

*Yveta Kajanová*

## **Rock Subcultures versus Pop Music: Italian Pop Music at the Czechoslovak *Bratislavská lýra* Festival<sup>1</sup>**

### **1. Introduction**

The sociological interpretation of “subculture” not only reflects a particular music genre but also extends into philosophical, political, aesthetic and other concepts. The emergence of a subculture is commonly associated with a musical counterpart. Any segmentation across the broad spectrum of modern popular music – jazz, country, rock, reggae, rap, and electronic dance music (EDM) – into novel genres with their committed supporters has brought a new simplicity, bearing both pop music features and the potential to become a subculture (Frith, Straw, Street 2001, p. 94; Encyclopedia Britannica 2023). Each music genre, therefore, can be transformed from its simple original form into a more complex artistic phenomenon: for instance, swing-style jazz as a pop genre developed into bebop; rock and roll and hard rock subsequently evolved into progressive rock; and EDM (industrial, synthpop, techno pop) led, among others, to styles such as trance, trip hop, and glitter. Franco Fabbri (1981, pp. 52–54) perceives a music genre as a system of formal, technical, semiotic, social, economic, ideological, and other canons which are but one step away from being a complex subculture. According to the sociomusicologist Simon Frith (2001), pop music addresses a wider range of listeners, mainly a general audience, whilst a subculture is oriented towards specific fans. Furthermore, rock, contrary to pop music, has the ambition to become a counter-culture genre (Whiteley 1992) with critical and radical attitudes towards society (Hebdige 1991). The relationship between mass culture and subculture is vexing, even raising a question as to whether it actually might be antagonistic. Frith (1987, p. 137), for instance, considers both pop and rock music as “commercial forms distributed through mass media as mass culture”. Moreover, Phillip Birgy (2021, p. 1) – despite an oppositional mainstream and underground divide in rock music

<sup>1</sup> This article was submitted by the author under invitation and was subject to a peer review evaluation.

– speaks of “the ambivalence of their inclusion in a market or commercial network”. The Italian scholars Stefano Marino and Giovanni Mugnaini (2024, p. 146) have researched pop music and the punk rock subculture and, in their analytical comparisons, found crossovers between the two genres. For Italian punk rock bands, they pointed out that the transformation of pop music into the indie scene had not occurred until the mid-1980s; an example is Madonna’s 1985 song “Material Girl”, remixed in 1990 (Reynolds 2006, pp. 34–40). For subculture–pop music fusions, history attests to them being a two-way process.

The social dimensions of rock subculture and their alignment with a particular group status was emphasized by Frith as early as 1978 (pp. 46, 51). He later claims (1987, pp. 133–139) that, unlike the rock genre, pop music is unable to convey identity in various social groups but can, nonetheless, create an identity (p. 144), which makes the whole relationships issue more intricate. Likewise, Andy Bennett’s opinion (2005, pp. 333–342) on “forming identity and shaping lifestyle through pop music” indicates a looseness in the pop music and rock boundaries. For understanding the intersections between the rock subculture and pop music, it is important to contextualize the genres with their particular historical period. Despite the emphasized sociological attributes of rock and pop, their musical characteristics – repeated choruses and hooks, catchy and easy-to-remember melodies, well-structured rhythm, dance function, mood enhancement, and lyrics appealing to young people – have sometimes proved to be more vital for their popularity (Boyle, Hosterman and Ramsey 1981, pp. 47–55).

Of the Italian music influences upon the 1950s world scene, theoreticians (Frith, Straw, Street 2001, p. 100) wrote that rock and rollers drew on Italian tradition – referring particularly to the popular song “It’s Now or Never” – and “gave Tin Pan Alley sentiment a new edge of melancholy”. Broad-cantilena melodies also infiltrated pop music productions at the *Bratislavská lýra*, but genuine ingredients of soft or pop rock did not arrive until 1977. Nevertheless, during the socialist realism era in Czechoslovakia, Italian pop music compositions were disparaged as Western influences.

## 2. Objectives and method

I have based my study of interconnections between rock subcultures and pop music on mapping the 32-year-long developmental path of the *Bratislavská lýra* festival, spanning 1966 to 1998. The focus is on identifying those pivotal years, aspects and key elements through which rock subcultures permeated pop music. By analysing the reviews pub-

lished in the Czech and Slovak magazines *Popular*, *Melodie* [Melody], and *Hudobný život* [Music life], I examine the occurrence of rock style features, such as instrumentation, patterns and riffs, the greater sound levels, clothing, rebellion, and the components of rock stage showmanship being adopted in the pop music genre. By unearthing mentions of these elements in the press, I explore conformist, ambivalent and antagonistic relationships between rock subcultures and pop music. In addition, attention is given to critics' remarks about Italian pop music and its place and audience appreciation in the Czech and Slovak pop music context.

### 3. *Bratislavská lýra* in the years 1966 to 1969 (festivals I–IV): Conformist relations

In 1966, the Slovak composers and practising musicians Pavol Zeleňay and Ján Siváček – taking inspiration from the Sopot International Song Festival in Poland<sup>2</sup> and the Bulgarian Golden Orpheus International Song Contest<sup>3</sup> – initiated and organized in Bratislava the first *Bratislavská lýra* festival. Two years later, the pair attended the Midem festival in Cannes and the Sanremo Music Festival (*Il Festival della canzone italiana*)<sup>4</sup>, where they made foreign connections and gained valuable organizational insights.

The *Lýra* became a platform for national pop music productions and attracted enormous audience interest in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Participants included such artists as Udo Jürgens (in 1966), Brian Auger, Julie Driscoll, the Shadows (in 1968), the Beach Boys (1969), Cliff Richard and Josephine Baker (1970), the Jamaican-German ensemble Boney M (1977), José Feliciano (1979), Opus, Billy Preston, the British glam rock band Smokie, and Alla Pugacheva (1983), John Mayall (1985), Stevie Wonder and Joan Baez (1989), and Joe Cocker (1998). The artists represented a tapestry woven from a blend of pop music and chanson (Gilbert Bécaud and Mireille Mathieu, performing in 1971 and 1985 respectively), blues, rock, and folk. Later, decent and clean pop music-style performances were turned into rock shows, which even embraced the controversial and sexually provocative singers Amanda Lear (in 1982) and Sabrina (in 1989).

