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*Contemporary Summer Village Assemblies in Central Serbia and (Generational) Performative Practices of Older and Newer Rural Vocal Layers**

ABSTRACT: For the present day middle-aged and older village singers in the Šumadija region in central Serbia rural singing festivals are quite popular events: these are occasions for local communities to share their enthusiasm and to communicate through songs, sharing the elements of tradition they all consider *theirs*, inventing new lyrics to well-known traditional melodies ('standards'), socializing, and confirming their friendships based on pure satisfaction in common singing. On such occasions there appears an opposition in relation to Serbian old and new traditional vocal rural layers (see more for ex. Petrović and Jovanović, 2003, Golemović, 2016). Namely, for village middle-aged and older singers, the main common means of expression are *recent* or *newer* rural singing with structural elements closer to the European ones. *Old-time* rural singing, with its second chords in two-part texture, non-tempered scales, more hermetic in character, shows differences between regional local traditions, and hence has not been regarded as a common way of musical communication for village singers. On the other hand, younger neotraditional singers, in professional or amateur ensembles mostly from towns and mostly conducted by ethnomusicologists, have been devotees of old-time singing as a strong endemic musical device, rich in musical, ethical, and expressive sense. At the festivals they sing such songs to awaken and demonstrate their value in the settings where they are already lost from living practice. This paper is based on the principles of applied ethnomusicology, on long-term fieldwork and on scholarly researches in Šumadija, as well as on personal performing and teaching experiences.

KEYWORDS: Serbia, old rural vocal layer, newer rural vocal layer, festival, performing ethnomusicology, applied ethnomusicology, festivals, communication, mediation, ethics

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Introduction: Context and Methodology

In their conception, nowadays festivals and assemblies in Serbia mostly inherit the former ones, organised in different places during the time of Socialist Yugoslavia, with the aim to present and preserve traditional music and dance heritage of nations and minorities all over the country. Such festivals (a great number of them having the character of competitions) have been an important part of cultural life of small towns and also of particular regions in Serbia; some of them still occur today. Scholars – ethnomusicologists, ethnologists, ethnochoreologists – used to have, and still have an important role in their preparation (see LajićMihajlović and Grašar, 2017, pp. 202–211, 242–244; Radosavljević, ed. 2020), so that such events have grown into being some of the “most significant ventures in safeguarding and presentation of traditional culture” (D. Dević, cited in: Radosavljević, ed. 2020). Thanks to these festivals and assemblies, also ethnomusicologists’ fieldwork was greatly facilitated: it became much easier to meet the informants, especially the ones who were skilled in performing songs and instrumental pieces that belong to the older rural musical layer (see for ex. Petrović and Jovanović, 2003, Golemović, 2016).

The majority of these manifestations are referred to by the emic word *sabor*¹, which means *gathering*, or *assembly* (in its old meaning, it might also be read as *communion*). This term is very useful because it designated the continuity of traditional folk gatherings organised in the past around the (Orthodox Christian) Church holidays, which were traditionally occasions for common singing and dancing. They occurred during the year generally in the summer period, between April and October, but great many of them are held from early June until the end of August.

In this article several aspects of contemporary ‘life’ of traditional songs in Šumadija region (Central Serbia) will be observed, through elaborating different crosswise aspects of music events in focus. The topics that will be encompassed are as follows: the nature of these concrete village (music) assemblies, musical nature and reception of the historical layers of traditional rural vocal heritage of these regions and their negotiation in practice (in tradition and in academic discourse), the impact of activities in the field of applied ethnomusicology and of work of neo-traditional ensembles, as well as the impact of pedagogical work in this domain (acc. to Ramnarine, 2008, pp. 87–88). Methodologically, this case study is based on the postulates of applied ethnomusicology “at home” (see Stock, 2008, p. 12), following the long continuity in this scholarly approach in Serbia, with the aim of “reconstruction and reintroduction of lost [traditional] repertory” (Stock, 2008, p. 12), as it would be aligned with the so-called “first wave” of applied ethnomusicology (Harrison, 2014, p. 20). The article also relies on the methodology of artistic research studies (Aho, 2013, p. 65) from the point of view of *performative ethnomusicology* (Baily, 2008, p. 131) and self-reflexive

