

An Interview with Branka Stamenkovic

A Lady with a Flair for Tradition

by Tore Lomsdalen



“The whole point of astrology is to help people exercise their free will to a greater extent and to know the limitations of their fate.”

Branka Stamenkovic has studied astrology since 1987. After graduating from John Frawley's Horary Correspondence Course and receiving the H.C. diploma, she founded her own horary correspondence school and now has students from five continents. She is also ISAR C.A.P. certified. Branka has lectured in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, England, Scotland, and the United States. Mundane astrology is her great area of interest, and she authored *The Book of Serbian Horoscopes*, a collection of the most important charts from Serbian history. Her articles have been published in several magazines worldwide: *The Mountain Astrologer* (U.S.), *Astrology Quarterly* (U.K.), *Astrologia Restaurata* (Germany and The Netherlands), *Aspects* (South Africa), *Astrologos* (Serbia), and *Zvijezde* (Croatia). Branka organized the meeting of international delegates from almost 20 countries as part of the ARC (Astrological Registration and Communication) during the 2002 UAC in Orlando, Florida. She has served as an AFAN board member and is ISAR's International Vice President for Serbia. Branka launched the Balkan International Astrological Conferences in Belgrade, Serbia and participated in organizing the first two, in 2001 and 2002. She may be reached via e-mail: self@scnet.rs

I met Branka at the 8th Balkan International Astrological Conference in Belgrade, an impressive gathering with lecturers from the U.S., Canada, Germany, Denmark, and Russia. The conference was a true bridge-building event between Western and Eastern astrological hemispheres.

Tore Lomsdalen: I assume that astrology is very popular in Serbia and the Balkans, based on the high number of people attending this conference.

Branka Stamenkovic: Yes, it definitely is. You know, in the West, everybody knows their Sun sign. Here, even the rising signs are commonly known, and many people are aware of their Moon signs as well. There has always been a thirst for occult, spiritual, and religious awareness, which was difficult to explore during the Communist era. Basically, there wasn't any knowledge of astrology back then. Astrological schools and classes were nonexistent, at least on an official level.

After the fall of Milosevic in 2000, the urge to pursue religious, spiritual, and alternative interests exploded. Astrology attracted a large number of supporters, and many young people were introduced to it. From an economic point of view, Serbia is still a poor country, where many citizens have to struggle hard to get by. This situation does influence the type of astrology we perform.

In the West, to a large extent, people have their material and financial lives sorted out. There, the mainstream astrologer has consultations regarding spiritual, esoteric, or psychological issues, often implying a deeper search for Self. Here, people go to the astrologer for predictions! They want to know when their lives will start to improve on a more materialistic and worldly level.

There is also a great need for mundane predictions. Many governmental elections take place every year, and

several astrologers are asked by journalists to predict the outcome. Frequent questions are: “Will a new constitution be formed?” or “What will the future look like if a new state or country should be born in this region?”

For many years, we have been living in a considerable state of uncertainty, politically, economically, and militarily. We don’t know what tomorrow is going to bring. Drastic change can happen overnight, as it often does around here. So you see, this type of astrology is much needed and highly respected.

Besides that, almost all Serbians have had their chart read at some point in their lives — if not by a professional astrologer, at least by a friend or acquaintance who is into astrology. Every single day, several hours of astrological TV and radio programs are being transmitted.

Tore: How did you get into astrology?

Branka: When I was 19, I fell in love with a guy and hoped that astrology could tell me how we could end up together. Of course, it did not work out. Nevertheless, it propelled me into astrology forever after. For a decade, it was a hobby, until I was able to get hold of some astrological books. These were extremely hard to obtain at that time.

In 1999, I finally managed to hook up to the Internet. That literally opened up a new world and inspired me to take up astrology on a more professional level. After establishing contact with the international astrological community, I was lucky to be granted some scholarships and attended conferences in the U.S. and the U.K. Two years later, I happened to meet John Frawley, became his student, and eventually started my own horary school.

Tore: You consider yourself very much a traditional astrologer. What do you think are the basic differences between modern and traditional astrology?

Branka: The differences are multifaceted. While new or modern astrology

has a history of about 100 to 300 years, old or traditional astrology has been around for 2,000 to 4,000 years. Although old astrology can be separated into various branches of evolution (Babylonian, Hellenistic, Arabic, Medieval, etc.), one should be aware that none of the differences between these branches are as big as the one that was created when astrology changed into its “new and modern” form.

Previous systems differed among themselves and kept evolving, but they still had a firm basic foundation through the same seven planets and the job of predicting the future. Then, positive periods could be awaited with anticipation and readiness to glean the best from them, while negative ones were approached with caution and remedial measures. New astrology introduced new planets and almost totally renounced the predictive side of astrology. Nowadays, astrology seems ashamed of what it has always been used for, namely predicting the future. Modern astrology often looks like a wannabe psychology!

