

# THE ROLE OF POPULAR MUSIC IN THE MODERNISATION OF THE SOCIETY OF INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA<sup>1</sup>

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This paper studies the role of popular music in shaping and contributing to the modernisation of interwar Yugoslav society. At the constant crossroads between the East and West, tradition and modernity, the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia was trying to establish intensive contact with modern Western culture and to become a part of Europe. During that period, the entertainment industry was constantly growing. The entry and development of popular music in Yugoslavia can be traced through music publishing, gramophone records, radio, and the formation of popular music ensembles and bands. Therefore, archival sources, periodicals, record catalogues, printed sheet music, and other relevant literature were used to write the paper. By exploring musical genres, cultural influences, and socio-political contexts, this paper aims to highlight how popular music acted as a dynamic catalyst for change during an important period in Yugoslavia's history.

**Keywords:** popular music, modernisation, Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, Radio Belgrade, *Edison Bell Penkala*

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The interwar period in Yugoslavia has attracted significant attention from researchers, including musicologists and cultural historians. Given that this is a complex and eventful period in the history of Balkan nations, that found themselves united in one state for the first time, the text will provide a brief historical overview to elucidate this. It is also important to clarify why the phenomena of modernisation and Europeanisation/Westernisation are emphasized to such an extent in the history of interwar Yugoslavia. The significant role of popular music in this context is supported by numerous studies published in the last two decades, which explore diverse aspects of its appearance and influence (Golubović 2021; Hrvoj 2009; Križić 2018; Lučić 2003; Lučić 2007; Srećković 2007; Vesić 2015; Vesić 2017; Vukobratović 2022, etc.). Evidence of the growing interest in the popular music of the interwar period is also reflected in the sheet music collections published in the past decade (Medić 2014a; Medić 2014b; Medić 2015; Medić 2017). Additionally, of significant importance for studying Yugoslav interwar music is the project DISKOGRAF of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb, which created a database encompassing all the discographic releases of the companies *Edison Bell Penkala*, *Elektroton*, and *Jugoton* from 1927 to 1950.<sup>2</sup> Archival material from the Historical Archives of Belgrade was a valuable source in tracing foreign musicians

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and artists who toured the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia. Periodicals were utilized to enrich the comprehensive understanding and offer supplementary information as necessary. The aim of my article is to deepen the understanding of the modernizing role of popular music in interwar Yugoslav society through the analysis of sources and relevant secondary literature.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929) was formed after the end of World War I on December 1, 1918. Most of the territories it included had previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, which vanished from the European map after having existed for centuries. The nation's heterogeneity was brought about by the centuries-long authority of Austria-Hungary in the western regions, which introduced the influence of Central Europe and the nearly four-century domination of the Ottoman Empire in the east from 1459 to 1878. Therefore, at the crossroads of Europe, interwar Yugoslavia was a tapestry of diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultural traditions. During that period, Yugoslav society was at a crossroads between the traditional and the modern world. The path to modernisation was slow but constant, and culture played an exceptionally significant role. Nevertheless, the newly established Kingdom was marked by significant social disparities among the societies that had found themselves within its borders after the formation of the new state. Historian Ljubodrag Dimić described interwar Yugoslavia in one sentence: "A land of small peasant farms, limited accumulations, irrational production, national heterogeneity, biologically exhausted by wars, religiously enclosed and confessionally divided, burdened by the past, economically disintegrated, politically polarised, culturally neglected, it simply cried out for a well-conceived development strategy that would accelerate the process of social integration" (Dimić 199, 194). The titles of notable books by Serbian historian Andrej Mitrović and British historian Eric Hobsbawm aptly describe the interwar period in Yugoslavia: it was a time of intolerance<sup>3</sup> and an age of extremes<sup>4</sup>.

The Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia was marked by profound societal transformation when the young nation attempted to overcome differences and establish a unified identity amidst its rich diversity. In this intricate setting, popular music emerged as a dynamic influence, reflecting and actively contributing to the modernisation of society. While not immediately apparent, popular music went beyond a passive soundtrack of the era, assuming an active and influential role. The introduction of popular music, a thriving nightlife, the emergence of *varietés*, and the growth of clubs led to a profound transformation in how people spent their leisure time, a phenomenon that echoed worldwide. This shift was closely tied to the progress of industrialisation, which elevated leisure venues to the status of "great third places" in people's lives, ranking just after family and work (Oldenburg 1999). Belgrade, as the capital of the newly formed state, found itself in a unique position. Ruled by the Ottoman Empire

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3 Andrej Mitrović, *Vreme netrpeljivih: politička istorija velikih država Evrope 1919–1939* [Times Intolerant: A Political History of the Great Powers 1919–1939]. Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1974.

4 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century (1914–1991)*. London: Abacus, 1994.

for almost three and a half centuries (1521–1867), it retained the influence of the Orient despite its aspirations to become part of Europe. As a multi-century periphery of the Ottoman Empire, Belgrade struggled not to be on the periphery of Europe due to its geographical position.

However, it is essential to note that this cultural transformation was not evenly distributed across the entire Yugoslav population. The state was formed in a socio-economic environment characteristic of a semi-feudal pre-industrial society. The economic underdevelopment, poverty, and antiquated economic and social structures made Yugoslavia one of the poorest and least advanced European countries in the 1920s (Trkulja 1993, 20). Nevertheless, the burgeoning urban centres pulsed with the energy of modernity, providing a contrasting soundscape of Western-influenced jazz, cabaret, and dance music. If we take the data from the Artistic Department of the Privileged Theatre and Concert Agency of the Association of Actors of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia *Jugokonzert* (Golubović 2021, 131–151), which had a monopoly on organising foreign music and popular tours in the country in the 1930s, among the cities where foreign artists performed were Belgrade, Novi Sad, Sombor, Niš, Vršac, Kragujevac, and Kikinda in Serbia; Zagreb, Osijek, and Split in Croatia; Ljubljana and Maribor in Slovenia; Skopje in Macedonia, and Sarajevo in Bosnia. Popular music performers most commonly came from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria, and Romania. However, there were also artists from other countries such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, Greece, Poland, Sweden, Spain, and even the United States and China (Historical Archives of Belgrade, Fonds 1103 [Udruženje glumaca Kraljevine Jugoslavije], Inv. No. 112–113).

Popular music was also performed at various venues and on different occasions. It was used for entertainment at different types of celebrations and gatherings, dances, hotels and restaurants, taverns and cinemas, and other places that offered leisure and enjoyment. Therefore, urban areas were the primary beneficiaries of these Western cultural influences, but they accounted for only a fifth of the population. Consequently, many rural parts of the country remained untouched by the Western way of life, which remained an abstract concept for much of the population (Calic 2019, 99). Establishing international connections with European countries was a vital endeavour for the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, as it opened doors for cultural, scientific, and technological exchange. France, Germany, and England played a significant role in influencing urban areas, enabling them to embrace and adapt to the evolving trends in European society through the transmission of culture (Gašić 2005 and Dimić 1997/III).

Modernisation is one of the most impactful processes that have historically transformed society and human consciousness. When social scientists discuss social change, their focus invariably encompasses shifts in a culture and society's institutions. This involves shifts in values, concepts, social interaction dynamics, material culture, and economic processes. Such changes can range from subtle, barely detectable shifts to truly revolutionary transformations, and their full significance may not become immediately apparent when they occur (Callanan Martin 2015, 11). Numerous researchers have

delved into the modernisation processes in Serbian and Yugoslav society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced by foreign factors. So, how did they define modernisation? Modernisation is commonly used as a synonym for *Europeanisation*, given that European influences significantly impacted societal transformation. In mass culture, American influences were also noticeable alongside European ones. Thus, we can refer to this as a sort of *Westernisation* even though American influences were absorbed through European ones (Marković 1992, 15). The emergence of the first jazz ensembles in interwar Yugoslavia is directly linked to American influences and the records that young people were listening to. During the 1930s, Louis Armstrong, Paul Whiteman, and Benny Goodman were revered as idols among jazz enthusiasts (Baronijan 1970: 105). According to the renowned Serbian jazz musician Vojislav Simić (1924), this era witnessed the initial instances of local entertainment music. Yugoslav composers were primarily shaped by the influences of Italian, French, and Spanish music on the one hand and American jazz on the other. The earliest compositions included romances, chansons, waltzes, tangos, and an occasional foxtrot (Simić 1999, 109).

