НАРОДНА МУЗИКА ВРАЊА / FOLK MUSIC OF VRANJE

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Today, it feels almost unreal to hold in your hand a CD box that includes a generously informative booklet written by an ethnomusicologist. This is at a time when we have become accustomed to digital releases, often without accompanying text material. The CD *Folk Music of Vranje* consists of field recordings from Vranje in southern Serbia and its surroundings from the early 1970s by Radmila Petrović (1923–2003), a Serbian ethnomusicologist who devoted herself primarily to Serbian vocal traditional music.

The material, which is very abundant, includes recordings by well-known singers of urban folk songs from Vranje, but also excellent performances by lesser-known artists.

What is so special about the urban folk music tradition from Vranje? What is it that makes Vranje interesting from an ethnomusicological perspective? With its location in southeastern Serbia, Vranje is sited at the meeting point between East and West, between the Oriental and Western culture – at the "crossroads of time and space," as expressed by Marija Dumnić Vilotijević in the CD's booklet. I believe that it is in the meeting points between peoples and cultures that the truly most interesting musical expressions in the world are created, and if that is true, it is no wonder that Vranje is significant. Serbs, Turks, Vlachs, Roma, Greeks, and Albanians settled in the area at different times, and they all brought their music with them.

But the recordings also show traces of other encounters. Encounters between folk culture and popular culture. The 1970s, the decade when these recordings were made, was a time of transition. The rise of modern media meant that the

transmission of traditions that previously took place directly between people in the oral culture was, on many occasions, replaced by mediated transmission. I also believe that new media had a great impact on the emergence of new urban styles and traditions.

The recordings for this edition have been selected based on several different criteria: primarily representativeness, skilled performances, and the best possible sound quality. In one case, the heirs of a tradition bearer did not want to give their consent to the CD release, which is of course a pity, but these recordings are preserved and archived anyway for those who are particularly interested.

The music on the CD represents a wide range of musical expressions and provides good examples of both rural ritual music use and urban music. To me, the contrast between the local ritual and rural music, on the one hand, and the orientally influenced popular, urban music, on the other, is of special interest.

The CD contains thirty-four tracks, the last of which is a suite of dance melodies. Most of the songs are performed by one or two singers. There are four instrumental tracks. Interestingly, the instrument called *duduk* that Kojadin Jović Diča plays on *Krupan čačak* (track 5) is a long cylindrical duct flute. I guess most folk music researchers are more familiar with the Caucasian *duduk*, which is not a flute at all, but a double reed wind instrument. But this is not the first time in folk culture that names have been transferred between different types of instruments – especially wind instruments.

One singer I have particularly noticed is Ljubinka Buba Bulatović, whose soft alto voice is heard on no less than seven of the CD's tracks. Her voice usage brings to mind a more modern vocal ideal, while some of the songs have oriental features. My personal favorite is a simple love song *Da znaješ, mori, da znaješ* [*If You Only Knew*], from Bora Stanković' popular drama *Koštana* (1902), where she really makes the most out of a rubato melody.

The closing track with dance melodies is particularly worth noting. Clarinetist Kurta Ajredinović accompanied by accordionist Azir Ajredinović plays a fourteen-minute medley which is, to my ears, outstanding. The suite uses the well-known melody *Vranjanka* as an interlude that connects a number of dance melodies. The influence of Turkish music is clear in the tone and ornamentation of the clarinet. The scales that appear are partly based on the tonal system of Turkish makams – mostly makam *Hicaz* and makam *Nikriz*. The clarinetist is obviously a very skilled and clearly driven dance musician.

It is truly a good thing that these recordings have been given a new life by the Institute of Musicology SASA in Belgrade and have been provided with knowledgeable comments by Marija Dumnić Vilotijević. The edition will engage general audience interested in music but will also be an important piece of the

puzzle in the music history of southern Serbia. Today, we most often hear folk and popular music in arrangements for ensembles – through field recordings of this kind we also gain access to more original folk musical performances. Certainly, an inspiration for today's musicians and singers.

In conclusion, this CD is a very welcome contribution to the understanding of the musical development of singing styles and instrumental music in Vranje. The CD's booklet enriches and complements the recordings in a very fruitful way.

Dan Lundberg