Regarding the fourth year of the *Bratislavská lýra*, the Czech critic Jaromír Tůma (1969, p. 237) wrote: “San Remo was supposed to be

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1961 (Rohál 2014, p. 164).

<sup>3</sup> Held in Sunny Beach from 1965.

<sup>4</sup> The first event took place in 1951.

anxious and Western Germany, as before, to sigh with envy. As soon as I was excitedly holding in my hand an exclusive bag with the festival logo [and] had a look around the magnificent scene in the hall ... I sensed the birth of a *superfestival* which was to become a showcase of federalized Bratislava.”

However, the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of the former socialist Czechoslovakia and the subsequent political interventions constrained the prospects of the increasingly successful festival. Already in 1969, authorities questioned the artistic qualities of pop music by pointing out its western-like character and saying that “the strong prevalence of contemporary (commonly called ‘modern’) entertainment music (jazz and various hits) needs to be – mainly on radio and television – overpowered by the classical genre... with their sheer dilettante reasoning, they [pop music supporters] create a terminological confusion by mistaking jazz for dance music and new dance rhythms for modern music” (Kalina 1969, p. 1). In his defence of the pop genre, Ján Kalina (1969, p. 1) rebukes the bureaucrats for their “unyielding conservatism and love of everything old-fashioned” and remarks that “they, for the sake of Dvořák and Lehár, would like to obliterate Ellington and [the Czech pop music singer Karel] Černoch”.

The participants of 1969’s *Lýra* included the Beach Boys, whose performance was written up as “optimistic, entertaining music and a grand, professionally executed show”, although behind-the-scene voices murmured that “the Beach Boys live are not the same as their records”, because the sound quality could not measure up against that of their albums. Nevertheless, the performance of their drummer, Denny Wilson, was sharp and “they played with a vigorous beat, even though they are not a hard rock band” (Tůma 1969, p. 239).

The organizers were accumulating skills and experience in structuring a festival programme. With respect to this, Tůma (1969, p. 237) expressed his dissatisfaction that “at the end of the third evening, they scheduled the Italian singer Lara Saint Paul after the Tremeloes! It was clear that after the half-hour ovation that the Tremeloes received Lara Saint Paul would not get a chance to sing in Bratislava”. The critic writes (p. 239) that the British band played “simple” and “melodic” pop rock “songs baptized by Latin America and Italy”. Notwithstanding, he does not label the Tremeloes as pop rock but, instead, opts to describe their style as “noisy guitars” combined with melodic tunes. Further, this critic comments (p. 237) that the Karel Vlach Orchestra “stumbled” in their accompaniment to soul-style pieces and that “the guitar–piano combination sounded quite dissonant”, thus contributing to a negative impression. Moreover, it was an indication of emerging harmonization issues in alloying a swing orchestra with a rock lineup.

“[On the other hand], however, an atmosphere starkly different from that at the *Bratislavská lýra* was fostered in the University Club, to which – ir regardless of any beat or non-beat divide – leading Czech and Slovak pop music figures also found their way. ... In the packed venue with its stylish and friendly ambience, Bratislava beat stars jammed till late night with Prague and foreign guests” (Tůma 1969, pp. 237, 238). Here, the hard rock hippie subculture intermingled with pop rock and pop music, whilst the presence of a disc jockey anticipated the nascence of the future disco scene. Tůma sees the club’s beat (rock) subculture and the *Bratislavská lýra* festival – an official pop song contest dominated by 1960s cantilena in the fashion of Les Reed and Tom of Jones’s model of melodic ballads in a full, robust voice – as two opposing streams.

#### **4. *Bratislavská lýra* in the years 1970 to 1975 (festivals V–X): Ambivalent relations**

Already at the fifth festival in 1970, its organizers were well aware that the survival of a pop song beyond the contest doors requires a collaborative promotions by the whole music industry (publishers, agencies, radio, and television). According to Marián Jurík (1970, p. 1), popular music has now acquired stability, incorporating “the approaches of popular, jazz, and beat music”.

However, the success of the *Bratislavská lýra* was particularly dependent on prominent singers and stars. With respect to the fifth event, when compared to previous years, Jurík (1970, p. 1) voices his dismay that “although the festival is primarily conceived as a song competition following the San Remo model, we will see only few [international pop] stars ... the contestants are mostly new voices and faces”. Another critic, Ľuboš Zeman, articulated a contrary view that the 1970 event was one of the few global festivals that would enjoy such an immense import of stars, including The Peddlers (Great Britain), Joséphine Baker (France), and festival orchestra conductors Josef Votruba, Mike Mansfield, Cliff Richard, and Barry Ryan.

In his review, Zeman (1970, p. 7) criticizes the Italian singer Sergio Endrigo for his aloofness, atypical of Italian pop musicians.

The conclusion of the festival was dedicated to four singers: Kati Kovács from Hungary, Sergio Endrigo from Italy, Ela Calvo from Cuba, and Bogdana Karadocheva from Bulgaria. This session was one of the weakest of all festival nights; perhaps only Kati Kovács and ... Sergio Endrigo may be worth mentioning. Endrigo sang “L’Arca di Noé” (well known from San Remo, where its lyrics were awarded a special journalist prize). His performance can be, though, criticized for a degree of coldness, even indifference.

Another Italian artist, Rita Pavone, became the star of the *Bratislavská lýra* in 1973.

