SFR Yugoslavia), a country consisting of six republics that would become separate states during the 1990s and 2000s. He grew up in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the geographically central republic, which was considered the most multicultural (and therefore the most pro-Yugoslav) republic in the entire federation. Many articles about him claim that his place of birth, as well as the fact that he comes from a mixed (Croatian-Serbian) marriage, predisposed him for his later inclination toward merging diverse music styles and melting them into new forms.

Stemming from Yugoslav rock/pop, and having evolved into the biggest star of “Balkan music,” Bregović is currently in the position to offer the Balkans as a commodity to international consumers. Biographical and discographic data discussed in this chapter can be loosely grouped in four different phases (see Figure 3.1), following the large genre shift in Bregović’s career: from rock, to film, to pop, to world music. It also reveals the evolution of his role in the music-making process (from being a guitarist, to lyricist/composer, to producer), and the performing medium (from rock band, to solo artists, to larger ensembles). Of course, this simplified taxonomy cannot be rigidly applied to his numerous projects which are not equally distributed across the four decades and are stylistically hybrid, but nevertheless it offers a helpful tool in reviewing his long career.

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1 In the SFRY Kosovo had the status of an Autonomous Province (as opposed to a republic). The official status of Kosovo as an independent state, which declared independence in 2008, is not unanimously recognised by the international community at the time of writing.
The concept of visibility discussed by Slobin (1993: 17-20) is useful in providing an insight into the intended target group for the releases: local (national), regional and transregional (global). The intended visibility is evident from the labels that released his various projects: some of them are released in SFRY/Yugoslavia/Serbia, whereas others are covering broader territories such as the entire Europe or the US. The genre shift mentioned above corresponds to the differential visibility of Bregović’s music: his rock and pop releases are mostly intended for local consumption, whereas film and world music releases are distributed (trans)regionally. As discussed below, different audiences are presented with the same music/tunes but contextualised within different genres, which greatly facilitates Bregović’s “recycling” (see 4.2) as it enables him to benefit from offering the same music to different markets.

As presented in Figure 3.1, the early years of Bregović’s career were stylistically uniform, showing his focus on rock music. However, starting in the 1990s his activities become increasingly diversified. In this sense, it is problematic to refer to these intertwining realms as temporally delineated “phases.” Nevertheless, the list of releases signed by him does show a certain clustering according to the genre. The first period spans the 1970s and 1980s and

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2 For additional discographic information, see Appendix 1 and http://www.discogs.com [Accessed July 1 2013].
covers the most successful years of the rock band Bijelo Dugme, when he was mainly influenced by rock music (see 3.1). The second period starts at the beginning of the 1990s, when he began to compose film music and when his music became internationally visible (see 3.2). The third period (see 3.3) is marked by projects visible only at local levels, and it temporally overlaps with the fourth, still ongoing period when his releases show a functional shift towards the world music idiom (see 3.4). These four periods roughly relate to four decades of his career (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s), although, as already mentioned, there are significant overlaps (especially in the 1990s). Figure 3.1 also shows that over the decades his music’s visibility shifts from local to (predominantly) transregional.

The remainder of this chapter displays a summarised artistic biography of Goran Bregović. Given his popularity and the popularity of the ensembles he was (and still is) associated with, the extent of the discourse and amount of available information cannot be conveyed here entirely. Many discographical details as well as an immense amount of details about his private life as a megastar need to be omitted, in order to create an introduction to the discussion about the image of the Balkans in Bregović’s “Balkan music” (in Chapters 4 and 5). The biography will therefore focus on a number of issues that are of relevance for the later discussion, and for Bregović’s role as the most popular Balkan music composer:

- Style-shifting: (constructed) taxonomy of his music;
- Leadership and authorship in his music-making process;
- Inspiration from other styles (especially traditional music);
- Resolving of the traditional vs. modern dichotomy;
- Involvement in (stylistically) diverse projects;
- His creative process (composing and producing);
- Musical borrowing and the perceived authenticity of his music;
- (Political) appropriateness of his music;
- Reception and popularity of his music, as well as its performative elements.

3.1. 1970s and 1980s: Rock Music

Bregović’s music career started in his adolescent years in 1960s Sarajevo, when he played guitar in local kafanas (playing mostly newly-composed folk music – see 2.2.1), which would, according to his own testimony, make him inclined towards this genre in his later career. In the early 1970s he reached Naples (Italy) where he played the mainstream tourist repertoire of the time. It is only after his return to Sarajevo that his career began to unfold in a new direction.
Following the publishing of several 7-inch records featuring singles that had great success with the local audience, in 1974 Bregović and several other Sarajevo musicians founded a band called Bijelo Dugme (lit. The White Button – henceforth WB), and their growing popularity was documented by numerous articles in local music magazines. Over the next fifteen years the WB would release nine 12-inch and a number of 7-inch records. They broke all Yugoslav records in the number of albums sold and concert visitors, and created what was rightly referred to as “Buttonmania” (in reference to the “Beatlemania”).

The online archive of the Džuboks (Jukebox) magazine, the first “Yugoslav music magazine,” paints a reliable picture of the band as it grew beyond the local Bosnian & Herzegovian level to become the “Yugoslav pop music phenomenon.” On the one hand, their “phenomenal” status referred to the band introducing “the first viable form of fully professional and authentically domestic rock music within Yugoslavia’s cultural landscape, and in transforming it from a marginal socio-cultural phenomenon to a central popular-cultural referent of Yugoslav youth culture” (Mišina 2010: 285). On the other hand, it referred to the novelty of the band, which stemmed from the innovative conjoining of folk music and rock and roll (and other popular music styles).

The emerging of the WB followed (albeit with a delay) contemporary trends on the global popular music scene, and the emerging of rock and roll in the 1950s and 1960s. Since it propelled the introducing of a whole new genre of popular music in Yugoslavia, the WB were from the very start of their career put in varying stylistic categories. Initially the band was introduced to the audience as a pop-group, “pop” denoting music that was neither folk nor classical, but also did not conform to the style of (then popular) “Schlager” music or jazz. However, this label was in subsequent years gradually replaced by other terms, firstly “pop-rock” and then “rock” or “hard rock.” These categories were often accompanied by a prefix “Yugo(slav),” resulting in labels such as “Yugoslav pop” or “Yugo-rock.”

The wavering position of the WB in the taxonomy of the Yugoslav music scene is likewise evident in recent academic research (albeit for different reasons). The main discrepancy to the beginning of the band’s career seems to be its questionable belonging to the rock bracket, seemingly due to the perceived lack of ideological engagement and subversiveness attributed to rock and roll. Rasmussen states that the WB has taken over the elements of rock ideology that focus on individual freedom and the quest to be “different,” while omitting its politically subversive elements (2007: 60). This view (of the WB selectively adopting rock ideology) seems to be shared by other scholars, when it comes to retroactively assigning the WB the rock label. In those accounts (e.g. Gordy 1999 and Mijatović 2003) that focus on 1980s and 1990s and deal with rock and roll’s role in overthrowing the regime of Slobodan Milošević during the 1990s, the WB

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3 The name of the band was derived from one of its first hits, Kad bi bio bijelo dugme [If I Were A White Button], 1974 (see Figure 3.1).

does not qualify as a rock band and is omitted from the discussion: for example, Mijatović defines it as pop (2003: 158). In contrast, Gordy places it at the other end of the pop-folk continuum and dubs it proto-neofolk, or even as a precursor of turbo-folk (Gordy 1999: 123 and 145 respectively; see also 2.2.1). Likewise, Stokes qualifies the band as folk-rock (2007: 311). Nevertheless, within the Yugoslav popular music scene of the 1970s, the band members have unmistakably fulfilled the role of rock and roll stars; furthermore, their political engagement was also present, although gravitating towards the non-subversive, mainstream side of the spectrum, supporting Yugoslav proclaimed values of “brotherhood and unity” (see below). The 1980s and especially the 1990s (which are the focus of both Gordy’s and Mijatović’s studies) are the period when The White Button was already reaching its end (disbanding in the late 1980s).

With its initial visual inspiration being glam rock, over the years the band was musically inspired by a whole range of popular music styles (boogie, blues, reggae, ska, funky, new wave), which were at times uncritically taken over and implemented in WB tunes, sometimes uncomfortably merging with other elements. Every new record was eagerly awaited by the audience and assessed with respect to their previous releases, discussing whether the new one would keep the same course or move in a new stylistic direction.

Bregović, who featured as the guitar player, composer and lyricist (later to become an arranger, too), soon became the natural spokesperson for the most popular Yugoslav group. Unlike other band members who mainly commented on songs and provided personal information requested by fans, interviews with Bregović often revolved about broader issues of cultural policy and censure, music styles (domestic and foreign), the band’s general ideological strategy embedded in contemporary politics and the like. In this early phase his role in the creative process was rarely, if ever, questioned by other band members, which is an issue that casts an interesting light on subsequent disputes about authorship (see below). The process of creating a new album would usually start with Bregović entering the studio with half-developed ideas that would evolve during rehearsals, in cooperation with other band members. He described his friends as “filters” for his ideas, and they in turn referred to him as the band leader. Nevertheless, his declared relying on his band members in fact only underlined his leading role in the creative process, especially when he described them as nothing but “influences” on his creativity, as if they were instruments in his musical palette:

[When asked about a replaced drummer] – It is very difficult to convince people [of the importance of other band members] because the public eye always focuses on me. But I cannot do anything without them. In that process, while I am creating a song, they are of crucial importance. You see that as soon as I have a new [band member], a new influence, my songs are different. The amount of what I write by myself is really small. Everything is generally made together with them. ... I am lucky with players. Whenever someone was away for the army [service] I would replace him with a good player. That was my advantage, that I had good influences (Glavan 1983: 9).
Numerous accounts of the WB’s creative process reveal Bregović’s crucial role. His self-declared “laziness” led to the situation that he frequently wrote the lyrics on the eve of the studio recording, putting the singer Željko Bebek in an uncomfortable position of not knowing in advance what he would be expected to sing. In an interview he gave during the recording of their fifth album, Bregović added:

*During these few visits to the studio I have learned a lot about your work process. I am finally convinced that compositions are really created only in the studio itself, and that you write the lyrics at the last moment. ... Working like that, there is no time for going back, for a second look.*

Indeed, I make the lyrics at the last moment, and then there’s no way out. Whether [the song text] is good or not, it stays as it is. I recently created a text for the same afternoon, for Željko [Bebek] to sing it. Then we rescheduled and did something else, so the text was not used until the following day. But the next day I didn’t like it anymore and I threw it away (Vukojević 1980: 56).

Bregović’s creative drive led him to cooperate with a myriad of other musicians, so much so that the band’s activities often depended on Bregović’s schedule and willingness to continue working. Simultaneously with WB albums, he released several other LPs where he was featured as composer or lyricist (most notably for singer Zdravko Čolić, who would enjoy a success comparable to the one of the WB, only in the “Schlager”-style). Bregović’s impact on the local and national (Yugoslav) pop-rock scene was so profound that when he went to the (compulsory) army service in 1978, the whole scene went into hibernation for one year, with several bands trying feebly, and failing, to make a breakthrough in Bregović’s absence.

After WB’s first few records were produced in London and New York (thanks to the generous support of “Yugoton,” the biggest record label in SFRY), the experience gained there encouraged Bregović to start producing himself, both for The White Button and for his independent projects. Already starting with the second record, Bregović began to experiment with different sound colours, reaching beyond the instrumentation typical for a rock band. While first using synthesised sounds, Bregović later turned to actual additions to the main

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5 Some of the other releases were, importantly, his early crossovers to folk music, which in those days created quite a stir among WB fans, for they established an objectionable link with the ill-reputed newly-composed folk music (see 2.2.1): for instance, the 1989 album by a big NCFM star Hanka Paldum, featuring Bregović as a guest guitarist. In contrast with criticism aimed at Bregović, within the NCFM circle Paldum’s release was positively commented upon as a welcome crossover to rock music, and Bregović was even praised for “furthering folk music” (Rasmussen 2002: 107-108).

6 Unlike many other independent projects undertaken by Bregović, some of Čolić’s records, created in collaboration with Bregović, are listed in Figure 3.1, because some of these songs would become the basis for the latter’s recycling projects during the 1990s (see 4.2).
WB ensemble. Adding soloists and groups – such as a string ensemble, symphonic orchestra, mixed or children choir, solo soprano, folk singing group or a folk brass ensemble – enabled him to polish his producing skills, which was a field that would be paramount to his international success throughout the 1990s and 2000s. It can even be said that in its later years the WB shifted from a rock-band to Goran Bregović’s band which he used as one of the instruments to express his music ideas (Vitas 2006: 41). He was also known for rearranging and reusing old, sometimes already released tunes, which was generally not accepted well by the audience. This rehashing would advance to the level of main composition technique in his later work (see 4.2.1), for which he would be dubbed a “master of recycling” (Rasmussen 2007: 87). It increased the importance of a song’s authorship with both the audience and the music critics, especially when the source material was sensitive in terms of having shared authorship or belonging to the corpus of traditional music.

Rearranging also became one of the common concert features for the WB. In spite of the audience’s expectation to hear familiar tunes in familiar arrangements, Bregović was known for offering live performances of older tunes in ever different transformations. In reaction, the concert audience often complained of not recognising the tunes it had been longing to hear. An excerpt from a concert review shows the ill-acceptance of Bregović’s first attempts at rearranging, and the enthusiasm towards the newer tunes that were performed unaltered:

As one could have expected, older compositions from their repertoire were mainly rearranged, most often in ska-reggae manner. That is not bad in itself, but in some cases it seemed forced. We realised that from the very beginning. Kad bih bio bijelo dugme [If I Were a White Button, the WB’s first mega-hit] in ska arrangement, with a bad PA system, sounded like blending of two radio stations playing different music. Then followed a version of the song Sve ove godine [All These Years], which we know from the repertoire of The Indexes [another popular band at the time], again in ska style, which meant that the [White] Button joined the trend of arranging other performers’ older compositions. The injection of reggae elements weakened one of their hit tunes, Eto! Baš hoću! [There! I Want it!], because its rebellious rock chorus resisted the change, resulting in an impression that the two songs were artificially fused together. And yet the songs from the last record were performed unchanged, and were accepted enthusiastically, because the audience was able to recognise them immediately. It created a somewhat paradoxical situation (Vukojević 1981: 38).

