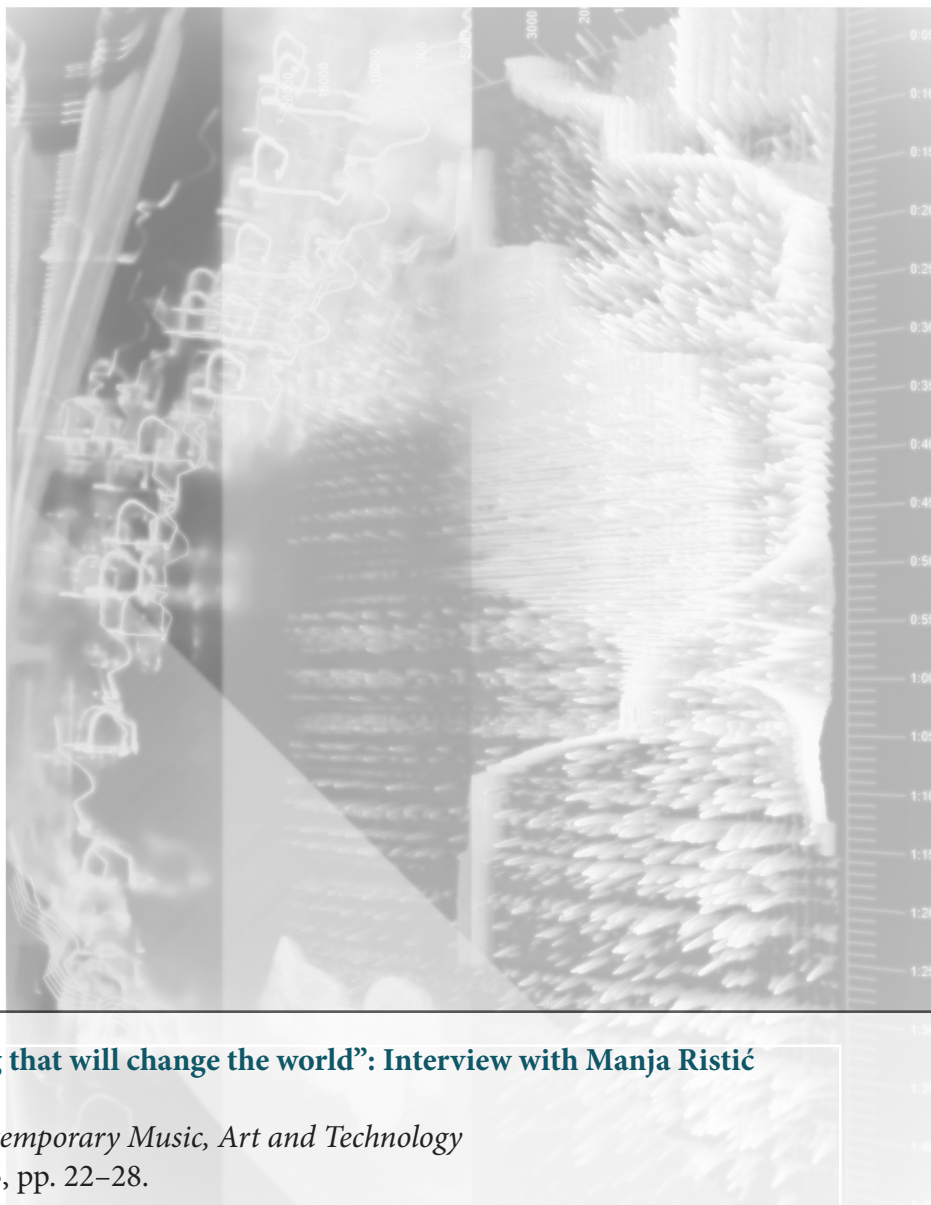


# I N S Δ M

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, ART AND TECHNOLOGY



**“The ritual of bonding that will change the world”: Interview with Manja Ristić**

Marija Maglov

*INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology*

No. 15, December 2025, pp. 22–28.