Until now, the *Bratislavská Lýra* has been an invaluable occasion for our audiences to get to know at least one of the greats of the global scene. Regrettably, this year featured no truly top artists, although Rita Pavone's performance substituted surprisingly well. Her comedian-like temperament, sometimes akin to a circus artist, helped to mask the fact that her repertoire did not always represent one with the highest artistic quality. ... Rita Pavone managed to thrill the audience and earned respect from even the most experienced professionals. (Dorůžka 1973, p. 240)

In 1973, a problematic practice, which was overlooked by critics, was that of pop music vocalists performing rock pieces with a combined orchestral<sup>5</sup> and rock band accompaniment. Examples were Helena Vrtichová with the folk rock song "Jablko"<sup>6</sup> [An apple] and Marie Rottrová singing "Piesočný dom" [A house of sand], written by the progressive rock musician Marián Varga<sup>7</sup>. Except for rock instrumentation blended with an orchestral sound, these presentations displayed no traces of rock subculture (in behaviour, clothing, or rebellion) identifiable by rock fans. In contrast, the rock ballad "Slzy tvý mámy"<sup>8</sup> [Your mum's tears], performed by the rock singer Petr Janda, was significant for its subculture appeal, although it did not win any of the main prizes, except for a journalists' award. Neither did "Jablko" nor "Piesočný dom" (Dorůžka 1973, p. 240).

The first four years of the *Bratislavská Lýra* were marked by agreeable relations between the rock subculture and pop musicians when any rock characteristics appearing in instrumentation, dynamic, or expression (e.g. aggressiveness) were softened in the spirit of "beautiful" pop music. In the subsequent period of 1970–75 the relationships changed to ambivalence.

The festival's tenth year underscored the disparity between audience tastes and those of the connoisseurs. Igor Wasserberger (1975, p. 1) emphasizes that experts "not yield to the mood of fans" in their discourses and adds that the star phenomenon and the performative style have a considerable bearing on the success of a song. He further states that if a

<sup>5</sup> The Czechoslovak Radio Dance Orchestra Bratislava, under the baton of Miroslav Brož.

<sup>6</sup> Composed by Pavol Hammel with the lyrics by Boris Filan; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBEvGWOSVQI>

<sup>7</sup> Collegium Musicum, Marie Rottrová: *Piesočný dom / Cesta vody k řekám*, Opus, 1973, 90-43-0277; lyrics by Kamil Peteraj; Marián Varga, hammond organ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrmvkTm6Wq0>

<sup>8</sup> Composed by Petr Janda with the lyrics by Václav Babula.

star singer were replaced by an unknown artist, the same piece definitely would not reach the same level of popularity. The critic here refers to the famous silver prize winner Helena Vondráčková and her song “Láska zůstává dál”<sup>9</sup> [Love is forever]. The discord between the professional and audience positions accompanied the *Lýra* until its very end, regardless of the fact that, in addition to the main gold, silver and bronze Bratislavská lýra prizes, other awards were introduced, such as that by journalists (in 1966, 1986, and 1989), the Audience Prize, the Critics’ Award (1969 and 1986), and the prize given by *Populár* magazine (in 1986).

Wasserberger (1975, p. 7) wrote about the Swiss pop singer Vico Torriani that “he brilliantly displayed all the bad taste typical of older German dance music and ... of Viennese and West German television”. In contrast, he considers (p. 7) the Italian composer and conductor Nino Rota as “the most esteemed guest of the *Bratislavská lýra*. It appears, however, that the audience did not fully appreciate the participation of this composer, who cooperates with the most renowned creators of modern film”.

### **5. Bratislavská Lýra in the years 1976 to 1979 (festivals XI–XIV): Antagonistic relations**

In 1976, in line with the trend of less formal open-air festivals and with the aim of making the *Bratislavská Lýra* accessible to a much wider audience, its organizers sought a change of venue. Instead of being staged in the Entertainment Hall of the Bratislava Cultural and Leisure Park, the event was relocated to an acoustically and climatically unsuitable sports stadium, which did not create a conducive environment (e.g. the audience only saw the contestants’ backs). “Another of the problematic novelties was the inclusion of ballet: its artificial spontaneity lapsed into a boring stereotype” (Wasserberger 1976, p. 1). The programme creators also sought a new sonic palette when “the festival orchestra had a significant function in only three of the eight competing songs. It was the wider variety of sounds...which affirmed...that a large brass lineup is not out of fashion when it is appropriately managed (Wasserberger 1976, p. 1).

Since 1976’s world scene was already dominated by disco and pop rock, some critics viewed the cantilenic swing-model big band as old-fashioned. Notwithstanding, in the accompaniment to the piece “On”<sup>10</sup> [He], the rock band Olympic still combined their lineup with

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yp7szwF\\_MS4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yp7szwF_MS4)

<sup>10</sup> Music by Petr Janda/lyrics by Zdeněk Borovec

a big orchestra. According to Wasserberger (1976, p. 1), “it was this composition that could demonstrate to the Slovak ensembles the inventive and effective possibilities of such an instrumental arrangement”. Wasserberger (1976, p. 1) also noted the considerably declining interest in the *Bratislavská Lýra* and that it ought not to be seen as a disaster because “the crisis in song competitions has been deepening, with critics deriding, for instance, even the Grand Prix of Eurovision – a contest of songs selected by individual countries – as ‘the grand prix of boredom’”.

In the mid-1970s, music listeners began to form subcultural groupings following their preferred genres, with the youth gravitating towards hard rock, progressive rock (Blüml 2024, p. 111), and jazzrock (Wasserberger mentions the Jazz Q of Martin Kratochvíl and the bands Fermáta and Prognóza). Nevertheless, this audience segmentation did not yet impact the *Bratislavská Lýra* at that time. Wasserberger (1976, p. 1) states that there was no “antagonism between younger and older audiences” and that provocative incidents, typical of the punk rock rebellion – such as, for instance, when Gilbert O’Sullivan “pulled flowers out of their pots, wiped his sweat onto a singer’s evening gown [and] stomped on the piano” – were offensive to the audience.

When the festival was held at a sports stadium in 1976, the interweave of pop music with rock subcultures was compounded by the jeans-wearing audience; this trend was affirmed the following year when the Italian singer Drupi, casually presented also in jeans, became the main star of the festival.<sup>11</sup> Drupi’s hoarse voice and accompaniment by a rock band blended with a big orchestra changed the *bel canto* aesthetic of beautifully formed tone and also disturbed the melodically wide Tin Pan Alley cantilena.