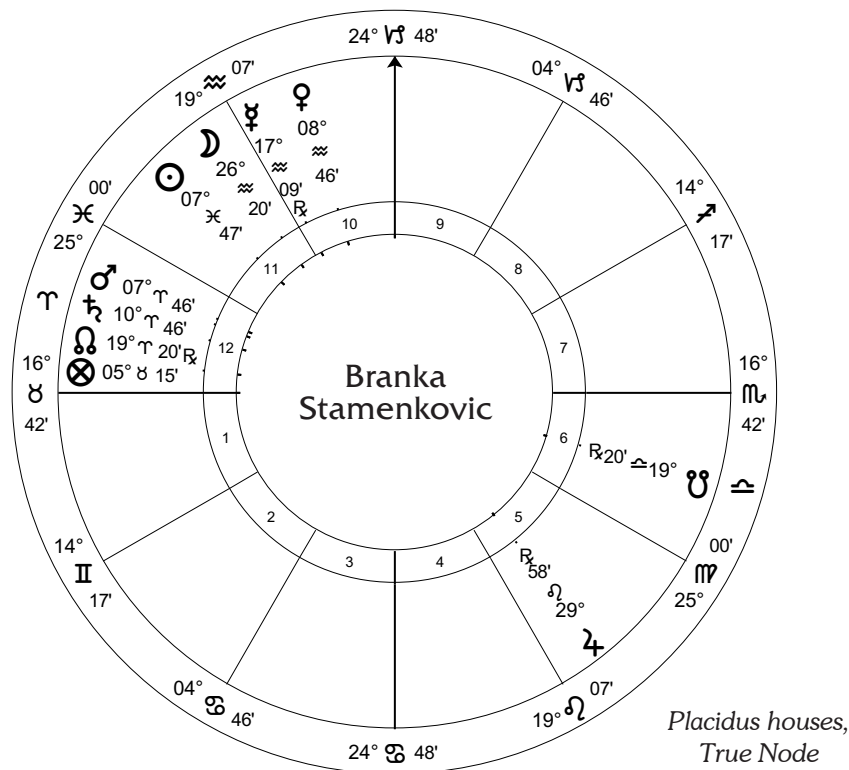
Tore: Do you believe that traditional and modern astrology have a common ground? Can they be

combined and work together somehow?

Branka: I don’t believe in mixing the systems, but I can’t see why they could not exist and work side by side. As strongly as I feel about changing the main objective of astrology, the modern version might be useful for clients who are interested exclusively in character analysis rather than prediction. However, to take the Hellenistic firdaria system, for example, and impose Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto periods upon it or onto the planetary hours system — that I am strongly against. Such mixing of systems, in my opinion, can only be counterproductive. It cannot even be called a combination of systems. It is changing the old system beyond recognition, just as introducing Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto as rulers of signs ended up doing.

Tore: So, do the transpersonal planets have any use in astrology?

Branka: No, I don’t think so. I figure that, if astrologers managed to do very good astrology without them for thousands of years, then certainly I should be able to do the same. I believe in



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“as above, so below,” and the *above* counts only if it is visible to the naked eye and is created by God. Therefore, manmade satellites and other flying objects don’t really count. Like the Babylonian astrologers, I believe that one should actually look at the sky to do astrology. On top of that, these modern planets just clutter the chart and create too many trees that mask the forest.

Tore: Some critics of traditional astrology maintain that you cannot simply disregard or ignore the psychological aspect of a human being as if it didn’t exist.

Branka: And who is ignoring and disregarding the psychological aspect of the human being? Even if traditional astrology’s main objective was to predict, it does not automatically follow that it is incapable of, or unwilling to do, psychological analysis of a person.

Tore: Do you use a psychological approach at all in your astrological readings?

Branka: Yes, I do, on many levels. If I am addressing horary questions about love, I analyze the motivations and inclinations of the people involved. This is, of course, important in questions about business partnerships, hiring new employees, and all questions involving relationships.

Also, when one is delivering a prediction to the client, one has to have some counseling and psychological skills. In the past, negative predictions were resolved quite radically. Babylonian astrologers would warn the king that he was in danger, and the king would put a “substitute king” on the throne. After a while, the real king would have him killed, redirecting to the substitute whatever negative prediction was coming his way.

Of course, we can’t do these things today. But we can still offer remedies for problematic situations, suggest how people should change or which attitude

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they should take toward other people, and so forth. I am not telling people that a bad childhood experience or a problematic relationship with parents or siblings might be the cause of an irrational or traumatic behavior pattern in their adult life. For this kind of analysis, a visit to a psychiatrist or a trained therapist would be much more useful.