In later years, as Yugoslav audience became more exposed to and more familiar with different styles of popular music, the discussion about stylistic “pinning-down” of the WB increased. It paralleled the discussion about their second main source of inspiration, which was folk music. This merge of rock and folk music was hardly unfamiliar to local bands, but it was the WB that raised it to an entirely new level. Indeed, their idiosyncratic mixture of rock and folk turned out to be their formula for success: “they were rockers, but with a flavor
close to everyday cultures of people’s lives” (Stanković 2001: 104). From the first newspaper articles about the band, Goran Bregović was described as “the composer and frontman of the band, who insists on merging Yugoslav folklore tradition and ‘hard-rock’ style, which creates interesting sound combinations and an original sound that distinguishes [the WB] from other bands” (Tvrtković 1974: 29). The music critics responded by pejoratively dubbing the band’s style “shepherd rock.” The elements relatable to folk music generally decreased on later records, showing nevertheless that the most popular tunes often turned out to be those inspired by traditional music.

In response to sometimes being criticised for links to folk music, Bregović tried to incorporate it in his vision of Yugoslav pop:

We have entirely – on purpose or accidentally – succumbed to this conviction of others, that our mission was to create Yugoslav pop music. We probably succeeded, otherwise we wouldn’t be this popular. But the most important thing, I think, is that we brought folk music closer to a generation that ... well, I wouldn’t say was disgusted, but ... disliked folk music. It seems to me that now, with The White Button, folk music gains additional dignity in the eyes of the world, which was too impatient, or for some reason refused to listen to it. I think this is very important (Despot 1976: 43).

Although in his later interviews he would attempt to diminish the role of folk music in WB tunes, Bregović kept tapping into Yugoslav traditional music for inspiration; during the same period, his other inspiration source became international popular music (see below). The thin line between inspiration and appropriation was frequently crossed in the eyes of the audience. Bregović was often criticised for plagiarism, which is a trend that would continue throughout his career, to the present. Vitas offers a detailed account of WB’s treatment of folk music sources, ranging from instrumentation, adopting rhythm and verse structure to direct quotes from (more or less) well known tunes. Moreover, she importantly claims that the beginning of Bregović’s career (when he played newly-composed folk music in local kafanas – see 2.2.1) provided him with a source of tunes for his subsequent career: in other words, his tapping into traditional music was not direct but via NCFM, which by default was not “genuine” traditional music but its derivate (2006: 18).

The motivation behind the introduction of folk elements into rock-based music was, according to Bregović, to offer the audience something familiar: “If it weren’t so recognisable, if it weren’t for these few symbols of ours at the very beginning, only a few, to hook on, [this music] would not have been accepted so well” (ibid: 47). This claim is corroborated by the fact that the later releases brought less and less folk “hooks,” as they were no longer needed to attract the already loyal audience. The melting of folk with rock was so successful that it made some of the audience uncomfortable, because (unlike the music of other musicians of the time who quoted traditional music) a clear distinction between the two genres was lacking. The band did not place itself at a safe distance from
NCFM, and consequently it started to gain bad reputation reflected from NCFM (see 2.2.1). The WB did not uphold the dichotomy urban/popular vs. rural/traditional; instead, it was neither urban nor rural. The WB’s crossover approach was such a groundbreaking novelty that Bregović was, many years later, blamed by music critics for being the originator of turbo-folk (see 2.2.1; this statement was apparently corroborated in recent academic texts – e.g. Gordy 1999: 123, 145).

When it came to emulating rock tunes, it was – like the inspiration from traditional music – noticeable in guitar riffs, drum patterns, and sometimes entire arrangements. For example, the end of the verse in *Pljuni i zapjevaj, moja Yugoslavija* (example 1986 Pljuni i zapjevaj, moja Yugoslavija.mp3)\(^7\) strongly reminds of the verse ending of the 1982 Survivors’ hit *Eye Of The Tiger* (which became famous as the soundtrack for the movie *Rocky III*)\(^8\). Bregović’s plagiarist image was so persistent that a review of the WB’s fifth album was formulated in a way that attempted to prevent any possible accusations. Under a subtitle “The Thief of Bagdad,” Kremer anticipated what Bregović would (in his later phases) call “collage” (see 4.2.1) and emphasised it as one of his main compositional techniques:

> It might be a bit silly to defend Bregović in advance, but since he has a reputation of the biggest domestic plagiarist ... [it should be stated that] *this record does not contain anything stolen*. A comprehensive review shows that [the record] is made following the same principle according to which pop-artists create their work. Instead of using street garbage, Goran gathered a number of rock ‘n’ roll parts – mainly worn out from longtime use – and created new pieces by merging them, giving them new meanings. He has done this in the past, but not so pronounced. So, let’s not be nitpicks and complain about every detail (1980: 37 – emphasis added).

\(^7\) The complete list of examples, including song titles and their translations, is provided in Appendix 1.

\(^8\) There are many more examples of such “borrowings.” For instance, Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bijelo_dugme, accessed January 14 2008) lists the following:

- *Ne spavaj, mala moja, muzika dok svira* (1974) inspired by Chuck Berry’s’ *Rock and roll music*
- *Sta bi dao da si na mom mjestu* (1975) inspired by Argent’s *I am the Dance of Ages*
- *Ništa mudro* (1976) inspired by The Rolling Stones’ *It’s Only Rock’n’Roll*
- *Pjesma mom mladem bratu* (1980) inspired by Bob Dylan’s *Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door*
- *Zašto me ne podnosi tvoj tata* (1983) inspired by The Clash’s *Should I Stay or Should I Go*
- *Padaju zvijezde* (1984) inspired by Van Halen’s *Jump*
- *Ako ima boga* (1988) inspired by Yes’ *Owner of a Lonely Heart*

Apparently, Bregović did not focus his borrowing only on Anglophone rock music: Gourgouris also reports that some of the WB ballads resemble music of Italian Lucio Dalla (2005: 336).
This fusion between rock and folk, resulting in the WB’s “interesting sound combination” (Tvrtković 1974: 29) was thus a point of relevance and criticism from the very beginning of Bregović’s career, only to gain even more importance in his post-WB years (see below).

In the post-WWII Yugoslavia, which featured a unique version of socialism covered with a “coat of pseudo-democratic pseudo-liberalism” (Barber-Kersovan 2009: 233), communist ideology had penetrated all forms of public life: it was very vigilant in proscribing and implementing regime-approved cultural policies. Consequently, music (and art in general) was politically utilised as “music of commitment” (Mišina 2010: 265). In order to prevent claims that they were trying to influence the audience in an inappropriate way, the first WB album in 1974 was firmly dubbed by Bregović as “just fun.” This statement was corroborated by the increasing popularity of the band: the most popular tracks turned out to be the easygoing, danceable tunes. Nevertheless, the band’s very existence and labelling as a rock band implied a tacit acceptance of Western music idioms (and rock’s inherent subversiveness), which needed to be carefully interpreted to the public eye and aligned with official ideologies. In record reviews, the WB was often declared as an “overall Yugoslav band” and a role model for the youth. At the same time, though, the band needed to keep a Westernised enough image (and music) in order to distinguish itself from domestic styles that were by that time regarded as old-fashioned. Yet again, too big an emphasis on their Westernised image eventually did lead to criticisms stating that the Association of Socialist Youth should be called on to react, “to confront this noise, masquerade, electronic music and vulgar lyrics” (Povijest Bijelog Dugmeta, n.d.). This is why Bregović’s statements from that early period show careful and diplomatic alignment with the views of both pro-rural and pro-urban movements, as well as both pro-Western and pro-Yugoslav ones. For example, his often-quoted statement, that he was “a peasant’s child” (despite the fact that he was brought up in the city of Sarajevo) stood in stark contrast to his inclination towards Western music styles. It was nevertheless deliberately evoked whenever his image as someone from the “people” was compromised, as if to validate him as someone who could not and would not in any way question or jeopardise the views of the ruling ideology, or replace them with those of the outside (Western, capitalist) world.

Furthermore, the rural/urban dichotomy (refracted through the Yugoslav/Western one) needed to be interpreted within an overarching doctrine proclaimed by the communist regime. What appeared to be the regime’s benevolent attitude toward rock music was often used as an example for a progressive, liberal version of SFRY communism (in comparison to other socialist countries). In response, Bregović played his part of a mild, polished rebel by very carefully positioning the band along the guidelines of the Communist Party (and even proclaiming the band’s desired identity as “New Partisans” – Mišina 2010: 266). At the very beginning of the band’s popularity, he tried to downplay its importance when confronted with an accusation of Westernising domestic pop music:
Such success made you powerful. Being so popular, do you feel social responsibility? 
- This is very important. ... I think that our ideological orientation is very important. The whole thing cannot be regarded anymore as just five long-haired guys who sing on a stage, because we are in a position to gather up to ten thousand people. This means that we are in the position to talk to a huge number of youth who is willing to listen. This means that we are extremely responsible to tell them the right things. I am very glad that both Željko [the WB lead singer at the time] and I are members of the Communist Party, and that our work has a certain orientation. ... As long as we talk about our music or about us as fun – we will allow everything. I allow everyone to express their even most personal opinion. But if you are trying to characterise The White Button as an import of some Western culture, Western ideology – then I have to be very clear and say that we are Tito's socialist youth and that it is obvious in everything we do! Our whole appearance and performance can be easily interpreted in the context of music and entertainment. However, if you try to claim that we are an import of Western ideology, I will seriously hold it against you. We are above all YUGOSLAV MUSIC. And the fact that someone minds if we do not wear peasant shoes and we do not play the gusle [folk bowed string instrument] is ridiculous (Despot 1974: 46).

As a consequence of the band’s immense popularity, the WB repertoire was largely discussed in the public discourse, but also closely scrutinised by those who needed to make sure that the band did not say or do anything politically inappropriate. In 1978, scandals involving drug abuse raised a heated debate about the perils of rock-culture (interpreted as the threat coming from the West), which showed once again how significant the band’s impact on the public life was. In 1979, a song involving a curse word and the word “Christ,” accompanied by a record cover displaying a female foot kicking a man in the groin, were dismissed as inappropriate and too violent. The record was censored and its releasing delayed until the problematic issues were resolved (Janjatović 2007: 33). Interestingly, after Tito died the following year and the country’s unnoticeable decline toward disintegration had started, the release of the next WB album went without problems, although it again contained cursing.

Although in his interviews he would not explicitly admit to it, Bregović was very much aware of the political power of music, and especially the WB music. In later statements he usually kept his stance that their music was just for fun and dancing, without any pretensions of sending social or political messages. Nevertheless, when his lyrics repeat: “I don’t care,/ I can tell you everything I want,/ Nobody takes me seriously anyway,” it is difficult not to read them as an ironical statement about awareness of the power of his words to his auditorium, which numbered hundreds of thousands of young people. However, in spite of the possible disapproval of the official communist regime hinted at in his lyrics, Bregović’s pro-Yugoslav and anti-nationalist orientation – his preference for a non-ethnic meta-identity (which would remain strong long after the disintegration of the SFRY into smaller states) – was always openly

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9 Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980), Yugoslav communist leader and lifelong President.
declared (see Mišina 2010: 268-274 for an array of Bregović’s pro-regime statements). For instance, in the spirit of “brotherhood and unity” proclaimed by the communist doctrine, for the sixth WB record in 1983 Bregović prepared a song in Albanian called Kosovska [The Kosovo Song], which was supposed to contribute to “dissimilar minds learning to live together” (Mišina 2010: 269) and thereby overcoming increasing conflicts between the Serb and the Albanian ethnic groups cohabiting in the province of Kosovo.

Especially during the last WB period, Bregović made clear references to his anti-exclusivist and pro-Yugoslav (yet at that time already tacit anti-communist) orientation, for example by including the Yugoslav anthem Hej, Sloveni [Hey, Slavs] in the band’s 1984 release. He described the stylistic polyvalence of WB music as a uniquely Yugoslav trait: “not because we declared ourselves Yugoslavs, but because our music had elements from everywhere, it was inspired by those territories ... And so it was close to everyone” (Ilic and Mikac, quoted in Baker 2008: 757). Furthermore, he publicly expressed his commitment to the Yugoslav socialist leader, Josip Broz Tito. After his death in 1980, though, Bregović reinterpreted his fondness ironically, placing it in the context of “socialist kitsch”:

I always liked that socialist kitsch. It was always so touchingly kitschy, so touchingly tasteless that I had to like it. ... I liked [Tito’s] leather coat which immediately transforms the man into a monument (Popović 1996).

In an overt reconciliatory spirit (which was yet to gain momentum in his 1990s statements, and for which he would frequently be addressed by the public – Stokes 2007: 327), in 1986 Bregović (unsuccessfully) attempted to conceptualise the complete record Pljuni i zapjevaj, moja Jugoslavijo [Spit and Sing, My

10 Reflecting on Bregović’s earlier fondness and affirmative statements about Tito and the entire “socialist kitsch,” Gajić draws a deeper connection between the two: “Both of them come from ethnically mixed families, both of them grew up in harsh Balkan circumstances having to learn all the tricks, both of them affirmed themselves in a broader international environment. Both of them built their reputation by selling international stories in their homeland, stories coloured by local specificities (ideological, and musical), and by selling local specificities to the international environment, and all that in order to achieve their personal interests. Hedonists with a thing for refined pleasures, both of them like beautiful women, expensive villas, worldwide trips, dandy clothes and expensive, often white suits. Both being morally questionable, these ‘men of the world’ do not really care for their associates and folk traditions (although they speak highly of them). ... Besides, both of them have a demagogical talent to, when needed, put on folksy clothes and give to the people what they want. Building personal interests into popular stories, they surf global waves which they serve, not caring for the consequences or what will happen after them. That is why their egoistic, superficial psychology, and their material success is similar to the ‘New Age’ movements – and at the same time ideal for globalisation processes: because it responds to the widespread wish to live lives that are comfortable and easygoing, without awareness about the long-term consequences of events that they take part in only for personal benefit” (Gajić 2005).
Yugoslavia] so that it would include politically incompatible personas: those who were devoted communists and those who were deemed nationalist or otherwise subversive for the official state ideology (Popović 1996; Mijatović 2002: 22-23). However, due to problems with the police and arrests following meetings with people labelled as inappropriate by the state, the entire concept was abandoned and only one of the intended cooperations was actually completed: the title track *Spit and Sing, My Yugoslavia* begins with a prominent communist, Svetozar Vukmanović Tempo, singing a partisan song *Padaj, silo i nepravdo* [Fall, You Force and Injustice] accompanied by a children’s choir from a Sarajevo orphanage (Janjatović 2007: 34; example 1986 Pljuni i zapjevaj moja Jugoslavijo.mp3).

