

*Requiems for Sarajevo: The dramaturgy of ruins, the musicality of repair*

On 14 February 1984, I fell over outside a Fish and Chip shop in Nottingham. I got a black eye. My dad carried me home on his shoulders across Bulwell Golf Course. My mum gave me some ice cubes wrapped in an old tea towel to hold against my face and switched on the Black and White television set from Radio Rentals. I heard the music before I saw the image fizzing into life. Torvill and Dean were dancing to *Bolero* at the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. When I hear the music now I remember the fall, the smell of fish and chips and the feeling of watching the world from my Dad's shoulders. I remember the tears rolling down my cheeks and the cold of the ice against my face as I watched two people from our home town dancing on ice somewhere very far away. I remember the pain. I remember the cold. I remember the ice melting.

10 years later, on 19 June 1994, acclaimed conductor Zubin Mehta led the Philharmonic Orchestra of Sarajevo in a performance of Mozart's *Requiem* at the city's National Library (City Hall) lying in ruins after constant bombardment. At this stage in the Siege of the city at least 10,000 people had lost their lives including four members of the orchestra whose seats remained empty. The concert was shown live on television across Europe and the USA (but not the UK) and attended by an audience of 50 local dignitaries and UN representatives. The concert starts, as this documentation shows, with Mehta walking across the debris of the bombing and the dust of five million books incinerated in a fire on the first day of the Siege. It is claimed, by Robert Donia, that by destroying the library, the Serb aggressors were attempting an act of 'memoricide'.<sup>1</sup> The ice stadium where Torvill and Dean danced was also destroyed during the siege. The wooden seats turned into coffins. The grounds around the building turned into a graveyard. The UN used the ruined stadium as a morgue. Olympic logos became riddled with bullet holes.

In 2014, I created a devised performance with a cast of English, German and Bosnian actors that explored Ravel's *Bolero* in relation to the city of Sarajevo, the Winter Olympics in 1984 and the Bosnian War (1992-1995). In our piece, *Bolero*, we re-enacted Mehta's 1994 *Requiem*. The performance was shown at Nottingham Playhouse and Sarajevo War Theatre. While we were in Sarajevo

in 2014, the City Hall was reopened with a performance by the Vienna Philharmonic. Built when Sarajevo was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the building represents the cultural heritage of the city as well as its constant struggle for a sense of regional and national identity. Its regeneration, through the use of culture, is a metaphor for the way in which music repairs.

This paper reflects on *Bolero*, a multi-lingual, devised performance I directed in 2014 exploring war, conflict and my memory of watching Torvill and Dean winning gold at the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo 30 years earlier. We made the show in the UK, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo. I explore working in these cultural contexts and weaving together dramaturgies of ruin and repair. I discuss conflicts inherent in the way multiple narratives of the piece are interwoven to address the way the Bosnian War and the Siege of Sarajevo were overlooked in the West at the time. I highlight strategies employed to devise the work and draw on Dragan Klaić's chapter 'Theater in Crisis? Theater of Crisis!' (2002), where he writes about the catalysing role theatre plays in times of conflict and as resistance during war.<sup>2</sup> I compare the deterioration of Ravel's mental health with the impact of conflict on the city of Sarajevo to ask how *Bolero* connects music and war, themes of ruin and repair.

*Bolero* was devised with an international cast and toured to Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo after its premiere at Nottingham Playhouse as part of neat in May 2014. It was performed in Sarajevo on 28 June 2014, the exact centenary of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. The performance features the assassination and follows the ricochet of the gunshot that triggered the First World War through 100 years of history, to the 1984 Winter Olympics to the Bosnian War to the present day. It sought to shine a light on the tragedy that consumed Sarajevo in the 1990s and I invited Bosnian actors, who lived through the war, to share their experiences. The cast included 20 community performers who represented the company in the original ballet of *Bolero* (1928), commissioned for *L'Opera Garnier* by prima ballerina, Ida Rubinstein.

The original version of Ravel's *Bolero* takes 17 minutes to perform depending on the conductor's tempo. On 4 May 1930, Toscanini performed *Bolero* with the New York Philharmonic in Paris as part of a European tour. Toscanini's

tempo was significantly faster than Ravel preferred, and Ravel signaled his disapproval by refusing to respond to Toscanini's gesture during the audience ovation. An exchange took place between the two men backstage after the concert. According to one account Ravel said 'It's too fast', to which Toscanini responded 'You don't know anything about your own music. It's the only way to save the work'. According to another report Ravel said, 'That's not my tempo'. Toscanini replied 'When I play it at your tempo, it is not effective', to which Ravel retorted 'Then do not play it'. The dynamics read 'Moderato' and Ravel always reminded conductors to 'stick to the tempo'. The only recording that does this is one that Ravel conducted himself. It lasts exactly 17 minutes and sounds like a train. It was inspired by rhythms of machinery, factories and World War One gunfire. You hear this in the beat of the side drum.