¹ This variant of *sabor* has been called “a vernacular conceptualization of mass folk gatherings and celebrations” (Jakovljević, 2012, p. 110) using the old folk name.

research, based on long and profound field experience strengthened by results of diligent music analyses, which provide a common access to (recent) musical historical past (acc. to Stock, 2008, p. 4), as well as on own vocal and pedagogical practice and experience. It may also be said that the methodology relies on applied and community-based music research, but with insights from autoethnographic and auto-artistic research (Aho, 2013). Attention is paid to the validation of old and new vocal practice among local singers vs. in academic circles, as well as through the prism of performers' generational attitudes. Sources used for this paper are the numerous author's and other archive and contemporary video recordings from tourist organisations and from cultural centres archives, from published materials, as well as from the author's personal collection². The main observations are based on the author's direct experiences in the field and at events in focus, as performance ethnomusicology allows insight into "cultural and artistic values, associations, and embodiment within a musical system" (Aho, 2013, p. 69).

The gatherings that are the focus of this article have been regarded in literature as state authorities' means of transforming rural, "hard cultural form" into a "soft" one, guided and controlled through the "folklore on stage" in the times of Yugoslavia (Jakovljević, 2012, pp. 116, 118, 120), just as in (other) communist countries of the Eastern Block, so as to "tame" traditional music and transform it into a political question rather than folk art. This initiated, provoked and/or accelerated many processes on different levels (social, political, economic, and aesthetic) that reflected on rural traditional music-making of the time, and especially on processes in traditional music and its performative outcomes (Jakovljević, 2012, pp. 107, 118, 115). On the other hand, these events also helped to keep certain elements of traditional music alive through a considerable period of time – several decades, when they were no longer part of the living vocal practice, that is, from the 1970s and 1980s onwards, up to the early 21st century. This occurred also thanks to the local singers' enthusiasm for gathering and performing (which was especially important for the participation of female singers, see more in: Hofman, 2012).

From the times of Yugoslavia and later on it was common practice for scholars long established in the field to nurture older, archaic types of traditional music. Experts from the spheres of ethnomusicology, ethnology, sociology, ethnochoreology, took an active role, encouraging village musicians to continue performing old-time pieces, despite the fact that they had already disappeared from the living practice (together with their ritual contexts); similar experiences in Poland were described by Prof. Piotr Dahlig (see: Nowak, 2013, p. 65). As a prominent example of such scholar-native musicians' cooperation in Serbia, we draw attention to the continuing work and survival of the group "Crnućanka" from the village of Crnuća

² Sources: Archive of Touristic Organization GornjiMilanovac and of Cultural Center Topola. Author's field recordings from Šatornja and Nikolje monastery were made by Dejan Ivanović, professional tone engineer (1956–2019), to whom I express my deepest gratitude and respect for his help and dedication in preparing these recorded materials to be used in projects like the writing of this study, as well as preparing a radio broadcast, for the sake of safeguarding Serbian traditional culture.

on Mt. Rudnik, Šumadija region. The group was founded in 1966 as a male vocal group and reinforced in 1970 by joining a female ensemble. This village group has kept the (female and male) old ways of singing for a long time in their repertory and because of this their appearances in Serbia and abroad were held in high regard. In 1976 the group received the European Prize for Folk Arts.