While publicly declaring his commitment to the official ideology, Bregović was nevertheless finding ways to embed an ironic and multilayered position in all levels of his music. For instance, the “spit and sing” from the title and verses that commiserate with Yugoslavia as “a poor queen” reflect the increasing wrinkles on Yugoslavia’s face that would result in bloody civil wars in the years to come. In a later interview Bregović elaborated:

The whole record had this small concept that was supposed to be all-inclusive, but it was impossible to achieve. The idea was to gather all the enemies of the state in one place. ... In those days it was technically impossible. Nobody would produce such a record. ... That is why we ended up with [Svetozar Vukmanović] Tempo, and he was supposed to sing with the children’s choir. ... When the record was finished, all possible committees gathered to discuss whether [the title verse] meant “spit in your hands and sing,” or was it, God forbid, the other thing (Popović 1996).

The first meaning of the “spit and sing” verse referred to, as Bregović explained, the expression comparable with the English idiom “roll up your sleeves and get to work” (Trifković, n.d.). The “other thing,” the other meaning that could not be uttered, implied that one should spit on it. In other words, the unspeakable thought was that the entire SFRY concept was not as successful as the official ideology had claimed.

Another interesting example of a possible ironic reading of Bregović’s mobilising music for political messages is the 1987 tune dedicated to the state police forces, *A milicija trenira strogocu* [And the Police is Exhibiting Its Strictness] (example 1987 A milicija trenira strogocu.mp3), which had been released four years earlier as a children’s song in one of his independent projects. In this new version, recorded live, it starts with an infantile, mocking rendition of *The Internationale* played on a toy xylophone. On the surface, the song is a cheerful ska number that praises the power and strength of the Yugoslav police forces (in the chorus, “So young, and beautiful, and skilful, Militia”). But it is precisely this discrepancy between the lyrics and the cheerfulness of the music that leaves an impression that the author is sending an
opposite message, one having to do with the regime being assisted in its oppression by the police forces.

In spite of such tacit hints and unspoken criticisms against the regime, Bregović retained a strong pro-Yugoslav stance; indeed, in light of his ongoing pro-Yugoslav position some of the later (post-1990s) analyses question the political relevance of his earlier criticism (e.g. Rasmussen 2007: 60). During the 1980s, when the tensions between the Yugoslav republics already began to rise, Bregović committed his arranging skills to promoting the officially proclaimed “brotherhood and unity.” Whereas in the previous period he merged rock and folk, foreign and domestic music elements, in this phase he turned to merging different traditional styles in Yugoslavia (albeit still against a rock background). In this context, his folk references gained another meaning:

In the spirit of political turbulences in Yugoslavia, the band did not use only local Bosnian folklore anymore. Now the folklore had a multi-national character which, in such political framework, created the impression of a pro-Yugoslav attitude and tolerance. During its first period the White Button reflected the rural-urban issue and, related to that, the relationship between newly-composed and urban youth music. Later, during the 1980s, the key social-political events redirected the attention of a rock-pop band, such was The White Button, to Kosovo, Yugoslavia, to the relationship between Serbs and Croats (Vitas 2006: 62-63).

In 1988 Bregović created one of his most politically sensitive collages. Under the title Lijepa naša [Our Beautiful One] he pasted together two songs – a Croatian and a Serbian one – that were very well known and carried strong local-patriotic, even nationalist connotations. The first one, Lijepa naša domovino [Our Beautiful Homeland] has meanwhile been adopted as the Croatian anthem, but during the SFRY days it was interpreted as overtly nationalistic and therefore politically subversive (possibly carrying a prison sentence) if played on its own, without the official Yugoslav anthem which would aurally affirm the Yugoslav meta-identity (Pettan 2010: 136). The second one, Tamo daleko [There, Far Away] is a Serbian song from the First World War, which depicts soldiers in war, stuck on the Thessaloniki front in northern Greece, longing for their homeland (Saramandić 2004: 50). Merging these two songs together made perfect sense to Bregović, from a textual point of view (since both dealt with praising one’s homeland), but also from a musical one (see 4.2.1). Nevertheless, due to the fact that both songs had strong (Serbian and Croatian) nationalist undertones, and since the record was released in the period (the end of 1980s) which already saw the first symptoms of the civil war that was about to break two years later, this song was considered very awkward and was not welcomed by the audience. Janjatović states that there were even cases of the band members having to seek cover from the audience’s rage at live concerts, as a consequence of this bold hybrid (2007: 35). Still, Bregović’s conviction of its pure musical value led him to reuse it in different arrangements in later stages of his career (see 4.1.2). The same record left a much bigger trace with the hit-song Đurđevdan (example 1988 Djurdjevdan.mp3), a cover of a Romani song that – in
its later emanation as *Ederlezi* (see down) – is nowadays the core number in many a brass band’s repertoire. Interestingly, Bregović claimed that this song was based on a traditional Albanian song (Dedić-Milojević 2006: 57), which contrasts the nationalist connotation it acquired among Serbian audiences (especially given the sensitive relationship between the Serbian and Albanian ethnic groups). The same tune later played an important part in Bregović’s career as a composer of film music (see 3.2).

Throughout the 1980s, as the political frictions in SFRY gradually intensified, the WB continued to release five new records. The biggest Yugoslav band and the inventor of Yugo-rock could not fit into increasing anti-Yugoslav secessionist tendencies and hostilities that were building up in different SFY republics:

I remember our last tour as being very difficult. ... They take us out onto a dark stage, you think there is nothing else in the dark but the audience, and for the first time you hear these new cheers “Serbia, Serbia” ... The lights go on, and you see everything filled with Serbian flags. Something entirely new. Ironically the following day we performed in Croatia. Again the same darkness and from its depths [you can see] Croatian flags. Our vans were sprayed with slogans “Serbia über alles.” Then the same thing in Croatia. It was before [the political] rallies, before the demonstrations. It was apparent for the first time at our concerts. It made me feel disgusted and I couldn’t wait for that tour to be over (Popović 1996).

As if anticipating the end of the WB, in the same period (mid- to late 1980s) Bregović founded a production company Kamarad, which would publish most of his subsequent projects. At roughly the same time Bregović had importantly announced his stylistic shift and turn from rock towards traditional (later “world”) music:

[T]he “Western” element has lost the signification of subversion, resistance, alterity. Yet, when Bregovic announces in 1989 that he will turn to “ethnic music” with the explicit conviction that “there is no longer a point in simply copying American rock ‘n’ roll,” he hardly renounces the rock sensibility; on the contrary, he merely recognizes that “copying” the West is no longer politically effective (Gourgouris 2005: 337-338).

The same period was marked by increasing conflicts between the band members. Bregović’s involvement in other projects led the lead singer Ž. Bebek to leave the band in 1984, causing a big stir among their fans. He was replaced by M. Vojičić “Tifa,” and a year later by A. Islamović. Stylistic and other changes (caused by the change in the lead singers) somewhat diluted the WB’s impact, accompanied by the fact that by that time the rock scene was much more diverse, compared to the beginning of their career. The WB’s last album, released in 1988, was initially not meant to be the last one, yet unforeseen circumstances
(the health of a band member), followed by the war in Croatia breaking out in 1991, put an end to The White Button era.

### 3.2. 1990s: Film Music

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bregović became internationally visible by composing film music. His first projects of this kind appeared already in the late 1980s when, as the leader of the most popular Yugoslav band, he started embarking on various independent projects. In retrospect, however, it was not before the soundtrack for Emir Kusturica’s *Dom za vešanje* [Time of the Gypsies] (1988) that his career as a film composer really gained momentum. Indeed, it is safe to say that Emir Kusturica, dubbed “Balkan Fellini” (Iordanova 2008), enabled Bregović to become the internationally acclaimed composer that he is today. Kusturica’s movies are praised by numerous international awards; his role in constructing the image of the Balkans in popular culture is discussed in 2.3. (see also Daković 2008). However, his most popular productions (*Time of the Gypsies, Underground* and *Black Cat White Cat* from 1998) showed the Balkans at their worst: all feature an array of unfortunate, self-destructive characters struck by the ill fate of being born and living in the former Yugoslavia.

The plot of *Time of the Gypsies* dealt with a desperate young Roma in search for a better life for him and his family, who enters the world of crime, human trafficking and prostitution in Italy. The movie introduces Kusturica’s magic realism, a technique that blurs reality with strong symbols, which creates a common thread with his subsequent films. What was a turkey and an airborne lead female protagonist in *Time of the Gypsies* would become the flying fish in *Arizona Dream* and a floating (in fact, drowning) bride and a monkey in *Underground*.

The *Time of the Gypsies* soundtrack, merged with the soundtrack for another movie, Ademir Kenović’s *Kuduz* (1989), was released two years later, in 1990. Bregović’s cooperation with Kusturica, based on the decades-long friendship in their native Sarajevo, continued through two subsequent movies, *Arizona Dream* (1993) and *Underground* (1995). During the same period Bregović composed the soundtrack for two French movies, Philomène Esposito’s *Toxic Affair* in 1993 and Patrice Chéreau’s *La Reine Margot* in 1994, only the latter being released as a separate soundtrack.\(^\text{11}\) Apart from that, he composed music for various other (Yugoslav and international) film productions that, due to the fact they were not released as separate soundtracks, reached broader audience only in concert and recycled versions.

In search for appropriate music material to depict the otherness of Kusturica’s magical worlds, Bregović returned to his old sources of inspiration from the early period of The White Button. Moreover, Trifković (n.d.) claims that

\(^\text{11}\) Although some numbers from the *Toxic Affair* did in fact appear on Bregović’s compilation of film music, *P.S.* (1996). See Figure 3.1.
Bregović’s entire film music output is based on musically “Balkanising” the various others in the movie plots (sometimes leading roles being portrayed as outsiders, hence others). The success of this soundtrack for Bregović’s subsequent career is supported by Rasmussen, who states that “Bregovic’s light production treatment of [Roma] local repertoire became a hallmark of his future collaborative projects” (2007: 86).

*Time of the Gypsies* was created the same year as the last record of The White Button, and in fact the two releases have a song in common: *Durđevdan / Ederlezi*, mentioned previously. On the rock band’s record, *Durđevdan* (example 1988 Djurdjevdan.mp3) dealt with yearning for a lost lover, whereas as *Ederlezi* (example 1988 Ederlezi.mp3) it was a chant (almost) without words performed by (then uncredited) Macedonian Roma singer Vesna Jankovska. Both titles, “Durđevdan” and “Ederlezi,” offer a similar time reference – the first word is a Serbian/Slavic word for St. George’s Day (May 6th according to the Gregorian calendar), whereas the second is derived from the Turkish word *Hidrellez*, a holiday that marks the beginning of spring. This tune has special importance for Bregović’s career, not only because it is one of the tunes that he is most famous for, and not only because he recycled it several times. Moreover, it anticipates two music pillars of Bregović’s current career: Roma music(ans) and brass music (see 4.3). Several other tracks from this movie would appear in different arrangements in Bregović’s subsequent projects.

The second movie Bregović and Kusturica cooperated on was *Arizona Dream* (1993). This was Kusturica’s attempt at mainstream Hollywood cinema, featuring stars such as Johnny Depp, Jerry Lewis and Faye Dunaway, and including musical collaboration with Iggy Pop. It dealt (once again) with the male leading role (Depp) trying, and failing, to find his way in the world. During the same period, Bregović finally left Sarajevo, leaving his rock star life behind, and moved to Paris where after many years he was confronted with the necessity of working for a living. This is why this period (early 1990s) is marked by many smaller assignments. According to Bregović, he was not picky and accepted commissions for small-scale projects such as music for independent movies and television commercials.

Importantly, it is in *Arizona Dream* that Bregović for the first time embarks upon recycling tunes (initially released by the WB). Of course, this was made possible by the fact that *Arizona Dream* was aimed at an international audience, unlike *Time of the Gypsies* which was featured in Yugoslav cinemas before appearing at international festivals. Only in such circumstances, and in an entirely new context, could Bregović rearrange his earlier tunes and give them a new life, free from associations with the WB repertoire.

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12 Apart from Bregović himself who recycled *Ederlezi*, the same tune was also used as a soundtrack in many other movies, such as, for example, to create the soundscape for the invented Elsewhere depicted in *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006). It is also a recurring hit at live concerts featuring Balkan music (see 2.3), having become an instant token of musical Balkanness/Gypsiness over the years.
This is also an instance when Bregović continued with his collage technique, which was present already in the 1988 tune Lijepa naša (example 1988 Lijepa nasa.mp3), when he merged a Croatian and a Serbian song (as mentioned previously). For example, he pasted the intro of a WB song Da te bogdo ne volim from 1984 (example 1984 Da te bogdo ne volim.mp3) and a chorus and a bridge from Ako možeš, zaboravi from 1983 (example 1983 Ako mozes zaboravi.mp3), in order to create TV Screen performed by Iggy Pop (example 1993 TV Screen.mp3). Pop also wrote the lyrics for this track, although they were obviously inspired by Bregović’s initial lyrics about forgetting. In the light of Bregović’s “Balkanisation” of music sources (see Chapter 4), it is interesting to note how the “classical” male choir singing without words in Ako možeš, zaboravi becomes a “traditional” female group singing melancholic folksy exclamations in TV Screen (see also 4.2.1).

The specific flavour of Bregović’s music is acknowledged by Pop in the liner notes accompanying the soundtrack. Illustrating the tune Death Car, there is a drawing of a smashed car and the short message in Pop’s handwriting giving the most condense recommendation of Goran Bregović’s music: “I saw Temps de Gitanes [Time of the Gypsies] & dug it, so why not work on this guy’s new movie? Goran’s stuff is pretty cool, esp. the gypsy shit. Hope you like it – Love, Iggy Pop.”

