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The Coexistence of Older and Newer Two-Part Folk Singing in the Village of Prekonoga (Southeastern Serbia) as an Example of Bimusicality*

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Abstract

This paper deals with two different styles of rural folk singing in Southeastern Serbia which coexisted in the repertoire of a particular folk group. It is interesting that folk singing in the area of Svrljig can be followed through the ethnomusicological publications with music transcriptions from 1931 up to 2011 and it is vital even today. The characteristics of the older two-part singing style typical for this region are explored, as well as those of the newer two-part singing widespread after World War Two. These styles are chronologically compared and specifically presented through the analysis of (personal) field recordings of the group “Prekonoga” who carried both traditions. This characteristic of the group is considered in relation to the concept of bimusicality.

Keywords

Older two-part folk singing, newer two-part folk singing, rural tradition, bimusicality, Southeastern Serbia, female singing group “Prekonoga”

The Svrljig Area in Ethnomusicological Research

Svrljig, today a municipality in the city of Niš, is considered part of an amethanastical area (an area without larger migrations from and out of it) – Šopluk, and is located in the region commonly labelled in local ethnomusicology as Southeastern Serbia (also defined in Zakić /Zakić/ 2009: 2). The area of Svrljig is divided into “eastern” and “western” cultural zones, with the village that is considered here, Prekonoga, belonging to the former (Петровић /Petrović/ 1992: 372). Folk music (i.e. rural folk music, in accordance with particular research politics and conditions in the field) from the Svrljig area has been the subject of several ethnomusicological studies, so nowadays

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there exist several publications with fundamental ethnomusicological material (i.e. field recordings and music transcriptions) from the end of the nineteenth century, unfortunately published no earlier than the beginning of the 1930s (Ђорђевић /Đorđević/ 1931), from the period of the 1960s (Petrović and Ilijin 1963–1965), from the end of the 1980s (in Девић /Dević/1992, there are transcriptions of his material collected in the 1960s and the end of the 1980s, and later one part of his sound recordings is published in Golemović 2013), from the end of the century (Стевановић /Stevanović/ 1999, Михаиловић /Mihaailović/ 2000), and finally from the beginning of this century (Думнић /Dumnić/ 2006, partly published in Думнић /Dumnić/ 2011). During these research processes, vocal, instrumental and dance forms, as well as ethnographic data about rituals and customs were collected. Ethnomusicological research from Đorđević's notations up until 2006 proved a continuation of the existence of very similar melopoetic forms, which is highly valuable for research on Southeast Serbian folk music. Inspired by a rethinking of the tradition of rural singing in Southeastern Serbia, this study is mostly based upon personal field research from December 2006 and a video recording of the group's public performance in 2000.

Today, the most representative carriers of the Svrlijig traditional music practice are the older members of the Amateur Cultural-Artistic Society "Prekonoga" (Serbian: *Amatersko kulturno-umetničko društvo – AKUD*) from the village of the same name.² It is very important to say that the rituals the singers spoke about are not in practice any more in this region and that the recorded samples they performed out of a basic context, as part of their stage repertoire. This corresponds with their existence as a group – they testified that they performed all songs in an authentic context when they were young, but it is obvious that they have been institutionalized as a "folk group" by integrating into the local cultural-artistic society later on (in 2000). In practice, this means that as a "folk group" they are widely considered to be the preservers of the authentic Serbian folklore, but their staged performance actually enters into the domain of folklorism (they even participated recently at "Šljivik", TV show at Radio Television of Serbia, dedicated to the preservation of folk music and dance in form of competition for the best performer). Here, this term means placing folk heritage out of its primary context (which is why the function and communication between participants is altered), while the creations of folk "art" mostly remain unchanged. In this context, the fact that the singers recorded

² In December 2006 four female singers and dancers (alphabetically: Drenovka Đorđević /born 1942/, Malina Milojković /b. 1943/, Malina Miljković /b. 1940/, Vladanka Petrović /b. 1937/) were recorded. The group manager (Ana Jovanović) and bagpipe player (Nenad Jovanović) were also valuable informants about the musical folklore of the village. I am thankful to them for performing their heritage for my research.