MARIJA MAGLOV

*Institute of Musicology SASA, Belgrade, Serbia*

## “THE RITUAL OF BONDING THAT WILL CHANGE THE WORLD”: INTERVIEW WITH MANJA RISTIĆ



**Figure 1.** Manja Ristić, photo by Zoe Šarlija.

Anyone interested in the fields of experimental radio arts, interdisciplinary sound research, and field recordings has by now encountered the fascinating work of [Manja Ristić](#), a Belgrade-born (1979) violinist, sound artist, poet, curator, and researcher. Published by international labels such as LINE, REKEM, Erstwhile, Unfathomless, tsss tapes, Wabi Sabi Tapes, DASA tapes, Inexhaustible Editions, Skupina, Flag Day, and Naviar Records, commissioned by Kunstradio-Radiokunst, Radiophrenia, Radio Art Zone, Radio Belgrade, and others, curated for Ars Electronica (Austria), Cona Zavod (Slovenia), G12Hub (Serbia), BELEF (Serbia), CIFRA World (UAE), her works

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This interview is the result of research done within the Institute of Musicology SASA, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (RS-200176).

reveal particular awareness of relations and connections between humans, non-human worlds, and the environment in general. For her, sonic encounters are acts of meaning-making, while sound is both an artistic and an ethical act. In addition to revisiting her own relation to radio art, given this special issue, we discussed the ways in which sonic creations and listening practices have particular resonance with modern sensibilities in turbulent social times.

*What are your first memories of listening to the radio? Do you remember it as a particular sound(s) or as a situation and visual memory?*

To be honest, I can't recall my very earliest memory of listening to the radio, but I do remember the exact age and feeling when I began listening consciously and with full engagement as a teenager. The war had broken out a year or two earlier; I was 12 or 13 years old, and it was B92 Radio. I would listen to it whenever I had a spare moment – sometimes leaving it on all night and falling asleep to it.

In the early 1990s, another “modern” radio station launched, Radio Penguin. I would switch between the two constantly; for my generation, they were windows to the world. It's important to understand the context: this was the era of the fall of Yugoslavia. Serbia was trapped under Milošević's regime, and all state media was saturated with propaganda. B92, which had grown out of a youth programme on the main city FM station (Studio B) in the 1980s, became the first independent radio station and was openly critical of the new regime. Radio Penguin was a private station, financed by a shady Italian businessman who ultimately ended up in prison. I've forgotten the full story, but the socio-cultural backdrop was one of war, dictatorship, and a pervasive repression of freedom of speech.

*How did your interest in radio art start? Given that you are a trained classical musician (violinist) and active as an experimental musician and improviser, was there something you were searching for in radio art that you could not find or express in other music/sound art fields you were active in?*

No, I don't think so – it felt like the most natural thing to me from the very start, because I had already developed a somatic connection to the medium. Using transmission as a way to explore and share sound art seemed the most logical way of working with sound. I was already deeply involved in improvisation and experimental music, and had just graduated from two very prominent music academies, when I was invited to explore web-streaming as a means of connecting performers in virtual space. That was 20 years ago.

Soon after, I was invited to host my own radio show on the internet station Novi Radio Beograd. I hosted, produced, and often performed in a series of web-streamed concerts, connecting performers worldwide through live jam-session software. The for-

mat of the show opened the door to all kinds of live studio experimentations, including spoken word. It was both the evolution of the internet and the transformation of radio into a digital creative space – the shift from terrestrial broadcasting to streaming.

My show, *Soundbridging*, ran for three years. After that, I began collaborating with the Slovenian collective Cona Zavod, which at the time was developing one of its most remarkable projects – Radio Cona, a curated temporary radio station exploring the medium as a platform for sound-related arts. Gradually, I began creating sound art, composing, and moving from instrumental performance into electronic and electro-acoustic work.

It was radio that taught me how to use the studio; I had to learn sound engineering, and my technical stage experience improved significantly. But most of all, radio helped me find my voice – in both the literal and metaphorical sense.

*What is your relationship to the rich history of radio art in Radio Belgrade, or in other European centres? Did you have any figures whose work particularly inspired you?*

Radio Belgrade 3 had a profound influence on me. As a young classical musician, its rich archives and consistently serious, educational programming instilled a deep sense of culture in my developing psyche. For us – students of classical music – having our concerts broadcast from major chamber and orchestral venues around Belgrade was the highest honour a performance could receive.

I first learned about the Electronic Studio from a history book (I'm not joking). By the time I was studying, it had long ceased to exist. When I discovered its legacy, I was already immersed in the European experimental and electroacoustic scene. Among the composers who left a lasting imprint on the Studio, Ljudmila Frajt stood out most vividly to me.

Over time, I developed my own relationship with Radio Belgrade through a few collaborations and projects, including a meaningful friendship with Radio Belgrade 3 editor Ksenija Stevanović. She taught me that musical thinking is not only about aesthetic articulation, but also about profound critical reflection.

