
TRIBUTE TO PROF. DR. DRAGOSLAV DEVIĆ

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Dimitrije O. Golemović*

Department of Ethnomusicology
Faculty of Music, Belgrade

WE ARE ALL JUST PASSING THROUGH TO PROFESSOR DRAGOSLAV DEVIĆ (1925–2017)

We are all just passing through is what you told me, my dear Professor, at my father's funeral, instead of the usual expressions of condolences. And, as it usually happens in moments of the greatest grief, when the body is consumed by sorrow, the mind is completely 'pure' and rational, so here, I remember your words even a quarter of a century later, as if you had spoken them yesterday. Just passing through? You were right, Professor, but not all of us pass through life in the same way. Some, like in that popular saying, pass through life like a dog when it gets soaked in the rain – it shakes it off, the raindrops spraying off in every direction, and it is dry again – while others pass through life in such a way that afterward nothing is the same. Well, Professor Dević, you belonged to the latter type of people.

* Author contact information: golemovicd@gmail.com

Born all the way back in 1925, over the course of nearly a century, Prof. Dević traversed a long, winding, and thorny road, full of all kinds of obstacles, and yet often teeming with the sweetest fruits, not of a material, but of the spiritual kind. The road of knowledge, one might rightly say. And that road is always long, arduous, and uncertain. Winding. With many crossroads and hurdles. But Prof. Dević traversed it as though he had a map in his hands that helped him avoid taking a wrong turn and getting lost in some dark corner never to return. And so, although without a model to follow and yet as though led by the firm hand of a parent or friend, he built himself up, as well as much more – an entire ‘school’ – with many pupils, and then also teachers, who learned their craft from him.

A love of folk music, although he came from an urban background, is something that Prof. Dević carried in him all his life. In the beginning, it was hidden and emerged only occasionally, when, for instance, as a schoolboy, he would start playing some simple melodies on his violin that he had heard at home or elsewhere in his surroundings. And when the Second World War came and went, and the Professor finished his military service, he decided to study music, thereby choosing music as his vocation. A brave decision, even today, but much more so back then, but who could, even if they wanted to, discourage young Dragan from making this decision, which, as it turned out, shaped his entire life? Had there been an ethnomusicology department at the Academy of Music in Belgrade when he enrolled in its music education department, Prof. Dević would certainly have chosen the former; later, in conversations, he often said as much, but at the time, that was still unthinkable. That is why after he graduated, seeking to shape himself as a complete scholar, fully equipped to study traditional music, even though he had found a job and started his own family, he enrolled and after a few years graduated from the ethnology programme at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. Thus he became a complete scholar, which one could later see in his perennial striving to teach his students how to understand not only folk music, but also its living surroundings. Having joined the teaching faculty of the Stanković School of Music, Prof. Dević also began teaching the subject then called *muzički folklor* (музички фолклор, music folklore), thus beginning a pedagogical practice in a subject he barely knew, at the same time without even being familiar with the required methods that pertain to every discipline, including ethnomusicology. Lucid and practical, with a solid command of various disciplines of music, as well as those he had acquired during his studies of ethnology, the Professor created, so to speak, a certain kind of methodology as he went along. This gained further momentum after 1961, when he joined the faculty of the Music Academy as an assistant to Prof. Miodrag Vasiljević and then, after only a year, as a professor in his own right, due to Prof. Vasiljević’s untimely death. And then, like a child who is best taught how to swim by being thrown into the water, Prof.