The Italian singer Giampiero Anelli, known on the international music scene under the pseudonym of Drupi, won audience hearts at the festival’s second concert. ... The organizers of the *Bratislavská Lýra* deserve to be lauded specifically for importing first-class foreign artists. The irresistible Drupi with his famous hits, yet still refined and delightful in his presentation; the Boney M ensemble from Jamaica with not only its creative and original interpretation but also a big and captivating show; the foremost Hungarian hard-rock [also progressive rock] band Omega, which owed nothing to its reputation; the imaginative, lively, yet decent and subtle Waterloo and Robinson; as well as the professionally accomplished vocal group Brotherhood of Man from Great Britain ... these were the great triumphs of this year’s *Lýra* ... (M.P. 1977, p. 7)

<sup>11</sup> Drupi: *Vado via*, ČSTV 1977, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yDC-k8UhaQ>



The 1977 victory of the Slovak band Modus performing a pop rock-style song “Úsmev”<sup>12</sup> [A smile] marked a more tangible audience encounter with the rock subculture; according to a critic, however, “in popular music, one particular style, such as rock, for instance, cannot be canonized for the sake of trampling the others” (M.P. 1977, p. 7). Nonetheless, Modus eventually made the festival jury acknowledge the stylish shift to beat.

At the thirteenth festival in 1979, critics noticed a fundamental turn in pop music delivery, in particular the preference for a hoarse voice instead of the *bel canto* aesthetic of tone creation and melodic cantilena. A conspicuous fashion change also occurred, with musicians abandoning beautiful robes and tuxedos in favour of less formal streetwear in the spirit of sporty elegance. In terms of sound, the orchestra only provided a subtle colouring to the dominant beat-band sound. In his review of the winning song “Šaty z šátku”<sup>13</sup> [A scarf dress], the critic Leo Jehne (1979, p. 240) wrote:

... with their unusual, soaring, almost a terraced melodic moves and openly juicy lyrics, they [the songwriters] veered a considerable distance from the cantilena and rather candy-sweet lyrics in the song “Mám rozprávkový dům” [I have a fairy house] (which had been performed by Karel Gott when he won the 1966 festival). ... Equally far from Gott’s nightingale voice is the tenor of Lešek Semelka, at occasions sounding as if scrubbing a floor.

He points out the reformative shifts occurring at the *Bratislavská Lýra* and claims a permeation of rock features as early as 1968 when the Czech rock band Olympic, in the competition against cantilena-style pieces, won bronze with their hit “Krásná neznámá” [A beautiful unknown girl]. In 1979, Jehne observed that leading composers and singers did not enter the festival competition in order to avoid the risk of an unfavourable outcome. The same critic (pp. 240, 242) also mentions singers attempting, yet without much success, disco dance creations, and he speaks of a genre range starting from hard rock, musical, and neosuperromantic songs through to folk pieces evoking gospel and soul, and even the underground band sound. Jehne’s review (p. 240) of the Italian singer and pianist Claudio Baglioni shows his cognisance of the strong dominance of the rock genre in pop music.

The pseudo-romantic expression and appealing, blemish-free voice of the Italian singer and pianist Claudio Baglioni might have been impressive

<sup>12</sup> Written by Juraj Lehotský with the lyrics by Kamil Peteraj. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd4j9o6bZ-0>

<sup>13</sup> Composed by Lešek Semelka and Pavel Vrba.

at *Lýra*'s earlier events, but this year's performances of [the progressive rock ensemble] Collegium Musicum and [the hard rock and heavy metal band] Catapult guaranteed his failure beforehand.

It can, therefore, be said that in 1979 the conformist relations between the rock subculture and pop music progressed towards antagonism.

## **6. Bratislavská Lýra in the years 1980 to 1987 (festivals XV–XXII): Ambivalent relations**

During the 1980s, modern popular music encompassed multiple genres and styles. Commencing in 1979, the *Bratislavská lýra*, in addition to pop music pieces, embraced folk and chanson in the *Poetická lýra* [Poetic lyre] category and from 1980 included blues and rock in the *Koncert mladých* [Concert of youth].

At the 1982 festival, they scheduled the Italian singer Toto Cutugno<sup>14</sup> after Amanda Lear, whose controversial performance had been accompanied by a hastily assembled band of Italian musicians. Stanislav Titzl (1982, p. 240) wrote:

Although in the Trade Unions' concert hall [in Bratislava] Amanda Lear managed to establish a more intimate audience rapport than she had during her two concerts in the Prague Sports Hall, a music festival is not the right place for her; her limited vocal abilities with a problematic intonation would be better suited to cabaret-like shows. And so, Italian Toto Cutugno, better known as the songwriter for stars such as Adriano Celentano, Ricchi e Poveri, Tom Jones, and Mireille Mathie, among others, became quite an unexpected saviour on the third festival evening. With his likeable, seemly presentation and affect-free rendition of melodic tunes, he won favour of an audience already familiar with him through an album released under licence by the Opus record label.<sup>15</sup>

In an article (-ea- 1982, p. 16) tracing Toto Cutugno's career one can read: "His performance at the *Bratislavská lýra* also met with success, although Cutugno did not use 'cheerleading' or any extremely 'catchy' song. He did not impose himself on the audience but was pleasant and modest and sang with full commitment; it was clearly a labour of love." Upon his death, many Slovak daily newspapers remembered Cutugno as an artist from the *Bratislavská lýra* who had "triumphed at Eurovision well before the currently popular band Måneskin" (Đurčo 2023).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDS-VnZYjj8>

<sup>15</sup> LP Toto Cutugno: *Innamorata, Innamorato, Innamorati*, Opus-Carosello 1982, 9113 1218.