To understand the context in which the author of this text observes and analyses the events in focus, it is important to explain the relations between the village singers and the scholars through the newer history. Namely, members of the local communities highly appreciated the scholars who followed their work and constantly advised them on their repertory. Hence, when I inherited this relationship from my older colleague Dr. Radmila Petrović, who used to work in the Institute of Musicology SASA and made contact with the ensemble, they gladly accepted and welcomed me. Owing to our firm and deep friendship that we established through my fieldwork and common projects – concert activities and publications about traditional music they preserve (where I always sincerely pointed out their individual skills and my gratitude to them) – they started seeing me as an heir to the respected older ethnomusicologist, and as a person deserving their trust (personally, they often treated me nearly as their relative, or their child). It was a kind of privilege and I enjoyed every moment of our encounters. When I started working with the vocal ensemble “Moba” in Belgrade and started including “Crnućanka’s” songs in its repertory, the group accepted that as well (not so gladly, as they would react to anyone else singing ‘their’ songs); through this they showed their respect towards us. When I started working in the cultural-artistic society in Topola (a town nearby), teaching the young girls to sing “Crnućanka’s” songs in the form as close as possible to the original³, and when I started promoting the group as top experts on the music heritage of their county, they realised I was serious about making such ensembles and their knowledge prominent in Serbian culture, continuously organising concerts, promotions, publications, TV appearances. Bearing all this in mind, we could say there was established an alignment of values between the singers and researcher as to the traditional music they perform (acc. to Harrison, 2020). The results of my fieldwork, and the close relation to members of “Crnućanka” and to other singers in this part of Šumadija, especially in the vicinity of Topola, were achieved through long-term scholarly work which resulted in monographs, scientific articles and CD editions (of archival recordings and of applied practical work; see: Jovanović, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2010, 2014, Petrović and Jovanović, 2003). Also, the female vocal ensemble “Moba” included in its repertory some of the most prominent songs from these geo-cultural regions, thanks to the author’s fieldwork and experience.

³ In Topola, the main repertory that we cultivated consisted of my fieldwork recordings from vicinity of this town (Jovanović, 2010).

Local festivals and gatherings in West Šumadija region (central Serbia)

According to the tradition/practice which was encouraged from the beginning of the 21st century, several festivals have been established in this region with the aim to cultivate traditional music (mainly vocal tradition). Gatherings are connected to places and contexts connected to important events and periods in national history, and hence their names are partly created so as to remind one of them, or to point to the beauty of a particular county; they are as follows (ordered according to the level of the author's involvement in their organisation and programme): *Days of the Princess Ljubica (Dani Kneginje Ljubice)* in the village of Crnuća and in the neighbouring village and monastery of Vračevšnica⁴, *The murmur of Jasenica river (Jasenički žubor)* in the village of Šatornja and Nikolje monastery⁵, and *'Kojekude', when you pass through Serbia (Kojekude, kad Srbijom pođeš)* in the village of Orašac⁶. All three festivals occur during summertime, in the period when villages have usually celebrated annual holidays with gathering around churches and monasteries and organized fairs. This practice was more alive in the past, before the end of the WW II (after that, such celebrations were mostly prohibited by the communist regime, but after the fall of Yugoslavia this tradition was revived). The first of these festivals is usually held at the beginning of June, around the date of the Holy Trinity; the second one is always on the day of Saint Marina (known also as "The Fiery Mary") on 30th July, and the third is usually held during the weekend at the beginning of August, which coincides with the holiday of Saint Eliah. All three holidays are traditionally respected and had been celebrated with gathering around churches and monasteries and organised fairs in the past.

The analyses that follow are grounded on materials and experiences from the festivals held mainly before the pandemic of Covid 19; after this, it is noticeable that the enthusiasm for gatherings has faded and the festivals are somewhat reduced in form. Though analyses of all these elements would exceed the framework of this article, here we will be concerned with the elaboration of festivals in Crnuća/Vračevšnica and in Šatornja in their form as it was until the summer of 2020.

Such events were mainly organized by local authorities and sometimes helped by local touristic organisations. In the village of Šatornja there was an exception: the local community organised the assembly mainly on its own, with some help of the municipality; they shared their enthusiasm in all the logistics, from food to concert audio equipment. Alongside the main aim of protecting and cultivating

⁴ It is held in honour to Princess Lj. Obrenović, wife of Prince Miloš Obrenović, the leader of the 2nd Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman rule (in 1815), the founder of independent Serbia and its first ruler in the 19th century; his first place of residence was Crnuća. The Vračevšnica monastery, which he used to visit a lot, was built at the time of Prince Stefan Lazarević (before 1428).

