

Article received on 10th March 2009
Article accepted on 21st May 2009
UDC 78.072:781.7

Ira Prodanov Krajišnik*
University of Novi Sad
Academy of Arts – Department of Music

MUSICAL FOLKLORE AS A VEHICLE?

Serbian Musicological Society
International Musicological Society
Department of Musicology and Department of Ethnomusicology
Faculty of Music, Belgrade, 2008

Cooperation with international institutions has always been a sign that scholarship (besides culture) in Serbia is a sphere recognized as high quality, regardless of the political status of our country in the world. Thus the volume *Musical Folklore as a Vehicle?*, printed as a part of the cooperative project of the *Serbian Musicological Society* and *International Musicological Society*, confirms the important place of our musicological and ethnomusicological research in an international context, while the involvement of the foreign partner in organizing the meeting with the same title and his financial backing in the realization of this publication, are proofs of the responsible approach of both sides concerning the first project made on this level in our country.

Papers printed in the volume *Musical Folklore as a Vehicle?*, demonstrate the great diversity of approach (especially for us) towards the ‘domestic research terrain’, confirming the statement from the editorial by professor Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, PhD, that folklore ‘has always been a stimulating, inspirational and challenging source of theoretical thoughts on music.’¹

Due to the diversity of the studies received, the collection *Musical Folklore as a Vehicle?* (the question-mark at the end of the title refers to a certain dilemma concerning the veracity of the statement), is divided into two parts. The part named *Identities* consists of the texts focused on folklore research in the context of constructing the global and afterwards, the individual national or personal creative identities, or the identities of a specific musical genre.

* Author contact information: iraprod@ptt.rs.

¹ Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, ‘Introduction’, in: *Musical folklore as a vehicle?*, Belgrade, 2008, 8.

The problem range of the study *Folk Music as a Vehicle for Accomplishing a Global Cultural Identity* by Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, offers an adequate frame for recognizing the fundamental guidelines of the whole publications. Perceived as ‘the relationship between the regional and the international’, as a ‘medium for communicating’, the musical folklore, claims the author, is an area where the authenticity of a specific regional musical experience and the global cultural context meet. This encounter does not mean (as is often assumed) the loss of the specific qualities of the individual experiences concerned, but always represents a certain coexistence of the materials with different characteristics. An analysis of the function of musical folklore in the development of cultural identity, in the past and today, indicates significant differences. While in Romanticism this function was aimed at national cultural emancipation, in the 20th century it becomes polysemic: the area of its impact, besides political (when folklore serves the propaganda of a dominant ideology), can show characteristics of a purely aesthetical, artistic behaviour. This second case is very typical of the post-modernist times, when the ‘aesthetic of fragmentation’, makes the presence of musical folklore possible in many various forms. Therefore, it brings forward the *intertextuality* of such materials, but also the fact that the phenomenon of the national, in the context of the presence of musical folklore, is today replaced by the phenomenon of the *transnational*.

Two studies within this collection deal with the question of the development of Yugoslavian identity in the field of music. In her study *Inventing Yugoslav Identity in Art Music*, based on culturological research of the Yugoslavian sphere, by historian Andrew Wachtel, Melita Milin explains how the composers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–1945) created a ‘multinational’, or (as she points out) ‘supranational’ style. She begins her report by analysing the problem of creating the anthem of the newly-founded state. An awkward merging of the three stanzas taken from three different anthems of the peoples representing the most numerous part of the Kingdom’s population, clearly indicates an attempt to unite superficially the materials with quite different (musical) characteristics. In the ensuing period, this problem was transferred to the level of socio-political circumstances and their consequences in the sphere of creating artistic music. As illustrations of this subject, the author quotes works by S. S. Mokranjac, M. Polič, M. Logar, P. Konjović, J. Slavenski, and others, concluding that the Yugoslavian ‘ideal’ in music was present mostly between the two World Wars, and slowly disappearing afterwards. The work of Ana Hofman, *The Music of ‘Working People’: Musical Folklore and the Creation of Yugoslav Identity*, deals with the period after the Second World War, when, by cultivating folklore through the concept of amateurism as well as through the scholarly meetings, the state

attempted to proclaim this musical sphere as the most adequate cultural statement of the 'working people', and the 'new folk culture' – which was, essentially, 'antiindividualistic', and treated the folklore of different peoples as a 'multitude of one' – as a symbolic confirmation of the socialistic development of the society.