My connection to *Radionica zvuka* [*Sound Workshop*] and the radio drama tradition at Radio Belgrade began through musicianship. As a student at the Academy of Music, I often accepted invitations to play violin for radio drama productions. Sadly, my generation did not build bridges to the vibrant sound art tradition of the 1960s and 1970s – a period shaped by giants like Arsenije Jovanović, Neda Depolo, and Ivana Stefanović. We came of age in the aftermath of war, in a cultural vacuum left by the dismantling of a republic. In that atmosphere, cultural identity – once nurtured within institutional frameworks – slipped into the politics of rising nationalisms, censorship, and shrinking spaces for progressive expression.

So we turned to the independent scene, underground culture, and citizens' initiatives to build a more vital environment for contemporary arts and education. From 2004

to 2024, as a founding member of the Association of Multimedia Artists in Belgrade, I helped produce hundreds of international projects, cultural events, sound-related and scene art productions, publishing editions, artistic and media platforms, cultural policy conferences, and educational formats. During that time, while building scenes – including community radio, applied music for film and theatre, improvisational and experimental collectives – we occasionally collaborated with the National Broadcasting Agency, but not often. This isn't a critique, just a reflection of the reality: building culture means building bridges between divided public spheres.

I don't think I'm the right person to speak authoritatively about the tradition of radio art within the National Broadcasting Agency. That task belongs to those who have studied the celebrated generation that won awards at radio festivals in the 1960s and 1970s. If anything, I may be continuing their tradition of invisibility – a quiet persistence within Serbian society, marked by a lack of belonging in a deeply corrupt cultural landscape. Narratives about the disappearance of the Yugoslav radio tradition – and perhaps the non-visibility of my work and others like me – may one day be preserved by archivists at the British Library, ORF, or Phonurgia Nova. For reasons I can't fully explain, we seem to matter to them.

*We are conducting this interview at a time of an exceptional student anti-corruption movement taking place in Serbia for months. One of the most striking acts of protest and rebellion is the daily 15-minute silence in memory of the victims of the Novi Sad tragedy. You recorded one of these deeply moving, contemplative, but also possibly unsettling, silent observances that are, in a way, emblematic of this movement. From your point of hearing, is there some significant change in the way this social movement grew and was received, that is observable in this immersion in shared silence?*

Absolutely. Having experienced it first-hand on many occasions, I felt it as a powerful act of synchronisation with a deliberate, holistic intent. It is a ritual of attentive, intentional listening that becomes a form of witnessing and integration. This form of bonding and camaraderie is a deeply embedded gesture that influences everyone's physiological, emotional, and energetic state – a conscious recognition of disruption that prompts an intentional act of reconfiguration.

By paying tribute to victims in a sustained collective ritual of silence, people are not only sharing respect and grief, but synchronising in solidarity – amplifying and gathering energy to overcome the traumatic past and to reset the destructive system of values that produced such an appalling scale of corruption and destruction.

*In your note on a playlist containing this recording, you wrote: "The ritual of bonding that will change the world." I notice this affinity towards bonds, relationality, and a holistic approach beyond your protest recordings, especially those concerned with nature, the sea, and our environment in general. Since sound is this "surround"*

*phenomenon, perhaps more multidirectional than other senses, do you think it is in a way more effective in putting forward the idea of holistic relationality of being and things in the world?*

I share your sense that sound's multidirectional nature makes it uniquely suited to expressing the relationality of being. This is at the heart of my recent article, *Mnemosonic Topographies – Sensory Epistemology Between Sound, Space, and Memory*, which I presented at the International Conference in Bucharest, *The Sonic Turn: Sound, Power, and Knowledge in Contemporary Culture*.<sup>1</sup>

In it, I propose a mnemosonic topography practice – an embodied listening that traces the ephemeral contours of place through sonic resonance and sensory recall. This practice draws upon field recordings and psychoacoustic reflection, navigating the liminal terrain where sonic phenomena become mnemonic vessels, carrying sedimented histories and affective geographies. It is trauma-informed and tackles the ethics of minute listening; it interrogates how acoustic ecologies inscribe themselves upon the sensorium, revealing latent narratives embedded in the sonic substrata of landscapes, and exposing the entanglement of personal and collective memory with spatial experience.



**Figure 2.** Nazare, Portugal. Photo by Mark Vernon.

1 Manja Ristić. 2025. "Mnemosonic Topographies – Sensory Epistemology Between Sound, Space, and Memory". *The Attic*. October 4. Accessed 12 December 2025.