their repertoire,³ mentioned their television appearances, and have also written some songs, can be noted. The latter shows that the singers have firm aesthetic criteria for the style and musical-poetical dimensions of their singing. These criteria are conditioned by the demands of the wider auditory, as well as the more professional one – they are established in relation to other singing groups (Ranković 1999), but also through lasting cooperation with eminent ethnomusicologists who have helped them to become recognisable and to cherish their repertoire as the most representative of Svrljig folklore. Their presence and performance as an amateur singing group can be characterized as a means of involving the local population in politically correct social and culture activities which preserve tradition, identity etc. (Čolović 2006: 124) and as an institution of spontaneous collective expression (more in Hofman 2010: 37).

Two-Part Singing Styles in the “Prekonoga” Repertoire

Given the fact that two-part singing is emphasised within this group, from the aspect of the researcher and the performers themselves, two-part singing is the main focus of this paper, so the main characteristics of two-part folk singing in Serbia, and in the narrower region of Svrljig, will be briefly presented. In the Serbian rural tradition, two-part singing is the dominant manner of vocal expression. Different manifestations of two-part singing texture show different chronological layers in the Serbian music tradition: the older and newer rural manners of vocal performance. In contrast to the older singing form, which is considered to be archaic, the newer form of two-part singing, with supposed Western European origin, appeared in the Serbian tradition around the middle of the twentieth century and has been transmitted and popularised by the mass media. It became especially popular as a part of partisan folklore after World War Two (see more about the incorporation of partisan songs in rural folklore in Hercigonja 1972). On the other hand, there is the opinion that two-part singing is related to the archaic instrument of the area, the bagpipe (*gajde*) – the older style corresponds with the drone texture of the two-pipe instrument, while the characteristic ending fifth of the newer two-part singing style may have its origin in the cadenza motif performed on the three-pipe instrument typical of the Svrljig region (Dević 1978: 187; for the connection between the newer two-part singing and the bagpipe see also Golemović 1981: 9 and Лажих Михајловић /Lajić Mihajlović/ 2000: 136–140).

³ They made permanent recordings for Radio Belgrade in September 2006. I am thankful to ethnomusicologist Mirjana Drobac, music editor at Radio Television of Serbia, for this information.

Generally, older and newer rural diaphonies in Serbia vary in numerous parameters: vertical sonority structure, level of sound temperation, ambit of parts, melo-strophe form, metro-rhythmic base, timbre, ornamentation, and often in the number of participants and in the terminology of performers. Therefore, the older style is characterized by the following features: heterophone and/or drone texture, emphasized second in the vertical sonority in a nontempered and narrow sound system and a specific ornamentation manner. The characteristics of the newer style are: homophone texture with a consonant harmony, wider pitch frame, more developed form of melo-strophe, a tendency towards clearly organized metro-rhythmical pulsation and the possibility of a larger number of participants. Rural folk singing in the Svrljig region belongs to the Shopluk diaphony style (as opposed to Dinaric – another older two-part singing style present in Serbia; Девић /Dević/ 2002: 36); it will be described later. The above-mentioned researchers note two-part singing samples from the region of Svrljig, but Đorđević notes from the beginning, and those of Dević, Petrović and Ilijin from the middle of the twentieth century, show dominant illustrations of the older singing style. Nevertheless, among Dević's examples there are also several songs interpreted in the newer style, but performed by singers from other villages who are mostly male (transcriptions in Dević 1992 and sound samples in Golemović 2013).

The group's repertoire consisted of songs that belong to both the older and newer singing styles. Even though the coexistence of these different singing styles is present among groups from other parts of Serbia, the phenomenon of bimusicality is rather marginalised in the existing Serbian ethnomusicological literature (the first of very few mentions in Serbian ethnomusicology was in Dević 1997: 135, 136). The attention of researchers was mostly directed towards the differences between certain songs and ways of singing, so these styles have been studied separately or in parallel (cf. e.g. Девић /Dević/ 1986). Even when they are related, the styles have been observed at the level of their mutual influences (which do not necessarily exist): in such cases, it is usually said that the newer singing style threatens to quash or contaminate the older one (Golemović 1981: 6; Dević 1997). Moreover, the older singing style has elements strongly rooted in the Serbian tradition (e.g. the intentional presence of the second in the vertical sonority within a cadence), which continue to exist in the newer musical system (Golemović 1981: 35). Interestingly, some regions of Southeastern Serbia have still not accepted the newer style of singing because of their geographic isolation, which contributed to the stronger perseverance of the older singing style.