Tore: Is traditional astrology too “black and white,” “good or bad” for today’s modern society?

Branka: Astrology isn’t, but astrologers can be. Astrology just resembles life, and if life is black and white, astrology is capable of resembling it. If life isn’t black and white, astrology is capable of representing all the shades of grey. So, if such a problem exists, it is not within astrology, traditional or modern, but with astrologers. And, by the way — today’s world is still perceived to be “black and white” and “good or bad” in many, many places on Earth, especially in the West.

Tore: Do you think that traditional astrology lacks a spiritual dimension, not giving value to the modern human being’s search for self-development and spiritual awareness?

Branka: Throughout its long history, astrology has never lacked a spiritual dimension. It was always regarded as a sort of “divine handwriting,” a language by which gods (or God) communicate their will to people. The problem

of what you call “the modern human being,” which actually translates into the Westernized man, is the individual’s departing from a religion of any sort and then trying to satisfy the spiritual craving with modern, artificial substitutes. So, to answer your question: No, traditional astrology does not lack a spiritual dimension.

Tore: What can traditional astrology tell us about a natal chart that the modern psychological version cannot?

Branka: The quality of astrological readings, in my opinion, depends on the astrologer — not the astrology. I know quite a few modern astrologers who do make predictions, and they are very good at it. Unfortunately, I have met many, many more who either cannot or will not provide predictions. On the other hand, I have yet to meet a traditional astrologer who does not predict. And as I have said already, predicting has always been astrology’s main purpose. I believe it should continue to be so.

Tore: Why specialize in horary astrology?

Branka: Because it is concrete, verifiable, simple, and helpful. We still meet people who don’t know their birth time, not even the date or year of their birth. In such a case, a natal chart reading is not an option.

Tore: Why does horary work?

Branka: For the same reason that natal, electional, mundane, or any other type of astrology works: the quality of time. Astrologers recognize that every moment has a quality. If something happens at a certain moment, the quality of that moment describes the event. This could be a specific situation, an observation, or a person’s or a country’s birth time. In horary, we are working with the moment when the question was born.

Tore: As you have stated, the question of timing is highly important in astrology, especially in horary. If we relate to the Ptolemaic

doctrine of origin as the seed moment of the birth of a question, shouldn't one cast a horary chart for when the idea comes into the querent's mind for the very first time, not when the astrologer learns of it or receives it, as one does in horary? And do you think this generates a lack of credibility for horary, since you do not honor the true seed moment of the birth of the question?

Branka: We do not use the time of conception in natal astrology, but rather the time of birth, and it is the same in horary astrology. The time between starting to think about a question and the moment it reaches someone who can answer it — the astrologer — is the equivalent of the gestation period.

Tore: Some authorities or schools of thought in horary put the astrologer as lord of the 1st house in the horary chart. You don't include the astrologer in the chart at all. Why not?

Branka: First of all, I like to do my horary astrology in the orthodox and traditional manner. William Lilly, the "modern" master of horary, never included himself in a chart. If some contemporary astrologers want to modernize horary, I guess it is an individual choice. However, I would not follow that line of thought.

Secondly, I don't see any point in incorporating the astrologer into the horary chart. He or she is not at all a part of the question asked. We are only its interpreters. If you do natal, electional, or mundane astrology, you never put the astrologer into the chart, do you? Why make it more complicated than it has to be by bringing in alien elements?

Tore: Is horary astrology a form of divination?

Branka: I am not sure what you mean by "divination." Translating the starry language of the divine — yes, I think it is a very efficient tool for that, just as natal astrology translates the language

of the divine to describe the moment of someone's birth.

Tore: What about magic?

Branka: Magic has to have an element of intervention in it, an attempt to gain a certain result. When a woman puts on perfume or lipstick to try to become more attractive to men, then we can talk about elements of magic employed in that act. Horary astrology just gives you the answer about how things stand in a certain situation that you inquired about. Consequently, it isn't magic.

Tore: Nevertheless, aren't you just interfering in people's fate and limiting their free will, since horary presumably tells us what is going to happen, instead of letting the future and our fate evolve "naturally"?

Branka: No, that is certainly not what it means. The whole point of astrology is to help people exercise their free will to a greater extent and to know the



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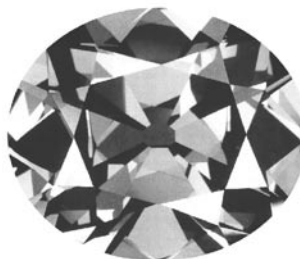


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limitations of their fate, which are the things that cannot be changed, no matter how much a person would like to be free-willed. Fate, of course, exists. It is a name for all the restrictions we are born into. Some elements in our lives are fated. However, within those restrictions, we have the free will to do certain things and to make certain choices.