*Sound/noise pollution was also the topic of your work. As a sound artist, how do you find measure when working with sound? On the other hand, what do you think are the ways for someone perhaps not familiar with radio and sound art to get interested, if there are already so many sounds around us, stealing our (short) attention, inducing fatigue?*

The measure comes from awareness, and from conceptual thinking. There is also a strong element of sensory – and more broadly, body–mind – recall when entering a landscape. For me, it is a developed intuitive practice: movement is conditioned by the vibrational flow already present in the place, and I either follow it or attune to it. It is a delicate process, sometimes automatic, sometimes intentional, and always responsive to the environment's own dynamics.

People are increasingly drawn to contemporary sound practices because of their sensory nature and immediate neurological effects. Different modes of creative sound practice find their audiences, but more consistent and articulate institutional support would help make them accessible to a wider public. We cannot ignore the neurological crisis of the digital age – an era in which attention is fragmented, sensory engagement is flattened, and the nervous system is under constant strain. We need to recognise the diverse sensory and cognitive modes we possess as vital to collective resilience. Sound research – especially when grounded in practices like mnemosonic topography – offers a rapid, non-invasive means of re-sensitising perception and re-establishing relational bonds with the environment, while also serving as a practice of self-care and self-repair.

*How does your working process look? Do you collect sounds regularly with the idea of using them somewhere, sometimes, or intentionally, with the clear idea of how you will use them?*

No, I don't cultivate projection in that sense. Ideas often arise in a strong conceptual manner, but what truly builds a work is the interplay between intuition, experience, and knowledge. The final intention embedded in the work is, in the end, energetically carved and released with care – but the process itself remains open, experimental, holistic, unpredictable, and situational.

I collect sounds all the time. Most of the time, I am simply a medium for collecting them, or *listening-with* specific micro-environments. The act is less about pre-determined use and more about being present to what emerges, allowing the material to find its own place and meaning within a work.

*There is a long list of your collaborators. How do you choose who you work with, and can you sometimes see a specific side of yourself coming forward with different collaborators? How would you describe the contemporary radio art scene/network (if there is one)? How open is it?*

I have spent most of my life deeply immersed in the world of musical collaboration. There is no more intimate way to know and be with someone than through shared creative work. When it becomes a profession, a specific psychological and emotional flexibility develops – honed, for example, through chamber, ensemble, or orchestral work. Later, when it becomes a “creative life” flow, collaborations are exactly that: shared experiences of life, cohabitation, co-regulation, co-creation.

I don't choose all of my collaborators; often, I am matched with someone by publishers or promoters. Impulses to co-create can come from all sorts of different agents and mediums – and that is how it should be. Full control that bypasses openness and unpredictability often stems from a rigid ego that struggles to mature; it comes from arrogance and material ambition. Unfortunately, those values are still predominant even in working with sound. There is a strong reflection of post-colonial, power-based, and somewhat mediocre hyper-production, which can bypass even the most basic human values such as racial or gender equality, not to mention geopolitical diversity. We are still trapped in the after-effect of narcissistic, soulless materialism.

But all that will change. For me, power lies in deep connection, vision, and compassion – qualities that are timeless and rooted in perceiving the world as a unified sentence. From that perspective, competing for journalistic or institutional attention so that someone less informed can proclaim me “relevant” is not very appealing.

There are truly amazing collectives out there that selflessly hold culture on their shoulders, especially in the field of experimental radio arts. But overall, I don't find the sound scene very open. It is up to all of us involved to help the discipline mature artistically and culturally, so that new generations can build their research on a solid ethical foundation.

### For listening:

*Sargassum aeterna*. <https://rekemrecords.bandcamp.com/album/sargassum-aeterna>.

*genesis*. <https://manjaristic.bandcamp.com/album/genesis>.

*Into Your Eyes*. <https://lineimprint.bandcamp.com/album/into-your-eyes>.

*water memory – mnemosonic topographies of the Adriatic*. <https://manjaristic.bandcamp.com/album/water-memory-mnemosonic-topographies-of-the-Adriatic>.

Manja Ristić and Tomáš Šenkyřík. *Vstal*. <https://skupina.bandcamp.com/album/vstal>.

Marja Ahti/Manja Ristić. *Transference*. <https://erstwhilerecords.bandcamp.com/album/transference>.

Manja Ristić and Mark Vernon. *Calypso's Dream*. <https://manjaristic.bandcamp.com/album/calypsos-dream>.