

**Popular Music  
in the Everyday Life of  
Working-Class People  
during and after  
Socialist Yugoslavia:  
The Endurance of *Čaga***

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Since I have been long fascinated by Bakhtin's thesis of declination and the resistance of folk (traditional) culture from the Middle Ages to the culture of the elite, I am confident that this resistance is a permanent strategy of those social strata and individuals, who do not have social power. I think this strategy is not only an issue of the medieval past but is also being used today. (Rihtman-Auguštin 2001, 236)

This chapter will present a brief overview of experiencing popular music in local music and dance venues during and after socialist Yugoslavia. After a discussion about the development of *čaga*, a vernacular term used to mark the affect of great entertainment, the chapter will discuss historically relevant layers in the development of Yugoslav popular music at the intersection of everyday life, political economy, and class in the specific sociocultural and economic context of the industrial city of Maribor and its surroundings in the northeast of Slovenia. From the historical perspective of consecutive developments of affective atmospheres, it will consider generational gaps and internal migration. It will show how, in the longer timeframe, affective atmospheres mix sounds of live music, media, people, and venues, being private, communal, or public.

If we understand atmospheres “as collective affects that are simultaneously indeterminate and determinate,” they provide “the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge” (Anderson 2009, 77). In their indeterminate nature, atmospheres “are resources that become elements within sense experience” (Anderson 2009, 80). In this context, we must differentiate emotions and affect: emotions are narrative and semiotic, while affects are nonnarrative and asignifying, as Sianne Ngai argues (in

Anderson 2009, 80). Atmospheres “mix together narrative and signifying elements and nonnarrative and asignifying elements” (Anderson 2009, 80). They reveal the long history of social transformations related to sweating bodies in dance halls and bodies penetrated with ever-emerging new musical sounds.

Affective participation in dance is an essential part of human socialization. New realities emerge when musical sounds touch us and penetrate our bodies (see Garcia 2015). In a quite literal sense, music and dance parties are territorialized. As DeLanda suggests, they are “processes that define or sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories” (2006, 13). At the same time, they also refer “to nonspatial processes which increase the internal homogeneity of an assemblage” (DeLanda 2006, 13). On the horizontal axis, such assemblage comprises content and expression. On the one hand, “it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 88, emphasis in original).

In the following sections, I will examine the importance of music and dance venues for shaping social relationships in the changing socioeconomic times of industrialization at the beginning of the 1960s in the area near Maribor. Then, I will present the relationship between class and the development of Yugoslav popular music. Finally, I will return to Maribor, the important industrial center, to show the shifts in affective atmospheres in such venues.

## Popular Music and Dance in Maribor and Its Surrounding

If you meet a person in Maribor after attending a concert, dance party, or any public or private celebration, he or she will define his or her excitement by the intensity of *čaga* by saying: “It was a damn good *čaga*” (*Bla je huda čaga*).<sup>1</sup> Alternatively:

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1 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

“There was no *čaga* at all” (*Nobene čage ni blo*). Everybody will understand the single word *čaga*, which literally means “a party” (Razvezani jezik n.d.) and “entertainment.” Its origin is unclear. It was taken from a slang word used in Croatia meaning “to party” that was most likely taken from Bosnia and might have Turkish origin (Klemenčič 2017). As a notion of excitement and enjoyment, *čaga* means not only party or partying but also the quality of partying and its affectivity, and it is not only related to music. Generally, it denotes atmosphere, that is, affective atmosphere (Anderson 2009). Historically, the excitement of *čaga* was related to various kinds of entertainment experienced in dance venues from socialist times until today. In the 1950s, Yugoslav cities and countryside areas built and hosted venues for youth socialization, where despite the repression against jazz and negative attitude towards some modern forms of dance, like boogie-woogie, various dance parties took place (Tomc 1989; Krstić 2010, 184–186; Kajzer 2011; Koter 2013, 13).

A typical example was a mansion known as Lepi dol, 10 km from Maribor, where younger people regularly organized dance parties. A rather typical rural mansion, Lepi dol was built in the 19th century by the citizens of Maribor. In the 1950s, after being nationalized, it became a meeting place for the local youth and a rural dancehall. They used to play music from records and the radio, but local musicians would perform for dance parties. The musicians’ repertoire was mixed: they mostly played popular songs from the time, especially *domača glasba*, the “domestic” music (Sivec 1998), which was the first variant of Slovenian ethno-pop,<sup>2</sup> later known as *narodnozabavna glasba* (folk-pop music).

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2 I do not use the term “ethno-pop” for a genre of music but as a wider and general denomination of popular music with any use of certain traditional musical elements. English translations of local terms for music genres are rather difficult and provisional, as they have various meanings already in the field. Slovenian audiences still use the initial term for *narodnozabavna glasba*, which was *domača glasba* (“domestic” music). With the terminological differentiation of *narod* (ethnic nation) and *ljudstvo* (people, folk) in the Slovenian language, the term *narodnozabavna glasba* should be literally translated as “national-entertainment music,” but this term nevertheless inherited the meaning of *narod* as *ljudstvo* (which is the case in Serbian and Croatian language without such a differentiation). Therefore, it may be translated as “folk-entertainment music” or “folk-pop.” At the same time, traditional dance music was very different from *zabavna muzika* (“entertainment music”), the label used at the national radio station, although it adopted polka and accordion at the end of the 19th century (see Kumer 1972).

However, an essential part of the repertoire were evergreen and pop songs of the time, especially Italian *canzona* from the San Remo Festival, and various kinds of dance music, from swing to boogie-woogie and early rock 'n' roll (especially Elvis Presley).