In the work titled *Folklore, New Music and National Identity*, author Marija Kostakeva attempts to answer citing practical examples, the questions already answered in theory in the study by M. Veselinović-Hofman. For this purpose, the author quotes certain works by Berio and Ligeti in the context of using folk elements, and afterwards analysing similar methods in contemporary Bulgarian music through the works of K. Iliev, V. Kazandžiev, G. Minčev, and others. The author concludes that, although 'national identities are going to disperse in our global age', the interest in folklore is an 'everlasting circle', which revolves forever.

The research titled *Cultural Paradigms within the Music of Aurel Stroe (1932)* by Ruxandra Arzoiu, deals with the works of the contemporary Romanian composer, 'a builder of bridges between different civilizations', whose supranational musical language, as shown through key opuses, is dedicated to 'enlarging communication on all levels between different realities – historical, geographical, cultural, affective.'

In a very inspiring exposition *A Much too Weighty Inheritance*, Katy Romanou deals with the complicated relation towards cultivating traditional Greek music throughout the 20th century, which is, on one hand, highly appreciated, but on the other, strictly separated from music which is taught and cultivated according to Western standards. The study begins with comments on the importance of the discovery of the first written musical document of ancient Greece, *Seikilos Epitaph* in 1883, and continues with research concerning this subject by Bourgault-Ducoudray, posing key questions concerning the approach to this art, with reference to the relation of modal structures of Greek folk melodies and old Byzantine modes, as well as the integral unity of ancient Greece, Byzantine and folk music. Difficulties in acknowledging the value of this inheritance, among other things, arise from the fact that its notation is different than from the Western, but because of the alleged discrimination of folk music by religious music, folk music is often transcribed into contemporary notation, which makes it 'accessible' to the Western tradition. As the study points out, the ways in which traditional music is cultivated and distributed in Greece today testify that this seems to be lastingly, a very delicate question of Greece musical culture.

Several works in the collection deal with musical pop culture. Two of them refer to the creation of songs for the Eurovision song contest. The first one, *Folklore as a Vehicle for*

(Re)Construction of 'unified space' or How to Turn a Fawn into a Wolf and Then Into a Dove and Not To End Up With Some Kind of Mythological Creature? by Vesna Mikić, by its humorous title, already indicates a discussion of recent strategies for creating songs for the famous European pop song contest, as well as why and how the folklore turned out to be a 'formula' for the successful rating of the participants. A research about a similar theme, *Musical Folklore in Popular Music as the 'Guarantor' of its Identity*, was presented by Dimitrije O. Golemović. Analysing the song *Oro* by Željko Joksimović from the Eurovision song contest in 2008, this ethnomusicologist has, by implementing the analytical apparatus of his trade, skilfully 'exposed' the difference between the authentic folklore and 'folklore' of the mentioned number. The phenomenon of 'neofolk culture', maybe even a kind of Austrian 'turbo folk', is presented in a work by Tilman Seebass, *The Folklore Ingredient and its Purpose in the Music of the Franui/a Tyrolian Music Group/*, which convinced us that the treatment of folk, not only in our country but abroad as well, can have a pejorative tone, that is, that folklore can be taken 'less seriously', by an addition of something 'comical, ironical or satirical'.² The band in question does not, therefore, belong to the categories of pop, jazz, rock etc, but uses the elements from all these genres within its local musical tradition, singing in their own dialect. The authors conclude that 'to reach both the regional and global audience' within such a concept, 'folk tradition can only be presented in an alienated form.' Pop culture is also the subject of the work by Julijana Žabeva-Papazova, who, in the text titled *The Influence of Macedonian Folk Music on the Development of Macedonian Alternative Music After 1991*, presents the most important Macedonian bands, *Mizar*, *Kismet*, *Anastasia*, *Baklava*, *Foltin* and *Lola V Stain*, who, in their songs, use the elements of Macedonian folk tradition from the 19th century called *čalgija*, Macedonian folk songs from different periods and the Byzantine spiritual tradition. Dealing with a genuinely interesting appearance of Belgrade bands *Orthodox Celts*, *Irish Stew of Sindidun* and *Tir na n'Og*, who cultivate art inspired by Irish music and culture, despite never, or almost never being directly connected to them, the phenomenon of 'Ireland in Serbia' was examined by Gordana Blagojević, in a paper titled *Folklore Music in a Global Village: 'Irish Serbs' in Belgrade Today*.