Robert Donia in *Sarajevo – A biography* (2006) writes about when the city of Sarajevo was besieged by the Serbian Army in 1992 that '... the attacks were unmistakably directed against the city's chief institutions of collective memory, leading some observers to characterize these attacks as "memoricide" ... shattering civic pride by wiping out records and physical manifestations of the city's diverse history'.<sup>3</sup> One of the first targets was the City Hall, the exact place Archduke Franz Ferdinand visited before he was assassinated in 1914. In 1992, a symbol of both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires that overlapped in the city, it was the largest library in Eastern Europe housing approximately five million books. The first few days of the war were waged in a fog as the dust of these burning books rained down on the city. Its epicentre of memory lay in ruins. To commemorate the centenary of the assassination in 2014, the City Hall was rebuilt and hosted a concert featuring music that Ravel wrote inspired by war - *La Valse*. This was the first time that music was played there since Mehta's 1994 concert. Music and conflict are interwoven into the fabric of the city's history. We recall Mehta's concert in *Bolero* as one of the performers says the following text.

An arc of strings: violins to the right, cellos to the left, woodwind in the centre. Around the orchestra is the choir; almost more performers than audience. The conductor, Zubin Mehta, stands proud at the front. He works himself into a frenzy. The orchestra is framed by ruins. Broken

pillars, blown out windows, burnt books. Tonight a concert. Tomorrow a trip to find water, food, shelter, safety. This is a requiem for five million books. This is a requiem for 11,541 people. This is the requiem.<sup>4</sup>

5 February 1994. Four month's before Mehta's concert. A bomb explodes in the main market square in Sarajevo killing 68 and wounding 144 people. It is the worst single atrocity in the conflict. The 120mm shell lands on a stall in the packed open-air market just before noon. The attack comes on the day leaders were meeting in the city to discuss its future exactly ten years after the Winter Olympics opening ceremony. It takes place during a ceasefire. There is now a memorial that marks the spot where the shell fell. When British journalists filed their stories about the bombing, it was relegated to second on the news after a royal divorce. This conflict took place in a cultural and personal blind-spot. *Bolero* is both a eulogy for lost lives and an apology for not knowing enough about them. We worked with the Bosnian artist, Haris Pasovic, who was in the city during the Siege. His input ensured we were more aware of historical acts of remembrance that took place in Sarajevo. And every year, in the city, a reading takes place of the names of those who died in the siege. It is a register of remembrance, an itinerary of ruined lives, passed down through generations so families may never forget, it is a litany for a city, a eulogy for four years of lost life. As Berger writes: 'storytellers are Death's Secretaries'.<sup>5</sup>

In Klaic's 'Theatre of Resistance' (2002), he writes about making a piece - *Sarajevo, Tales From a City* - casting the city as both a martyr and a hero. He describes that, 'Instead of rehearsing with an international cast and performing to audiences across Europe in a production about the war... he had an urge to create theatre in Sarajevo, with his colleagues and students, for Sarajevans, as a form of spiritual resistance and moral encouragement'.<sup>6</sup> This theatre, he realised, was not reaching 'to the very core of the pain and horror of the war' but 'developing a discourse around the catastrophe'.<sup>7</sup> One of the performers of *Bolero*, Jasenko Pasic, told us that during the war, there was a show at Sarajevo War Theatre every night of the 1425-day siege. There were gasps of pleasure in the audience when someone lit a cigarette onstage. Theatre was an escape route from the tragedy of everyday life. Theatre was a reminder of the world outside the endless war. There were three casts for

*Waiting for Godot* in case one of the actors was killed during the run. If a shell fell they would wait for the dust to settle, the lights to return and carry on.

Klaic writes about making his performances at the time, 'It went further than squeezing empathy from the audience; it reinforced the sense of responsibility and metaphorized the urban texture, and lifestyle and values being destroyed in Sarajevo. It did not attempt to compete with the gruesome television images that had by then become commonplace, but individualized the peril, reinforced and transmitted the anguish'.<sup>8</sup> For *Bolero*, I metaphorized the composition of Ravel to tell the story of how a piece of music, inspired by the First World War, could soundtrack both 1984 Olympic success and the sound of a city under constant fire. According to one of the actors who lived through the siege, there was never silence. The mountains around the city amplified every explosion so the city's gradual destruction became its own heartbeat.

