

The Saxophone In Zagreb

Josip Nocht International Saxophone Competition

By Eugene Rousseau

Since returning recently from Europe, several friends have inquired about my itinerary. When telling them that the first event on my tour was to serve on the jury for the 1st Josip Nocht International Saxophone Competition in Zagreb, Croatia, they seemed puzzled. Who? Where? Understandably, the saxophone is more closely associated with Belgium, Adolphe Sax's country of birth, and France, owing to its great tradition of classical saxophone playing. For some years, however, I have been quite aware of the high level of playing and teaching in Croatia, and its neighbor, Slovenia – an awareness that is rapidly taking hold world-wide. The recent competition serves as a sterling example, for two of the four finalists did their major study in Zagreb.

The event bears the name of Josip Nocht. Although clarinet was his primary instrument, Josip Nocht played the saxophone as a youngster; an instrument that he always loved. Being solo clarinetist in the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, he was often called upon to play saxophone when the program required it. As in most academies of this era, however, the saxophone was not included in the curriculum. Josip Nocht was Professor of Clarinet at the Zagreb Academy of Music, so when in 1976 Dragan Sremec and colleagues petitioned the Ministry of Education to include the saxophone, Professor Nocht had a sympathetic ear. The class opened the following year, an extraordinary event, as even the Academy in Vienna did not offer the saxophone until many years later. The first graduate in saxophone from the Zagreb Academy was Dragan Sremec in 1981. He was followed by Goran Merčep, Saša Nestorović, and Matjaž Drevenshek who, with Dragan Sremec, are the members of the esteemed Zagreb Saxophone Quartet.

It was a great pleasure to be a

member of the jury that was comprised of Pavle Despalj, Dragan Sremec, Matjaž Drevenshek, Arno Bornkamp, Claude Delangle, and Gordan Tudor. The 42 saxophonists were from 16 different countries: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, China, Croatia, France, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Spain. Required works for the first round were: *Quarter tone Waltz* by Gordan Tudor; *Sarabande* from Cello Suite by J.S. Bach, BWV 1008; and a work chosen from the following: Boutry *Divertimento*, Desenclos *Prelude, cadence et Finale*, Pascal *Sonatine*, Robert *Cadenza*, Sancan *Lamento et Rondo*. The only new composition from this group was that by Tudor, a highly interesting work that creatively employs the use of quartertones and other extended techniques.

For the ten players who advanced to the second round, the required compositions were Dubravko Detoni's *22 per 2 in 2* and a work of choice from the following:

Albright *Sonata*, Decruck *Sonate*, Denisov *Sonata*, Feld *Sonata*, Rueff *Sonata*, Yoshimatsu *Fuzzy Bird Sonata*. Four players advanced to the final round, and these four each played two concertos with the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra under the very capable direction of Tomislav Fačini. The first concerto was that of the noted Croatian composer, Pavle Despalj, who also served as a member of the jury for the final round. Finalists had their choice among Rueff, Ibert, and Larsson for the second concerto; three chose Larsson and one chose Ibert. The first-place winner was Juan Pedro Luna Agudo (Spain), followed by Sara Beriša (Slovenia), Lovro Merčep (Croatia), and Dimitrii Uvarov (Russia). The level of playing throughout the entire competition was extremely high – a wonderful confirmation of the saxophone as a vehicle of great artistic expression.



Portrait of Josip Nocht is by artist Dinko Zlatarić
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Juan Pedro Luna Agudo, 1st Prize
Josip Nocht International Saxophone Competition

Quite apart from the saxophone event, but nonetheless extremely important, was the setting for this momentous occasion. Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, is a city of nearly one million inhabitants. It is bordered on the west by the Adriatic Sea, and on other geographical facets by Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, and Bosnia Herzegovina. Croatia encompasses many ethnic groups, all of whom have contributed to its rich cultural environment. The city of Zagreb is home to the University of Zagreb Music Academy, a distinguished institution that will soon occupy a new and state-of-the-art building. For those visiting Zagreb, it is a pleasant surprise to encounter so many Croatians who speak English very well. Trips from Zagreb to other areas of Croatia reveal the country's vast natural beauty. This is particularly true in the region of Dalmatia, whose western edge borders on the Adriatic Sea. There are a number of cities located on the route from Zagreb – two of the most beautiful are Split and Dubrovnik. In 1979, the city of Dubrovnik, one of the greatest walled cities from the medieval era, joined the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. A tour from Zagreb to Dubrovnik along the Dalmatian coast is spectacular, especially if adequate time is taken.



4th prize - Dmitri Uvarov, Russia

Official Awards

1st prize

- Soprano Saxophone SELMER (series 3) sponsored by Henri Selmer Paris and Euro-Unit Group Croatia.
- At least one concert with THE ZAGREB SOLOISTS in the season 2014/15 sponsored by The Zagreb Soloists.

2nd prize

- Tenor saxophone SEQUOIA sponsored by Vincero Sequoia.
- Concert at the 2014 Samobor Music Festival sponsored by Pučko otvoreno učilište, Samobor.
- A 1,000 US\$ check sponsored by EROUSSEAU Saxophone Mouthpieces.

3rd prize

- Double case for Soprano and Alto Saxophone WISEMAN, custom made,

sponsored by

Wiseman Cases, London.

- A 500 US\$ check sponsored by EROUSSEAU Saxophone Mouthpieces.

4th prize

- VANDOREN award (400 € value) sponsored by Vandoren
- 400 € money award (bank transfer).

Here are some distances from Zagreb to other European cities in kilometers and miles:

Budapest.....	325k	200m
Munich.....	550k	340m
Rome	515k	320m
Prague.....	490k	304m
Salzburg.....	425k	265m
Vienna.....	268k	166m

Given the site of the Josip Nocht International Saxophone Competition, the large number of highly qualified applicants, and the thoughtful manner in which all details of this complex undertaking were so completely addressed, the image and perception of Croatia have been greatly and deservedly enhanced. A visit to this gorgeous country is highly recommended. §

Members of the Jury

- October 4, 2013, 9:48 a.m.
- Eugene Rousseau (USA), president
- Arno Bornkamp, The Netherlands
- Claude Delangle, France
- Matjaž Drevenšek, Slovenia
- Dragan Sremec, Croatia
- Gordan Tudor, Croatia
- Pavle Dešpalj, Croatia (The Finals)

1st International Saxophone Competition

Award Winners

- 1st prize - Juan Pedro Luna Agudo, Spain
- 2nd prize - Sara Beriša, Slovenia
- 3rd prize - Lovro Merčep, Croatia

[Click Blue Text Links To View Webpages](#)

Juan Pedro Luna Agudo's Performances
(Videos - All Rounds)

<http://www.adolphesax.com/en/the-competition/participants/2321-luna-agudo-juan-pedro-2>

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Josip Nocht International Saxophone Competition

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/competitions/international-saxophone-competition-josip-nocht>

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Competition Rules

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/competition-rules>

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Program

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/program-1sax-en>

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Application Form

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/application-form-sax>

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Members Of The Jury

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/members-of-the-jury-sax>

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Schedule

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/rasposed>

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Competitors

<http://www.kdz.hr/index.php/en/competitors>