⁵ This event is organised so as to include a visit to that monastery, also built in the times of Prince Stefan Lazarević (in 1425).

⁶ It is about the village where the First Serbian Uprising (in 1804) occurred under the leadership of the so-called Black Đorđe (Karadorđe Petrović). This festival used to be organised up to 2012, when the new local authorities ceased providing support for it.

traditional music, organisers also aimed to gather the custodians of rural music tradition who were eager to share their music with each other; they are the true devotees of traditional songs. It is a common fact that these manifestations are not visited by numerous audiences; in most cases, the most devoted and faithful listeners are the singers/bearers of the tradition themselves, so one of the main purposes of such concerts is their communication, within a specific musical community.

The conception of some of these events was as follows: hosts and guests gathered in the centre of the village, usually in the schoolyard, where the hosts provided a welcome with a modest snack. People are very enthusiastic: they socialise, enjoy the meeting, find confirmation and joy of mutual devotion to traditional songs. According to the small survey I conducted among them in 2018, they agreed about the advantage of the non-competitive manifestations, because of the spirit of free gathering, with no aim to compete, but to find a common language through musical communication. All participants wore traditional costumes with special pride and dignity. After gathering in the village centre, the official beginning was marked by *defilé* – a procession, parade of the participants through the main street in the village. On their way they sang – every ensemble sang its own song, so these songs blended in common sound. The main aim was to be seen and heard. This was the occasion in which most of the groups shared the same musical idiom; they mostly chose their most representative songs in newer rural vocal style. The parade ended when they got to the vehicles – tractors and cars – that carried them to the monastery, a few kilometres away. Usually most participants chose riding on tractors, in the open air, singing gladly on their way, sometimes with great enthusiasm that might not be seen in ‘official’, concert situations.

The journey to the monastery is a part of the event, like a small pilgrimage, and one more strong reason for the participants, like a blessing, to be there. In the monastery, all of them visit the main church and light the candles for their health and for the deceased. After this initial ritual, the short programme starts: all participants present themselves in the monastery yard, singing alternately a song or two. This is the smaller part of the music programme. After that they all have lunch in the monastery dining room and then go back to the village. The main concert starts in the afternoon.

Participants/performers at these festivals come from the neighbouring villages in West Šumadija, the hosts and guests have known each other for a long period of time; guests are partly from other parts of West Serbia, and also from Bosnia and Herzegovina – Republic of Srpska, or from Croatia, which represent Serbian traditions from these counties. In terms of generations, the most enthusiastic participants were born in the 1940s and 1950s, and later (a decade ago there were also representatives of the generation of the late 1930s, but they are quite rare in recent times). Most of them are skilled singers; some are less experienced, but are allowed to join in anyway.

Another category of guests are younger singers, that is, groups from the local and other cultural-artistic societies, and groups and soloists from other places, including professional neotraditional ensembles. Being a leader of the Moba vocal group from a big town, I was appreciated by the local singers and I was invited and took part in many of these events, as a member of Moba vocal group, and

also as a soloist. Finally, as a vocal pedagogue and mediator of transmission of traditional songs in local communities, I also prepared young performers for participation in these festivals. Following this practice, other younger ensembles⁷ emerged as well, led by ethnomusicologists⁸.

As will be shown in the following pages, in the context of the festival but also on other occasions, there will be visible the author's role as mediator. Such a particular contribution might be seen as mediation within the frames of 'adjustment ethnomusicology' "that makes social interaction between persons who operate with different cultural codes", i.e., as a mediator between different cultures (acc. to Harrison 2014, p. 21), or, in this case, between the cultural/musical layers, within the ethnomusicology *at home*⁹.