The most important music source was Radio Ljubljana. Established in 1928, it played a significant role in the post-World War I modernization processes. Perhaps the most important channel to spread the most common music trends and influence dance parties was the radio show entitled "Kar želite, to dobite!" (Listeners' Choice) that had already started in the prewar period, around 1932 or 1933. In this show, urban and rural listeners from higher and lower strata defined their musical preferences. Listening to the show was a communal act, especially when the show incorporated a specific music request with an accompanying message for the person or greeted a community, often during a joint meeting in the local pub or a public venue like Lepi dol.

To get an impression of radio transmission in the 1930s, let us check the Radio Ljubljana broadcast. Besides two radio bands, one string and another jazz, musicians from Ljubljana and the vicinity were invited to perform. Among those bands was the Magistrov trio (Magister Trio) from Šmartno, some 10 km from Ljubljana. They were announced in the program guide for May 14, 1935, as Godci izpod Šmarne gore (Ensemble from the foot of Šmarna gora) ("Utorak, 14 maja" 1935, 17). Occasionally, they were announced as a *kmečka godba* (peasant ensemble) that provides a *domača zabava* ("home party"), for example, on January 30, 1938 (see "Ljubljana. Nedelja, 30. januarja" 1938, 1). Their repertoire was thus "domestic," mainly polka and some waltz played by accordion, clarinet, and double bass or tuba. However, the same musicians would perform as a violin, viola, piano/accordion, and clarinet ensemble and call themselves the Šrامل kvartet (a Slovenization of the *Schrammelmusik* quartets<sup>3</sup>). On April 29,

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3 *Schrammelmusik* was a violin, viola, piano/accordion, and clarinet ensemble, typical in Vienna at the end of the 19th century. The term denotes a Viennese popular/entertainment music genre that transcended local popularity. Musical ensembles most often performed as a quartet consisting of two violins, a clarinet or an accordion, and a guitar.

1936, for example, the Magister Trio was announced as the “Magistrov šramel kvartet” (“Tedenski sporedi. Radio Ljubljana. Nedelja, 26. aprila” 1936, ii).

These various ways of announcing performances clearly relativized the classical distinction between rural and urban music. At least from the 1930s, the difference between “peasant” and “urban” music was blurred, and the same audience would listen and dance to both kinds of music. It remained so after the war, and it is so even today. Despite the claims of “urban” vs. “rural” in scholarship (see Sivec 1998, 1999; Stanković et al. 1999; Stanković 2021), one can find the same music played and attended in rural and urban music venues, not only in the so-called grassroots venues for alternative music acts in the countryside (Muršič 2011; Muršič et al. 2012).

To illustrate this point, let us return to the youth venue Lepi dol in the early 1960s. It was the place where my parents met. I could reconstruct their musical taste from the records in their small collection preserved in my home. There were seven single records of folk-pop music. However, they were not the dominant part of the collection. In the collection, there were more pop songs from festivals, mostly *pop evka* (pop song) festivals from Split, Ljubljana, and Opatija, altogether 13. To my surprise, there were also three records of jazz acts and, not so surprisingly, three records of rock ‘n’ roll and twist. Surprisingly, among the most important and numerous records were Mexican: 13 altogether! The exceptions to the rule were opera and parody with one single-play record. Their record collection was similar to those of residents from their generation I observed during my 1990s fieldwork in the village of Trate, some 30 km from Maribor. What might an individual record collection tell us about the music taste of younger village residents between the late 1950s and early 1970s? What kind of *čaga* did these postwar generations experience in their venues?

## Social Dimensions, Historical Shifts, and Affectivity of Dance Halls and Other Music Venues

In the post-World War II recovery, jazz became suspicious and oppressed until 1952, when the Communist Party became the more democratically designed League of Communists. In the mid-1950s, the latter not only accepted jazz and Western popular music and its various genres —especially Italian *canzona* and German *schlager*—but also actively supported the development of domestic pop in the form of *schlager* (in Slovenia the invented term was *popevka*). In Slovenia, the initial “domestic music” or later established folk-pop music developed from polka.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Serbian derivations of *starogradska* (old urban music) developed into the form of *novokomponovana* (newly-composed folk music)<sup>5</sup> as the pillars of domestic popular music.

It was also the period following the postwar reconstruction and early electrification—the two most important projects of the socialist state that emerged from World War II. These developments affected rapid migration from the nearby countryside to the newly established industrial centers around the country.<sup>6</sup> Typically, workers became employed in their late teens, when they were approximately 16 years old. They earned their own money and were able to spend some on partying. And, according to my fieldwork data from the countryside, no later than in the mid-1960s, they could buy themselves radio receivers with a gramophone and some records.

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4 As I explained briefly in footnote number three, folk-pop is a Slovenian variant of music developed from “domestic music” played at weddings and festivities (as classified in early recordings; see Kumer 1972; Muršič 1999; Kunej and Kunej 2016) in relation to similar polka-based genres in the Alpine and Central-European regions after World War II (e.g., *volkstümliche musik* in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria).

5 About this genre, see the work of Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen (2002).

6 Throughout the rapid industrialization, more and more industrial workers moved from the country to the industrial centers, although many former farmers would still have two jobs. Some estimations were that one-fifth of all arable land “was owned by peasant-workers” (Simon in Radenković and Solar 2018, 160).