Vladimír Brožík (1983, p. 4) states that the great variety of genres characteristic of popular music leads to songs being selected for a competition without rigorous criteria. In addition, Brožík points out not only the absence of pop music greats but also the fact that famous figures representing other genres attended the *Bratislavská Lýra* only as spectators. He referred explicitly to Karoly Frenreisz, founder of the Hungarian rock band LGT. The international stars at the 1983 *Lýra* included Donovan and the band Smokie. The former amiability between subcultures and pop music was breaking down, tensions began to grow, antagonism increased, and the festival organizers became aware and tried to respond. Although *bel canto*-melody pop music sharply contrasted with blues and chanson, these three genres, due to their qualities and strong messages, were still enjoyed by audiences with diverse tastes. The critic Branislav Slyško (1985, p. 1) wrote:

At the first festival concert, the audience was graced with the well-known repertoire by Al Bano and Romina Power, an artistic pair and a married couple from Italy, the winner of the 34th San Remo'84 festival, the oldest European popular song festival. Al Bano in particular attested to his distinctive vocal abilities by performing songs with the typical Italian cantilena, the greatest asset of this duo.

On the second day, spectators were treated to the “English blues veteran” John Mayall and on the third, the chansonnier Mireille Mathieu “literally lifted the audience from their seats thus creating one of the peak moments of the 1985 *Bratislavská Lýra*” (Slyško 1985, p. 1). Regarding the competing bands, Slyško (1985, p. 1) refers to technopop, New Wave, and reggae and mentions typical festival tunes (the so-called “*festivalovky*”), i.e. melodic songs accompanied by a big orchestra, and he praises the jury for not choosing them, but sending instead young rock groups into the competition. It can, therefore, be stated that the cantilena model of the song accompanied by an orchestra has become just one of the presentation possibilities.

A newspaper reported that the 1986 *Bratislavská lýra* captured “a breath of fresh air” with soft rock, pop rock, and reggae pieces<sup>16</sup> as prize winners in the domestic category. In order to stylistically classify the victorious compositions, Slyško (1986, p. 1) employs the term “melodic rock” and describes them as “middle song stream for the strictly indeterminate taste of the youngest audience”. He expresses certain objections

<sup>16</sup> The soft rock song “S láskou má svět naději” [Love brings hope to the world] by Petra Janů; pop rock composition by the Elán band, and a reggae piece by the Midi group.

to third place being awarded to “Mariners’ wives”<sup>17</sup>, performed by the Italian singer Aldo Riva, because “it is too simple and succumbs to the taste of the audience ... although it derives from the Italian cantilenic tradition, it certainly does not possess characteristics of timeless value”. Furthermore, Slyško (1986, p. 1) voices his disappointment about the lack of prominent artists. The Austrian band Opus, though it exhibited “a very accomplished craftsmanship in playing several pieces from their hit collection (‘Again’, ‘Positive’, ‘Eleven’, ‘Up and Down’, and ‘Flyin’ High’), their degree of inventiveness and originality was questionable. ... The band concluded with the composition ‘Live’, well-known from the charts”<sup>18</sup> (1986, p. 1). The vocal trio Bad Boys Blue was praised highly, as with its disco-style performance “it conquered the audience and enlivened the atmosphere”, even though this experience was facilitated by the use of halfplayback. Manfred Mann’s performance at the Concert of Youth held in the Pasienky sports hall<sup>19</sup> was acclaimed by critics as “a dignified culmination of the 21st Bratislava Lyre ’86 International Festival of Popular Song” (1986, p. 1). The act was a bombastic presentation with visual effects; Slyško says: “... a spectacular rock concert concluded with a cartoon depicting the farewell departure of the band.”

Although the West German singer Nicole represented the international standard in 1987, this foreign rivalry was not considered strong enough. “Another festival contestant was the Italian band Milk and Coffee, whose vivacious song ‘Cantero’ (I will sing) by Natali and Nisi did not reach the calibre we were accustomed to from Italians during the previous years.” (Mokrá 1987, p. 9)

## **7. Bratislavská Lýra in the years 1988 to 1998 (festivals XXIII–XXXIII): A struggle for hegemony**

From 1988, composers and professional singers, in order to avoid any risk to already established careers, declined to participate in the *Bratislavská lýra*. According to Slyško (1988, p. 1), “they left this stage to a second- and third-rate cohort” of Czech and Slovak pop musicians. He criticizes the interpretative standards of contestants and questions whether the qual-

<sup>17</sup> Written by Gianni Belfiore and Ninni Carucci.

<sup>18</sup> In the international category, the Golden Bratislava lyre was awarded to the Irish singer Spyder Symphon for his interpretation of “Bye, Bye” (D. Simpson), and the silver prize went to the Polish singer Danuta Błazejczykóvá for the piece “A Heart Is Not a Lonely Island” (composed by Włodzimier Korcz and Wojciech Młynarski).

<sup>19</sup> The vocal contest took place in the Istropolis Hall with a capacity of 1280 seats. The Pasienky sports stadium had a capacity of 3400 seats.

ity of life performances would be better if it were not for halfplayback. The 1988 festival revealed an intense audience hunger for the non-pop genres and, although its organizers expected the previous ambivalent relationships between pop music and rock subcultures to continue, these fusions proved to be only temporary. The *Bratislavská lýra* now arrived at a crisis point. The artistic standard of this year's event was saved by the flamenco music of the Spanish guitarist Paco de Lucia and his ensemble, which provided a "unique artistic experience" with a showcase of "brilliant technique" (Slyško 1988, p. 7). Heavy metal was represented by the Slovak band Metalinda with the piece "Lod' pre päť miliárd"<sup>20</sup> [A ship for five billion], which placed fourth. Some voices suggested cancelling the festival, whilst others spoke only about rescinding the competition part and changing it to a non-competitive show of pop music professionals (Lábska 1988/15, p. 9), or a contest of television video clips (Lábska 1988/10, p. 32).

Organizers grasped the opportunity for reforms in 1989. Aleš Opekar (1989, p. 227) and Pavol Beka (1989, p. 6) stated: "The *Lýra* ... abandoned the former old fashioned festival orchestra concept, thus creating scope for sound and visual distinctiveness, while also making the organization more flexible."