In 1994 Bregović worked on Patrice Chèreau’s La Reine Margot [Queen Margot]. The movie plot, based on a novel by Alexandre Dumas père, deals with the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century, and queen Margot’s secret love affair with a Protestant. Her “otherness” (her betrayal of her husband and the Catholics) is portrayed by “alien” sounds that penetrate Bregović’s music:

Bregović musically translates the Protestants as “the unknown” or “the other” because they are portrayed this way in the film. The Protestants are presented as a mysterious force that is threatening the ruling Catholic French dynasty. ... His complex compositional gestures are not lacking in organisation, both individually and when contextualised in the overall conceptual patterning of the film. Bregović’s works in the Queen Margot soundtrack are not the random Balkanic overloads that they first may appear to be. His eclectic reunions of the modern and traditional, chaotic and organised, improvisatory and formalised are placed with ... precise reference to the characters on screen (Trifković n.d.).

As in the case of Arizona Dream, the soundtrack for La Reine Margot abounds with quotes from traditional music and Bregović’s earlier works. For example, the track U te sam se zaljubia (example 1994 U te sam se zaljubia.mp3) is performed by a male ensemble in the typical klapa style, which is a prominent traditional singing style from Dalmatia (Croatia). Needless to emphasise, Croatian singing style is not related in any way with the movie plot or any of the characters; it is a free-floating reference (emptied of ethnic connotation), intended for an audience unfamiliar with the actual source of the tune.
Elo Hi (example 1994 Elo Hi.mp3), dubbed by Trifković (ibid) as “Margot’s song” because it is used in most personal moments in the movie, is the most successful collage of all tracks. Performed by Ofra Haza, a Yemenite singer from Israel, this song has been recycled by Bregović several times throughout the 1990s (in fact, its first version precedes Haza’s performance – see 4.2). As will be elaborated later, the song is constructed from a collage of three WB tunes: the verse comes from Ako ima boga (example 1988 Ako ima boga.mp3), the chorus comes from Kad odem, kad me ne bude (example 1986 Kad odem, kad me ne bude.mp3), and the bridge comes from a guitar riff in Ne gledaj me tako i ne ljubi me više (example 1975 Ne gledaj me tako i ne ljubi me vise.mp3).

1995 brought the most successful and last cooperation between Kusturica and Bregović. They collaborated on the movie Underground, a tragicomedy providing a bitter commentary on the decades of communism in Yugoslavia, spiced up by a love triangle. The plot revolves around a small community of people living underground for decades as they were misinformed that the Second World War was still ongoing, their resurfacing in the midst of the 1990s civil wars and inability to cope with the world they find. This movie, created immediately after the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, hints at a Balkanised image of Yugoslavs who are tainted by the soil they were born on and doomed by their congenital passion (see 2.1). With this movie, Kusturica tried to send an important (Balkanist) message to and about Balkan people and their “way”: “They never rationalize their past. Somehow the passion that leads them forward is not changed. I hope some day people may find better ways to use the passion they have so far persistently used to kill one another” (quoted in Iordanova 2008).

Underground was hugely successful, and it received numerous awards, including the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival. The soundtrack production involved the Cape Verdean singer Cesaria Evora, as well as the brass ensemble of Boban Marković (whose participation would trigger the ensemble’s international popularity – see also 4.2). The tunes Bregović is most famous for come from this soundtrack: Kalašnjikov (example 1995 Kalashnikov.mp3) and Mesečina (example 1995 Mesecina.mp3), composed by the late Šaban Bajramović (who sang the lyrics in Romani; see 4.2.2). These two tunes became a trademark of Balkan music style, as it is constructed and consumed by the international music market. They are some of the most popular tunes with Balkan Beat audience, and they are often appropriated and performed by those artists who want to give their repertoire the instant stamp of “Balkanness” or “Gypsiness” (see 2.3).

In the midst of the vast success of the movie and its music, the Kusturica-Bregović team began to weaken. Due to reasons that were never explicated (in spite of rumours related to financial matters), after Underground their cooperation has stopped, never to continue. After his collaboration with Kusturica had ended, Bregović continued to occasionally compose film music but on a much smaller scale, doing one small production per year on average. For his following movie Black Cat White Cat (1998), Kusturica preferred to entrust the music part with the No Smoking Orchestra, also from Sarajevo, even though it
carried the same spirit as *Underground* and dealt with Gypsy stereotypes (which were by then the cornerstone of Bregović’s international image – see 5.2). However, the success of *Underground* and its music could not be surpassed, and the general public’s conclusion was that Bregović would have done a much better job with music for *Black Cat White Cat*.\(^{13}\)

### 3.3. 1990s: Pop Music

As mentioned before, throughout his involvement with the WB Bregović also took part in various independent projects (see footnote 5). Besides being lucrative, they offered him an opportunity to apply his developing production skills (which he started to gain during WB studio recordings) in ever new contexts. In SFR Yugoslavia, he cooperated with many artists, mostly pop singers (rather than bands). The most important collaboration of this kind was with Zdravko Čolić, for two reasons: firstly, because of the immense popularity of Čolić in SFRY; secondly – and also of relevance to this discussion – because the tunes produced for Čolić would reappear in many of Bregović’s later releases. Bregović involved Čolić in some of his other projects, such as *Underground* and *La Reine Margot* soundtracks, as well as various stage productions (see 3.4).

During the period 1975-1997, Bregović produced (or co-produced) five records for Čolić. Out of these five albums, the two presented here\(^{14}\) were released in 1990 and 1997. The first itself introduced tunes that were recycled from earlier sources (see 4.2.1). For instance, a very successful tune from the early 1990s was Čolić’s version of Čaje Sukarije (example [1990 Caje Sukarije.mp3](#)) sung partly in Romani and including a girl’s rapping voice. Over the following nine years, this song was recycled at least four times by Bregović (see 4.2), but what is interesting is that it was itself a recycled version of a tune by a world

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\(^{13}\) Even though the two Sarajevo artists went separate ways after *Underground*, the importance of Kusturica for Bregović’s career is acknowledged by the composer himself: “In your interviews you frequently mention Kusturica. Why are you absent from his interviews? – Well, maybe he is more important to me than I am to him. You know, I do this now, but if it weren’t for him I would have never done this. It started so, almost by accident ... We knew each other even before *Time of the Gypsies* and then we started with only a few minutes for that movie, but then it extended to a whole hour. That is how it continued. If I have not had the fortune to work on good movies, nobody would have ever known that I can write good film music. You know, that’s how it is. I cannot avoid mentioning him. He is one of the most important persons in my life. Most probably there are composers who write good music for bad movies. That can never succeed. If it had not been for *Time of the Gypsies*, my international career would not exist. I consider him to have an important role in my movie. A leading role” (Nikcevich 1995).

\(^{14}\) Only two of these five releases are included in the list of Bregović’s selected projects (see Figure 3.1), because these two provided a substantial recycling basis for his subsequent productions. Three out of nine tracks from the 1990 release were reused; and five out of ten from the 1997 release.

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famous Macedonian Roma singer Esma Redžepova (example 1950s Esma Redzepova - Caje Sukarije.mp3). The 1997 release continued in the same vein: it spawned tunes that would be recycled in at least seven subsequent releases. It featured a Bulgarian singing group as backing vocals, who were by then a part of Bregović’s Wedding and Funeral Band (see 3.4). However, Čolić’s new sound produced by Bregović was interpreted as “too Turkish” and the CD was less than enthusiastically accepted by the public (see 2.2.1).

Bregović’s projects abroad proceeded in a similar manner: he appeared as a (co-)producer of tunes for several pop singers. Apart from Čolić’s CDs, he worked on five releases during the 1990s: in Greece (two artists), Poland (two artists) and Turkey (one artist). Out of 50 produced tunes, more than 90 per cent (47 tunes) were inspired, rearranged or pasted from earlier Bregović’s songs (see 4.2). These extensive recyclings, intended to construct and offer Balkanised sound in countries not native to Bregović, are the basis of the musical analysis that follows in 4.3.

1991 saw the release of the CD Paradehtika by the Greek singer Alkistis Protopsalti. The album reached a golden record status, and was clearly marketed as “Balkan music” as a consequence of Bregović’s involvement in the release. The press kit on Protopsalti’s homepage confirms his impact, stating that

[i]n the early 1990’s Alkistis Protopsalti proposed to the Yugoslavian composer Goran Bregović to turn his “Time of the Gypsies” into a Greek record. The result of this proposal – with Lina’s Nikolakopoulou lyrics – was the golden album “Paradehtika”. The record became a great hit, but beyond that, it was the first time that the Greek public welcomed the Balkan music, and this initiated the search for similar sounds (Protopsalti Homepage – emphasis added).

In the biography available on the website, written by Protopsalti herself, she repeats the statement about the success of the CD, and replicates the usual (see 5.2) image of Bregović as the exponent of Gypsy music and culture:

[This] album was a significant milestone on my musical journey. It was summer and a friend of mine, Costas Cotoulas, suggested that I see Emil Kusturitsa’s [sic] film “THE TIME OF THE GYPSIES” mainly to hear Goran Bregović’s songs and music. It was love at first sight. The experiences we lived through with the gypsies are unforgettable. Their unconventional way of life, their inconsistency, their

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15 In Greece, marketing of a music project as “Balkan” is somewhat surprising, given the fact that neither in the 1990s, nor today, did this term have the same appeal and marketing currency as it did in other parts of Europe. The Greeks do not readily subscribe to Balkan identity and their attitude towards belonging to the Balkans is ambiguous, even if the country is physically nested within Balkan soil (see 2.1.3). What might have influenced such good reception of Protopsalti’s “Balkanised” release is the fact that Balkan music was marketed as a foreign ingredient brought by Bregović; in other words, as imported rather than own.
nonexistent professionalism all faded as soon as they entered the studio. Their passion, energy and talent not only flooded the recording studio but also our hearts. Goran Bregović is charismatic. ... The “gypsy” performance played for two years – not only in Athens – but the whole of Greece and Cyprus (Protopsalti Homepage).

Although announced as the rearrangement of the Time of the Gypsies soundtrack, in fact only four tracks stem from this release, most notably Ederlezi, transformed into Toy Ai Giorgi (Ederlezi) (example 1991 Toy Ai Giorgi.mp3). The remaining tracks are from Zdravko Čolić’s repertoire from his 1990 CD, and the WB’s repertoire from the 1980s. This CD features the first collage version of Elo Hi (example 1991 Theos An Einai.mp3) that would, as mentioned before, become the most powerful tune on the La Reine Margot soundtrack three years later (see previous section).

Bregović’s next intraregional collaboration was also with a Greek artist, George Dalaras, with the CD released in 1997. An internationally acclaimed singer, Dalaras’ style is closer to urban Greek music, especially rebetiko. With Bregović, he (like Protopsalti) reflected on the region that both artists shared. The liner notes evoke the usual image of the region as a space of ingrained turbulence, utilising the immortal gun-powder metaphor (see 2.1.4):

The eve of the year 2000 is approaching and we are pushing a ball uphill, being certain that as soon as we reach the top we will roll downhill again. It is fun!
In this small, rocky neighbourhood of the world, which still ‘smells of gun-powder’, we go on singing. For the time being, we are through. Home free (Liner notes, Dalaras & Bregovic).

The entire booklet is visually designed in dark red tones, and shows almost exclusively photographs of Bregović and Dalaras. This strongly claimed authorship of the released tunes is in accordance with Bregović’s usual appearance in videos, CD booklets and on stage (see below). In contrast to Protopsalti’s CD seven years earlier (which features almost exclusively local musicians), this production involved musicians from different countries, and for the first time the “Wedding and Funeral Band” (in charge of wind section and percussion – see 3.4). The same singing group that previously took part in Protopsalti’s project was this time credited as “The Bulgarian women’s voices,” referring to the “mystery of Bulgarian voices,” a brand already established in the international music market (see 2.3).

All ten tracks on the Dalaras & Bregovic CD are recycled. Especially interesting are rearranged versions of the three tunes mentioned earlier: Čaje Šukarije (example 1997 Me Lene Popi.mp3), the merged Croatian-Serbian nationalist song Lijepa naša (example 1997 Ena Tragoudi Gia Tin Eleni F.mp3), and the Underground mega-hit Mesečina (example 1997 Nihta.mp3).
In 1999 Bregović worked on two projects. Moving along the intraregional cooperation trajectories (see 2.2.2), the first was a CD by a Turkish pop singer Sezen Aksu, releasing once again ten recycled tunes (on this CD, see Stokes 2007). Immensely popular, with more than 40 million sold albums, Aksu is regarded as the “Queen of Turkish Pop.” According to her website, her collaboration with Bregović, entitled Dügün ve Cenaze or “The Wedding and a Funeral” (probably after his Wedding and Funeral Band – see next section), increased her presence on the international market. The role of the brass band on this release is prominent; in Stokes’ words, it was the entire “point” of the CD, and “its distinguishing feature” (2007: 326). Tracks on the CD bring rearrangements of some of Bregović’s greatest hits, including Mesečina (Aysigi – example 1999 Aysigi.mp3), Kalašnjikov (example 1999 Kalashnikof.mp3) and Ederlezi (example 1999 Hidrellez.mp3). There is also another version of Elo Hi, titled Allahin Varsa (example 1999 Allahin Varsa.mp3). This release had a significant impact on Aksu’s career; it yielded a regional tour in which she was accompanied by a Macedonian brass band that provided the “Balkan” ingredient of her sound (ibid: 327).

The same year Bregović completed another CD, with the Polish pop singer Kayah. Like in the case of the Turkish CD, all ten tunes are recycled, six of them sharing the same tunes with (simultaneously released) Aksu’s CD. By that time, Bregović was already popular in Poland thanks to a previous concert tour, which he gave together with his Wedding and Funeral Band. The concert he gave in Poznan in 1997 was declared the greatest cultural event of the year, and was broadcast numerous times on local TV. It started a “Bregovićmania” in Poland which resulted in the collaboration with Kayah and later with Krzysztof Krawczyk (Krzysztof Krawczyk i Goran Bregovic, n.d.).