In towns like Maribor,<sup>7</sup> youth searched for places to gather, socialize, and party. Therefore, many public venues in the city's growing neighborhoods were used as dance halls. At the beginning of the 1960s, music bands were electrified to be able to play the current popular music. In 1962, Maribor hosted dozens of such electrified bands (Rudolf 1962) and many small dance venues to enjoy twist, beat, and pop. Although the city music venues in Maribor were much more inclined to jazz (Muršič 2000b) and early rock (Muršič 1995), it is important to stress that music taste has never been too narrow. Most people would always move among very different kinds of music and music genres.

Since the initial influence of radio on the music played at parties in the first part of the 20th century, many styles of dance marked the parties in the postwar period. All around Yugoslavia, youth danced in smaller or larger dance halls. In Zagreb, there were 96 dance halls—*plesnjaci* (Petrović and Hrvoj 2012, 40). About a dozen venues spread over city neighborhoods in Maribor and its surroundings, primarily restaurants, workers' clubs, and similar public venues.

Throughout the development of popular music, youth was its main protagonist, searching for new sounds and forming new audiences. Such was the case in the village of Trate, where I conducted historical-ethnographic research on the well-established music venue Mladinski klub Trate (Trate Youth Club), active from 1979 to 1994 (see Muršič 2000a). Around 1947, young members of the village women's organization *Protifašistična fronta žensk* (Antifascist Women Front) voluntarily readapted the mansion Novi Kinek into a village communal center. They organized various activities in the venue, from education to

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7 Established as a small medieval border town in the 12th century, Maribor developed into a local hub only after the construction of the railroad Vienna–Trieste in the late 1840s. After the establishment of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, Maribor first got textile factories, and after World War II, it became an industrialized center. In the 1960s, it became one of the leading industrial towns in Yugoslavia. It attracted the nearby rural population to move, especially the younger working force. At the end of the 1970s, Maribor was in many ways a city of young people, especially those employed in industry, and much less a city of young intellectuals. Just before entering the 1980s, the share of younger employees in the country was as high as 29% of the active population, but already in 1981, it began to decline (Mladi Jugoslavije 1982, 11, 45).

communal radio listening and, of course, dance parties. Ten years later, a new generation of local youth danced to then-emerged folk-pop music and formed several local ethno-pop bands. The same musicians continued to play and gradually switched to electric guitar, bass, drums, and organ.

At the end of the 1960s, a new generation, represented by a youth organization this time, occupied the venue. They played records by British and American rock bands of the time. A couple of electrified music groups—called beat bands—formed in the area in the mid-1960s. In 1979, another new generation occupied the venue and established an underground youth club. After a year or two, they moved to another historical building in the village, the deserted part of the mill, and adapted it. Then they held concerts and dance parties and had rehearsals for a couple of local punk bands, especially the internationally successful Center za dehumanizacijo (which translates as “center for dehumanization”) (Muršič 1995).

In 1994, when I became interested in the local scene, the mill was “de-nationalized”—that is, privatized—and given back to the heirs of the prewar owner. For almost 20 years, the mill, being declared a cultural property, was deserted. Several years ago, some Russian entrepreneurs bought the property and soon demolished the mill’s extension where the Trate Youth Club operated. Nothing was left there. New concrete now announces the building of a small swimming pool.

This story is rather typical of grassroots music venues and youth clubs in Slovenia, both in urban and rural areas. In the 1960s, authorities started establishing youth clubs in the frame of the *Zveza mladine* (Union of Youth). It was an organization later renamed the *Zveza socialistične mladine* (Union of Socialist Youth) with compulsory membership for everybody aged 14 to 28. Music of that time was further modernized: rock and pop.

In the late 1970s, when forming my first experimental teenage band in Maribor, we had to find a place for rehearsals. With knowledge of the authorities, we occupied the basement of a former nursery school, which was at that time adapted into the municipality’s local neighborhood office. It did not last long: after a couple of years, the place was pulled down, and a new bypass road was built. Nevertheless, at least for a while, the venue hosted some music events,

including my first public music performance. At that time, I did not know this was a typical destiny of such places.

In the 1980s, local youth cultural centers incorporated pop, rock, and some alternative streams of then-popular music, especially punk rock. After 1991, the Urad RS za mladino (Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth) and Študentska organizacija Slovenije (Student Organization of Slovenia) were established to support the local youth clubs and music venues. However, in the 1990s, youth clubs gradually lost the need to organize music events, so most state-sponsored youth centers nowadays do not have a stage. Therefore, non-governmental grassroots venues still organize music events (Muršič et al. 2012).

To summarize, the overview of everyday exposure to popular music shows dynamic transformations of music genres and their audiences, especially regarding issues of class, age, and gender, performed in various music venues and dance halls (see Muršič 2000a; 2000b). Emotionally and in relation to the sensation of sound, the consecutive generations formed their affective atmospheres in jazz dance halls and other music venues with polka and other kinds of “domestic” music (1940s–1960s); in larger dance halls, festival places, and venues with pop and rock music (1950s–1980s); in youth clubs and disco clubs with rock and disco music (1960s–1990s); and underground venues, squats, and modern commercial music venues with a variety of recent popular music genres, including the recent revival of folk-pop music (1990s–2010s). Music venues, especially youth clubs, continuously operate at the intersection of generation gaps, changing gender roles, and the interchange of the local and domestic (Yugoslav and later Slovenian) music production of the time (see Muršič 2011; Muršič et al. 2012).