A music group is considered to be a group of at least two people who share the same concepts of performing, consuming, distribution

and evaluation of music (Baumann 1989: 41). The fixed and most well-known members of the group “Prekonoga” at the time of the field research (2006) were four female singers and one male bagpipe-player, between seventy five and eighty one years old. All of them were from the village formerly mentioned, except one woman who had come from the near-by village for marriage and who claims that the ritual-custom practice differs among villages. The singers had no musical education and learned how to sing by listening to the older women – they even participated as singers in the rituals they were talking about. Apart from being performers, they also provided important information on the rituals and customs of this region, such as wedding (*svadba*), harvest (*žetva*), Saint George’s day (*Đurđevdan*), Lazarus Saturday (*Lazareva subota*), the rainmakers’ procession (*dodole*), vineyard picking (*branje grožđa*) etc. When we met, they were not able to recall all of the songs sung in the former rituals; they also performed some of the non-ritual songs, with lyrical themes and using another musical system. They were also representatives of the local folk dance practice with archaic instrumental accompaniment, which shows their familiarity with the older strata of rural folklore.

In analysing the songs performed by the “Prekonoga” group, different invariant structures (models), results in concrete melodies, were noted. These formulas were named as aria (*arije*) by the interviewed singers, for both diaphonical styles. It is most likely that this term is of recent origin, although the singers themselves said nothing about that directly. In addition to this stands the fact that, in this village in prior decades, Dević registered the use of the term “voice” (lit. *glas*) (Dević 1992). The term *glas*, common in the Serbian tradition, is characterised by researchers as an intonative and melodic type (pattern) which consists of the elements that dominate in a large number of similar melodic profiles (Радиновић /Radinović/ 2001: 41; Јовановић /Jovanović/ 2014).

The singers’ perception of the coexistence and interpretation of different singing styles, bimusicality, is illustrated though the different comprehensions of “arias” (melodical models) as female (or the older musical model) and male (or the newer musical model). At the same time, this is also a gender classification that indicates the “female” preservation of the old tradition (including rituals and customs) and the “male” or rather “male-female” preservation of the newer vocal expression. It is interesting to note that these singers speak of the “male aria” as an old tradition even while later saying that one song performed in that particular style is their product as authors. Since this is certainly a newer tradition, a question can arise as to whether the singers introduced changes in their repertoire based on their aesthetic preferences, while continuing to present the songs as archaic. These

singers nevertheless long to stay “talented anonymous individuals” and in that manner to contribute to the opulent folk art in the domain of reproduction production.

The **older** two-part singing is organized in such a way that one singer “leads” (*vodi*) and the other “follows” (*prati*), as they say. When talking about the older style, it can be noted that singers are gathered in two two-member groups and sing alternately – the second group sings the strophe that follows without canonic treatment of the strophes. The most highly emphasized characteristic of this style is the texture, which is predominantly in the form of a rhythmic drone. The second is dominant in the vertical sonority; non-temperament and occasional intonative instability are common, as is a narrow melodic range. At the beginning of each strophe there is a dull exclamation syllable “(h)e” with the conveying character which is of a longer length and by upward glissando accomplishes the axis-sound g^1 . The typical ornamentation of this singing style is clucking sounds. In some ritual genres there may be the sound “i¹”, downward in glissando from (approximately) f^2 at the end of the melo-strophe. It is interesting that the performed examples are in *parlando rubato* metro-rhythm with the occasional tendency towards distribution in the refrain. The metrics of the verse may be septosyllabic (4, 3), symmetrical octosyllabic (4, 4) or asymmetrical decasyllabic (4, 6). In the formal aspect it is notable that the lengths of lyrical and musical phrase often do not overlap. Some songs have a framing verse. The older singing can be illustrated with the song *Cornel Is Flowering in the Green Mountain* (*Drenak cveta u goru zelenu*, Example 1) which is usually sung on Lazarus Saturday. It is interesting that a song of this genre, even of this melodic type, was also noted in 1987 (Dević 1992: 464–467), so it is important to note its vitality during the second half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, this tune is present in different genres and its characteristics (such as X /4, 6/, frame verse, outcry) can also be recognized in wedding songs (Dević 1992: 432). This demonstrates a coherence between the genres of the rural ritual singing calendar (Dumnić 2006: 16), also present in neighbouring areas and interpreted as part of the magical connection of the whole annual cycle of customs for the fertility, health and prosperity of the local community (Радиновић /Radinović/ 1992: 122). Such a melodic and contextual basis certainly led to the stability of the older two-part singing style in the repertoire of those singers.