One of the primary aspects of modernisation is examining the relationship between *traditionalism* and *modernism* (Marković 1993, 16–17), therefore this process can be defined as “a global transformation of the traditional, that is, the transforming of stagnant societies into dynamic systems” (Gredelj 1996, 241). In the first half of the 1920s, the Belgrade<sup>5</sup>, Zagreb, and Ljubljana radio stations had not been established, nor had the *Edison Bell Penkala* gramophone record factory. Consequently, popular music initially gained favour within Yugoslav society due to imported sheet music and gramophone records. Publishing activities played a crucial role in the commercialisation and extensive production of popular music. However, it is essential to remember that using music scores required a certain level of musical education, while the overall literacy rate in the country was low. In Zagreb, the publishing of popular songs became a speciality of the Albini publishing house, which commenced its activities in the early 1930s (Lučić 2007, 129). Meanwhile, in Belgrade, a notable impact on the advancement of popular music was attributed to the publishing houses led by Jovan Frajt<sup>6</sup> and Sergei Strahov. According to Ivana Vesić, music publishing, domestic radio, and gramophone production formed the core of the Yugoslav “entertainment industry” (Vesić 2017, 67). She also suggests that an examination of the preserved collections and printed catalogues of publishing houses reveals the existence of musical compositions from that era categorised as “light” or “entertaining” music<sup>7</sup>, in contrast to the category of “serious” or artistic music (Vesić 2017, 70). For example, among Frajt’s publications, one could find arias and numbers from operettas composed by Emmerich Kálmán, Franz Lehár, Ralph Benatzky, and Edmund Eysler. Additionally, there were piano compositions in the form of stylised

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5 For Radio Belgrade’s role in modernising Serbian society in the interwar period, see Srećković 2007.

6 Frajt established his publishing house in 1921. He was the only one until the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, when other similarly profiled publishing houses (*Akord*, *Albini*, *Strahov*, etc.) appeared in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Ljubljana.

7 Terms such as *jazz*, *light music*, *dance music*, *entertainment music*, and *popular music* were sometimes considered synonyms.

dances (marches, waltzes, Boston waltzes, tangos, etc.) created by Austrian, Czech, Hungarian, French, German, and Russian composers known for their contributions to salon music and operettas. Frajt's collection also encompassed schlagers that originated from operettas or the rich production of German, American, Austrian, Hungarian, and Bulgarian popular music during that period (Vesić 2017, 72). Radios and gramophones were expensive, and only the wealthier classes of the population could afford them. Also, gramophone records were not cheap, so buyers could make instalment payments (Tomašević 2009, 127). This suggests that popular music was mainly accessible in urban settings and among the more affluent population. That is supported by the fact that in 1931, only 5.39% of Zagreb's total population had a subscription to Radio Zagreb, indicating the number of radio receivers since a subscription was obligatory when purchasing one. During that year, the average number of gramophone records sold per person was 0.46 (Lučić 2007, 130).