In post-socialist Slovenia, people again joined forces in self-organization. The most innovative and productive were massive culturally oriented squats, occupying former barracks in Ljubljana (Avtonomni kulturni center Metelkova mesto, occupied in 1993) and Maribor (Kulturni center Pekarna, occupied in 1994).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, former youth centers merged with other municipal

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8 In English translation, Metelkova Autonomous Cultural Zone and Pekarna Cultural Centre.

public services (e.g., for tourism, sport, culture, and youth) or became municipality establishments (as non-profit public services) or a part of student organizations. Fortunately, some (re-)established themselves as associations or clubs (Muršič et al. 2012).

In times of transition, these places acted as a kind of “liberated territories,” which means liberated from the pressure of capital and new “democratic” rule. During the 1990s, they had a reputation and public support, but only Radio Študent and some independent media still supported them after the privatization of the media.

In the past two decades, only a couple of those venues remained self-organized, typically as loosely ruled associations. Together with some newly emerged venues, typically squats, these self-organized venues formed the *Ustanova nevladnih mladinskega polja Pohorski bataljon, UPB*,<sup>9</sup> which supports non-governmental grassroots venues. In 2011, under the commission of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, the leaders of the UPB invited me to coordinate the research of those venues (see Muršič 2011, Muršič et al. 2012). The monograph *On Solid Ground: Analysis of Grassroots Venues and Youth Non-Governmental Field in Slovenia* (Muršič et al. 2012) was an example of a participatory study and presented the most challenging examples of self-organization across Slovenia.

Membership of the foundation comprises various clubs, associations, informal initiatives, and squats, as well as formally established cultural centers that provide space for various cultural events. The most important common denominator of the foundation’s members is music: it is put forward as an absolute priority. Well, it is not just any music that would matter for the locals to engage in primarily voluntary activities, but these types of music that are not commercial. As there is no other alternative for survival, the music in question is, of course, incorporated into the music market. However, its players and supporters cannot survive easily with the income they can generate. Furthermore, not only because of aesthetic reasons, activities in such venues, especially in squats, are under

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9 In English translation Foundation of NGOs in the Field of Youth Pohorje Battalion.

constant pressure from the authorities and capital. Therefore, the main question is if these “free territories,” under the constant pressure of neoliberal state and capital, have any future. From my perspective, the answer is clear: these places are the commons of the present, which is why they not only have a future but are also constantly emerging beyond the reach of the neoliberal state and capital.

All this development would not be possible without previous developments in the Yugoslav frame. It is impossible to distinguish the rise of Yugoslav popular music in the postwar period and the rise and unique positioning of the working class, the utmost carrier of specific affective atmospheres related to local music production and, at the same time, its main consumer. In the next part of the chapter, I explore the relationship between the working class and popular music.

## The Rise of the Yugoslav Working Class and Yugoslav Popular Music: Peasants/Workers Affectivity

Yugoslav popular music developed in the triangle of political pressures and stimulations, the socialist market, and its various audiences in the republics. The only common feature of those audiences was the rising purchasing power of the working class, with one foot in its mostly rural origins and another in rapidly developing industrial towns. In the 1940s, Socialist Yugoslavia started as a typical agricultural economy, and in 1991 fell apart as structurally industrialized land with elements of post-industrialization, especially in information technologies. In these less than five decades, its music production was constantly anticipating social developments: regional ethno-pop in the 1950s was quite well developed even before the rise of the market for its sale on records, even though the first and most significant records company, Jugoton, was established already in 1947 (Franulić et al. 2014; Škarica 2017).

Similarly, pop and rock developed as live music practices before the music industry was ready. It was thus expected that traditional styles of music, perhaps with modern adaptations and the introduction of new instruments, would prevail

in everyday life. However, despite the slow rise of folk-pop already in the 1950s and 1960s, it became a giant success only in the late 1980s with the rise of newly-composed folk music stars like Lepa Brena.<sup>10</sup> Music for dancing, which dominated Yugoslav popular music in the first two decades (at weddings, public celebrations, and dancehall events), was under the considerable influence of the imperial history of parts of Yugoslavia. While the western part of the country inherited Central-European music styles and dances (polka and waltz), the eastern part inherited Ottoman influences. Nevertheless, the dance music played was predominantly Western, with dance styles from the past and present.

Local traditional music survived in rural areas throughout the 20th century, especially in communal singing and informal dance events. If we consider peasants a separate class of “working people” (although they had never been any kind of homogenous group) and the remains of urban middle-class “petty bourgeoisie” from the prewar period, who later, during socialism, transformed into urban higher strata, it was industrial workers who were the most important consumers of popular music. Nevertheless, should we consider popular music as the music of the rising working class during the rapid process of industrialization? Well, yes, but with some restrictions.

It is namely essential to understand that popular culture, especially in its variously domesticated versions, became not only a characteristic of Yugoslav market socialism but was at the same time an independent sphere in which the working class, with all its unrecognized and conflicting and complex variety in regional, urban, rural, and other social layering dimensions, finally got a sphere at least to resonate as the working class. Its culture was indeed contemporary popular culture as an advanced alternative to traditional cultures from times before modernization, as Slovenian ethnologists would define the distinction between traditional and contemporary “mass” culture (cf. Kremenshek 1978; Baš 1978). Indefinable peasant “folk culture” was lost, as much as traditional rural “folk” (commoners) disappeared more than a century ago, while the newly

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10 About her music and public persona, see more in Hofman (2012).

emerged industrial working class—urban, semi-urban, and rural—adopted and domesticated popular culture from the West, or “mass” culture (Kremenšek 1983, 127). Contemporary popular culture thus met the expectations of the country’s most numerous and characteristic cultural strata.