Although Kayah has become popular within other corners of popular music (reggae, soul, jazz, R&B), she made a stylistic experiment with this CD, which turned out to be hugely successful. Again with Bregović’s name and face in the front, the liner notes feature the two artists in an arranged “peasant” style, resembling old-fashioned wedding photos.
Entitled *Kayah and Bregović*, this release received several Polish awards for the best video of the year, best pop record, and best single. Kayah gained the title of the best female artist, whereas Bregović himself won the title Composer of the Year. The CD itself became “the greatest artistic and commercial success of recent years,” winning yet another award that declared it “the record for the masses” (Kayah Homepage). The CD reached six platinum records (selling around 650.000 copies), followed by several singles featuring diverse remixes of the most popular tracks, including *Niema, niema ciebie* (example 1999 Nie ma nie ma ciebie.mp3), the recycled version of *Ederlezi* (as it is credited in the liner notes). It also features arrangements of *Elo Hi* (example 1999 Jesli Bog istnieje.mp3), crediting the “original” title and Ofra Haza for the lyrics, and *Čaje Sukarije* (example 1999 Caje Sukarije.mp3), which was, interestingly, credited as a “Gypsy folk music arranged by Goran Bregović” instead of mentioning Esma Redžepova, which must have been tacitly approved by Bregović (see 4.2.2).

In 2001 there was yet another Polish release, performed by Krzysztof Krawczyk, this time in a style closer to rock ballads. Claiming that his music is closer to “ordinary people,” Bregović entered into collaboration with a musician regarded as old-fashioned, in contrast to his previous project with hugely popular Kayah (Wywiad z Bregovićem, n.d.). Ironically dubbed “the kings of kitsch,” the two artists and their cooperation were put in context of the broader

\[^{16}\text{Courtesy of Universal Music Group.}\]

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neo-folk movement in Poland, which was greatly influenced by Bregović’s music:

Krawczyk is convinced of the commercial success of this material. For the past twenty years he has mainly been popular as a singer of romantic Schlagers. Neither he nor Bregović mind that young music critics ironically call them “kings of kitsch”. Newly-composed folk music has only recently been gaining popularity in Poland, mostly thanks to Goran Bregović’s concerts. Meanwhile domestic ensembles have emerged, which base their repertoire on arranged folk songs and music motives from the Carpathian region and eastern Poland.

It is difficult for creators of the new folk music to free themselves from Balkan rhythms, brought by Bregović, and this results in a sometimes unbelievable mixture of traditions (Kraljevi kića 2001 – emphasis added).

Among ten recycled tracks, Krawczyk offered his version of the pasted Croatian-Serbian tune Lijepa naša (example 2001 Witaj gosciu.mp3). Although Bregović’s name (and face) guaranteed success in Poland, which was already open to Balkanised tunes, this CD did not achieve the number of copies comparable with other releases mentioned in this subsection, and is frequently omitted from Bregović’s discographies.

In the midst of his various projects, Bregović reflected on his involvement with different artists and different music styles. Although not specifically referring to projects he was yet to make in the late 1990s, he claimed that his new (post-WB) music was much more natural. Somewhat contradictory to his frequent physical appearance on CD covers, he claimed that he enjoyed the fading of the limelight:

I always wanted such a career and now it has finally happened. I don’t have any obligations, I don’t have to have my picture taken, to talk to the newspapers and my record is still ok. The best part is that people buy records with material that does not require me to lie. [During the SFRY era] I had to lie sometimes, to create these artificial constructions, those pasted Frankensteins. My records are natural now, those Frankensteins I make today are more natural. My best music is yet to come (Popović 1996).

Bregović’s independent projects continue to the present day, although on a smaller (ex-Yu) scale. One of the most recent collaborations was with Croatian pop-star Severina which started in 2006 when Bregović co-signed a song she performed at the Eurovision Song Contest in Athens. This song stirred Croatian public life due to Bregović’s clear stamp as a Balkan music composer and the song’s categorisation as turbo-folk (interpreted as a Serbian label – see 2.2.1), and any links with Serbia being strongly rejected by the Croatian public because of the troublesome political relationship between the two countries (Baker 2008). Nevertheless, in spite of all the controversies, the cooperation between the singer and composer/producer resulted in a CD released in 2008. In addition to
instigating discussion about authenticity in and of Croatian music (imagined and defined as opposed to Serbian), it provoked strong criticism in religious circles, due to its title *Zdravo Marijo* (Hail Mary), so much that Severina was dubbed “Croatian Madonna” for her bold use of church symbols. In accordance with Bregović’s (by then) usual practice, the tracks were mostly recycled, this time from his previous stage production *Karmen* (see 3.4). The CD production involved brass ensembles from Croatia and Serbia, as well as a Croatian tamburica orchestra. Interestingly, one of the tracks is attributed to the Turkish singer Sezen Aksu (obviously after Bregović’s cooperation with her more than a decade earlier), which shows but one of many intraregional cross-links Bregović has established through his projects (see 2.2.2). The release offers a mixture of styles so typical of Bregović:

[I]n this album the urban, genuine and authentic merge into a distinctive new sound. Starting from the obvious elements of this region’s folk music, classical pop-rock, music framework of a cabaret, mild influence of blues, to modern dance rhythms, what emerged was something unique. ... The main track is “Gas, Gas,” a real “Balkan beat” which made Bregović famous worldwide (V.Dj.Dj. 2008).

Interestingly, in order to displace it from the negative turbo-folk label (see 2.2.1), in the Serbian release of the same CD the readers/listeners were assured that “the single *Gas, Gas* might sound to someone like turbofolk, but it is a mistake. The song is an effective dance-floor killer, an ultimate club tune, fun and easygoing, which immediately won the media, as well as European clubs where Balkan sound can be heard” (G.J. 2008).

3.4. 1990s and 2000s: World Music

The next (and still ongoing) phase of Goran Bregović’s career started in the late 1990s, still overlapping with his earlier projects (see Figure 3.1). Unsatisfied with the pace of composing and short deadlines associated with film music, he returned to his old passion for live performances. In order to start performing live after almost a decade of composing music for others, in 1996 he founded his Wedding and Funeral Band (also known as Wedding and Funeral Orchestra, Orchestra for Weddings and Funerals etc. – henceforth WFB). He has been

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17 An interesting detail about Bregović merchandising (sections of) his tunes is mentioned in reference to another singer’s CD release: When the press asked the singer Neda Ukraden about a particular song produced by Bregović, she replied: “[Bregović] gave me the song for free, but I had to pay him with my mom’s *sarma* [stuffed cabbage dish]. By the way, [he] once told me: ‘Listen, I can give you only a half of this song, because I already gave the other half to Severina’” (S.D. 2006).

18 Tambura, or tamburica, is a traditional plucked string instrument, also prominent in surrounding countries (e.g. Hungary).
performing worldwide with this ensemble ever since (Mijatović 2002: 31). An idea of an orchestra as Bregović’s expressive “instrument” stems already from the WB period (see 3.1). Already in the late 1970s he experimented with introducing timbres uncharacteristic for a rock band. The WFB is just a culmination of Bregović’s decades-long search for a tool most suitable for expressing his musical ideas.

The name of the orchestra implies that funerals are typical occasions for playing (brass) music in the region. However, in reality this practice, although noted, is far less common than Bregović presents it, even though cases of funeral brass playing have been noted sporadically by local researchers (such as Pettan 1992: 185 and Golemović 2006b: 362-363). Bregović places this practice in a specific context of Orthodox Christianity: “They really play in the weddings and in the funerals, as in the orthodox [sic] tradition. After the funeral ritual you’ve eaten, you’ve drunk so, for a while, your pain is estranged by the music” (Fabretti n.d.). In another interview, he reflects on the fact, noted in 2.2.1, that the origin of Serbian brass music probably is military bands. His emphasis on the military practice as “the only solid tradition here” only corroborates the violent image of the region (see 2.1):

How did you come up with the name “Wedding and Funeral Band?”

It occurred to me because all my players from that brass orchestra have, in fact, played at weddings and funerals. Each of them has played either at weddings or funerals: some of them played more at weddings, and some more at funerals. I thought it was so cute. ...

Brass music stems from the military tradition, and it is very distinctive. Coming from the military service, trumpeters started to play at weddings, and then at funerals. All of a sudden the military, which is by the way the only solid tradition here – or rather the military sound, to be more precise – penetrated these segments where it wasn’t planned. However, it is obvious that the military trumpet is easily recognisable everywhere; it is an archetype that is close to everyone (Alempijević 2002).

In journalistic descriptions of Bregović’s orchestra, its (ethnically and stylistically) diverse nature is often used as a metaphor for the multicultural, hybrid Balkans (see 2.1.2). Its members come from different former Yugoslav ethnic groups, most notably the Roma, supplemented with a Bulgarian female singing group. The role of Roma musicians in Bregović’s career, elaborated in 5.2, is well reflected in the orchestra. They are the core of the ensemble, and together with the other members they are “in the service of a permanent contrast between the most advanced technology of musical construction and a pinch of folkloric perfumes from the Balkans” (Bregović Homepage [old]: Press in English).

Initially set up as a hybrid between a Roma brass ensemble and a symphonic orchestra, the WFB has gone through various instrument combinations since its inception (although gravitating towards a smaller ensemble over the years). Especially so in Bregović’s various collaborations, the
performing body can encompass wind instruments, strings, percussion and vocal section consisting of three main units: soloists (coming from diverse music backgrounds), an “Orthodox” male choir and a “traditional” female singing group. Each of these components offers a specific sound colour and opens a different set of stylistic possibilities, enabling creation of different codes (Slobin 1993). They are also spatially separated on the stage and visually different: whereas the members of the male choir and the string section wear black suits and ties, the female group and the brass section are in village clothes (although not exactly referring to any specific group or region, but rather clad in generic “folk” outfits).

![Figure 3.3. Wedding and Funeral Band, showing its different sections (brass, string, choir and female singing group), with Bregović centre stage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Goran_Bregovic.jpg)

The syncretic, diverse nature of the orchestra is also emphasised in the musical backgrounds of its members: Bregović explains that there are uneducated, semi-educated and highly trained musicians, and elaborates:

*How was born the idea for the Orchestra of the weddings and funerals?*
GB: From an ambition to play with a symphony orchestra. When I came back to the “concert” form, I first played with a traditional band, orchestra and choir, but removing all wood instruments (clarinets, etc.) that I found too harmonious. I recomposed this orchestra as I imagine the “human” music, not perfectly tuned, more natural. I replaced the trumpets by a gypsy brass band, which requires a shifted play compared to a symphonic score. I also added traditional drums, and


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computers. In the chorus, I have only male singers coming from orthodox [sic] song tradition. And for the female intonations, I have the Bulgarian Voices\textsuperscript{20}. All that gives the feeling of a great freedom (Goran Bregović 2002).

I work with talented people. I have trumpeters who before [they started working with] me played at weddings their whole life; the second trumpeter is a Macedonian and he plays the first trumpet in the Jazz ensemble of the [Serbian Broadcasting Corporation]. I also have a Gypsy trumpeter who has completed only few months of elementary school, whereas the saxophone player teaches at three conservatories. Three of them have only ever played at funerals. A colourful bunch, from semi-literate to highly educated. That is good, because it creates curiosity among them and a certain madness when it comes to making music (Dedić-Milojević 2006: 57).

The importance of a “not too harmonious sound” for Bregović is repeated in other statements of his:

In an orchestra, I was always irritated by the fact that it was too much in tune. I don’t like [things] to be too much in tune, because it is not natural and I don’t feel natural. I like it when it’s a bit “out of tune,” exactly as much as everything around us is also out of tune. ... There is such a thing as human tuning. I find perfect tuning unnatural, it irritates me (Mijatović 2002: 53).

Since its foundation, the WFB has played hundreds of concerts worldwide, although the majority of their performances have been in Europe and South America. Only in years 2005, 2006 and 2007 did they give their first concerts in Asia, North America and Australia respectively (Bregović Homepage [old]: Biography). The concert reviews use a jargon that unmistakably relates Bregović’s music to folk music revivals (Livingston 1999), glorifying the mystical powers and ancient life forces residing in traditional music. A few short excerpts from Bregović’s homepage (in its previous version, before the Alkohol-remake – see below) clearly show recurring tropes in describing his music, including the notions of the Balkans as a powder-keg and their music as intrinsically hybrid (see 2.1.2):

For the past four years [Bregović] has attracted the sensibility of most varied audiences in Europe letting them taste something that started out as original film-track music, and that ends up anchored in our orphic subconscious as the most beautiful, captivating, cross-breed visual symphony that has been woven over this last decade of the XX century. It is a mind-blowing return trip with no destination or port of arrival. ... The Balkan Soul offers us not only reasons for fear and weariness as in their latest belligerent exploits. From the mud appear also flowers...
of incomparable splendour and beauty. ... May gods and muses of art replace devils of war and disaster. So be it (Bregović Homepage [old]: Press in English).

All of a sudden, we are thrust into the heart of the Balkan’s genius, into this sweet and irresistible confusion of feelings, where people are, at the same time, laughing, crying and singing, between an ironic thoughtlessness and an exacerbated sentimentalism – life there is a permanent and opencast complete theater, with its intense dramas, its unutterable joys and, always, omnipresent, this beautiful nostalgia that never overloads [sic] itself, like by some kind of magic, in one inexhaustible fountain of life (ibid: Music for movies).

Reviews of Bregović’s concerts and CDs with the WFB stress the hybrid structure of the orchestra and the music’s eclectic nature. In accordance with the world music discourse (see 4.1), words often used are mix, blend, melt, merge etc. Another single snapshot of Bregović’s Internet portrait shows clearly how striking this image (of his music traversing borders of time, space, genre, religion, etc.) really is for his listeners:

He can merge Balkan folk and electronics, frantic rhythm and sacred themes. ... “My music? It’s a mixture born from the Balkan frontier. A mysterious land where three cultures cross each other: orthodox, catholic and muslim” [sic] ... His compositions, a mix of Balkan folk and refined technology, conquered Europe ... So let’s give space to the music: raw and roaring sounds, a bit “alcoholic”, mixed with solemn and touching tunes ... It’s a formula that melts Bartok and jazz, tango and Slavic folk, turkish [sic] suggestions and Bulgarian vocals, orthodox sacred pholiphony [sic] and modern pop beats. ... You really can’t resist to the charm of this Balkan inebriating cocktail (Fabretti n.d.).