Popular music should be considered a sociocultural phenomenon (Manuel 1988). The emergence of popular music as a new phenomenon started to become more distinct in the early 1920s. Already in 1920, an article appeared in the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, asserting that following the war, devastation, and loss of life, a period characterised by frenetic dancing, the dominance of foxtrot, and one-step had begun (*Politika*, 01.02.1920, 3). Baronijan noted that "folk and popular music served the same purpose and audience. When it came to dances, the most beloved was still the *kolo*, which was gradually displaced by the waltz and then the modern tango" (Baronijan 1970, 104). It is important to note that Russian émigrés who arrived in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the October Revolution and Civil War played a significant role in forming popular music (Vesić 2015; Golubović 2021, 152–187). They played a significant role in producing cabaret performances that blended musical elements, dancing acts, and comedy sketches. They also contributed to the production and distribution of popular songs (schlagers) and performed Gypsy and Russian folk music and dances, which were well-known in urban centers before the Russian Revolution (Vesić 2015; Golubović 2021, 152–187). Based on all of the above, we can conclude that popular music in the early 1920s had two starting points: traditional and modern. The first was concentrated on folk music and forms close to traditional Central European popular music, like Straussian melodies and operettas. In contrast, the second was associated with modern popular music imported from the West, collectively called "dance music" or "jazz" in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Modern dances brought greater freedom of movement and embodied contemporary fashion, which is why they were initially banned in prestigious clubs (*Politika*, 01.02.1920, 3). Each season brought new dances, so in the second half of the 1920s, popular dances included the Black-Bottom, the Andalouse, and the Heebie-Jeebies. These dances had originated in America but received stylisation in Paris (*Politika*, 13.11.1927, 8). Naturally, the conservatives were appalled by the excesses of the youth and other consumers of this new trend. Attitudes remained unchanged until the end of the 1920s, as evidenced by Josephine Baker's controversial performances in Belgrade and Zagreb in 1929.

Conservative circles expressed significant concern about her provocative dances and negative influence on the youth. However, this did not diminish her success, as urban Yugoslav society constantly rushed toward the new and sensational. Boško Tokin, a pioneer of Yugoslav film criticism, succinctly described the chaos of that time:

“They copied and transferred novelties to keep pace with Europe, regardless of actual needs. Constructive forces of the country could not come into play. They could not voice their opinion and provide their measure. In the general vertigo of Belgrade, devoid of ideals, societal morals, a Belgrade of new houses, a river of automobiles, with the wild music of jazz, the gaze of elegant and heavily made-up women, a variety of the most refined external appearances, Belgrade was playing a dangerous game. Reckless. Gambling. It put the fundamental features of the nation at stake. The foundations. The future. Belgrade was semi-urban, semi-cosmopolitan, primitive, decorative, dynamic, Byzantine, refined, immoral, secretive, brutal, temperamental, merciful, drunken, attractive, unscrupulous, familiar, hyper-modern, and anachronistic.” (Tokin 2015, 51)

During the interwar period, Yugoslav society witnessed a profound revolution in the way music was created, distributed, and consumed, thanks to the advent of modern technologies. Among these transformative innovations, from the early 1920s, radio and the gramophone emerged as powerful tools that democratised access to music. During that period, radio transformed into a specific form – “broadcasting” (centralised transmission and private reception), becoming a mass medium (Middleton 1990, 84). It flooded city streets, public spaces, and the cosy confines of households, ensuring that occasional respites vied with the almost ceaseless intrusion of the broadcast sound. As “one of the most remarkable cultural achievements of mankind” (*Radio Beograd*, 5/1931, 10), radio had multiple roles – contributing to economic, political, and social modernisation.

The expansion of new media had an important role in accelerating the process of modernising society (Marković 1992, 77). Radio broadcasting was established in the second half of the 1920s in the three largest cities – Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. In Europe, music was transmitted via radio for the first time on June 15, 1920, with the renowned lyric soprano Nellie Melba pioneering radio broadcasting as she performed for the English radio station “Marconi”. Interwar Yugoslavia appears not to have lagged significantly behind Europe; however, radio broadcasting began when the country had limited electrification, and the economic conditions for widespread reception were unfavourable. Furthermore, Yugoslavia did not have a radio industry in the interwar period, and records were imported from abroad (Marković, 1979, 16–17).<sup>8</sup> As a result, the number of radio subscribers in interwar Yugoslavia was the lowest in Europe, coming in at just 0.3% (Gašić 2005, 107). The number of Radio Belgrade subscribers

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<sup>8</sup> The company *Edison Bell Penkala* from Zagreb produced gramophones and gramophone records, so Marković’s statement is not entirely accurate – records were imported, but also produced in interwar Yugoslavia.