In his review of the Italian singer Sabrina, Slyško (1989, p. 3) commented that this Italian disco singer was a disappointment, because she sounded most dissonant. Even in the pieces ranked in Western European charts, Sabrina focused only on the visual appearance. The ninth issue of *Populár* magazine in 1989 did not comment on Sabrina's performance but richly decorated two pages with her photos.

Comparing the performances of Sabrina and the American folk musician Joan Baez, Opekar (1989, p. 227) wrote: "The female guests Sabrina from Italy and Joan Baez from the USA, the leading figure of the global folk movement, presented entirely contrasting facets of popular music." Baez openly acknowledged Charter 77, greeted Václav Havel, who was smuggled into the festival as a member of her sound technical team, and also invited the banned folk singer Ivan Hoffman to join her on stage. This was in June, a few months before the Velvet Revolution, and resulted in Hoffman's performance having been halted by a deliberate power cut. Hence, sexual presentation (Sabrina) and political provocation (Baez) represented two contrasting non-musical aspects of this year's festival.

The 1989 *Lýra*, alongside pop music performed with halfplayback, featured Latin-American folk rhythms, rock-style dance music, funk-samba, and heavy metal compositions, along with New Wave, which Beka (1989, p. 8) described as "a melodic offshoot of hard rock music".

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX07KIPqbx0>

The New Wave piece “Aj Ty” by the band Banket<sup>21</sup> took out the Golden Lyre award (Vejvoda 1989, pp. 14–17). Barbara Mokrá (1989, p. 6) felt uncomfortable with the predominance of playback, and with regard to the Italian contestants in the international category, she added: “Gino Castelli’s rendition of the song ‘Bella Ti Amo’ [‘Marry me now’] with his own lyrics (and music by H. Striver) was not a great success. In contrast, Etta Scollo, another singer of Italian origins, raised many a demanding listener from their seats when she sang her own piece titled ‘Music’. She convinced with her expressive interpretation, interesting phrasing, voice quality and, to a significant extent, with her songwriting contribution.” The cover page of the tenth issue of the 1989 *Populár* displayed a colour portrait of Scollo, but a reviewer (-bm-1989, p. 2) presented her as an Austrian singer with Italian origins who studied in Turin and Vienna.

The festival was preceded by Stevie Wonder’s three-hour concert<sup>22</sup>, which was attended by 30,000 spectators and revealed the wider possibilities of pop music presentation. Wonder’s success together with Baez’s politically provocative performance augmented doubts about the future of the *Bratislavská lýra*.

After the 1989 Velvet Revolution, music journalist Marián Jaslovský (1990, p. 4) highlighted a shortage of funds to cover expenditures associated with inviting big stars in future. Critics also raised objections to the use of playback (whether half or complete), as it caused programme delays due to difficulties with installing and managing devices between different performances. However, as reinstating the festival orchestra seemed out of fashion, playback was the only option.

In the years from 1990, the *Bratislavská lýra* showcased the hopes of the domestic scene (e.g. the Slovak heavy metal band Money Factor, 1990) as well as attracting legends and stars (whether big or small), for instance, Boy George (in 1992), Faith No More and Chuck Berry (both in 1993), Luigi Martilotti from Italy, and Joe Cocker (1998).

The 1992 *Lýra* still held the live international contest, but the lack of audience interest was disappointing as a concert hall with a capacity of 600 people only attracted about 40 (*Zlatá lýra*, part 9, 2016). However, the live domestic competition had been replaced by a television contest of video clips. Endeavours to move away from the traditional cantilena-orchestra model and live presentations continued, with organizers establishing, instead, rock club concerts and international fairs of European rock bands (with participants from eleven countries) and rock publishers.

In 1993, the new name of Rock Pop Bratislava was adopted, although *Bratislavská lýra* still remained in use. Owing to these changes, the festi-

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRp88CrefUQ>

<sup>22</sup> It took place on the 30th of May 1989.

val lost its former character and the support of many figures of the Slovak music scene, who, therefore, did not regard the 1994 and 1995 events as a continuation of the previous *Lýras*. Despite the Rock-Pop-Jazz agency pressing to go forward with the concept of rock fairs through to 1998, the fairs only attracted very little interest. In 1996–98, the conductor Vlado Valovič, supported by the Ministry of Culture, attempted to restore the old model of the *Bratislavská lýra* (i. e. a live contest of cantilena-like songs with orchestral accompaniment), which would also feature other rhythms, such as samba. In spite of his effort, however, the revised events no longer had the same spectacular character and failed to encourage the media involvement (*Zlatá lýra*, part 9, 2016).

## 8. Conclusion

What were the factors behind the demise of the *Bratislavská lýra* festival? On the one hand, critics regarded pop music as a snobbish art, whilst rock represented a fresh quality. Consequently, festival managers sought, in genuine goodwill, to transform the big stage pop music event into a multi-day rock club festival (Jaslovský 1989; Opekar 1989). On the other hand, some believed that the festival suffered sponsors' disinterest, a want of financial resources, and frauds linked to the post-1989 privatization of state assets (*Zlatá lýra*, part 9, 2016). Winding up the *Bratislavská lýra* ensued a loss of the official Czech and Slovak pop music platform and opportunities to promote domestic artists in an international contest. As a result, Czech and Slovak cultural institutions, foreseeing organizational issues for a domestic pre-selection competition in a now-disintegrated market, were hesitant about participating in the Eurovision Song Contest. Rock subcultures, irregardless of their considerable contribution to the demise of the *Bratislavská lýra*, kept following their own developmental trajectories. The hegemony of rock prevailed over the conformist, ambivalent, and antagonistic relations between subcultures and pop music. Rhythm and the rock band clearly won in the cantilena versus rhythm, and the orchestra versus rock band polemics. Nevertheless, the comeback of retro styles in the late 1990s (e.g. Michael Bublě) and the popularity of TV SuperStar reality shows emerging in 2004 and following the British Pop Idol format (licensed by the FremantleMedia company), such as Slovakia Seeks a SuperStar and Czechia Seeks a SuperStar, showed that the *Bratislavská Lýra* organizers' resignation was unnecessarily untimely<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> This paper was made possible by a grant (VEGA 1/0016/23) from Comenius University. This paper was peer reviewed.