The main characteristic of their **newer** singing style is of one soloist standing out in front of a group of an unlimited number of performers. It is interesting that this “male aria” can be performed by both men and women, even combined, probably because this way of singing has no sacred contextual basis, as is the case with the older style. It has to be mentioned that a singer who had not formerly been

exposed in such a context “led” only one song of this kind. The newer singing differs from the older in almost every aspect: apart from the striking homophonic texture, the more tempered note relations in the leading melody, the wider ambit, the tendency towards establishing a precise metro-rhythmic base, the different manner of ornamenting (e.g. vibrato), the different timbre with clear lyrical articulation, and the strophic form of rhymed couplets are present. In the formal aspect the accordance of the music’s length with the lyrical phrase is obvious. The group’s newer singing style represents their self-written song *Hey, Svrljig, City in the Valleys (Oj, Svrljigu, grade u doline*, Example 2). This song demonstrates several interesting aspects of rural singing in this area. Namely, it is sung to one of the typical tunes of newer two-part singing and it became very popular as part of partisan folklore in Yugoslavia during World War Two (Golemović 1981: 12, 44–45). Apart from being commonly considered as “folk”, it actually has a composer and title – Oskar Danon, *Ide Tito preko Romanije*. He composed it in 1942 on the basis of the musical folklore of the Romanija region, Eastern Bosnia (Danon 1982). In relation to the heritage of the Svrljig region, it is important to mention that this song was recorded in 1966 in the village of Burdimmo, and that the performers were men who sang it intonatively correctly (Dević 1992: 505–506; cf. Golemović 2013). Moreover, this song is interesting in terms of the aforementioned idea that two-part singing might have emerged from the sound made by the bagpipe. The very song *Ide Tito preko Romanije* was given to a player of the local bagpipe variant (*erske gajde*), but he was unable to perform it correctly because of a different musical thinking (Vukosavljević 1981: 51), which corresponds to the older folklore. Finally, the “Prekonoga” group took this music and wrote other lyrics based on the theme of love, using local motifs, the local dialect and poetic interventions in order to fill the decasyllabic verse (adding the syllable “-ulj” in two lines). This kind of adjustment is typical of creations in the newer two-part singing style (Golemović 1981: 10, 33).

In spite of the idea that the vertical sonority result would be two-part singing, in the case of a large number of performers there maybe the presence of additional notes which are accidental, or wrong. The impression is that, while performing, the voices are rather relaxed, and singers do not pay as much attention to vertical sonority perfection as was the case with the older singing style, which was sung correctly. Given this fact, it is easy to notice that the older style is rooted in group’s music heritage and that is why they have trouble in adjusting to the newer style.

Bimusicality and the Repertoire of Singing Group “Prekonoga”

The ability of these singers to cherish two interpretative styles allows the study of the level of bimusicality. It is widely known in ethnomusicology that the term “bimusicality” has several meanings. This term is common in literature nowadays and very useful in applied ethnomusicology (cf. e.g. Solis 2004). It was introduced by Mantle Hood in the middle of the last century (although the phenomena he discussed existed even earlier), implicating the practical mastery of students of ethnomusicology in foreign, “exotic” music, for which he provides methodological instructions (Hood 1960: 55–59). After that, the question arose among professionals of whether the performers themselves (whose music is studied) can be bimusical. Bruno Nettl said that there are many people belonging to different cultures who are originally bimusical (or even polymusical) and who behave in the same manner as bilinguals (or even polylinguals). Moreover, it is possible that some folk music performers are familiar with e.g. classical music (Nettl 1983: 50), or that some musicians in urban settings are performing diverse music styles and genres (Cottrell 2007). Timothy Rice offered a retrospective view in reviewing Hood’s concept, outlining the original ideas of bimusicality and its methodological operativeness (Rice 1994: 332–333). Also, Stephen Cottrell gave an overview of the existing literature related to this concept (Cottrell 2007).