during the interwar period started with 7.071 in 1928, when broadcasting began, and reached 86,060 in 1938 (Radio Beograd 1979, 293). Their numbers consistently increased year by year, although there was a slight slowdown in the early 1930s when the global economic crisis hit the country. The situation with Radio Zagreb was quite similar. During the Great Depression of 1929, Radio Zagreb subscribers began to rise sharply, doubling by the mid-1930s. In 1936, the number reached 11 000 and 35 491 in August 1940. Considering that Zagreb had approximately 250 000 inhabitants at that time, it turns out that every seventh resident was a radio subscriber (Ceribašić 2021, 345). During this period, the sales and production of records by the Edison Bell Penkala company were also at their peak. Interestingly, during a time of severe economic turmoil and political upheaval worldwide, including in Yugoslavia, the consumption of music products was steadily increasing (Lučić 2007, 134). Radio Ljubljana also sparked significant interest. In the first year of broadcasting, subscribers doubled, rising from 2030 in 1928 to 5862 in April 1929. On the eve of the Second World War, it reached 25 000 subscribers, with even more substantial growth anticipated (Stefanija 2016, 126).

As an example, Radio Belgrade's program, like other European radio stations, was formulaically designed to cater to a broad listening audience, encompassing music genres categorised into classical and light music. Right from the outset, Radio Belgrade's musical concept was clearly defined: the morning hours were allocated for classical music, coinciding with peak listenership, and the afternoon featured traditional or folk music. The evening slot was reserved for the Radio Jazz Orchestra's performances and popular music (Karan 2019, 31). In 1935, the data revealed that music constituted 63.5% of the overall program, with 40.6% dedicated to light music and 22.9% to classical music. The broadcast included a wide range of music genres, from opera, operettas, symphonic and chamber works to solo performances, dance music, jazz, and more (*Radio Beograd*, 44/1935, 6–7).

Dance music encompassed sung and played schlager songs—subsequently, entertainment and jazz music developed from these roots (Marković 1979, 109). Although jazz was mentioned in the Yugoslav press as early as the 1920s, the name of the new genre was not standardised and varied between *žaz*, *jas*, *džaz* and *džez*. A significant moment was the emergence of sound films in the early 1930s when modern music singers and dancers began to captivate the audience. In the spreading of popular music and schlagers from sound films, a significant role was played by Edison Bell Penkala, the only discography company established in interwar Yugoslavia.

The expansion of such music followed because major gramophone record companies started releasing the latest hits performed by big jazz orchestras. Because of these records, music enthusiasts could hear jazz giants like Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, and Paul Whiteman, which also led to the formation of the first jazz orchestras in interwar Yugoslavia (Marković 1979, 109). Since they were the most significant urban centres in the country, it is not surprising that the first jazz orchestras emerged in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. Additionally, it could be argued that the geographic factor, in proximity to jazz hubs in Europe such as Paris and Berlin played a role, as it

is likely that the first jazz orchestra was formed in Ljubljana in 1922. Among the most popular ones, we can mention *Mickey Jazz*, *Academic Jolly Boys*, *Melody Boys*, *Cion Jazz*, and the *Student Academic Jazz Orchestra* in Belgrade. In Zagreb, there were the *Bingo Boys*, *Jazz Sinchopatens*, *The Devils*, and *Quick-Swingers*. Ljubljana boasted groups like *Original Jazz Negode*, *The Merkur*, and *Sonny Boy*. Notably, all these bands had English names, reflecting their aspiration to get closer to the new musical genre and stand out in the Yugoslav music scene. A similar phenomenon could also be observed in other instances during that era. For example, the names of Belgrade's cafes and other hospitality establishments in the 1920s and 1930s also embodied the city's cosmopolitan lifestyle. Thus, following European trends, Belgrade acquired venues with names such as *Excelsior*, *Union*, *Luxor*, *Palas*, *Claridge*, *Splendid*, and others (Golubović 2021, 173).