Concepts of old and new vocal layers in traditional understanding, in academic interpretation, and in performing experience

An insight into the main features of these two categories is grounded in author's field experience in Šumadija and also through rich experience in music analyses. Both views show a significant distinction between these layers of Serbian rural vocal tradition: in terms of particular musical parameters and in terms of general musical character of these pieces. The method of analysis as a tool shows many significant aspects of the studied materials and is deeply rooted in the methodology of Slavic ethnomusicological "schools" in a way that has brought results capable of providing a reliable foundation for extensive deep and comparative insights and syntheses by prominent scholars (see for ex. Pashina, 2012; Klymenko, 2015). Rich experience in conducting a thorough analytic work may also result in valuable reflexive scientific contributions (Zemtsovsky, 2010). It has to be added that analytic scholarly approach in Slavic ethnomusicologies cannot be accidental; namely, in East and South Slav music traditions there are shared specific kindred (if not common) formal, rhythmic, metric, melodic

⁷ In recent times, the young mostly dance and play in the folk orchestra (violin, flute, accordion etc.) and, more rarely, traditional instruments, mostly the pipe. In choreographed folklore dances the tempo is very fast; the young also wear complete folk costumes. In somewhat rarer cases, they prepare traditional dances, as close to the original ones as possible. It is a fact that traditional singing is a most rare activity among the young members of folklore societies.

⁸ A great novelty has been the foundation of a young female group and of children's group, as heirs of (old) "Crnućanka", in 2019. The conductor of young singers is Mrs. Ivana Todorović, ethnomusicologist, who relies in her work on shared rehearsals with older women. I. Todorović is also engaged in organising the festival in a somewhat changed form since the 2020.

⁹ Through a long practical teaching experience in the sphere of performing ethnomusicology, or through "pedagogic activism", I also found that there must be no "musical and other orthodoxies" in pedagogical work (as mentioned in Ramnarine, 2008, pp. 87–88). This approach is brilliantly explained in Ewa Grochowska's (2017, p. 70) and Rytis Ambrazevičius' (2020, pp. 80–81) papers. In my work I am also led by looking for the right expression of each of the singers, following codes of traditional songs, which I consider of the highest ethical standard in this kind of work.

and interval features that stem from their belonging to the same *cultural circle* (Elschek, 1998, pp. 43, 48). I consider it important to point out the similarities between these traditions once more, because they are deeply rooted in a common cultural and ritual past.

It has already been stressed that the favourite common way of singing and means of expression among the participants of the assemblies we are talking about, is the *recent* or *newer* rural vocal layer, *na bas* (“to the bass”). Its structural elements are to some extent close to the European ones: there are the homophony, tone row close to diatonic, more-or-less consistent sequence of parallel thirds, cadence in perfect fifth. The new layer is nowadays obviously a kind of contemporary central Serbian village “world music”, musical *lingua franca* for traditional village singers of the older generation. Not only are traditional songs sung there, but also songs with new lyrics with subjects of love, humour, patriotic feelings, or individual stories of life experiences. New lyrics are attached to common traditional melodic models (so to say “standards”, that is, melodic patterns, *airs*, well-known to a wider number of singers in central and West Serbia), popular as important codes of communication between the contemporary singers. Since all the singers know these common models, they are able to sing together, especially to accompany the skilled soloists; the accompanying part is standardized. Bearing in mind that the main goal of the people at the assemblies is to communicate and to entertain, it is also well-understood that locally considered *musical aesthetics* responds to these musical demands.

“Musical understanding” between hosts and guests comes from similarity in musical sound, sensibilities, and in musical texts between the traditions from Central Serbia (Šumadija) and traditions from West Serbia. These regions are tied by family connections which represent Dinaric inhabitants whose traits can be followed far to South West and West of the country (and more to the West and Southwest, to Montenegro, Herzegovina and Bosnia). Musical codes between these traditions are very much related: well known melodies (emically known as “arije”/*airs*) to which different lyrics are applied are common in different regions of central and West Serbia.