From a historical and genre-based view of the development of popular music in socialist Yugoslavia, we can deduce that there was noticeable correspondence between music genres—even the kinds of music played and consumed—and social stratification. If the rural areas still preserved some older music practices, and ethnologists and ethnomusicologists still enthusiastically studied the so-called traditional music (*ljudska glasba*; see Kumer 1972), and, at the same time, the remains of “townspeople” and petty bourgeoisie, together with educated strata and the ruling class, would still cultivate classical (art) music or jazz, the emerging and gradually dominating working class expressed the urgent need for its own kinds of music. That meant *pop evka* songs—locally translated and adopted pop songs (evergreens, *chanson*, *canzona*, and *schlager*)—various newly emerged versions of ethno-pop, and emerging genres of popular music, especially rock.

In order to give an illustration of that process, let me shortly describe the ascent of Slovenian folk-pop music, which was actually the first such genre that appeared in Yugoslav popular music. At Radio Ljubljana, after the audience requested its playing for the desired public greetings, this accordion-dominated polka-style music with elements of jazz arrangements was aesthetically compromised: the redactors established a special board to check its “suitability,” especially regarding lyrics and pieces as the whole. It does not mean that it was censored but at least unwanted. The issue was not political but predominantly aesthetic, following the task of a national radio to educate public music taste.<sup>11</sup>

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11 One of the first radio redactors for this kind of music at Radio Ljubljana, Janez Bitenc, remembers that it was 1955 when the first such board was established. It rejected many songs for many different reasons. Among the criteria of having “good” lyrics and music, there were also criteria of not being rude or offensive and not containing swearing or public morality, etc. Sometimes, this commission rejected even 90% of all the current production (see Sivec 1998, 367; 1999, 40). Ivan Sivec, one of the songwriters for those “ensembles” and radio redactors, claimed that only every sixth or seventh ensemble deserved to be played on the radio (1999, 41).

Popular music with elements of traditional music was primarily considered low-brow, which means, it was supposed to express the taste of the lowest strata in society, not necessarily the working class, although it was precisely the strata that carried on ethno-pop. Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen thus wrote about Serbian newly-composed folk music:

Devaluated musical styles variously associated with the local notions of “Eastern,” “Islamic,” “ethnic,” and “foreign” stand for marginal groups within the national hierarchies of the culturally representative. Their aesthetic inferiority, further denoted by technological qualification—cassette music—and the subcultural notion of “informal” thriving in communal, ritualistic, and club settings, supports the equation between the popular, the socially marginal, and the culturally illegitimate. (1996, 109)

These kinds of music, not only newly-composed folk, were music genres “that had emerged in the 1950s as a consequence of major changes in Yugoslav society, including its modernization, urbanization and hybridization, in order to feed the cultural needs of the emerging working class and other cultural ‘mongrels,’ who represented the largest part of the population” (Petrović 2017, 100). Famous Serbian singer-songwriter Đorđe Balašević described singers of newly-composed folk music—*narodnjaci* (“folkies”), as “a hybrid class halfway on the road from the village to the city” (Gordy 1999, 107). Being largely ignored among “dominant post-Yugoslav interpretations” of Yugoslav popular music (Petrović and Hofman 2017, 71), newly-composed folk music “with its roots in traditional folk music [...] was a reflection *par excellence* of the socialist transformation from rural to modern industrial society” (Hofman 2013, 293). It addressed masses of working people throughout the decades, but “precisely this ‘working-classiness’ was considered its major deficiency” (Kolanović in Petrović and Hofman 2017, 71).

Nevertheless, the class situation in the field was not clearly defined. Individuals and groups from various strata would overlap territorially and regarding their social mobility, meaning neither countryside nor urban centers were

culturally homogenous. They all hosted mainstream and alternative, local and regional ethno-pop and avant-garde projects. Therefore, despite the consensus in the press that popular music genres using traditional musical expressions were the result of recent migrations from villages to urban centers and that the new Yugoslav working class was still supposed to be more villagers than “civilized,” we must understand that the coexistence and intertwinement of urban and rural phenomena characterized their lives.

### *First Generations of the Urban Proletariat: Emergence of Ethno-pop Čaga*

As Aidan Southall said, “the great city still exerts magnetic attraction” (2000, 408). Due to the post-World War II rapid industrialization, it was impossible to distinguish between the industrial and rural proletariat. Their ways of life were specific, as well as their music preferences. The abovementioned ethno-pop genres were the main kinds of popular music listened to by rural-urban workers who recently moved to industrial centers, typically living in recently built block settlements, though not exclusively. Even though they found this music the most appealing, there were considerable differences in musical preferences among workers from different regions. Most industrial workers in Slovenia initially moved from the Slovenian countryside. However, after the 1960s, the workforce predominantly came from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later from Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo. Those workers came to quite a different cultural environment, thus having even more need to follow their “own” music. Here is where music tastes and preferences of the working class, especially in the northern parts of Yugoslavia, reflected the same structural logic, but in terms of music admired, it differed profoundly.