Besides providing adequate research space in analysing the problem of folklore as a transmitter of information referring to one and/or several cultures, the first part of the collection shows an openness towards researching the phenomena in the sphere of contemporary pop and rock music, which, a decade or two ago, was unthinkable here. Therefore, these texts prove the

² A similar example in our country was first presented by the band *Rokeri s' Moravu!*

existence of a necessary amount of awareness of the ‘world outside artistic music’, about this ‘other world’ in which we, as scholars almost do not participate, while at the same time confirming that the other areas of Europe in these genres, have in one way or another, become ‘victims to the virus’ of neo-folk culture. In this context it is, however, strange that no participants (especially those from Serbia) mentioned the fact that the phenomenon of the ‘transition’ of pop music into the domain of folklore is also followed by a reverse phenomenon – the ‘transition’ of turbofolk music and newly-composed folk music into pop!³

The other part of the collection, named *The Historical / The Functional / The Representational*, comprises the studies which deal with: 1. the attitude towards folklore in the past and today; 2. the composers’ approach to folklore paradigm; 3. the treatment of folklore in the mass media.

In the work *Bohemia in the 1870s: Two Views of Folkloristic Music*, Michaela Freemanová presents the ‘battle’ between two ‘trends’ in Bohemia at the end of the 19th century: one, which promoted the development of Czech/Bohemian music according to the foreign ‘model’ of Wagner or Liszt, and the other, which ‘defended’ the national elements and cultivated the ‘domestic’ tradition. This study is illustrated with a number of quotations taken from two most influential contemporary musical papers: *Dalibor* and *Hudební listy*.

An almost personally presented essay, *Communication Between Language and Song / Observation in a Kurdish village, October 2006* by Dorothe Schubarth presents the cultural atmosphere of a Kurdish village where she stayed for a short time, in October 2006 – its inhabitants, customs, and ways of communication, mostly referring to the function of music within them.

The only work dealing with church music is the study *The Symbolic Meaning of Imaginary Church Folklore in the Orthodox Choral Music of Alfred Schnittke* by Bogdan Đaković, who, as he himself points out, analysed the works of the famous contemporary composer, from the viewpoint of his general approach to Christian ideology and aesthetics, from the viewpoint of formal-substantial analyses of the three most important Schnittke works in this genre (*Three Choruses, Concerto for Mixed Choir, Twelve Psalms of Repentance*), as well as from the viewpoint of a possible understanding of Schnittke’s employment of Orthodox symbols, which reveal the author’s approach to life and the world of art.

In an excellent study by Virág Büky, *Two Concerts Two Nations and Two Notions of Nations*, the author deals with the *historical concert*, organized first in Vienna, and afterwards in

³ One only needs to hear the new Ceca Ražnatović and Lepa Brena songs in order to understand this!

Budapest in 1918, presenting the soldiers' songs collected in Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War. This project, supported by the state (among others, Bartók and Kodály participated), but substantially and significantly variously treated in Austria and Hungary, indicated the different understanding of nation and folk creativity. The Austrians (however much they might have glorified their own language) in this project proved, first as being more open to other nations, and also as a side which supports the scientific approach to folklore. Hungary however showed the background of its political fight for independence, taking a completely unrealistic stand towards its own 'glorious' history.