The popularity of such songs at the festival is explained by one of the hosts in this way: “People/ singers want something that is harmonic!” (Radosav Ranitović, b. 1947). It could be seen as a cathartic, “bright” feeling in singing consonant intervals: fifths and fourths on climaxes, perfect fifth in cadences, thirds in the middle. So, common singing in this idiom provides a catharsis, confirmed by mutual understanding through musical sound.

* * *

At these occasions also the songs of the older musical layer are presented, but they occur much more rarely, in specific circumstances.

In contrast to the newer rural style, old-time rural singing might be considered as “consonant” only in terms that were quite clear in the past, showing

another aesthetic; one of them is the treatment and understanding of second chords in two-part texture as consonances (a feature that makes Serbian/Balkan old musical styles akin to Northeast Lithuanian *sutartinės*, possibly showing a very old historical connection between the cultures, see Vyčiniene, 2012). It is also characterised by two-part singing in heterophony, heterophony-bourdon and bourdon, by non-tempered intervals, and by richly profiled ritual genre-conditioned musical forms and expressions. To put it simply, by a much more hermetic character that demands a special kind of skill from the performers and a special kind of attention from the listeners.

Songs from the older layer are markers of local musical identities, features of musical idioms of different regions. In the post-WW II period a levelling out of these identities and local specificities occurred, in favour of the newer rural style (Petrović, 1990, p. 165), so by now the old-layer songs are mostly absent from the village vocal practice. It must be said that during the Yugoslav period the popularity of festivals and competitions with state-conducted programmes and events became a “nucleus of changes in music itself” (Jakovljević, 2012, p. 114) that affected the older and more specific ways of Serbian rural musical expression.

Nowadays, many contemporary village singers in Serbia avoid such songs and cases of their being appreciated are becoming rare. There are several reasons for it: 1) the rising need of village groups to include more singers, since the general problem is the fast disappearance of good and skilled singers, and since more numerous groups (up to 10 people) can perform only newer songs, it turns out that this is the only solution to building the repertory; 2) older songs reflect stylistic and character specificities which collide with the main purpose of the assemblies – to communicate easily through music; 3) older songs are much more demanding, i.e. difficult for singing because they can be sung in duets and trios, so a much higher level of skill and responsibility is demanded from the singers; and 4) under the influence of popular music genres and media, singers who live in towns nowadays and are under their influence consider older songs as “ugly”. On the other hand, the fact is that those singers have never learned to sing such repertory, so they do not have any idea of how they may really sound and what kind of music adventure they may bring.

Still, a minority of singers who can sing such songs and are skilled in that are very fond of them and value them highly. In contemporary situations they align with the other (less skilled) fellow singers and remain without insisting on performing such songs; however, they appear to be very happy with any chance for them to show their specific skill.

Scholars’ evaluating of the vocal styles in the field is a special problem of practical and of ethical nature; generally speaking, scholars would be expected to avoid it by all means. Still, when it comes to music and performance issues, the situation slightly changes (see Harrison, 2020). In conversations with the performers in the field it was confirmed that the ones who *know how* to sing the old songs have a different attitude towards singing in general; the researcher who gets to understand this, by logic, chooses to align her/his values with the researched community, as coming “from the inside’ of their value construct(s) and system(s)” (according to Harrison, 2020, p. 76).