To understand this complexity, we must move far back in the past. Before its first historical appearance in 1918, and before the kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro became independent, the Yugoslav territory belonged to two empires, Habsburg and Ottoman. It is fundamental for understanding Yugoslav ethno-pop and popular music in general. Throughout the 19th century, in all parts of Yugoslavia, the nationalist bourgeoisie worked hard to introduce and

impose Central European classical music as a standard in music education. At the same time, urban music styles and music played at dance parties and in the inns, taverns, hotels, and other entertainment places were derived from local adaptations of popular songs from the imperial centers, which means music from Vienna and Budapest in Slovenia and Croatia, and music from Istanbul in the rest of Yugoslavia. Good examples of such remnants were the quartets that played *Schrammelmusik* at the beginning of the 1920s in Slovenia and the Kociprova banda (Kociper Brothers Band) from Beltinci, Prekmurje, playing popular songs of the time from Budapest. This chapter is not the place to deeply analyze the influences of imperial legacies in music. However, in ethno-pop music genres, they became apparent, leading to accusations of those styles as Alpine, that is, Austrian/German for Slovenian polka-based folk-pop music, as well as melismatic and rhythmically rich newly-composed folk music as Oriental.

Those genres were musically very different, and its audience was initially practically exclusive: folk-pop music was limited to Slovenia and parts of Croatia, and newly-composed folk music to Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and some parts of Croatia. To add to the complexity of the development of Yugoslav popular music, there were other variants of local popular music already well-developed before World War II: old urban music, mainly in Serbia, *sevdalinka* in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Sandžak and partly in Kosovo, and, finally, Romani music in the southern part of Yugoslavia in various musical styles, predominantly brass bands. When we put together early *schlager* style, derived partly from pre-World War II *starogradska* and *kafana* (bar) singing and adaptations of popular songs from Central and Western Europe for radio performances, with dance parties, we can find a vivid music life far before it reached radio transmission and the recording industry. Already in the late 1940s, these genres of early popular music were acceptable for all strata of society, not only for the working class but with a clear regional range.

When the first generation of socialist workers in the late 1950s and early 1960s earned enough to purchase radios and gramophones, they would buy the hit records of the time. The sale of records produced by the Jugoton record company rose in accordance with the sales of the up-to-date music of the time. It was

these new sounds that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, that is, electrified and rhythmically expressive evergreen pop, jazz, and early rock, which became the first genres of popular music produced and sold to both working-class and middle-class consumers, who bought records before the working-class (especially jazz). It changed enormously in the 1970s and 1980s when some albums sold 300,000 or up to 500,000 copies, which was quite a number for a country of 20 million inhabitants (Franulić et al. 2014, 12).

However, the emerging ethno-pop music genres of folk-pop music and newly-composed folk music (or, much later, turbo-folk<sup>12</sup>) became the characteristic music admired by the first generation of the Yugoslav postwar “working class.” The paradox of this music production was that it was not properly Yugoslav: what was admired in Slovenia with the Alpski kvintet (Alpine Quintet), established in 1953, was not more than a strange curiosity for the Serbian audience, while the initial stars of Serbian newly-composed folk music, e.g., Lepa Lukić or Predrag Živković Tozovac, were no more than curiosities for the Slovenian audience.

The empty space for the general audience in Yugoslavia, especially the working class, thus became local versions of pop songs (*schlager*) and the early adoption of rock. Nevertheless, the production of pop songs—*popovka* (Slovenia), *pjesma* (Croatia), *šlager* (Serbia), and pop song in Macedonia (*non-музика, забавната музика*) varied, so the production of pop songs in different parts of Yugoslavia differed considerably and was driven by solid competition (see testimonies in Luković 1989). Singers who were big in Croatia were not as big in Serbia. However, the leading figures had enormous national appeal (e.g., famous stars such as Ivo Robić, Đorđe Marjanović, etc.).

### *The Second Generation: Rock ‘n’ Roll Čaga*

In the late 1960s, working-class people born in towns became the dominant part of the working people in socialist Yugoslavia. Younger generations were

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12 About the genre of turbo-folk, see Ivana Kronja (2004) and Rory Archer (2012).

born with access to electronic media and the music industry, so their initial music environment was oriented toward emerging pop and rock music. Despite their upward social mobility with prolonged education and eventual promotion to the middle class, their social environment paved the way for Yugo rock as we historically know it. Its roots are various electrified bands from the early 1960s and the famous “pop” bands from the second part of the 1960s, like Siluete (Belgrade), Bijeke strijele (Zagreb), Kameleoni (Koper), and Indexi (Sarajevo). The next generation brought famous Yu grupa (Belgrade), Smak (Kragujevac), Bijelo dugme (Sarajevo), Parni valjak (Zagreb), and Buldožer (Ljubljana). The last Yugoslav generations coming to the age in the 1980s brought Pankrti (Ljubljana), Prljavo kazalište, Film, Haustor (Zagreb), Električni orgazam, Ekaterina Velika, Disciplina kičme, Partibrejkers (Belgrade), Zabranjeno pušenje, Plavi orkestar (Sarajevo), as the most popular among many other bands. Although it is impossible to define their class origin (having some music education, many musicians were recruited from middle-class families), it is clear that their main audience was primarily the working class.

Some rock groups from the 1970s would explicitly target working-class people with their names, e.g., Teška industrija from the Bosnian industrial town Zenica. Although the early punk, especially in Ljubljana and Zagreb, was much more played by middle-class people, there were some exceptions to the rule, expressing characteristic working-class sentiments. These exceptions were much more obvious in provincial towns and, in some cases, in Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade. With their unique sensibility to issues related to “ordinary” people, Ljubljana’s new-wave punk band Otroci socializma (The Children of Socialism), with its lead singer and poet Brane Bitenc, sang about death, military life, and other issues of everyday life. The famous lyrics by the Belgrade group Šarlo akrobata talked about an “ordinary person” who wants to cross the line but is not allowed to, using the ambiguous meaning of the term *ne sme*, meaning “he is not allowed to” and “he does not dare to.”