Dević took the same path, knowing that every journey, however long, must begin with an initial step. There were daunting and complex tasks before him, especially for a singlehanded man. The greatest difficulty was that the circumstances dictated taking up those tasks simultaneously, even though their 'nature' demanded tackling them in succession, since solving each one of them was conditioned by solving the preceding task. However, there was no time for that, so Prof. Dević simultaneously went about building a previously non-existent scientific methodology, churning out articles and books, and taking part at every major scholarly event in Yugoslavia and abroad. His scholarly work was based on fieldwork research as a necessary precondition for producing meaningful work and making a valuable contribution to the field and to our familiarity with traditional culture. In addition to all those pursuits, Prof. Dević also simultaneously worked to produce teaching methods, necessary to transmit this knowledge to students of ethnomusicology. One might wonder how he simultaneously accomplished all of that and how much energy he had to invest in it, but only the Professor and his family knew that. The rest of us, even myself, although I was his teaching assistant (from 1979 on), could not grasp it. The cheerfulness and ease with which he approached every task constituted one of the best qualities of this remarkable man. A man with a clear sense of purpose, like Michelangelo, who reportedly said, when they asked him how he made his statues: "That's simple. A piece of rock, a hammer and chisel, and then you take away all that is 'unnecessary'".

Professor Dragoslav Dević worked at the Academy of Music, later the Faculty of Music, until his retirement in 1990. It is thanks to him that Serbian ethnomusicology has a clear concept, based on the synergy of practice and theory, with fieldwork, transcription, and analysis as its core activities, and, over time, due to its own development and that of other fields, expanding in various ways, depending on the affinities of those pursuing it. Building upon the foundations laid down at the Music Academy in Belgrade, Professor Dević, as well as his students, continued working in other environments as well, spawning a dense web of scholarship and pedagogy, extending from Skopje to Novi Sad and all the way to Banja Luka. The erstwhile modest department of ethnomusicology, where the *music folklore* course was for years taught by the Professor alone, gradually expanded, reaching eight professors today, seven of whom have doctorates, with ethnochoreology taught as a scholarly discipline in its own right. The Department also has its Sound Archive, comprising a large number of tapes, many of which were recorded by Professor Dević himself. Thus far, the department has conferred a large number of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in ethnomusicology. Many of its alumni have remained active in ethnomusicology, in their work, at other faculties, the Institute of Musicology at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as various music schools.

This list of activities pursued by Prof. Dević is not nearly exhaustive of all the pursuits that filled the life of this man, for instance, his work on the radio and television, as well as various events, most prominently *Dragačevski sabor trubača* (Драгачевски сабор трубача, Guča Trumpet Festival), *Sabor narodnog stvaralaštva Srbije* (Сабор народног стваралаштва Србије, Serbian Folk Creativity Assembly), *Homoljski motivi* (Хомољски мотиви, Motives from Homolje), *Crnorečje u pesmi i igri* (Црноречје у песми и игри, Crnorečje in Song and Dance), *Mokranjčevi dani* (Мокрањчеви дани, Mokranjac Days), and *BE-MUS...*

And after all of the aforesaid, I cannot refrain from saying a few more words about my personal memories of Professor Dević. After decades of our friendship, whether at the Faculty, in fieldwork, or privately, I have numerous memories of him. They appear unexpectedly and like sudden flashes, they light up and disappear again, illuminating me at a given moment, offering me advice or reminding me of an enjoyable experience we had together. Still, apart from *we are all just passing through*, I will remember, probably as long as I live, these words from the Professor: *What you don't write in this book, you'll write in the next one*. Although his words might strike one as a sort of “justification” for writing something superficial or otherwise flawed, they harbour a message from a wise man, aware that one writes ‘one’s book’ throughout one’s life and that one’s individual works are only chapters in that book. Those words, even though it seems that I always acted in line with them, even without knowing about them, came as a sort of confirmation that I was on the right path. At the same time, it is as if they freed me from the responsibility to assess my own work. Individual chapters of a book. Nicely put. And that book, it just occurred to me, is nothing but a chapter in the book that we are all writing together!

Someone once said that everyone dies twice, the second time when they are forgotten. When it comes to Prof. Dragoslav Dević, there is no need to fear, since what he did for Serbian ethnomusicology is so significant that it undoubtedly constitutes its foundations. And the scholarly principles that he established and the insights that he presented in his many works will always remain valid, that is, will never become obsolete, but will be used and improved upon by those who study traditional folk music.

Rest in peace, my dear Professor, and may eternal glory shine upon you.

Eulogy delivered at the funeral of Prof. Dr. Dragoslav Dević
Belgrade, 26 September 2017