

Selena Rakočević

**The International symposium "Urban Music of the Balkans"
The Documentation and Communication Center for Regional Music in Durrës (Albania),
September 28-October 1, 2006**

In the process of intense "Europeization", which for the citizens of southeastern Europe has in recent years gone beyond mere current politics, taking the shape of a distinct struggle for a "better life", whose outcome is within reach and which, as was formulated in one of the oft repeated phrases, "can and should be led by each one of us", the idea of the Balkans as a unique cultural area has attained a new vigor. After the winds of war at the end of the 20th century, and in spite of the still unresolved Kosovo issue, the Balkans as a region in which models of multicultural social communities have existed for centuries, has once again become a metaphorical (yet also real) area which has something to offer to Europe and the world. These political tendencies in recent years have been directly embodied in new regional associations and newly-founded institutions, of which the Documentation & Communication Center for Regional Music (DCCRM), headed by composer and ethnomusicologist Sokol Shupo, with its center in Tirana, is one of the most appealing. Along with prolific publishing activities and intense documentation and archival work, the recent organizing of the large symposium on urban music in the Balkans, with more than forty participants from nearby countries as well as from Europe and the USA, is the pinnacle of all their hitherto activities.

With the support of several significant institutions – the Albanian parliament and the Albanian Academy of Sciences, the German Embassy in Tirana, the Goethe Institute from Thessaloniki, and under the auspices of two great ethnomusicological associations – the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) and the International Musicological Society (IMS), Sokol Shupo has succeeded in his intention to edit and publish a collection of works which will be put on view at the symposium even before it is held, so that the entire manifestation on September 28 could be grandly opened with the promotion of the sizeable book entitled "Urban Music of the Balkans" dedicated to the founder of ethnomusicology in Albania, Ramadan Sokoli. The following days, September 29 and 30, presentations of works were held according to the same schedule as in the collection.

At the very start, presented were several studies whose authors attempted to analyze issues existing on the level of the entire region. The text "The Europeization of the Balkans", by

the dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana Dr. Božidar Jezernik, had the character of an introductory study due to the synthesis approach to the cultural history of this region from the mid-18th century and throughout the 19th century. In spite of the current political aspirations towards Europe, which have inevitably also reflected themselves on the ideology of humanistic sciences but in which there is a tendency to idealize everything that comes or had come from Europe, Dr. Jezernik reminded us of the acknowledged facts of the positive aspects of the Ottoman Empire and the negative sides of the “inviolable” West.

Most the papers presented at this symposium can be denoted as historical-monographic information on particular phenomena of urban music in certain Balkan countries or its particular areas. Among these is the paper on ethnomusicology by Dr. Dimitrije Golemović on trumpeting in Serbia (“Brass orchestras in Serbia: from urban to rural and back to urban music practices”), an article entitled “Traces of urban influences on rural communities on the Pind Mountain” by Dr. Athena Katsanevaki, the study entitled “Balkan music in Vienna” by Dr. Ursula Hemetek, and “The contribution of gypsy accordion players to the transformation of folk music in Bulgaria” by Dr. Lozanka Pejčeva, as well as the piece “The Macedonian traditional urban dance model” by Ivona Opetčevska-Tatarčevska, and “Music for the kolo dance in the urban milieu of Banat” by Selena Rakočević, M.A., et al.

Among the monographic pieces focusing on the time dimension of the origins of certain developments in Balkan urban music, several of them represent regionally broadly set historical disputes. Among them we are singling out the following: “The tradition of makam music in the Balkans” by Dr. Bulent Aksoy, “Interethnic loanwords and music modernism in *Balkan* popular music: the past and the present” by American ethnomusicologist Jane Sugarman, and “Albanian and Turkish music” by Dr. Recep Uslu.

Unlike the papers that are positioned as more or less comprehensive historical overviews of the studied phenomena of urban music practice, an outline was given in several pieces of the contemporary developments in Balkan music. Among these, we single out articles by Dragica Panić-Kašanski, M.A., on music practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the last war – “*Izvornjaci (original folk music)* – music of a rural derivation as a part of popular urban culture”, and the paper by Ivan Lešnik, M.A., entitled “Between the Balkans and Europe: a study of the band *The Mambo Kings*”.

Only a couple of papers focused on a direct analysis of isolated phenomena from the linguistic or musical practice of the Balkan peoples. Among them is the article by linguist Dr. Victor Friedman dedicated to multilingualism (the use of multiple languages) in the urban music of the Balkans as an ideal model of multiculturalism and the article by ethnomusicologist Velika

Stojkova entitled “The unwarranted second in Macedonian folk melodies – the Byzantine or Ottoman influence”.

Islamic religious music was the subject of research of several authors. The articles of American ethnomusicologist Dr. Karl Signell and Bulgarian musicologist Dr. Ivanka Vlaeva were dedicated to the music of the Islamic order of the Mevlevi, while ethnomusicologist Bahtir Sheholli from Priština spoke about the Dervish musical practice in Kosovo.

In percentage, the most represented were papers dedicated to Albanian urban music, which is logical considering that Albania was the host country of this summit. Among these articles we single out the paper by Sokol Shupo entitled “Urbanized rural songs as a category of Albanian urban music”, and Dr. Eno Koço “Reflections on Albanian urban lyrical songs”.

Along with a significant number of papers presented at the event “Urban Music of the Balkans”, several CDs and books were also promoted. Among the promoted CDs we single out two anthology issues of Roma music recorded in Romania during the second half of the 20th century, presented by ethnomusicologists Dr. Marian Lupascu and Dr. Constantine Secara, as well as the superb double CD album of the music of Albanian immigrants in Italy, edited by ethnomusicologists Dr. Antonello Ricci and Dr. Roberta Tucci.

The busy schedule of the two-day symposium was rounded off by evening projections of two films dedicated to traditional music. These were the provocative films “Whose song is this” by Adela Peeva from Bulgaria, and “Kosovo in the eyes of a local gypsy musician” by Slovenian ethnomusicologist Svanibor Petan, which, in spite of the final generally-intoned humanistic scenes, were imbued with the locally positioned political orientation of its authors.

The symposium dedicated to the urban music of the Balkans is one of the most significant symposia held in recent years in this region. It not only gathered experts of various profiles (ethnomusicologists, musicologists and linguists) dedicated to the traditional practice of the Balkan peoples, whose articles have already been published in the sizeable book “Urban Music of the Balkans”, but the significance of this gathering is also in confirming the fact that the music practices of the Balkan peoples have the same history and font of common traits. Thus, the Balkans as a unique multicultural area attained a new dimension of regional collectivity.

In addition to this, the main impression from this symposium is that in spite of the prevailing anthropological approach due to which the last decade has been guiding contemporary ethnomusicology towards culture studies, the concept of an ethnomusicological analysis of music and its parameters as the basis and subject of research is not only a thing of the past, but is also the main link which in a certain extent binds into a unique whole all the different ethnomusicological practices of nearly all the Balkan countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Romania). The question, however, remains, to which perhaps some new symposium will provide an appropriate answer: can we speak about a regional, Balkan ethnomusicology?

Translated by Elizabeta Holt