Figure 3.4. Bregović and the WFB in performance

21 Reprinted with kind permission of Marija Rankov.
The WFB’s regular repertoire consists of Bregović’s greatest hits, which they perform in independent concerts or festivals dedicated to world music. He is marketed in countless reviews as a Balkan ethno [music] star, the king of Balkan ethno-rock, a living legend of Balkan rock and ethno music, Balkan fever hit, a guru/wizard of Balkan ethno music, etc. As a guru/wizard/king, Bregović has been awarded honorary citizenship of Buenos Aires, but also of Tirana, capital of Albania, which is interesting given the rather tense relationships between Serbia and Albania. In 2004 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of music by the CITY College in Thessaloniki “in recognition of his distinguished career and his contribution to the cultural development of South-East Europe.” The same article also mentions “the pivotal role Goran Bregović has played in capturing and preserving the diverse ethnic traditions of the region and presenting them to a global audience” (Graduation Ceremony 2004).

Apart from his ordinary tours, Bregović embarks on commissioned projects where the WFB is frequently joined by various ensembles or soloists. In this way the sound reaches yet a new level of hybridity where even more codes are layered upon one another (Slobin 1993). These projects, typical in the period during and immediately following the breakup of Yugoslavia, are usually connected by a common thread of multiculturalism and reconciliation. In this sense they resemble the late phase of the WB career during the 1980s, when Bregović used to bring together songs/people with different backgrounds to underline the overarching, pan-Yugoslav identity (see 3.1). Nevertheless, his recent projects are much less popular among his worldwide audiences, compared to his greatest hits such as Ederlezi, Kalašnjikov and Mesečina, so much so that the section for upcoming performances on his website sometimes contains a warning that a concert would feature new repertoire instead of the biggest hits. Because of performing such a diverse repertoire, and in order for the audience to adjust its expectations, the concert announcements also often state the number of performers involved (whether it would be a “small” concert with only 7 musicians on the stage, or a “big” one with 35 or more).

The first big event where the WFB performed was in 1997. On the occasion of inaugurating Thessaloniki as that year’s European cultural capital, Goran Bregović and the WFB were commissioned to give a concert that would be released a year later as Silence of the Balkans. According to the event’s Artistic Director, quoted in the liner notes, the aim of the commission was a “work which would bring together the Balkan experiences with the image and the history of a city, that forms a spiritual and cultural centre of the whole area for 23 centuries.”

Created in the midst of the turbulent 1990s, which brought civil wars and the gradual breakup of the SFRY, Silence of the Balkans carries a powerful reconciliation appeal emitted by Bregović. Not taking sides in the still ongoing conflicts, he declared this project a general tribute to all victims of wars in the Balkans (Pećanin n.d.). His connection with and promotion of music familiar as “folk” and “own” entered a “new level of both authorial intimacy and Balkan exotica” (Rasmussen 2007: 86-87), as he collaborated “with artists from the whole
Balkans. Everything that could be called the Balkans: between Budapest and Istanbul” (Heineken Rock Interview 1997). *Silence of the Balkans* brought several recycled tunes, most notably *Ederlezi* in a style similar to the early world music arrangements, with samples of sounds digitally processed so as to give an impression of an “indigenous” environment, and synthesised instrument timbres (for instance, *Ederlezi*). For this release Bregović hired a conservatory-trained composer as an arranging assistant, which is a practice that he would continue in his later projects (as he preferred to remain deliberately ignorant, in his own words: “I learned to nurture my ignorance as some sort of knowledge” – Grujić and Nikčević 2012).

The CD tracks on *Silence of the Balkans* are sequenced so that sung tunes alternate with four tracks entitled *Silence* 1-4. The first interjected *Silence* is an instrumental introduction ending with a cracking (slowed-down) recording of what were allegedly the words of Winston Churchill saying: *The Balkans is a powder-keg. Much so, Europe can’t live without it. Behind the line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Southern Europe, and all cities and population surrounding it. OK. The Balkans is a powder-keg, but we will find common conceptions on both sides.* Bregović’s reference to the wars in the former Yugoslavia continues all the way up to the last track (entitled *Mocking Song*), where three children’s voices close the complete *Silence of the Balkans*. A simple motif performed on a toy xylophone is accompanied by a brass ensemble and voice. At the end the three boys, one by one, say their names and declare their friendship with the next boy: “My name is A and my friend is B; My name is B and my friend is C; My name is C.” The composer explained the thought behind this track:

I have, in fact, a small composition for male choir and three children’s instruments. I wanted them to be played by three children from the “Ljubica Ivezic” orphanage. It is an orphanage from my neighbourhood in Sarajevo. On a certain allegoric plane, my intention was to have three orphans – a Serb, a Croat and a Muslim – because I didn’t want to cooperate with any adults. If I cooperate on an allegoric level with Serbs, Croats and Muslims, let them be those abandoned children (Mijatović 2002: 32).

In consequence of the success of the assignment of such magnitude, the years that followed brought more commissions and more chances for multicultural, crossover projects. In 2000, in Italy, Bregović produced the *Hot Balkan Roots* for the occasion of the *Bologna 2000*. He was commissioned to be the “ambassador of music for the Orthodox countries” (probably meaning the countries where Orthodox Christians make up the demographic majority). In this project he included three brass ensembles (from Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia) and a Russian female vocal ensemble (Bregović Homepage [old]: Biography).

In 2002 Bregović released his *Tales and Songs from Weddings and Funerals*, marketed in different countries as differently as classical music, jazz or pop. It contained tunes that would become the core of his concert performances in the
subsequent years. Similar to the *Silence of the Balkans*, the tracks are structured in a sequence of (mostly) instrumental “tales” (*Tales* I-VII), intertwined with vocal “songs.” In the liner notes, the tales are accompanied by tempi (some of which are invented, such as “adagio poco febrile” or “moderato melancolico”) and instrumentation indications such as “for wind orchestra and clock” (*Tale* I), “for wine glasses and strings” (*Tale* II), but also “for Zdravko Ćolić and the Georgian Male Choir” (*Tale* III). The last tale is subtitled “Scherzo for gypsy orchestra.”

The sung numbers are either in a non-existing language (such as *Tale* III) or in Roma language. This is a deliberate decision by Bregović not to use any of the languages deriving from his mother tongue, Serbo-Croatian:

*Why are all verses on the CD written in Roma language?*

Since I don’t write in Serbo-Croatian anymore, as that language doesn’t exist anymore, lately when I write for vocals I write in an imaginary language, I put vowels and consonants where it suits me. And this CD I wrote in Gypsy [language]. Not in protest to the fact that Serbo-Croatian does not exist anymore, but rather because I don’t feel comfortable writing either in Croatian or in Serbian, or in that Bosnian which is a new invention I cannot fit into.

*Which language do you speak?*

Well, in Ours. There is that dead language that could be called Ours. And it was nice for me to write in Gypsy [language], I felt as if I was at the beginning again. ... Now, since I wrote in a language that is new to me, the songs are very simple, they show the joy of discovering links between that language and music (Ferina 2002).

With this release, Bregović obviously intended to recharge his pool of dance-floor hits, so he created several tracks that have a mood similar to *Kalašnjikov* or *Mesečina*: for example, the tunes *Sex* (example 2002 *Sex.mp3*) or *Cocktail Molotov*, as well as the *Polizia molto arrabiata* (example 2002 *Polizia molto arrabiata.mp3*) which is in fact a recycled *A milicija trenira strogoću* from 1987 (example 1987 *A Milicija Trenira Strogocu.mp3* – see 3.1).

Later that same year Bregović produced *My Heart has Become Tolerant* with (up to that moment) the clearest focus on reconciliation and multiculturalism. It was premiered at the French Festival of Sacred Music which that year had a subtitle “From Bach to Bregović.” According to Bregović, it was a “laymen’s liturgy” dedicated to similarities in religious services of the three major monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. He depicted the millennia of coexistence of the three religions by involving three female singers as three “priests,” each stemming from a different religion. He elaborated:

The concept with the three of them is exceptionally interesting, because [apart from being “priests” of three religions] they represented three minorities – Tunisian singer Amina represented Islam, Dana International represented Judaism and Vaska Jankovska [represented] Christianity. It is interesting because Vaska is a Gypsy and she represented Christianity, whereas Dana is a transvestite and she represented Judaism (Ferina 2002).
Although he often denied any political engagement, all these statements showed Bregović’s intent to send a message that transcended his music. It was even more noticeable when it came to the same performance in his native Sarajevo:

In Sarajevo we performed in a different setting. We brought string musicians from the Sarajevo Philharmonic, and a vocal ensemble from Belgrade Orthodox Church. That is how we kept this allegoric level. For Sarajevo, such a setting might be even more important than the one with Arabs and Russians. I don’t think it changes anything, I don’t have such an illusion. But the destiny of this mankind is probably to eventually make peace with each other and coexist with all our differences. Still, it is a long road to illuminate, and every little light on this path is welcome (ibid).

In 2004 Bregović premiered another project, “his first opera entitled Bregović’s Karmen with a Happy End, the first Carmen with a K and a Balkan accent. A combination of naive theatre and opera” (Bregović Homepage [old]: Biography). After more than one hundred performances, in 2007 it was released on CD. Initially conceptualised as a movie script, Bregović later gave up on that idea and created a musical using a few core motives from Bizet’s Carmen. Apart from the WFB, the music ensemble included Vaska Jankovska, a Macedonian Roma singer whose powerful voice had made Ederlezi such an extraordinary number some fifteen years earlier.

Karmen’s narrative reveals a complex structure consisting of several intertwining stories. It is an opera about an opera, and an opera within an opera. In the centre of the plot is Kleopatra (leading female role) in search of a lost opera that was created by Fuad, a deceased Gypsy trumpeter. He made it for Karmen, who had also died as a prostitute in Italy. In order to restage the opera, Kleopatra meets members of Fuad’s band in search for pieces of the almost forgotten music, which is performed as the second act of Karmen. Unlike Carmen and Fuad’s Karmen, though, Bregović’s Karmen has a happy end since Kleopatra marries Fuad’s nephew Bakia, who she is secretly in love with. Several layers of the narrative create a blurry temporal line, supported by the WFB members’ double roles (within Bregović’s and Fuad’s Karmen). One of the roles in the opera is dedicated to Bregović himself, who is announced in the libretto as “an elegant gypsy with a black eye-patch.” The language of the opera is Roma and English (or Roma and Serbian/Croatian in case of domestic performances).

The complexity of the plot is increased by multimedia supplements: The subtitles placed above the stage provide translation of Roma passages, but also display excerpts by the narrator that are instrumental in tying the story together. Furthermore, there is a printed sheet that comes with every ticket: the audience is supposed to follow cues given by Bregović and look at the illustrations made by Karmen. The entire visual component of the opera (including the
accompanying illustrations) evokes associations of naïve painting, with bright colours and simplified forms.

The main motive of the scenography and the drawings are Cupids with moustaches. This is a line that stretches beyond a simple humorous and incongruous effect: the hairy angels embody at least two concepts that deeply penetrate Bregović’s art. Firstly, Kleopatra’s fondness of men with moustaches and her words “What’s life without happiness? It’s like a kiss without a moustache” relates strongly to the constructed masculine image of the Balkans, and Balkan men being frequently depicted in fiction literature with moustaches (see 2.1.4). The second reference to a moustache is made by Bregović himself, in what seems to be the core concept of his opera, as well as his other hybrid projects:

My Karmen has nothing to do with Bizet. Except for the fact that my libretto would have been impossible to write if it were not for Bizet’s. It is very frequent in art history. It is the same like when you put a moustache on Mona Lisa (Pantelić 2006).

Mentioning Mona Lisa is probably a reference to Marcel Duchamp’s L.H.O.O.Q., a Dadaist art piece from 1919, displaying a reproduction of Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa with a moustache and a goatee. In this way Bregović interprets his music as a postmodernist expression, and positions his production within the broader context of contemporary art (on world music and postmodernism, see 4.1).

Figure 3.5. CD cover of Karmen

22 Courtesy of Universal Music Group.
Bregović’s declared intention behind *Karmen* is a wish to create artwork that would communicate the joy and energy of Gypsies, but at the same time avoid the negative segments of the Gypsy stereotype – something he develops further in his other statements about Gypsies (see 5.2). In his words, the purpose of *Karmen* was to offer Gypsies a happy-ending narrative, an unlikely positive version of the old Gypsy plot:

Opera is an expensive thing, for rich people, and this [*Karmen*] is cheap, for poor people. My *Karmen* is a small anti-opera for poor people, which can be performed and afforded by poor people. That is the ambition behind my opera. ... I would like it to be played for tips, the same way like 90 percent of gypsy tips come from playing several of my songs. ...

*Why the happy end?*

Why shouldn’t I intervene, if I can? If the ambition of my opera is to enter the repertoire of gypsy orchestras, imagine if I would give them a tragic end. As if there are not enough tragic events in their lives (Pantelić 2006).

The same intention, to give Gypsies a happy ending, is repeated by Bregović in the libretto itself. Reading Fuad’s letter about how he came to the idea to transform *Carmen* into *Karmen*, he says:

And then I saw that opera. “Carmen”. Giovanni, the guy from whom we always buy trumpets, wanted me to see it at all costs. Seems it’s the only gypsy opera. I always thought that in culture things are better than in life, but that Carmen gets fucked over just like mine. ... That’s why I wrote that opera. That’s why I decided to write it all over again. If we, gypsies, have only one opera, then that one can have a happy end. At least (CD liner notes).

*Karmen* was premiered in 2004 at a local festival in Serbia featuring amateur Roma theatre groups. The performance was not announced in the media until after the event, when only a few newspapers reported about it. In his introduction to the performance, Bregović actually referred to himself as a Gypsy. He also reflected on the fact that he had been appropriating Gypsy music for many years, and repeated the same thoughts in an interview:

We took from you [the Roma] for a long time, it is about time to give back a thing or two. *We Gypsies* have but one opera, and it ends tragically. That is why I decided to create and perform, with my orchestra, for the first time in this region, a Gypsy Karmen with a happy end. Enjoy! (Jovanović 2004a – emphasis added).

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23 In fact, the *Karmen* performance in Belgrade two years later was promoted as the Serbian premiere, because the fact that the world premiere was in a small town of Sremska Mitrovica was virtually unknown to the public.
We cannot always take everything from the Roma, and never give anything back. A job of an artist is an immoral, Robin Hood job. In music you take like one takes from a bank, with the bank’s hope that you would return what you took, with interest. I feel obliged to return in this way everything taken away from the Roma. That is why I selected [the local festival], where only Roma theatres perform. I gave them Karmen as a present, and they can perform it from now on without any compensation (Jovanović 2004b).