The program also consisted of gramophone record concerts during the 1930s, including dance music and popular hits. For instance, if we take the *His Master's Voice* concerts on Radio Belgrade in 1930 as an example, the audience could hear popular genres like tango, foxtrot, and slowfox, as well as music from famous sound films. However, classical music remained more prevalent (Maglov 2022). When we analyse the statistics of subscribers from 1938 according to their professions, we observe that the majority were craftsmen (19.90%), followed by private officials (15.49%), merchants (14.17%), government officials (13%), and private individuals (9.87%). Farmers (5.74%), officers (4.87%), and students (0.70%) constituted only a small percentage of radio listeners (Marković 1979: 19). As with the other two radio stations, Radio Ljubljana's programming content started to flourish, aligning with the preferences of the primary subscribers. In 1929, these subscribers were comprised of 30.7% officials and 31.7% merchants and craftsmen. The objective was to make radio accessible to every household nationwide, even though radio receivers remained too costly for rural inhabitants and labourers in the early 1940s (Stefanija 2016, 127). This suggests that radio, given the cost of the radios, subscription fees, and gramophone records, was a privilege enjoyed by the bourgeois class and wealthier individuals in general (Marković 1979, 20).

A significant moment in the musical life of interwar Yugoslavia was the opening of the gramophone record factory *Edison Bell Penkala* (1927–1936) in Zagreb. This was a local branch of the *Edison Bell Corporation*, one of the mid-sized European record companies that had operated successfully for about thirty years alongside other major international record companies (See: Gronow and Pennanen 2002, 228–230). The company was established by a business contract between *Edison Bell Ltd.* from London and *Penkala Works Ltd.* from Zagreb. In addition to producing gramophone records, the factory also manufactured gramophones, radio sets, and other audio and electro-technical devices with similar purposes. However, considering the country's weak infrastructure and overall economic situation, the question arises as to why the decision was made to open the factory in the Kingdom of SCS? There were two main reasons for this. The first reason was the country's geographical location convenient for establishing a central office covering Yugoslavia, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania, Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine. The intention was to



produce one million records annually for the Balkan region alone (Bulić 1980, 19–20). But, the main reason for establishing the company in Yugoslavia was the absence of copyright protection laws, making the production of records completely unrestricted (Bulić 1980, 21; Ceribašić 2021, 330). *Edison Bell Penkala* owned record stores in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Skopje, but their records could also be found in retail stores owned by others throughout Yugoslavia. These stores sold records from other companies as well as their own, including the London-based parent company *Edison Bell*, *His Master's Voice*, *Columbia*, *Brunswick*, *Odeon*, *Homocord*, *Polydor*, *Electrola*, and other influential record labels in the European music industry at the time.

The role of the *Edison Bell Penkala* publishing house's in distributing and commercialising popular music in interwar Yugoslavia is best illustrated by comparing its catalogues to other publishers, such as *His Master's Voice* and *Odeon*, which were also prominent in the market. The catalogue of *His Master's Voice* from 1928 reveals that they did not offer popular music; instead, they focused on serious music, primarily solo, chamber, and various arias from operas (*His Master's Voice*, 1928). On the other hand, *Odeon* had a broader range of genres in its catalogue, with new recordings from 1927–1928. In addition to offering new labels of Serbian records, encompassing orchestral music (performed by military and tamburitza orchestras), accordion and tamburitza music, folk songs and dances, opera excerpts, Croatian music recordings, and various foreign songs and dances, their selection also included records of foreign modern dances in a wide variety: one-step, two-step, foxtrot, shimmy, Boston waltz, waltz, Ländler, Java, mazurka, polka, tango, and others. This demonstrates that modern dances included more conventional ones from Central Europe and modern dances with syncopated ragtime rhythm that had arrived in Europe from America. However, of the 454 records in the catalogue, only 12 featured modern dances (*Odeon*, 1927).