Thus, it has happened several times at the assemblies in Šumadija that my vocal group “Moba”, and/or the young ensemble of the Cultural-artistic society “Oplenac” from Topola were the only performers of songs of the older layer. This was greeted with a welcome by the hosts, especially in situations when someone from the audience recognised a specific song and timbre that reminded her of the old singer, from whom we learnt/received the song; such cases recurred several times at concerts (which meant great encouragement for me personally, to be able to achieve the tone and character of songs so that the community would recognise them as “well sung”). Another occasion was very remarkable: a prominent local female group soloist, responding to my appeal to listen “Moba’s” concert performance of an old-time (harvest) song, came to me with a fellow lady from the group after the performance and told me: “It was *quite good*, but – let me tell you, I need to show you how it should *really* sound!”. And, for the first time, she stood next to me, and started singing, with a persuasive, suggestive bodily presence which pointed to the production of the voice and the timbre, which needed to be taken over, followed, imitated by me, or – I needed to join with her so as to gain the common spirit and character of the old-time song, practically unknown and never apprehended by the majority of the group (which was the real reason these songs were rarely on their programmes). I had a clear feeling that she exchanged with me something that, due to the new circumstances, she does not share with the majority of her fellow singers, like a kind of *elite* singer within her community.

Older songs are also very well accepted at the festivals if sung by guests from more distant regions. It seems to be the most appropriate representation of guests’ local identity. Also, neo-traditional ensembles from towns¹⁰ are also more recognised as performers of the songs of the old layer. Younger neotraditional singers, despite loving singing songs of the newer layer, are also devotees of old-time singing. They see it as a strong expressive endemic musical device, rich in musical, ethical, and expressive sense; this kind of singing is also often seen as the one that needs to be saved from disappearing. Moreover, it is attractive to the young because their hermetic musical world and second chords may be regarded as the sound of *avant-garde*, modern and exciting (as confirmed in the field; Jovanović, 2010).

The absence of competitive situations (where as a rule singers are not encouraged to sing older repertory, unlike in Poland, see Nowak, 2018, pp. 63–64) provides more potential for experiments by adding old songs to the programme with no risk of external judging, but with friendly feedbacks from the members of the community of performers itself.

¹⁰ Including such groups in village programmes and learning their repertory has also been a practice elsewhere in Slavic countries, see Dorohova, 2016, pp. 88–90; Bikont, 2016, p. 122).

Artistic research as methodological tools in ethnomusicological work

Encounters with the essence of musical old rural vocal layer and also with the newer one took place during the long-term fieldwork in this geo-cultural area, and through friendships and acquaintance with local singers of several generations, especially with the oldest. One could refer here to Dimitrije Golemović's words: I "have taken the field within myself" (Golemović, 2012, pp. 202, 203).

This was confirmed on the occasion when I assisted in "Crnućanka's" choosing its representative song for an exclusive TV appearance. Some time in 2010, a member of the group, folk pipe and double-flute player Milovan Matić-Mića (b. 1947), my good friend and fellow artist on "Moba's" concerts and tours, came to the Institute of Musicology, and said to me: "I need advice from you. We [the group] are invited to "Šljivik" [a famous TV show and competition on Radio Television of Serbia]¹¹ as representatives of our municipality!" It was an honour for the group, and a long awaited moment for them to show widely their value and skills. "We need," he continued, "to represent our village and its tradition in the best possible way. I came to you, as an expert who has known us for such a long time, you are also Radmila's heir [Dr. R. Petrović]. The group has great confidence in you. We need to sing just one song, so we need to be very careful. What do you say? Which song should we choose?" I was honoured, and happy that he came to me with such a question. I understood that there was room for me to tell them what I really see as the best solution in this matter. And I had no dilemma about that; I instantly had in mind the old-time, archaic songs. Of course I knew well Milovan had hoped differently – that the group would represent some of the newer songs, more attractive to contemporary ears. However, I said to him instantly: "Milovan, you know my attitude. If you ask me, you should sing some of the most representative songs in the old rural way. Thus you will show the character of your people, of your village, in a way that no one else could do." I suggested to him the old wedding songs, harvest songs, or the song *na glas* that the women trio sings so well¹². Milovan understood me. He stayed quiet for a few moments, and then he said: "OK. I will tell the group your opinion." Brought up in the old, traditional manner, he was respectful towards scholars and he also had honest respect for me.

