

Novica Petrović, *Kontrakulturni trendovi u britanskoj i američkoj popularnoj muzici šezdesetih godina XX veka* [*Countercultural Trends in British and American Popular Music of the 1960s*]. Beograd: Filološki fakultet [Belgrade: Faculty of Philology], 2016, pp. 127.

Reviewed by **ALEKSANDRA ORAŠANIN¹**
University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology,
English Department
Belgrade, Serbia

The latest addition to Anglophone culture studies in Serbia explores the multifaceted 1960s decade, namely the countercultural trends which were mirrored in the music of that era. The critical overview, penned by Novica Petrović, Associate Professor at the English Department of the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, fills the void in the popular culture and music studies (written in Serbian) that existed between the publication of Janković's *Dug i krivudav put: Bitlsi kao kulturni artefakt* [*The Long and Winding Road: The Beatles as a Cultural Artefact*](2009), which gave a band-focused layout of the 1960s, and any future works that would venture to delve into the complexities of the said decade from a wider angle. To say that the author's task at hand was challenging is an understatement. In fact, Petrović himself states that it would be impossible to encompass all the relevant actors and works within a 'reader-friendly' book, and confirms that the book's intention is to provide the Serbian readership with a summary of the countercultural motifs most pertinent to the topic. As such, the book is aimed at a wider audience than the culture studies milieu.

The book's structure consists of five sections, each thematically paving the road for the following one, and each with its corresponding literature attached at the end. The value of this lies in handing the readers an option to further broaden their knowledge before moving on to the next section. Since they are interconnected and rather deftly weaved into a tight structure, it is advisable to consider the work in its entirety from the very start, although the sections will be presented here separately for the sake of the interested audience.

I Section one, titled *Kontrakultura šezdesetih godina XX veka u potrazi sa sopstvenom paradigmom* [*Counterculture of the 1960s in Search of Its Own Paradigm*] serves to outline the social and historical context in which turbulent ideas and events all ended bundled up under the eponymous term referred to simply as *the Sixties*. Petrović carefully avoids the trap of calling that decade the age of political revolution and underlines that the Sixties were a period of *societal* rather than political reform and revolution. He introduces readers to such terms as The Summer of Love, The Days of Rage, beatniks, permissive society, etc, all relevant to any study hoping to lead the ones on its receiving end to a deeper understanding of the topic. By citing Ian MacDonald (1995; 2004) for the first time, Petrović tips the hat to the author whose works provided a point of departure for his own rendition of the decade's values. This section also brushes on the themes of drug (ab)use, the friendly competition between

1 Kontakt podaci [Email]: a.orasanin@gmail.com

the two sides of the Atlantic, as well as on the political strife within the USA, stemming from the generational gap intensified by setting two different social ideologies as focal points of public life. The author concludes that the utopian vision and anthropological optimism of the youth invariably failed, not for the lack of ideals, but perhaps because they remained solely that and did not manage to cross the line into reality. He argues, however, as will be evidenced by the final section of the book, that critics should not be dismissive of the Sixties as a faded trend.

II In the next section, „*Druga britanska invazija*“ kao transatlantski dijalog među kulturama [*The Second British Invasion*“ as Transatlantic Dialogue Between Cultures], Petrović revisits the well-documented ventures of the influencers who were tipping the scales in favour of British or American domination in popular music of the age. To illustrate, he compares Dylan’s “electrified” music, brought about by fascination with the daring Beatles, with a more introspective and pensive mood of the Beatles in return. Far from merely superficially comparing the artistic values of such changes, Petrović here contributes to academic discussion by also presenting the not-so-favourable feedback these musicians would encounter from their respective audiences, showing that the self-proclaimed liberal generation was not unconditionally such – a crucial point, often overlooked, which explains the untimely lapse into less fervent political engagement and art a mere decade later.

III Perhaps the most recognizable trait of the Sixties naturally deserved its own section. In *Psihodelija – kontrakturni opijum za narod?* [*Psychedelia – a Countercultural Opium for the Masses?*] the author places psychedelic music in its rightful context of a wannabe-revolutionary-enlightenment decade and discusses its origins, influences and consequences. And while readers will undoubtedly appreciate the vivid glimpses into quasi-scientific delusions of the LSD experimenting and the explanation that it was The Beatles’ insistence on the ‘value’ of the drug for musical talent that provided an incentive for other artists to follow in their drug-laced footsteps, we find that the value of this section lies in perhaps easily neglected mentions. By quoting Murray’s (2005) vicariously-experienced psychedelic years as an example of the prevalent obsession with anything psychedelic, Petrović presents one of his sources as not just a citation, but a witness to an era. Such incorporating serves to animate his references, assigning them with more than just a bibliographical importance. He also criticises biographers of the artists of the time (such as Syd Barrett’s) who blindly repeated overdramatised stories of drug abuse, and instead takes a rational viewpoint of the troubled primum mobile of popular music, of whom there were many.

IV The immediately following section *Mi protiv Njih – politički angažman kontrakulture šezdesetih* [*Us Versus Them – Political Engagement of the 1960s Counterculture*] considers the second vital trait of the 1960s counterculture. It lays out the historical background – namely the Vietnam War and racial segregation – which provided a context for political activism in music. To explain how popular music sometimes inadvertently obtained new meaning (for instance, The Animals were popular among American troops in Vietnam), Petrović claims that it was the general feeling of oppression, felt by the young in both the UK and the USA, that allowed for the fluidity of lyrical meaning and the use of music for expressing political and social stands. Unlike some cultural critics, Petrović does not fail to underline that the American

counterculture was not as strong as the British one, offering as evidence the fact that the long-reigning No. 1 song of 1966 was a patriotic take on the war. If we add to that the examination of instrumental sequences in 1960s music, we cannot but conclude that such lucid academic interpretations are indispensable when it comes to bringing something new to the discussion on a metaphor-heavy time period.

V Finally, *Nasleđe kontrakulture šezdesetih – ima li ga?* [*Legacy of the 1960s Counterculture – Does It Exist?*] as the last section of the book examines the surviving influence of the Sixties, focusing on two musicians whose careers prolonged the life and ethos of the decade which had formed their artistic voice and message—the musicians in question being Kris Kristofferson and Leonard Cohen. Petrović elaborates on his sources (cf. Ratcliff; DeCurtis) to suggest that despite the two different styles in which they imparted their political views – Kristofferson very bluntly and Cohen in a Biblical and lyrical way – both artists nevertheless shared the same engaged sentiment of the Sixties. Petrović, however, finds another trait linking the two veterans – the 1960s concept of love as a cure for the world's woes. This aptly rounds up a book discussing the decade which birthed The Summer of Love.

Petrović's work gives us a balanced overview of the socially most dramatic decade of the 20th century. The style is concise and clear, yet not without creative phrasing that lifts up works of this nature. The general reader will find bountiful examples and gain access to more than basic knowledge. Petrović posits that the Sixties were "a time of high hopes, grand illusions and eventually – bitter disappointment." For any era which presents such fertile ground for many interpretations and reflections, it is significant to have a wide array of intrepid researchers ready to foray into the matter. Petrović's work lays a solid foundation for further reading, all the while not failing to seize an opportunity to give its cogent contribution to current academic discussion.

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