## References

- Beka, P.  
1989 *Svieži lýrový vietor, Hodnotíme Čs. Autorskú súťaž na Bratislavskej lýre '89* [A fresh air of the lyra, Evaluation of the Czechoslovak songwriters competition at the Bratislava lyre], in "Populár", vol. XXI, n. 9, p. 6.
- Bennett, A.  
2005 *Editorial: Popular Music and Leisure*, in "Leisure Studies", vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 333-342.
- Birgy, P.  
2021 *Practices in Two Underground Scenes (1979, 2015)*, in "Revue Francaise de civilisation Britannique (French Journal of British Studies)", vol. XXIV, n. 3, pp. 1-16 (<https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/8240#ftn11>, retrieved 22 January 2024).
- Blüml, J.  
2024 *Polystylistic Tendencies in Early Czech Progressive Rock*, in Y. Kajanová (ed.), *Ubuntu Fusion Music*, vol. 11, Peter Lang, Lausanne, pp. 103-118.
- bm.  
1989 *Cena pre Ettu [A Prize for Etta]*, in "Populár", vol. XXI, n. 10, pp. 1-2.
- Boyle, J.D., H., Glenn L. and Darhyl S.R.  
1981 *Factors Influencing Pop Music Preferences of Young People*, in "Journal of Research in Music Education", vol. 29, n. 1, pp. 47-55.
- Brožík, V.  
1983 *Na margo medzinárodného festivalu populárnej piesne 25.V.-28.V.1983* [Some remarks on the international pop song festival 25.V.-28.V.1983], "Hudobný život", vol. XV, n. 13, pp. 1-4.
- Dorůžka, L.  
1973 *Lyra, zrcadlo průměru [Lyre: a reflection of the mediocre]*, in "Melodie", vol. 11, n. 8, pp. 240-241.
- Ďurčo, J.  
2023 *Kontroverzný Cutugno? Legendárny spevák vystupoval s ruským armádnym zborom* [Controversial Cutugno? The legendary singer performed with the Russian army choir], in "Plus 7 dní", 30 August 2023 (<https://plus7dni.pluska.sk/zahranicie/kontroverzny-cutugno-legendarny-spevak-vystupoval-ruskym-armadnym-zborom>; retrieved 12 February 2024).
- ea.  
1982 *Toto je šťastný človek [This is a happy man]*, in "Populár", vol. XIV, n. 11, pp.15-16.



Fabbri, F.

1981 *A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications*, in D. Horn and P. Tagg (eds.), *Popular Music Perspectives*, IASPM, Göteborg-Exeter, pp. 52-81.

Frith, S.

1978 *The Sociology of Rock*, Constable, London.

1987 *Towards an aesthetic of popular music*, in R. Leppert and R. McClary, (eds.), *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 133-139.

Frith, S., Straw, W. and Street, J. (eds.).

2001 *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 93-105.

Hebdige, D.

1991 *Subcultures: the Meaning of Style*, Routledge, London.

Jaslovský, M.

1990 *Skončil sa 25. ročník Bratislavskej lýry. Za málo peňazí málo muziky* [*The 25<sup>th</sup> Bratislava Lyre concluded. For little money little music*], in "Hudobný život", vol. XXII, n. 21, p. 4.

Jehne, L.

1979 *Lýrové proměny a problémy* [*Transformations and problems of the Lyre*], in "Melodie", vol. 17, n. 8, pp. 240-242.

Jurík, M.

1970 *Pred piatou Lýrou* [*Prior to the fifth Lyre*], in "Hudobný život", vol. II, n. 11, p. 1.

Kalina, J.

1969 *Pesničky pri Dunaji. Bratislavská lýra 1969* [*Songs by the Danube. The 1969 Bratislava Lyre*], in "Hudobný život", vol. I, n. 9, p. 1.

Lábska, Y.

1988 *O džezze, Lýre, obecenstve, džezových dňoch a o sebe hovorí Peter Lipa. Poradte, ako ďalej!* [*Peter Lipa talks about jazz, audiences, the Jazz Days festival, and himself. Please advise where to go from here!*], in "Hudobný život", vol. XX, n. 15, p. 9.

1988 *Lýrové a festivalové otázky. Náš hosť Pavol Hammel* [*The issues of the Lyre and festival. Our guest is Pavol Hammel*], in "Rytmus", vol. 39, n. 10, p. 32.

Marino, S. and Mugnaini, G.

2024 *What Is Punk (in Italy) Today? Some Remarks on the Aesthetic and Social Aspects of Musical Subcultures*, in Y. Kajanová (ed.), *Ubuntu Fusion Music*, vol. 11, Peter Lang, Lausanne, pp. 143-166.

M.P.

1977 *Bratislavská lýra '77* [*Bratislava Lyre '77*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. IX, n. 13, pp. 1-7.

Mokrá, B.

1987 *Hodnotíme 22.ročník medzinárodného festivalu populárnej piesne Bratislavská lýra '87* [*We review the Bratislava Lyre '87, the 22nd international pop song festival*], in “Populár”, vol. XIX, n. 9, pp. 1-9.

1989 *Prevaha vokálov. Hodnotíme medzinárodnú súťaž o Bratislavskú lýru* [*The predominance of vocals. We review an international contest for the Bratislava Lyre award*], in “Populár”, vol. XXI, n. 9, p. 6.

Opekar, A.

1989 *Lyra prožitkem soutěž přežitkem* [*The Lyre is an experience, the competition is an anachronism*], in “Melodie”, vol. XXVII, n. 8, p. 227.

Reynolds, S.