Indeed, Bregović’s earlier statement that he wishes Karmen was performed by local ensembles, followed by his announcement about making it available for royalty-free performances, is corroborated by the fact that, for a period of time at least, the Karmen website actually contained the score of the opera. In a zipped file titled partitions.zip, the complete scores and instrumental/vocal parts for seven out of 15 tracks released on the CD were available for free download.

The opera had its “official” Serbian premiere in April 2006, in Belgrade (see footnote 23). The reactions in the press were somewhat ambivalent, and Bregović’s play with the operatic form was interpreted as underachieving, as a lack of actual skills needed to create a “serious” work of art. A TV review which was broadcast on the national television the following day was in a similar vein. Bregović’s statement that he wanted to create a small opera for poor people and small ensembles was seen as a weak alibi for the fact that the piece was artistically mediocre. Karmen’s unpretentiousness was seen as an excuse to tap into the “recognisable Balkan milieu” (Balkan labels being considered undesirable – see 2.1.3) without novelties and innovativeness. The whole project was assessed as an unoriginal and unsuccessful sensationalist attempt:

If you want to create a spectacle in the U.S., the only thing you need to do is to gather some cash and give it to Tarantino, Spielberg or Stone. In Serbia it works a bit differently. You take bits from famous Bizet’s opera “Carmen,” kick out all that is lasciviously pathetic, replace violins with Serbian trumpet, spice it up with a French accordion, serve it with authentic Gypsy swear words, and wrap it all up in sheets from the lucid songbook by the most famous Bosnian musician of all times. ... And that’s how you get “Bregović’s Karmen, e bahtale agorea” or “Brega’s Karmen with a happy end”, the weirdest thing ever heard and seen by the phlegmatic music world (Jovanović 2004a).

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24 The sheet music was available at http://karmen.artistes.universalmusic.fr/ [Accessed April 19 2007]. After being available while Bregović toured with Karmen, in the latest update of his website it is no longer available, offering only its libretto instead.

25 The question why only half, instead of the complete score, was made available, is very interesting. One answer might be that the omitted tunes are those that Bregović planned to share with other artists, such as Croatian singer Severina, whose latest CD contains several tunes recycled from Karmen (see 3.3). Another might be that the omitted tunes were developed through improvisatory process and were never written down, before or after the studio recording.
In contrast, the same performance in Amsterdam in June the same year was received enthusiastically. The audience in Paradiso seemed thrilled by the narrative, by the music, and rewarded the orchestra and the composer with frenetic applause. A curious detail, projecting both Bregović’s leadership in the ensemble and rehearsed spontaneity of the event, was when he stopped the performance some five minutes after it had started. Apparently dissatisfied with the way the orchestra has begun, he shouted “Stop! Once again, from the top!” and the whole opera started once again, this time approved by the composer and master-of-ceremony Bregović. This was far from the only instance of this theatrical move: over the years, it was mentioned in many concert reviews from his performances around the globe (see 4.1).

2005 brought another huge production, only on a regional level, but mobilising familiar issues related to authorship and political agency of Bregović’s music. After many rumours, The White Button (all instrumentalists and singers who were ever in the band – see 3.1.) briefly reunited and gave three concerts in three capitals: Zagreb (Croatia), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Belgrade (Serbia). Out of six former republics that constituted SFR Yugoslavia, the concerts took place only in capitals of those three that were directly involved in the wars during the 1990s. Therefore the short tour had a strong reconciliation and Yugo-nostalgic feeling to it, which is supported by a statement on Bregović’s website that the audience “proved [Bregović] right in the hope that people separated by wars could at least share and enjoy a common musical heritage” (Bregović Homepage [old]: Biography).

The concerts were sold out. The audience in Sarajevo and Zagreb amounted to 70.000, whereas the Belgrade concert was the biggest music event up to date, gathering up to 200.000 people in an open-air stadium. The concerts were commercialised to the highest level by involving Coca-Cola as the largest sponsor. In fact, the whole project was allegedly initiated by Coca-Cola, as part

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26 An interesting event, which might be a possible consequence of Karmen, is a project run by Emir Kusturica, the film director that Bregović used to cooperate with (see 3.2). It seems that Karmen’s success initiated a similar project by Kusturica. In 2007 he released a “punk opera” Time Of The Gypsies, based on the story from his 1988 namesake movie. What is remarkable is that the music for the opera was in fact new, having no connection to the soundtrack Bregović composed and which made him (and the movie) so famous (see 3.2). The music was composed and performed by the No Smoking Orchestra, a Sarajevo-based band that had also produced soundtracks for Kusturica’s movies after he has ended his cooperation with Bregović (such as Black Cat, White Cat in 1998). Even though Ederlezi was again the backbone of the music, Kusturica emphasises that it is by no means “Bregović’s Ederlezi.” This somewhat bizarre situation is mentioned only in passing on Kusturica’s website, making a brief remark in one of the press reviews that “[t]he movie was a hit in Yugoslavia in the days when the country was falling apart, and got rave reviews elsewhere for its stunning images, intoxicating mix of comedy and tragedy and the unaffected vitality of the mostly non-professional cast. Not the least of the movie’s attractions was the enchanting music by Goran Bregović. Because Kusturica and Bregović are no longer on speaking terms, a new score had to be written” (Von Uthmann 2008).
of its global Soundwave campaign. All three singers accepted the offer, and apparently the one who was the least enthusiastic was Bregović himself, who was allegedly hesitant to step back and reminisce the WB era. Unlike him, the other band members never really musically evolved further from the WB, which was the peak of their careers, and those who were still in the music business mainly did small-scale gigs by covering old WB tunes in the old WB style. Nevertheless, after some negotiations (that, according to rumours, included a significant fee), the whole project could start.

The events were extremely politicised, in spite of Bregović reiterating over and over again his old statement how he never intended for his music to send political messages (in accordance with his hesitation to explicitly declare his political loyalty to SFRY as a political entity, opting for the idea of a meta-Yugoslav identity instead, and especially in accordance with his disinclination to associate himself with any of the post-Yugoslav national identities). However, besides raising Yugo-nostalgia\textsuperscript{27} (Pogačar 2010) to the highest level, all three societies (Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian) were deeply stirred. The Sarajevo concert was almost cancelled due to security reasons because a militant group blamed Bregović for talking dismissively in an earlier interview about their leader during the war in Bosnia, and believed he was the speaker for Serbian hegemonic ideology. Likewise, the Belgrade concert was scheduled for June 28th, a religious holiday Vidovdan, associated with events in Serbian history when Serbian nationalism was at its peak. The political ambiguity was, like in the old WB days, attributed to Bregović:

Choosing June 28th for the Belgrade concert was far from unintentional. ... Bregović profited again on domestic “transnational traumas” that, from the battle of Kosovo to Ferdinand’s assasination to Milošević’s war cry in Gazimestan and

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\textsuperscript{27} Especially during the Belgrade event it was possible to purchase Yugo-memorabilia, such as t-shirts with SFRY prints, five-pointed red stars, or Josip Broz Tito’s signature. One of the banners announcing the concert actually displayed Tito’s photograph. At one moment during the concert, the audience spontaneously burst into the chorus of \textit{Jugoslavijo, na noge} [Stand up, Yugoslavia] from a 1986 song (example \url{1986 Pljuni i zapjevaj, moja Jugoslavijo.mp3}), even though it was not performed by the band on the stage. The Yugo-nostalgia, curiously present among the adolescent concert audience born when SFRY had already fallen apart, was commented on in many concert reviews: “One hears words such as ‘the meeting with a better side of Yugoslavia that is no more’, ‘resurrection of the White Button is (on a symbolic plane) not unlike Josip Broz reincarnated’ ... ‘Yugoslavia together again’” (Pantić 2005).
his transport to The Hague 12 years later,\textsuperscript{28} clearly define Vidovdan as the local War Day. Utilising that unfortunate national archetype which prompts an automatic reaction of Serbs ... Bregović could count on at least 150,000 tickets for the Belgrade concert. And he got them, in spite of shy voices in the last few weeks coming from Sarajevo and Zagreb, saying that “actually, they don’t really play all that good anymore” (Pantić 2005).

Controversies mounted around the WB mini tour. On the eve of the Belgrade performance, Bregović initiated an unplugged session on Belgrade “Pink television.” This TV station, well known for turbo-folk orientation (see 2.2.1), put a new spin on the WB repertoire, especially by bringing guest singers – popular turbo-folk stars – to perform live some of WB greatest hits.\textsuperscript{29} For this occasion Bregović rearranged WB tracks in his current style: adding the brass section, Dalmatian klapa ensemble, “Bulgarian voices” and so on. Trying to justify his “apples and oranges” approach, which in the given context was far from musically, culturally and politically innocent, Bregović said: “I always wondered how would the ‘Button’ sound in a [context of a] kafana, so I invited some singers who I would like to listen to in kafana” (P.U.S. 2005 – on kafana see 2.2.1).

The overall impression of the evening was that it was an unsuccessful attempt to create an MTV-style unplugged session. Moreover, the unsettling mix of rock and folk resulted in the whole evening sounding “like a bad joke with music relics” (ibid). In the days of its greatest popularity (during the 1970s and 1980s) the WB was already struggling to keep its music on the rock side of the rock-folk pendulum, and had to disprove labels such as “shepherd rock” and

\textsuperscript{28} The “Battle of Kosovo” refers to the battle of medieval Serbia against the Ottoman Empire on 28 June 1389, which has special significance in Serbian history. The Serbian side was defeated, choosing – according to the oral epic poetry – “the kingdom of heaven over the kingdom on earth.” “Ferdinand’s murder” refers to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, committed by a Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip, which was largely interpreted in historical sources as the direct cause for the outbreak of World War I (see 2.1.1). The “war cry in Gazimestan” refers to a speech delivered by Slobodan Milošević on 28 June 1989 (at the celebration of 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo). In the speech Milošević for the first time insinuated at the possibility of armed intervention to solve the raising tension between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, which anticipated the collapse of Yugoslavia and civil wars that followed. Finally, Milošević’s deportation to the Hague war tribunal for a trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity also took place on June 28 2001. A more complete list of Vidovdan-related events in Serbian history is available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vidovdan [Accessed July 14 2012].

\textsuperscript{29} Some of the performed tunes are available at [All accessed July 14 2012]:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C83dnfoyre0
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_tWF2udcjk
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cprOKSF37BI
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5ObvZ3besg
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXEEEtKz4Vao
accusations that it had been the forerunner of turbo-folk (see 3.1). On the other hand, Bregović was apparently never bothered by such criticism; besides, he had achieved his huge post-WB success precisely by Balkanising his earlier rock tunes; in other words, he was acting entirely in accordance with his current career. Still, seeing the band on Pink television singing folksy versions of their favourite tunes made many of their old fans feel uncomfortable.

All controversies notwithstanding, the concerts were hugely successful. Raised emotions after the concerts brought ideas about the WB reunion, which was hinted at in the media several times, causing a big stir among the audience. However, unlike his former band members who were allegedly willing to reunite, Bregović rejected any possibility of returning to the rock idiom. It is understandable, given the fact that he had moved on and reached international success in other music styles, whereas the rest of the band remained confined to the intraregional market, and inescapably marked by the WB label (albeit a positive one).

Nevertheless, inspired by the success of the small 2005 tour, the three WB singers decided to join forces, in spite of their conflicts in the earlier decades, and launched a European and U.S. tour. Asked to comment on the fact that the singers were performing what was copyrighted as his music, Bregović replied that his author’s rights need to be respected and that he should be paid royalties for BAT performing his music. Indeed, in April 2008 he protested against their performance being broadcast on Croatian television as the “White Button,” so the recording had to be put off the air (Skinuti sa HRT 2008).

That same year (2005) Bregović initiated another production: he transformed his La Reine Margot soundtrack (1994 – see 3.2) into a ballet score. It was performed in the Belgrade National Theatre during the season 2005/2006. Similar to his awkward fusion between rock and folk during the WB concerts, the usual Balkanised sound of Bregović turned out to be a bitter pill for the ballet goers who were not used to the blurred distinction between “folk” and “classical.” Unlike the usual reviews of his music, the ballet score was commented upon in much milder terms, replacing “Balkan” with “ethno” and “folk” with “folklore” (e.g. Limić 2005).

In 2006 Bregović completed a commission for the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam) and the European Concert Hall Organisation entitled Forgive Me, Is This the Way to the Future? Three Letters to Three Prophets (which he would later consider for the second part of his Sljivovica & Champagne release – see below). Together with Kristjan Järvi’s Absolute Ensemble (New York), the WFB, led by Bregović, performed in some of the biggest concert halls of Europe. In Amsterdam, the concert was staged at the Concertgebouw within the series “Balkan, klinkende avonturen.” Bregović was announced as an expert in diverse music cultures of the Balkans, and his cooperation with Järvi was described as a meeting of rich Balkan traditions and contemporary music (Debuut Goran 107).
Although conceptualised and marketed as a fusion of two disparate music realms, those of traditional and contemporary music, the two performing ensembles rarely played simultaneously; instead, they alternated in playing separate segments. The segments performed by the brass section were met with the most enthusiastic reaction by the audience. As usual, the WFB played many quotes from its earlier tunes and the WB repertoire.

In the following year it was clear that Bregović had finally installed himself firmly in the traditional/world music field in Serbia. In August 2007 he performed for the first time at one of the Serbia’s largest festivals – Guća. This festival is dedicated to brass music (see 2.2.1) and was for some of the WFB members the biggest arena of their previous music careers. Although many tunes created by Bregović entered the mainstream brass repertoire and were performed many times on the Guća stage, Bregović never performed himself. The concert was declared that year’s most important event of the entire festival, and was broadcast live at national television.

The WFB, led by Bregović holding a whiskey glass in one hand, offered the usual range of hits, ending with a double rendition of *Kalašnjikov*. They also performed selected tunes from the WB repertoire, pushing all the right Yugonostalgic buttons in the same way like during the WB tour two years earlier. They were eagerly accepted by the audience exploding with enthusiasm. He exited the stage as the “crowned trumpet king,” although he himself is not a trumpeter (Šaponjić 2007). The importance of being authenticated by the Guća audience, getting the seal of approval at the ultimate brass music event, was acknowledged by the composer:

[The WFB] played in the most important concert halls in the world, but it seems to me that it is easier for them to embarrass themselves in New York or Paris, than in Guća. ... It is difficult for me to understand why this performance is so important to them, but it is nice to see how anxiously they await the performance on Friday. *What does Guća mean to you?*

Guća is a specific madness that has no counterpart. ... We will play a different repertoire than usual, because we will record this concert and probably release it next year. I have never released live recordings, and this will be a recording that goes with alcohol. ... So I will drink on the stage and play the music that suits me when I drink (Pantelić 2007).