The group accepted my choice. This turned out to be a good solution: at the semi-finals of the competition the group won maximum points with an old-time heterophonic-drone harvest song, to *long harvest mode*. This TV event was a real celebration of the old singing. I was proud of it and really happy; I fulfilled the "opportunity to encourage musicians and singers to cultivate rare and archaic

¹¹ This state TV broadcast was conceptualised so that different counties in Serbia should represent themselves in different ways of singing, dancing and playing; the obligatory part of the programme was traditional singing. The broadcast was of a competitive character and it was a sign of prestige to appear there.

¹² I also asked him – if he and/or the group think(s) and do otherwise, not to ask me anymore, anytime, for any more advice. I needed to keep strongly this attitude and to show how important it was to me.

phenomena” and to “activate the authentic folklore in the field” (Nowak, 2018, pp. 62, 64). I am also glad that I may join my colleagues that are faced with this kind of effort, representing the “performance-theory-action” model, with stress on its social (and political) potency, as excellently described by Tina Ramnarine (2008, p. 87).

Conclusion

The assemblies that were the focus of attention here were mostly created by the local people themselves, to enjoy them. Guests are familiar and friendly people who come for common music making, as to a kind of *musical oasis* of traditional singing. The time, place(s) and the order of events coincide with the form of old celebrations (and also partly with the form of a wedding!), which, it seems, they needed to revitalise, even without saying so. However, multifaceted musical repertoire in this cultural context reflects the *unsettled pluralism* of musical idioms (Harrison, 2020, p. 80).

The popularity of the newer songs and tweaking the repertoire in the direction of pleasing the majority in the audience, might, in my opinion, point to the slight risk of such gatherings sliding towards populism, towards turning the occasions of traditional music into occasions of simpler and simpler entertainment. And the author’s attitude is that there must be some “higher” purpose of these manifestations, and that purpose has to be of unquestionable ethical nature. This is because, as the composer and academician Vlastimir Trajković (1947–2017) wrote, “Traditional, folk arts – and so folk music [...] of the pre-modern times, anytime and anywhere [...] is the only one entirely free from the artistic lie, from kitsch; moreover, it is the only one entirely free of bad taste as well. [...] it may be concluded that the phenomenon of the artistic – and hence also the phenomenon of the musical – has deep, primarily bio-anthropological roots” (Trajković 2022: 82). Certainly this description applies primarily to rural traditional music of the older rural layer, in Serbia or anywhere. It seems that the already mentioned *minority* capable of interpreting old-time songs might be regarded as a village *elite* of its kind; they understand this hidden musical world and do not give up. Their being encouraged by scholars and fellow singers might lead to the promotion of real representatives of the old-time singing knowledge, of the old *know-how* concerning musical heritage.

The mediation discussed here comes from author’s long-time field acquaintance, and hence could be possibly described, as John Baily put it, as: “Being able to perform to a reasonable standard provides privileged access to current affairs in the field, and a direct entry into the performance event” (2001, p. 96); or as it has been shown in similar experiences from Poland about contexts of connected fieldwork and performing ethnomusicology (Aho, 2013, p. 71, Niemkiewicz 2017, pp. 42, 48–50). The experience from Serbia might be also regarded in these contexts. Moreover, it seems that the author’s position with regard to fieldwork and assemblies in Central Serbia might be commented on in the words by Johnathan Stock: “Participation as a performer, particularly, allows

the researcher to experience life at the heart of the musical event” (Stock, 2008, pp. 10–11).

The common place for ethnomusicologists and their searching for the feeling of sense during their extensive fieldwork is, in my opinion, looking for the truth, namely, “[T]ruths that we look for so far away” (Lévi-Strauss, 1999, p. 1). Ethnomusicologists’ privilege is in finding their truths in calming, regular, beautiful musical forms and expressions. For the researchers of music assemblies in Šumadija, the presence of old-time rural vocal layer sometimes provides a feeling of a found faraway homeland. It is not only the idea of safeguarding. It is the idea of observing those musical pieces as precious and keeping them in living practice, finding them permanently, universally valuable.

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