Ruža Bonifačić made an important contribution to this issue in a region of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. While studying Hood’s conception of “bi-musicality” and Blacking’s conception of musicality (Blacking 1973), she differentiates between the broader and narrower meanings of bimusicality. The term “broader bi-musicality” represents “the ability of the individual to listen, accept, to like and understand two different musical styles in the performance of which he may, but need not, participate” (Bonifačić 1997: 37). The term “narrower bi-musicality” is closely related to Hood’s opinion and therefore implies “competent mastery of two different musical styles” (Bonifačić 1997: 50). She studies the bimusicality of certain singers from the island of Krk (Croatia) based upon the following parameters: participation in a music performance (with consideration of the repertoire, age of the performers and the area in which they perform), the conditions in which the music performance is given, and the manner, style and quality of the interpretation. Of great importance is the factor of which style the new music forms are created in, as well as society’s opinion on the examinee’s competence in both styles (Bonifačić 1997: 52–58). In addition, she introduced the categories of active and passive bimusicality, the latter implying performing badly, but with a high level of interest in various kinds of music (Bonifačić 1997: 58).

Finally, the activity and performance of “Prekonoga” group can be observed comparatively in the manner suggested by Bonifačić. The previously debated two-part singing is the most important common parameter within which their bimusicality can be regarded. It is noticeable that the older songs predominate in their repertoire, probably because of the requests of ethnomusicologists with whom the group have collaborated. As formerly mentioned, in their performances the older two-part singing type prevails, which is seen in quality of the vertical sonority component. While performing the newer songs they are not aware of the fact that they are less successful than while performing the older ones, because of their relaxed voices, the larger number of performers and their conformity to the older style. Their strong and enduring adjustment to the older music style can be explained by their exposure to that folklore in their youth. Although it is more difficult for them to adapt to the newer style, they create the new songs in this very manner, probably because of the applicability of its melodic patterns, but also because of the need to accommodate themselves within the growth of present trends – for example, singing in larger groups, ability to communicate with a wider audience in Serbia, and adjustment to groups from other regions of the country, mostly of Dinaric origin (even the possibility of comparison with those groups). The lack of creativeness in the older style can be interpreted as a preservation of the older songs which are considered as unchangeable things (even as taboo in the original ritual context), given their ritual origin and long tradition. This shows their tendency towards the preservation of the folklore of supposed archaic origin.

The bimusicality of “Prekonoga” is recognisable in the fact that they were very active and prominent performers who knew and used two different music styles. Nevertheless, they showed a stronger tendency towards one: the dominance of the older over the newer style is clear in the manner presented above – this is easily understood given their age, and requests for the older folklore styles by the organisers of public performances; it can also be said that their reputation among audiences has been accomplished with this particular singing style. According to everything discussed, they can be considered as representative performers of the older singing style, which is strongly confirmed by their community. The newer two-part singing of the “Prekonoga” group is of weak quality, but they nonetheless express a keen interest in this singing form and tend to cherish it in the domain of their musical habits and customs. Their bimusicality is “broader”, in Bonifačić’s terms.

The concept of bimusicality in its originally established meaning shows that more than one musical practice can be accomplished and

that it has good results in terms of ethnomusicological methodology. Furthermore, it provides the possibility to observe different types of musical thinking in the repertoires of various musicians. In other words, this concept can be useful in musical cognition research, but also in policies of the sustainability or development of musical cultures. The example analysed here is interesting as a contribution to the application of the bimusicality concept because it is rare illustration of the process of creation in the newer style (i.e. one level of that style) and at the same time as a case of the maintenance of older rural musicality in contemporary Serbia.