Nevertheless, the most famous example of a song dedicated to the working class was “Radnička klasa odlazi u raj” (The Working Class is Ascending to Heaven) by Croatian new-wave band Haustor. Paradoxically, those in

charge at the label Jugoton did not dare to include the song in the first album by the group released in 1981, presumably because of its ironic statement that the working class is dead. It was released on the album *Treći svijet* (The Third World) three years later without any problem. At that time, Yugoslavia's dramatic and severe problems were apparent: austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, resulting in the collapse of Yugoslav industry, an increase in unemployment, a soaring inflation rate, and finally, the violent dissolution of the state. The song speaks about a typical early morning at the train station with workers having a cognac before heading to work. However, the working class has lost its role in history; the black devil invites them to stay until they eventually leave with their families for the weekend. To additionally identify with workers, the lyrics were written in a typical dialect of workers-peasants from the Zagreb hinterland.

The bands that belong to the music movement *new primitivism* presented views of marginal people and ordinary townspeople from Sarajevo (the so-called *raja*).<sup>13</sup> However, it would be exaggerated to say that this genre was truly working-class. Partly it was indeed, as it emerged ten years before the rock craze provoked by the band Bijelo dugme. Nevertheless, it was an urban phenomenon and expression of mostly middle-class kids. The movement incorporating Zabranjeno pušenje, Elvis J. Kurtović and His Meteors, and some other bands touched the sentiments of younger generations in times of economic collapse, expressing dissatisfaction with the situation in the country. The working class at that time was indeed becoming obsolete. Middle-class urbanity was replacing it.

Therefore, in Yugoslavia and its successor independent states, the ideology of “urbanity” became a tool of distinction between “civilized” urban people and “savage” peasants. In his foreword to a compilation of interviews with protagonists of the rock scene from former Yugoslavia, Croatian writer on popular culture Branko Kostelnik hopes that his volume will contribute to the “fight for urbanity, freedom, and equality” (2004, 8).

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13 More about this genre and its bands, see Hofman and Pogačar (2017).

### *Middle-Class Affectivity: From Jazz Čaga to Pop and, Again, Rock 'n' Roll*

Despite the nationalization of property in the 1940s, the prewar middle class largely survived. From big owners, they became small owners, forming a palimpsest of the Yugoslav petty bourgeoisie. An essential characteristic of those townspeople was their cultural affinity to classical art. In music, it was opera and symphonic music. Throughout the development of socialist Yugoslavia, these strata became more and more dispersed. In the 1960s, many newly educated people got positions in management and social services, forming the new “technocracy,” which became a threat to the leading party; a couple of years after 1971, the party fell into disgrace.

Since the prewar times, jazz has been the music of students and urban middle-class youth. Perhaps partly for this reason, the authorities had a repressive attitude toward jazz in the 1940s and early 1950s. Too many Yugoslav communists would perhaps agree with the Soviet authorities that those who play jazz today will betray their homeland tomorrow (Barber-Keršovan 2005, 30). However, this was not the only reason that jazz, except its most basic dance forms, had never become a “working class” culture.

Rock ‘n’ roll was different. Although, like jazz, it attracted students and youth, the new sounds for dancing around 1960 were different. Hence, the dance halls, including *plesnjaci*, which I wrote about in the first part of the chapter, attracted many more working-class youths than jazz a couple of years before. Although it started with dance and jazz arrangements of modern music, throughout the late 1950s, 1960, and up to the late 1980s, rock ‘n’ roll represented freedom and liberation (see Žikić 1999, 17) from the state socialism or its Yugoslav self-management variant. Slovenian punk rock in the late 1970s and early 1980s was, in the views of its protagonists and observers, “the school of democracy” (Barber-Keršovan 2005, 514).<sup>14</sup>

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14 Alenka Barber-Keršovan, describing import of early rock ‘n’ roll to socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s, used Reinhold’s term “recontextualization.” She wrote that “only a very thin stratum of well-off youngsters whose parents possessed a radio or even a record player, at that time almost unobtainable luxury, had access to this music” (2001).

Nevertheless, we have to understand that these “well-off youngsters” were not the kids of the members of the League of Communists. Though some were, those people belonged to the higher strata: doctors, professors, and especially managers who were not necessarily party members—or if they were, they were its members more nominally than actively.<sup>15</sup>

It was indeed a paradox that the only class taken seriously, “working people,” was largely separated and alienated from the ruling party. I was born in the 1960s into a typical working-class family in Maribor. At that time, it was becoming, for a while, the leading industrial town in the country. Assuming that my experience of the socialist working class in the 1970s and 1980s was not atypical, I can say that I did not know anybody from my working-class neighborhood, neither relatives nor the workers I knew from Maribor factories, to be a member of the League of Communists. On the contrary, since my earliest age, I remember skepticism and criticism, if not an open revolt of workers against communist rule. Many myths of the socialist working class are circling nowadays, but one thing is sure: in my experience, the Communist Party was not their party.<sup>16</sup>

Not only members of the League but also non-members formed the social strata that could have simply afforded more than average working-class people

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15 It is also important to understand that President Tito, and some core members of the Yugoslav League of Communists, were born as working-class kids. Josip Broz, born near the border of Slovenia and Croatia, to a Croatian father and a Slovenian mother, was trained as a mechanical locksmith, thus a typical Yugoslav working-class person, “among other hundreds of thousands” (after Matvejević 1984, 202). Nevertheless, membership in the League of Communists did not reflect this working-class based social stratification. On the contrary: it formed a kind of an elite ruling political class.