6 April 2012. Twenty years after the siege began. They close the main street in Sarajevo. More than 100 trucks filled with red plastic chairs enter the city. It takes six hours to set up 825 rows over nearly one kilometre. 11,541 red chairs. One for every citizen killed in the siege. 643 small chairs for all the children who died. On some of them during the event, passers-by leave red roses, teddy bears, ice skates, plastic cars, candy or toys. At 2pm a concert begins. Called *A concert for nobody*. An orchestra starts to play to the 11,541 empty chairs. On this bright, sunny day it starts to rain.<sup>9</sup>

One of the performers in *Bolero* told this story as part of the piece. He helped to put out the chairs on that morning in 2012. They called it *The Red Line*. It was conceived by the artist we worked with, Haris Pasovic. They did not have enough red chairs in Sarajevo so they borrowed them from Serbia.<sup>10</sup> Klaic concludes that, 'Theatre needs time to distance itself from the event in the reality it wants to address. After the war, with some breathing space recovered, some time-distance built in, theatre would have more of a chance to dramatize wartime experience'.<sup>11</sup> For *Bolero*, I told a story that used Ravel's music as a bridge to weave my childhood memory of falling over outside a Fish and Chip shop in Nottingham to Torvill and Dean, to Paris, to Sarajevo.

The piece invoked a narrative of ruins, juxtaposing the destruction of a city with the decay of Ravel's neurological condition that led to his early death. The piece had a dramaturgy driven by the music and a century of creativity and conflict that ran through it like the piano wire that bound the assassin, Gavrilo Princip's, withered arm after he was imprisoned for the assassination.

I spoke to the actors from Sarajevo War Theatre about why they made so much theatre about the war and they said 'How can we not?'. Then they asked, 'What do you have to make theatre about?' I remember what Matthew Goulish, Goat Island, wrote, 'Some words, speak of events. Other words, events make us speak'.<sup>12</sup> These are the words events made me speak: Where shells fell across Sarajevo, the holes in the pock-marked pavements have been filled with red wax to make them look like flower petals. The streets there, bleed flowers. They call them Sarajevo Roses. Our performance of *Bolero* (2014) ended with red roses falling onstage like flowers on a grave, like flowers at the end of an ice dance routine. The music acts as a narrative the audience follows like a score. Like the sound of a gunshot on a Sarajevo street that triggers 100 years of conflict and continues to ricochet through time.

We discussed the politicality of ruins inherent in the piece and how Torvill and Dean's dance became a dance of death, a couple's embrace becoming the way someone might carry a body. The way that funerals lasted 15 minutes before the snipers came. Roughly the same length as *Bolero*. And how used to death its citizens became during the siege, running across roads to get water, escaping snipers' bullets every day. Susan Sontag, who took a production of *Waiting for Godot* to Sarajevo, wrote: 'If [the war] seems unreal, it is because it's both so appalling and apparently so unstoppable. Even people in Sarajevo sometimes say it seems to them unreal. They are in a state of shock... People ask me if Sarajevo ever seemed to me unreal while I was there. The truth is, since I've started going to Sarajevo... it seems the most real place in the world'.<sup>13</sup> As Jean Baudrillard said: 'Sontag herself confesses in her diaries that the Bosnians do not really believe in the suffering which surrounds them... It is hell, but hell of what may be termed a hyper-real kind, made even more hyper-real by the harassment of the media and the humanitarian agencies,

(perhaps even events like this concert and the footage it uses), because it renders the attitude of the world towards them even less unfathomable'.<sup>14</sup>

The Bosnian cast of *Bolero* (2014), who lived through the war, shared their experiences of the Siege of Sarajevo and this addressed the 'memoricide' that took place.<sup>15</sup> This then is the final realisation to be made of the dramaturgy of ruin and repair that the different performances invoke, conjuring ghosts of music and cities where one conflict has rewritten the bullet holes of another on walls and war memorials. To capture this in performance was to seek ways to make manifest these iterations on a stage where one historical narrative replaced another and a red velvet curtain (Paris 1928) revealed a cardboard wall (Sarajevo 1992-96) which in turn revealed a pockmarked, shell damaged concrete surface (Sarajevo, 2014). Jean Baudrillard writes, 'What was remarkable...was the absolute status, the extraordinary superiority conferred by misery, distress, and total delusion. They were not in need of compassion, they were ... the ones to take pity on our dejected condition.'

Sarajevo was only two-hours flight from Vienna and yet seemed a world away. Now, post-Brexit, post-Trump and with an ongoing refugee crisis, does Europe risk becoming even more disjointed, its union even more ruined? As a British artist in Bosnia I was made to feel welcome as it was recognized I was trying to tell their story in their words. For *Bolero*, as the cast involved were an intercultural ensemble our shared language was theatre-making and our vocabulary physical rather than verbal. We spent more time making the work than talking about it. As Goat Island said: 'The dialogue is the work'.<sup>16</sup> We told each other's stories, for example, a British performer spoke of the siege, a Bosnian performer spoke of watching Torvill and Dean on television.

