



Jasmina Talam

Akademija za glasbo, Univerza v Sarajevu  
Academy of Music, University of Sarajevo

# A Short Story about a Great Man: Contribution by Svanibor Pettan to the Development of Ethnomusicology in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnian-Herzegovinian ethnomusicology started to develop in the early 1930s. The first Bosnian ethnomusicologist, Friar Branko Marić, began to research the traditional folk music of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1920s and presented the results of his research in the doctoral dissertation *Volkmusik Bosnien und der Herzegovina* (1936). The first systematic ethnomusicological research was initiated by Cvjetko Rihtman in 1947 within the Institute of Folklore Research. The main goal of his fieldwork was the collection of old, traditional “untouched”, and therefore locally colored music forms. Thus, the concept of “authentic” was for a long time dominant in collecting, and when associated with “old” it worked well. However, this one-sided approach had to be overcome, since rigid approach to modern processes was a threat to the development of Bosnian ethnomusicological thought.

The establishment of the Academy of Music in Sarajevo in May 1955 was accompanied by the formation of the Department of Musicology within which first local professionals in this field were educated. The 1970s witnessed a new era in Bosnian ethnomusicology, primarily due to the work of Ankica Petrović. “Since that time, the subject of Bosnian ethnomusicology has expanded into research of the context and function of music, and thus acquired new dimensions that bring ethnomusicology closer to other scientific disciplines such as sociology of music, ethnology, anthropology, etc. Thus, the subject of ethnomusicology was no more only the structural analysis of given music forms, but also their functional and cultural analysis.”<sup>1</sup> The first connection with Bosnian ethnomusicology, Svanibor Pettan had in the 1980s.

1 Jasmina Talam and Karača Beljak Tamara, “Ethnomusicological Research and Fieldwork Methodology – Experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” in *Approaches to Music Research: between Practice and Epistemology*, vol. 6 of *Methodology of Music Research*, eds. L. Stefanija and N. Schüler (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 98.

*I am linked to Bosnian (ethno)musicology and (ethno)musicologists through numerous, content-rich and warm ties. It all started as early as 1982, when I attended the gathering of students of Yugoslav music academies at Ilidža near Sarajevo, where I presented my Zanzibar material and thus represented my home institution of Zagreb. Dr. Ankica Petrović, Professor at the Academy of Music in Sarajevo, was the one who, as a torchbearer for the entirety of Yugoslavia of new visions and approaches in the profession and in 1987 a member of the committee at the defense of my master's thesis in Ljubljana, opened up for me – as well as for a series of her own students (Ljerka Vidić, Dane Kusić, Mirjana Laušević and Rajna Klaser) – the path to doctoral studies in the USA, for which I am eternally grateful.<sup>2</sup>*

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) had implicit consequences on ethnomusicology. Most of the active ethnomusicologists left the country and those who remained fought for survival. Thanks to Vinko Krajtmajer at the Academy of Music in Sarajevo, the Department of Musicology survived and preserved the largest ethnomusicological sound archive. The war has also encouraged scholars from different fields to point out the disaster that happened and encouraged the international community to help in solving problems, and to use their knowledge to help those that were affected. Professor of theology at the University of Leeds, Adrian Hastings, wrote a little book titled *SOS Bosnia* (1993), and later founded the Alliance for the defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ADBH)<sup>3</sup> from which the Bosnian Institute was created and based in London in 1997.<sup>4</sup>

In order to draw attention to the sufferings of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ankica Petrović and Ted Levin released the CD *Bosnia: Echoes from an Endangered World* (1993) in which they selected the examples of Bosnian music recorded during their fieldwork in 1984–85 and several commercial recordings.<sup>5</sup> According to Levin, “the musical sounds presented on these recordings were silenced in many parts of Bosnia (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Some of the performers died, at least one was wounded and one captured, the others escaped in the midst of war bloodshed, their fate is unknown, and inaccessible.”<sup>6</sup>

2 Svanibor Pettan, section “Rekli su...,” in: *60 godina Muzičke akademije u Sarajevu (2005–2015) – Deset novih godina* (Sarajevo: Muzička akademija, 2016), 25.