The spring of 2008 brought yet another spectacle performed by Bregović, this time within the Eurovision Song Contest, which was held in Belgrade (Serbia). He played one of the recent hits (Gas, gas), followed by a recycled

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30 Before the concert I had an opportunity for a brief conversation with Bregović, during which he told me that I probably would not like it (since, presumably, in his eyes I was an ex-Yugoslav expecting to hear music more inclined towards his usual repertoire and the old WB hits), and added that the thought behind this concert was to merge two contemporary orchestras, but embodying different types of contemporariness.
version of a WB tune, and ending with the unavoidable Kalašnjikov.\textsuperscript{31} Despite the fact that Bregović introduced the last song with words “I will play now a little mocking song about the people who like to carry guns” (which is his usual intro to this song at international performances alike), the mocking intention was not welcome by the Serbian audience, whose general impression was that Serbia was misrepresented by evoking yet another association with weapons and violence.

In early June 2008 Bregović’s career was temporarily put on hold as he suffered a serious accident. After climbing a cherry tree in his garden, he fell and fractured a spinal vertebra. He was operated and recovered remarkably well, continuing his U.S. tour. The end of 2008 brought his next CD release, announced initially on his website as the “Alcohol Concert.” It was a live CD Bregović referred to in the above mentioned quote, and it was entitled Alkohol: Šljivovica & Champagne, the first part of a double CD – entitled Sljivovica and Champagne each – which should offer a “crazy” and a more “sophisticated” version of drinking (Hochman 2009). The CD cover shows Bregović holding two glasses, two different vessels for two different alcohols:

![Figure 3.6. Cover of Alkohol: Sljivovica\textsuperscript{32}](https://example.com/cover.png)

\textsuperscript{31} The entire performance is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lT3NiFD204 [Accessed July 14 2013].

\textsuperscript{32} Courtesy of Universal Music Group.
The role of drinking is repeatedly emphasised by Bregović onstage, where he usually tries to transform his concerts into a kafana experience (see 2.2.1). In many interviews he stresses the link with drinking and evokes the images of the out-of-control, overindulgent Balkans (see 2.1.4), relating alcohol(ism) to his “culture” and “tradition”:

[Alkohol] is a live record. It’s a drinking record. I am from culture where music since always was for drinking. We don’t have classical music. It was always about alcohol around music. So I don’t have to excuse too much, just from the tradition like this. I see the future of this music, the musicians will have good tip, the women will be on the tables, and the music is done for that. Exactly. And they will drink good alcohol (Interview with Bregovic 2010).  

The composer’s updated homepage corroborates this new theme by displaying the cover of Alkohol, but with an added warning: “If you don’t go crazy, you are not normal.” Bregović exoticises the alcohol ingredient of his new releases: in one of the interviews, he claims that “[e]very culture is marked by the alcohol or the drugs that are mainly used ... We are marked by sljivovica” (ibid). The same interview reveals an interesting reversal of the familiar West/East dichotomy (“Maybe we don’t have the same idea of champagne ... My idea is rich criminals drinking champagne just to show off” – ibid): in the process of assigning negative values to the West, he nevertheless places this corrupted West in the Balkans.

Alkohol: Sljivovica was available in stores worldwide, and it is a frequent item offered for illegal downloading on the Internet. It features 13 numbers recorded at three live performances – in Guča, Belgrade and Skopje (FYR Macedonia). In fact, the CD also includes an uncredited fourteenth last number entitled “Hidden song (bonus),” which (not surprisingly) turns out to be Kalašnjkov. Bregović described the tunes as “cheerful melodies for hard alcohol” (Balkanopithecus 2008), and continued:

Some musicians are trying to copy European elements, but if we want to be honest, we have to say that in our music it is important that we can drink while we listen to it. That’s our tradition (ibid).

Featured tracks were the core of the new series of concerts performed in 2009, announced under the title Alkohol – Šljivovica (Bregović Homepage [new]). Although always present as the master-of-ceremony, it is noticeable that

33 Interview with Bregović 2010 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kASnQFlwNHs, 6.00). [Accessed May 28 2013].

34 Interestingly, in Serbia it was released in late December, and sold in a cardboard sleeve for a rather low price, as a part of a package offered by a telephone company – as an incentive to purchase a prepaid SIM card.
Bregović himself starts to play an increasingly passive role on stage, leaving the playing and singing roles to the WFB, the Bulgarian female duo and the male soloist A. Ademović, the most recent addition to his band. The CD tracks stem from several sources: firstly, what he labels as traditional music (neatly credited as “Trad.” in the liner notes). The second source are the WB tunes in brass arrangements (for example, 2008 Zamisli.mp3 in its WB version, rather than his later collage as Parfum Paranoia), probably because of specific locations where live performances took place: all three cities used to belong to the former Yugoslavia, and the majority of the audience was arguably familiar with the WB repertoire and therefore more susceptible to Yugo-nostalgia. Finally, most of the tunes were arrangements of arrangements – tunes previously performed by Protopsalti, Dalaras and Aksu (see 3.3 – examples 2008 Venzinatiko.mp3 and 2008 Tis Agapis Sou To Risko.mp3), and were now given an even stronger brass flavour. Some of the tunes were renamed in comparison to their “original” version, and often performed in different languages.

An interesting example of Bregović’s music Balkanisation is the new rendition of a famous tune from the WB era, Za Esmu (example 1984 Za Esmu.mp3). In this new version (example 2008 Za Esmu.mp3), the most striking change is the 9/16 metre (subdivided into 2+2+2+3), which is in stark contrast to the original 4/4 metre. Besides, the 2008 version incorporates two added quotes from traditional music. Another interesting track is the already mentioned Gas, gas (by Croatian singer Severina – see 3.3), which is here listed as Gas Gas (Shantel vs. Bregović), implying contrast (instead of cooperation) between Bregović and one of the most popular DJs responsible for the popularisation of Balkan beat in Western European clubs (see 2.3).35

Throughout 2009, Bregović continued with his live performances. In June Sljivovica & Champagne was released in the U.S. An Internet article about this new release once again credits Bregović with a reconciliatory role (titled “Goran Bregovic De-Balkanizes With a Shot of ‘Alkohol’”), and continues to cite him for referring to the same ideas of hybrid, eclectic Balkans (see 5.1): “His intersection of many musical cultures is pretty much a given. ‘It’s natural for someone like me from a place like this,’ says Bregovic … ‘Everything is mixed. I don’t have to look for any concept. It’s impossible to find anything pure there’” (Hochman 2009 – emphasis added). This article reproduces most of the images evoked by Bregović himself – the exotic image of the Gypsies, presenting himself as a nomad (“I’m an old-fashioned traveling composer. Traveling and presenting my music”), references to the out-of-control Balkans (“Lots of methyl alcohol we

35 This song, performed by Ademović, was obviously arranged in a hurry in order to use the momentum of its popularity prompted by Severina. In this version, the lyrics (initially intended for a female singer) were uncomfortably put in second person’s form, for instance changing the already slightly awkward verse “Oh, how I love a man’s scent” into “Oh, how you love a man’s scent.” At the same time, though, politically sensitive verses (such as the one mentioning “Latin alphabet” in the Croatian version) were cautiously modified (into “Cyrillic alphabet” in the Serbian version).
have for centuries in our grains. Maybe that is partly why we are like we are”) and so forth (ibid. – see 5.1. and 5.2).

Bregović’s role as an exponent of the pan-Balkan musical space was once again acknowledged in 2010, when the first Balkan Music Awards bestowed him with the award for the “Overall Contribution to the Development of Balkan Music” (Hofman 2013). Throughout the year he continued with his world tour, including a performance he gave in The Hague, where his concert marked the official beginning of the campaign for the city to become the European Capital of Culture for 2018. This interesting decision, to bring a renowned Balkan performer to promote a European diplomatic campaign, was nevertheless met with vast enthusiasm by the visitors of The Hague Grote Kerk. Still exhibiting his role as the master-of-ceremony, Bregović effortlessly steered the event, commanding the audience when to clap and when to sit down. He ended his performance with Kalašnjikov – as if to create a final reminder of the violent Balkans he comes from – instructing the audience to join him in his intro cue “Cigani, Juriš!” [Gypsies, Charge!] but in Dutch. To an observer not caught up in the atmosphere of the event, this loud shout (aanvallen!) uttered by the whole venue, and its echo bouncing off the church walls, might have been the strongest impression of the evening.

In 2010 Bregović received yet another confirmation of his position as the mainstream artist, when he was commissioned by the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation to compose and produce the song for Serbian entry at that year’s Eurovision Song Contest. Out of three tunes (all of which would be numerous-ly recycled in his later concerts), the one that won the majority of the public’s voices was the one that was most explicitly “Balkan” – Ovo je Balkan [This is the Balkans], performed by an upcoming turbo-folk star Milan Stanković.36 The selection of this specific title and this specific composer to represent the country at the ESC was met with an ambivalent reaction by the Serbian viewership, who felt uncomfortable with such blatant auto-exoticising (cf. Dumnić 2012). Composed in the style of Balkan beat (see 2.3), as a conglomerate of rapping and brass backbeat, hip-hop and traditional dancing, youth vernacular and folksy singing, it promised to reach higher than the 8th place, where it ended in the final ranking. Nevertheless, the song was, as it would be expected, picked up by Bregović and now constitutes a part of his core repertoire (such was the case at The Hague performance in 2010), performed towards the end of the concert in Spanish translation (as Balkañeros).

Ever involved in continuous reusing of his previous music, one of Bregović’s latest projects is the rearrangement of his Queen Margot soundtrack, which he transformed again, this time into a theatrical piece entitled Margot, Diary of an Unhappy Queen. The plot of Margot is recontextualised and intertwined with a pained narrative about the war in Bosnia, Bregović using his music (as in many earlier projects) to comment on the recent political history of the Balkans. As was the case with Karmen, the libretto for Margot is available on

36 The live performance in Oslo is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xKeYFkB9Pw [Accessed May 28 2013].
his website. He also resumed his collaboration with Zdravko Čolić, by co-performing a song Manijači (Maniacs, also a pun on the word mariachi) on the latter’s 2010 release. Apparently musically original, the intertextual aspect is nevertheless created by referring to a well-known pop music reference, as the video overtly reworks Paul Simon’s 1986 hit You can call me Al. That same year he renamed the upcoming second part of his double CD to Champagne For Gypsies, thereby effectively reconfirming Gypsies one of his pillar themes (next to the Balkans), but also “Gypsifying” champagne – reinscribing it with its initial meaning of luxury, affording it to Gypsies, the unlikely champagne consumers. In another interview he explained that he had considered transforming what he referred to as his Violin Concerto into the Champagne section of the CD, but in the meantime changed his mind because the Concerto underachieved in generating a drinking atmosphere:

The initial idea of [Alkohol] was for its second part to be a violin concerto that I was commissioned to compose two years ago, Three Letters [to Three Prophets, performed with Absolute Ensemble, mentioned above]. It is a very nice concerto, I recorded it in live performance ... And then, in concert, it seemed very nice. But afterwards, when I listened to it [I wondered]: who would drink to this record? I wouldn’t.

As a post-2010 coda to the review of Bregović’s career, it should be mentioned that Champagne For Gypsies was released in late 2012, emphatically promoting Roma musicians (featuring as guest lead singers). In the liner notes Bregović reiterates his engaged political stance by positioning the release “in reaction to the extreme pressure that Gypsies (Roma) have been experiencing lately across Europe.” Conceptualised (like his other projects) with a specific underlining, this one brings together Gypsy (and Traveller) guest singers, accompanied by the WFB.

37 Both librettos (in several languages) are available on Bregović’s homepage (Bregović Homepage [new]) [Accessed October 4 2013].

38 The official video is available here (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-q0NNmBhOo) [Accessed May 28 2013].

39 Bregović in a 2010 interview (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJcQnkNJMzA, 5.00) [Accessed May 28 2013].

Although locating himself outside the Gypsy community when praising their qualities and “raising a toast” to their extraordinary musical talents, Bregović’s visual representation yet again perpetuates many of the familiar stereotypes, employed here to facilitate his awkward transformation into an exoticised Gypsy. The three photos in the liner notes show the artist in different aspects of his metamorphosis, digitally altered so as to leave an impression of the musician’s dark complexion. The two outer images (see Figure 3.7) underline the presumed pretentiousness of the Gypsies, embodied in elaborate jewellery, rings and watch, extravagant dark-violet felt suit in one photo and his already omnipresent show-off white suit in the other. In the two photos he is holding a bottle of sparkling wine and two tall glasses. These images are brought to yet another transformative level in the middle section of the CD supplement, spatially occupying the central (and twice as large) space in the booklet. In this image, Bregović is pouring champagne over his head, apparently in full abandon, against a colourful (digitally inserted) background. The core message of the whole release is made explicit in a large subtitle in bright red letters stressing what was already stated on Bregović’s website: If you don’t go crazy, you’re not normal.

Musically, this CD offers yet another medley of recycled WB tunes and Bregović’s recent hits (such as the tunes he produced for the Serbian Eurovision Contest, as mentioned previously). The first promotional tracks were already released in early 2012, with Bregović reusing one of the two tunes that were unselected for the 2010 Eurovision. As was the case with This is the Balkans turning into Balkañeros, the tune Predsedniće, Alo similarly became Presidente, featuring no other than the Gypsy Kings. This collaboration of the biggest

41 Courtesy of Universal Music Group.

42 The official video for Presidente is available at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzzVLhS1GC4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzzVLhS1GC4) [Accessed May 28 2013].
Balkan composer (see 5.1) and the quintessential, first megastar Roma musicians arguably marks the final stage in the merger of two conjoined niches in world music (Balkan and Roma). The fact that the most popular Gypsy musicians now subscribe to Bregović’s version of Gypsy music is indicative of his current popularity, as well as the representative power of his music.