One of the actors in Klaić's project, Damjana Cerne, writes about her reason for being involved: 'I had an urge to do something for the city... which was being destroyed in front of our very eyes, we were all watching it on T.V, it all hurt and irritated me very much... I knew I had to talk about it, fight against it... as an actress, and artist I had to set up a discourse in that sleeping Europe, people needed to have an opinion on it, the killing and destruction... it had to be stopped'.<sup>17</sup> A performer in *Bolero* (2014), Amila Terzimehic, speaks

of being involved in similar ways 20 years later, she said: 'I sincerely hope this performance will take the audience back to their roots and encourage us to start thinking about what Bosnia and Herzegovina really is. My generation doesn't know much about these things'.<sup>18</sup> Her memories of growing up during the siege were shared in the piece. Her mother making her crawl across the runway and telling her the lights in the sky were fireworks not tracer bullets.

In the latter years of his life, Maurice Ravel suffered from Pick's disease. Due to the development of primary progressive aphasia, Ravel began to find it impossible to notate despite the creative part of his brain still very much functioning. He had the material swimming around in his head, but no longer the means to express it. And towards the end of his career certain qualities of the music he composed seemed to change. In 1932, Ravel suffered major head trauma in a taxi accident, after which, he began experiencing absent-mindedness and other symptoms linked to aphasia. It is debated as to whether it was this accident or the onset of Pick's disease that was responsible for the symptoms. Indeed, it may well have been as early as 1928, when Ravel was writing his *Bolero*, that he began experiencing the early stages of dementia. Certainly, there is something in the repetitive rhythm that suggests the onset of some kind of neurological illness. Ravel's memory itself was degrading and, like the city of Sarajevo, his sentient ability was under siege.

The verb, to (un)ravel, inspired the making process for *Bolero* (2014), which involved weaving together different narratives connected to the music of Ravel, from the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914 to Torvill and Dean winning Olympic Gold in 1984. The dramaturgical process for this project was entirely focused on a weaving together of different narrative threads. The methodology for this practice as research project draws on Fischer-Lichte's 'interweaving performance cultures' as an evolution of the intercultural theoretical paradigm and Barba's notion of 'weaving together' the found and the fictional texts about music and conflict. I consider *Bolero* as bringing, or weaving together, the performative and the commemorative to both remember and stage the loss experienced by a city, a country, a composer. It is no coincidence that the *tempo* to which Ravel was so adamant that conductors conform translates literally as *time*. Whether it is the 17 seconds

before Torvill and Dean's skates touch the ice, the 17 minutes of Ravel's *Bolero* or the 3 years 10 months 3 weeks and 3 days of the siege. There is an element of Klaic's 'time-distance' here, as we move further away from the conflict the potential to make theatre about it grows to counter the erasure of memory that it attempted. If this is the case, then perhaps to commemorate through performance, to stage loss, seeks to repair the 'memoricide' that took place. It is in this way that perhaps music repairs the dramaturgy of ruins left behind.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Donia *Sarajevo - A Biography* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006) p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> Dragan Klaic *The crisis of theater? The theater of crisis!* in *Performance manifestations for a new century* ed Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Donia *Sarajevo- A Biography* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006) p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Pinchbeck, *Bolero*, dir. by Michael Pinchbeck (first performance Nottingham: Nottingham Playhouse, 31 May 2014).

<sup>5</sup> John Berger, *And our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*

<sup>6</sup> Dragan Klaic *The crisis of theater? The theater of crisis!* in *Performance manifestations for a new century* ed Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Pinchbeck, *Bolero*, dir. by Michael Pinchbeck (first performance Nottingham: Nottingham Playhouse, 31 May 2014).

<sup>10</sup> 'In pictures: Bosnia's war remembered', *BBC News* [online] (6 April 2012) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17640204> [Accessed 27 September 2016]

<sup>11</sup> Dragan Klaic *The crisis of theater? The theater of crisis!* in *Performance manifestations for a new century* ed Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Goulish, *39 Microlectures in Proximity of Performance* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Sontag, Under Fire: Sontag <http://www.tau.ac.il/arts/publications/ASSAPHTH11/AKSTENS.html>

<sup>14</sup> Jean Baudrillard, No reprieve for Sarajevo - <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard/ baudrillard-no- reprieve-for-sarajevo.html>

<sup>15</sup> Robert J. Donia *Sarajevo- A Biography* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006) p. 315.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Pinchbeck, 'The worship of detail, the detail of worship', *Dance Theatre Journal*, 22.3, 5-10.

<sup>17</sup> Damjana Cerne, Interview with Damjana Cerne 22/04/09, written account, translation from Bosnian. <http://docshare01.docshare.tips/files/28530/285300651.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> British Council, *Michael Pinchbeck – The End* [online video] <http://vimeo.com/98774946> [accessed 1 May 2017].