EXAMPLES:

♩ = 75

E, dre-nak cve-ta u go-ru ze-le-nu, i!

E, drenak cveta u goru zelenu, i!

E, the cornel is flowering in the greenmountain, i!

Drenak cveta u goru zelenu,
zdravac raste pod velemu stenu.
Zdravče, venče, beru te devojke?
K'd te beru, uz obraz te nose!

The cornel is flowering in the green mountain,
the geranium is growing under the big rock.
Geranium, wreath, are girls picking you?
When they pick you, they wear you near their
cheek!

Example 1: "Drenak cveta u goru zelenu"

♩ = 76

Oj, Svr-lji-gu, gra-de u do-li-ne, gra-de u do-li-ne,
o-ko teb su Svr-lji-ske pla-ni-ne, Svr-lji-ske pla-ni-ne. O.F.

Oj, Svrlijgu, grade u doline, grade u doline
oko teb' su Svrliške planine,
Svrliške planine!

Hey, Svrlijg, city in the valleys, city, in the valleys,
you're surrounded by the Svrlijg
Mountains, the Svrlijg Mountains!

Oj, Svrljigu, grade u doline,
 oko teb' su Svrljiške planine!
 S leve strane – planina Devica,
 u Devicu lepa čobanica.
 A sa desne – Visokulj planina,
 u planinu do dva čobanina.
 A ispodulj dobra reka teče,
 procepa su, medenice zveče.
 Iznad reku čobani planjuju,
 čobanicu pesmom dovikuju.
 „Čobanice s planine Device,
 dođ' kod mene da ti ljubim lice,
 da te vodim u Ravnu pećinu,
 da pokažem svu moju veštinu!”
 Čobanin me poljubi, pa ode,
 ostavi me k'o ribu bez vode
 u pećini da tugujem tugu.
 Ode čoban da miluje drugu...

Hey, Svrljig, city in the valleys,
 you're surrounded by the Svrljig Mountains!
 On the left – Devica Mountain,
 in Devica is a pretty shepherdess.
 And on the right – Visok Mountain,
 in the mountain there are two shepherds.
 And below flowing a good river,
 fissuring and clinking.
 Shepherds are lazing above the river
 and calling the shepherdess with a song.
 “Shepherdess from Devica Mountain,
 come to me to kiss your face,
 to take you into Ravna Cave,
 to show you all my skills!”
 The shepherd kissed me and went,
 left me like a fish without water
 in the cave to grieve.
 The shepherd went to kiss another one...

Example 2: “Oj, Svrljigu, grade u doline”

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КОЕГЗИСТЕНЦИЈА СТАРИЈЕГ И НОВИЈЕГ
ДВОГЛАСНОГ НАРОДНОГ ПЕВАЊА
У СЕЛУ ПРЕКОНОГА (ЈУГОИСТОЧНА СРБИЈА)
КАО ПРИМЕР БИМУЗИКАЛНОСТИ

(Резиме)

У овом раду говори се о певању старијих певачица Аматерског културно-уметничког друштва „Преконога” из истоименог села код Сврљига, које припада музичком дијалекту Југоисточне Србије. Према уважавању поделе сеоског двогласног певања у Србији на старије и новије, као и поделе старијег на динарско и шопско, рурално народно двогласно певање заступљено у Сврљигу може бити старије – шопско, и новије. Старији тип двогласја у овој области може континуирано да се прати у етномузиколошким публикацијама од 1931. до 2011. године. Са друге стране, после Другог светског рата експанзија двогласног певања новије традиције утицала је у одређеној мери и на наслеђе у овом крају. Након представљања карактеристика двогласја сврљишког краја, у студији су анализирани (лични) теренски снимци на којима је заступљено певање обе врсте – традиционално старије сеоско двогласно певање и „ауторско” новијег стила. Коначно, овакав репертоар фолклорне групе из Преконоге посматран је из аспекта бимузикалности, односно способности неговања два различита музичка наслеђа. Закључено је да је у певању старијих певачица АКУД „Преконога” препознатљива „шира бимузикалност”, будући да је доминантан стил сеоског двогласног певања који има дужу традицију.

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