A new approach to Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra* was presented by Laszlo Stachó, in his text *Bartok's 'Fatherland Melody': a Reexamination*. Here the famous work by the Hungarian composer was analysed from the viewpoint of the paraphrasing of a melody with irredentistic connotations, taken from the operetta *The Bride from Hamburg* (1921) by Zsigmond Vincze. Stachó claims that Bartók, in his composition, used the mentioned melody as politically tinted material, changing it by his interventions in such a way that (contrary to the original) it marks the cultural integrity of central Europe. Thus he also stressed Bartók's supranational attitude, which also runs through the other works of the great composer and ethnomusicologist.

Nadežda Mosusova made her contribution to the analyses of folklore in artistic music in a study *The Legend of Ochrid and Zorba the Greek – the Popularity of Ethnic Ballets in Serbia and Elsewhere*. Emphasizing the most important historical dates and occasions for the composition of the two ballets, in this comparative study the author confirmed the importance of the ballet genre connected to the ethno world, and stressed the most important details in the public life of these works.

Weaving a touching history of 'the youngest but very gifted composer, music critic, conductor and melograph', whose successful career ended tragically in the Jasenovac concentration camp, in his work *Erich Elisha Samlaich: the Tragic Fate of a Culture Bearer*, Dušan Mihalek presented an almost unknown personality from our musical life. Judging by Samlaich's preserved works our cultural history had, at that time, a mature young musicologist who, among other things, had distinguished himself by writing certainly the most competent text about Sephardic Jews in former Yugoslavia.

In a study *Folklore and Modernity in Greek Piano Music of the Twentieth Century: the Case of Dimitris Dragatakis (1914-2001)*, Magdalini Kalopana analysed the problem of coexistence of the folkloric and the modern, presenting chronologically the layers of new

elements in the works of this author, also emphasizing ‘the coexistence of tradition and modernity’ as the composer’s creative credo.

In a text *Musical Folklore in a Greek Mass Media: a Case Study of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation*, Nick Poulakis gives a critical analysis of the programme of this television channel, using (as he himself points out) the achievements of reflexive ethnomusicology, media anthropology and postcolonial studies. In this context, the author first draws attention to the definition of media of (state) television as a space for the ‘reproduction of dominant ideology’, since it participates in ‘the creation and popularisation of official cultural politics’, that is, of course, financially dependent on the state to which it belongs. A priori distancing himself from general conclusions, the author claims that his research is just a study of a specific programme series, broadcasted in the summer of 2005, under the title of *Musical Tradition (Mousiki Paradosi)*. Broadcasting such a programme on Sundays, immediately after the liturgy and another theological programme, indicates a carefully premeditated ‘overture’ to a programme in which the Greek researcher, theologian and Byzantine music teacher Panagiotis Mylonas, through a potpourri of singing, dancing and playing of different Greek folklore groups, gives his positivistic, romantic, acultural and nationalistically oriented vision of the preservation of musical tradition. From the critical approach to this series, the author draws the conclusion about the ‘chaos’ ruling in Greek mass media concerning the treatment of the phenomena of ‘folklore’, ‘tradition’, ‘identity’, ‘difference’, as well as the ambivalent attitude of these media towards globalization.

The publication *Musical Folklore as a Vehicle?*, comprises an enviable interdisciplinary space of musicological and ethnomusicological thought, which proves that this subject still belongs to one of the central spheres of scholarly musical research. Writing about the essence of music, Philip Bohlman once titled his study *Is All Music Religious?*⁴ The collection *Musical Folklore as a Vehicle?*, calls for paraphrasing this question. Namely, it seems to be asking: Is all music – *Folklore?*

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

⁴ Philip V. Bohlman, ‘Is All Music Religious?’, *Theological music. Introduction to Theomusicology*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1991.