16 Although membership in the Communist Party did form a special social “avant-garde” formation, it would be too exaggerated to define them as a “class” (see Djilas 1957). After all, immediately after the war, in 1948, 49% of party members were peasants or peasant-origin, 30% were workers, and the rest were others (Suvin 2014, 113). Moving up in the party hierarchy, the ratio turned around. Working councils, the backbone of Yugoslav self-management socialism, typically cooperated with management, so, according to the study by Bilandžić in 1985, they were not exactly working class’ political organs or tools but “more part of the business-managing mechanisms of the company” (in Mihaljević 2018, 37).

and peasants. Membership in the League of Communists was a ticket to climb up socially, make a career, and cross from the lower to the higher strata. The leading communist bureaucratic class was thus constantly recruited with ambitious managers and intellectuals, and working people remained where they were. They could assess positions of *apparatchiks*, but being eligible for leading positions in the real economy—especially management, public service, or other significant institutions in civil society—was outside of their reach. It led to a paradox that everybody would recognize immediately in factories: members of the League of Communists among the ordinary workers were very few, while leading management was almost all, though not entirely, “communist.” If managers were mostly agreed-on members, then ordinary workers were the most consistent critics of the League.<sup>17</sup>

No other song expressed the alienation of the League of Communists from ordinary people better than the song “700 usnjenih torbic” (700 Leather Bags) by the abovementioned group *Otroci socializma* when each of the 700 delegates at the Party congress received a leather bag. Although it became a hit song among the Ljubljana alternatives and played at Radio Študent, it provoked massive anxiety in the “concerned” public. The band recorded and printed its first album, but it never reached music stores.

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17 The vertical stratification mobility available to the membership to the League of Communists is clearly discernible from the data about membership in the Trade Union. While membership in trade unions was self-understandable for every worker, only some 10–15% of trade union members were members of the League. However, coming to the leadership of the unions, 92–98% of the highest representatives of trade unions were party members (Reljano-*vić* 2018, 66). After the consolidation of market socialism, “market relations strengthened the technocratic class, a grouping made up of non-productive workers, such as directors, managers, work supervisors, the marketing sector, etc.” (Pantić 2018, 207). With the rise of this social strata, “this class entered coalitions with the middle layers of the party bureaucracy” (Pantić 2018, 207). The reaction to this rise was response of party bureaucracy with strengthening state and administrative institutions (Pantić 2018, 207).

## Beyond the Urban and Rural Divide: Social Outsiders and Their Music Attractions

The long story of popular music in Yugoslavia (with a focus on Slovenia) has made us reconsider the affective dimensions of social transformations related to music. In its many forms, Yugoslav punk brought more contemporary kinds of *čaga*. Not only with pogo or later developments in moshing, but it also appeared to become—socially and politically—a very impressive development, having at least some influences in the social transformations from the late 1980s and the 1990s. Since then, new kings of *čaga* have appeared: rave, hip-hop, and turbo-folk. All later developments are rooted in long-term affective practices passed down between generations in local popular music venues.

In the end, I must mention another admired kind of *čaga* from the marginal part of Yugoslav society. Despite expectations that socialism would not form any underclass, Yugoslav society had many kinds of lowest strata: the village proletariat, rural daily workers, and other people with practically no property. During socialism, there were also homeless people, especially after the introduction of the socialist market system in the late 1960s (see Želimir Žilnik's *Black Film* from 1971; Ćurčić et al. 2009). Nevertheless, the most typical “class” of Yugoslav social outsiders were the Roma.

Being cultural brokers and ritual specialists in providing music for weddings and funerals, especially in the southern part of the country, the Roma in socialist Yugoslavia were a specific people, a kind of ethnic underclass (Gypsies, *Cigani*). The Roma became praised by the films in the 1960s and later with Kusturica.<sup>18</sup> In music, they would oscillate between the most elementary possible music practices (in *kafana*) up to the most successful popular music icons such as Esmā Redžepova and Šaban Bajramović. Nevertheless, their class position was low or very low. Success in music would be one of the possibilities for their upward social mobility. In many ways, they were music brokers (Pettan 1996),

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18 See more in the chapter by Jelača in this volume.

but as well the exemplary “Blacks” of the Balkans (Barbarič 1996, 154). In that sense, some hip-hop acts would successfully bring a creative mixture of Romani musical expression with modern and global popular music, especially among the largest Roma settlement in former Yugoslavia, Šutka (Skopje, Northern Macedonia). Other outsiders in Yugoslav society were clergy with their own ritual life and some sporadic music production. It is worth mentioning some recordings of Christian rock by Catholic priests and monks in the early 1970s. Christian pop and rock only recently marked the development of the local popular music scenes, though still on the margins.

To conclude, we cannot overlook the historical roots of the present-day interconnectedness of national, regional, and local popular music scenes in the post-Yugoslav space. The experience of *čaga* is still around. Going back to the rural area around Maribor, one can read on Facebook an exciting reflection about the rapper Leopold I.’s performance in the venue Ceršak on January 15, 2023:

*Uau, what an evening, what a čaga it was. Leopold I. set the bar high. Uffff, lyrics, music, ambiance, and atmosphere. During the performance, we toasted more than once for the New Year, which means we were tied together. Thank you to each and every one of you, and truly thank you for rewriting the history of our “Cirbek” [Ceršak] together. Thank you, Leopold I., since yesterday, you are now our “Cirbežaner” [Ceršakian]. (Kulturno umetniško društvo Ceršak 2023)*

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