2006 *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984*, Penguin Books, London, pp. 34-40.

Rohál, R.

2014 *Legendy Československé populární hudby. 70. a 80. léta* [*The legends of Czechoslovak popular music. The 1970s and 1980s*], Grada, Praha.

Slyško, B.

1985 *Bratislavská lýra 1985* [*The 1985 Bratislava Lyre*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. XVII, n. 13, p. 1.

1986 *Medzinárodný festival populárnej piesne Bratislavská lýra 1986. Lýra chytila druhý dych* [*The 1986 Bratislava Lyre international pop song festival. The Lyre captured a fresh breeze*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. XVIII, n. 12, p. 1.

1988 *Medzinárodný festival populárnej piesne. Bratislavská lýra 1988* [*The 1988 Bratislava Lyre international pop song festival*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. XX, n. 14, pp. 1-7.

1989 *Medzinárodný festival populárnej piesne Bratislavská lýra 1989* [*The 1989 Bratislava Lyre international pop song festival*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. XXI, n. 14, pp. 1-3.

Stanislav, I.

1969 *Lýra nesúťažná* [*Noncompetitive Lyre*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. I, n. 11, p. 6.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia.

2023 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, searchword “Popular Music” (<https://www.britannica.com/art/popular-music>; accessed 22 January 2024).

Titzl, S.

1982 *Kdo vzlaté struny lyry zabráť zná* [*Who strums well the golden lyre strings*], in “Melodie”, vol. XX, n. 8, pp. 240-242.

Vejvoda, J.

1989 *Straty a nálezy ôsmej dekády IX* [*The losses and finds of the eighth decade*], in “Populár”, vol. XXI, n. 9, pp. 14-17.

Wasserberger, I.

1975 *X. Medzinárodný festival populárnej piesne, Nie je dôležité vybrať, ale zúčastniť sa* [*The international Pop Song Festival X. What is important is to participate, not to win*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. VII, n. 13, pp. 1-7.

1976 *Bratislavská lýra 1976* [*Bratislava Lyre 1976*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. VIII, n. 13, p. 1.

Whiteley, S.

1992 *The Space Between the Notes. Rock and the Counter-Culture*, Routledge, London.

Zeman, Ľ.

1970 *Horúci import na Bratislavskej lýre* [*Hot import at the Bratislava Lyre*], in “Hudobný život”, vol. II, n. 13, pp. 6-7.

### **Discography and primary sources:**

*Zlatá lýra* [Golden Lyre], 10-part documentary, 10 x 56 min., 2016, Peter Hledík (director), Robert Valovič (script).

### Rock Subcultures versus Pop Music: Italian Pop Music at the Czechoslovak Bratislavská lýra Festival

Drawing on critical reviews in the Czech and Slovak press regarding the *Bratislavská lýra* [Bratislava Lyre] pop music festival, held annually in Bratislava from 1966 to 1998, the author examines the conformist, ambivalent, and antagonistic relationships between pop music and rock subcultures, while also giving attention to the commentaries about Italian participants, such as Rita Pavone, Drupi, Nino Rota, Toto Cutugno, Aldo Riva, Sabrina, and the Al Bano & Romina Power duo. Besides the substantial influence of rock subcultures – in particular hard rock, New Wave, progressive rock, and heavy metal – which brought changes to instrumentation, image, clothing, and stage presentation, other genres (e.g. reggae and funk) also steered the developmental directions of this festival. Whilst in its first stage (1966–77), the *Bratislavská lýra* mainly featured a Sanremo-like *bel canto* style of pop music with orchestral accompaniment, in the subsequent period (1977–98) contestants began incorporating rock show attributes. Cantilena-versus-rhythm and orchestra-versus-rock band polemics accompanied the event until its final year: on the one hand, there were endeavours to transform it from a pop music show into a presentation of rock clubs (in 1990–93) and, on the other, efforts to restore the original cantilena-orchestra model (in 1996–98). Ultimately, the antagonistic competition between rock subcultures and pop music played a decisive role in the demise of the *Bratislavská lýra* in 1998.

KEYWORDS: *Bratislavská lýra*, Festival, Pop music, Subculture, Italian pop music.

### Rock Subcultures versus Pop Music: Italian Pop Music at the Czechoslovak Bratislavská lýra Festival

Partendo dalle recensioni critiche della stampa ceca e slovacca del festival di pop music Bratislavská lýra, tenutosi annualmente a Bratislava dal 1966 al 1998, l'autrice esamina le relazioni conformiste, ambivalenti e antagonistiche tra la musica pop e le sottoculture rock, dando attenzione ai commenti fatti su partecipanti italiani come Rita Pavone, Drupi, Nino Rota, Toto Cutugno, Aldo Riva, Sabrina e il duo Al Bano & Romina Power. Accanto alla sostanziale influenza esercitata dalle sottoculture rock – specialmente hard rock, new wave, progressive rock e heavy metal –, apprezzabile nelle innovazioni, nella strumentazione, nell'immagine,

nel vestiario e nella presentazione sul palcoscenico, anche altri generi (ad esempio, reggae e funk) contribuirono a direzionare lo sviluppo del festival. Mentre nella sua prima fase (1966-1977), il Bratislavská lýra presentava perlopiù uno stile di pop music ispirato al modello del bel canto stile Sanremo con accompagnamenti orchestrali, nel periodo seguente (1977-1998) iniziò ad incorporare elementi da rock show. Le polemiche tra questi stili, cantilena vs. ritmo e orchestra vs. rock band, accompagnarono l'evento fino alla fine della sua storia: da un lato ci furono dei tentativi di trasformarlo da uno show di pop music in una presentazione da club rock (1990-1993), dall'altro ci furono anche dei tentativi di riportarlo al modello originale cantilena-orchestra (1996-1998). In definitiva, la competizione antagonista tra sottoculture rock e pop music giocò un ruolo decisivo nella fine del Bratislavská lýra nel 1998.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Bratislavská lýra*, Festival, Musica Pop, Sottoculture, Musica Pop italiana.