Tore: Do you have to believe in a higher cosmic power or entity to be able to do astrology — or horary, in particular?

Branka: Well, I am living with a very skilled and successful psychological astrologer who is an atheist, so — obviously you can do astrology and not believe in God or a higher power. But if you do believe, it certainly helps. It answers many of the questions that atheistic astrologers have to struggle with.

The quality of astrological readings, in my opinion, depends on the astrologer — not the astrology.

Tore: Do you predict death, if asked?

Branka: No, I do not. This is where I become a “psychologist.” Western culture does not cope well with the concept of death — as opposed to some other cultures. So, I don’t want to risk implanting the idea of too short or too long a life into anyone’s head. Personally, I don’t feel comfortable dealing with such questions or health/illness questions. Still, that doesn’t mean

I don’t know how to answer these questions.

Tore: What is your point of view on the relationship of astrology and science?

Branka: It depends on which science we are talking about. Exact sciences definitely have no correlation with astrology. But if meteorology — with its inability to predict anything in the long term — is considered a science, then I am baffled that astrology can’t be in the same category of sciences. However, to qualify for a science these days, astrology would need to be stripped of any divine philosophical elements that it stands on. Therefore, I’m against attempts to change astrology according to the standards of science, just to be able to call it a science. This seems to be a fancy trap that a lot of today’s astrologers fall into. Instead, let science change itself from within. The time might come when scientists will change their principles so that they do not clash with astrology.

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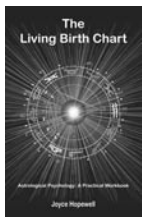


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Tore: You run a well-established international horary school. What does it take to become a good horary astrologer?

Branka: You have to learn the techniques, of course. But even more important than that is to learn to think straight. As strange as it sounds, it is not the easiest thing to do. Too often, astrologers can't see the forest for the trees and keep complicating the process of arriving at a judgment. Often, they take too many irrelevant details into account. Horary is simple and straightforward, but it is a challenge to master this discipline.

Tore: Where do your students and clients come from?

Branka: Some of them come from Europe, Australia, North and South America. The majority are from ex-Yugoslavian republics. Montenegro is at the top of the list.

Tore: What kind of astrology will we be using in the future?

Branka: With the revived interest in the translation and publishing of old astrology texts, it is my nonastrological prediction that traditional astrology will slowly but surely replace modern astrology in the decades to come. It might not happen during our lifetime, but I think that astrology will eventually come back to its true roots.

Tore: You are pursuing a master's degree in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at Lampeter University in Wales. Why do you want to study astrology academically?

Branka: It is not astrology that I think I can learn at Lampeter, or any other Western university, because universities do not teach astrology. But there are programs dealing with the history, philosophy, and cultural development of astrology. No matter how much interest purely academic thinkers show in this field, I believe it would be difficult for them to fully understand the philosophical and cultural implications of astrology without being a practicing or skilled

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astrologer. This is where we jump in, because we already know!

On the other hand, the astrologers of today could use a higher education as well. Earlier, only highly educated people practiced astrology. Nowadays, we could use an infusion of people with M.A.s and Ph.D.s from the relevant academic fields who actually practice our craft. It can't do any harm, only give us a bit more respect. So, it is a two-way street — academia can make good use of us, and vice versa.

Tore: Who are the greatest astrologers according to you, alive and deceased?

Branka: Oh, that's a difficult question! Within the type of astrology I practice, the greatest astrologer of all time must be William Lilly. The living one would be my teacher, John Frawley.

Tore: In closing, tell us a little more about yourself.

Branka: I'm a Pisces, with Taurus rising and the Moon in Aquarius, though I have often been told that my Mars-Saturn conjunction in Aries comes across stronger than anything else. (See **Chart**, page 83.) I was born in Belgrade, Serbia, and have been living there all my life.

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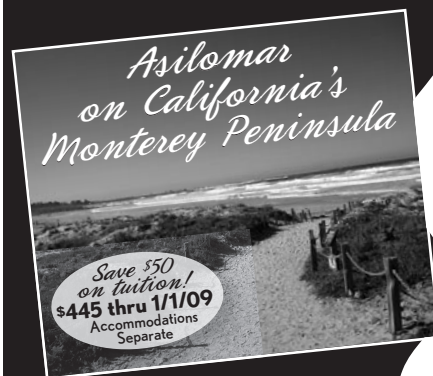
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