In *Edison Bell Penkala's* Main Catalogue from 1927, records were categorised as “domestic and foreign”. They were further classified into sections, including operas and operettas, a diverse selection of folk music from the Yugoslav nations, tamburitza orchestras, and music from other countries (*Edison Bell Penkala*, 1927). However, the most extensive section was modern dances, which reflected the musical preferences of the 1920s and 1930s, making it the most prominent category of recorded music during that period. In her analysis of eleven collected sale catalogues, Jelka Vukobratović observed that approximately half of *Edison Bell Penkala's* production was comprised of foreign music that was primarily categorised as popular music and spread across various sections, including “dance music”, “foreign music”, “cabaret”, “latest hits”, “songs from sound films”, and others (Vukobratović 2022, 238). *Edison Bell Penkala's* music production can be divided into three main categories: (1) reissues of records originally released by *Edison Bell* in London, which included recordings of jazz and salon orchestras; (2) records of Romanian and Hungarian music created for their respective markets, and (3) foreign songs performed by local musicians. These songs mainly belonged to the popular music category as vocal-instrumental songs accompanied by jazz ensembles. The domestic popular music ensembles recording for *Edison Bell*

*Penkala* varied in their number of performers, ranging from trios to salon orchestras. Among them, we can highlight the *Edison Bell Jazz* (Zagreb) ensemble, which was the most active during the company's existence. Other notable ensembles included Jazz Band Šimaček, Jazz (Band) Vlahović-Šimaček, Salon (Jazz) Orchestra (Jazz Band) Vimer (Vimmer), and Jazz Schild-Vlahović. Trios did not have specific names and were named after the surnames of the performers: Trio Schild-Vlahović-Košćica, Trio Tijardović-Vlahović-Košćica, and Trio Šimaček-Vlahović-Košćica (See Database of the Diskograf project (hereinafter DDP)). Singers were linked to Zagreb and Belgrade National Theatres and cabarets, while bands were part of the growing interwar Zagreb jazz and dance scene (Vukobratović 2022, 238).

By examining the DDP and analysing seven sales catalogues of the Edison Bell Penkala company (see the list of catalogues in the bibliography), we observe a presence of popular music performed by jazz ensembles from Germany, England, and America since the company's establishment in 1927. Since introducing the first sound films in interwar Yugoslavia in 1929 (Kosanović 2011, 35), the presence of schlagers and other musical hits also from German, English, and American films has steadily increased. Comparing popular music sections that included jazz bands, film schlager, dance music, operettas, etc., in the extensive catalogues from 1927, 1929, and 1931 (EBP 1927, EBP 1929 and EBP 1931) excellently illustrates the direction in which the commercialization of both domestic and foreign popular music was heading, indicating significant interest from listeners.

Ultimately, we are led to consider to what extent popular music served as a herald of modern Yugoslav society. First and foremost, we must consider the population to which it was accessible. Although less than 25% of the inhabitants of interwar Yugoslavia lived in urban areas, it is essential to note that not everyone could afford modern innovations such as radios and gramophones. In the beginning, owning one of these devices was a matter of social prestige. Besides that, each season brought new dances that required people to learn new movements. This resulted in the popularity of dance schools during those years and the adoption of new outfits that reflected current trends.

Based on the analysis of various sources, it is evident that popular music played a significant role in interwar Yugoslavia. The influence of popular music, both domestic and foreign, was multifaceted, shaping various aspects of Yugoslav society and culture. This influence became apparent through introducing new musical genres to the Yugoslav scene, which were perceived as innovative due to their importation from abroad. The production of gramophone records and the proliferation of music venues such as cafes, cabarets, and clubs further contributed to the diversification and enrichment of the Yugoslav music scene. The dissemination of popular music through radio broadcasts and sound films contributed to its widespread popularity and cultural impact. This is particularly evident in the case of the *Edison Bell Penkala* record company's production. Further examination reveals the deep-seated influence of European trends, particularly from Germany and England, on popular music in interwar Yugoslavia. Notably prominent in jazz, this influence underscored European musical styles' permeation

into Yugoslav culture. Publishing houses played a pivotal role in shaping the musical landscape by distributing modern dances and schlagers.

Therefore, while popular music undoubtedly played a significant role in reflecting and influencing modernisation in interwar Yugoslavia, its impact was limited by accessibility and social status. The emergence of new dances and the cultural shifts they represented highlight how music intertwined with broader societal changes, shaping auditory experiences and fashion and lifestyle trends.

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