3 The first issue is a short version of the text “Save Bosnia”, which was sent as an appeal to the UN to lift the arms embargo against the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina as “a means of defending itself and its population from well-armed aggressors”. They also advocated an appropriate military intervention under the auspices of the UN in support of Bosnian sovereignty and integrity. This appeal was signed by numerous professors of British universities and several members of parliament (“Save Bosnia!,” accessed August 1, 2018, <http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/oct93/saveb.cfm>).

4 Hastings joined musicologist Bojan Buijić, professor at University of Oxford, renowned historian Noel Malcom, Brendan Simms, professor at University of Cambridge and journalist Melanie McDonagh. In October 1993, the Alliance began publishing monthly news called Bosnia Report, which was published from 1997 to 2007 under the same title as an on-line magazine. The journal contained texts of various contents, including those about music, which were trying to spread awareness of the political and cultural identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

5 All income from CD sales was donated to humanitarian organizations operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ted Levin and Ankica Petrović donated the revenue from the CD to surviving folk musicians. The last donation was presented at the Academy of Music in Sarajevo on June 17, 2017.

6 Ted Levin and Ankica Petrović, *Bosnia: echoes from an endangered world*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian / Folkways SF40407, 1993, compact disc.

Svanibor Pettan, with the project Azra, had given the most important contribution to the research of musical activities of Bosnian refugees and their practical application.<sup>7</sup> The project involved three mutually connected groups of activities:

1. Research on the cultural – and specifically musical – identity of Bosnian refugees in Norway;
2. Education for the Norwegians and the Bosnians in Norway through:
  - a) Music in Exile and Ethnomusicology classes taught at the University of Oslo, and
  - b) Lectures in refugee centers on Bosnian music and Music and war on the territories of former Yugoslavia; and
3. Music-making within the Azra ensemble.<sup>8</sup>

The project aimed to create such a state of mind among the refugees that should help them to live in the present time in Norway, and also to prepare them for co-existence in multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina in the future. After fieldworks, which involved refugees located in different parts of Norway (Arendal, Hemsedal, Oslo, Trondheim, Tromsø), regular lectures held at the University of Oslo had followed and finally, public lectures for both Bosnians and Norwegians were organised. As the result of the activities that happened beforehand, the Azra Ensemble was formed in which both Bosnian refugees and Norwegian students participated. The first public performance of the ensemble was held in March of 1994 in the hall of the National association of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Oslo and was followed by other performances in refugee camps and in front of Norwegian audiences. Project Azra was quickly recognised as the model through which ethnomusicologists transmit knowledge “from a fairly small and closed circle of academic elites to those that such knowledge can help in everyday life, from making political decisions to establishing coexistence in the field.”<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that through public presentations at lectures and international symposiums, interviews for written and electronic media, and through numerous works, Pettan presented the results of his research, and thus contributed to the strengthening of Bosnian cultural identity and stimulating positive cultural communication.

During the war, ethnomusicologists could not conduct research in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They felt lonely and were left to themselves. This research by Svanibor Pettan, as well as his human and professional endeavors, has encouraged us to act in a hopeless situation and realize how important our work is in impossible conditions. War devastation, mass displacement of the population and life in the diaspora significantly influenced the determinants and goals of ethnomusicological research in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. The few ethnomusicologists who survived the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, faced great challenges: studying not only traditional music, but also contemporary musical forms and processes. Bosnian ethnomusicologists needed every kind of assistance – from professional to friendly – that would restore confidence and

7 Research was conducted by Svanibor Pettan as part of a three-year project titled *The Resonant Community in some Norwegian schools*, which was lead by Kjell Skjellstad.

8 Svanibor Pettan, “Making the Refugee Experience Different: ‘Azra’ and the Bosnians in Norway,” in *War, Exile, Everyday Life*, eds. Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Maja Povržanović (Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996), 249.

9 Svanibor Pettan, “Uloga znanstvenika u stvaranju pretpostavki za suživot: Ususret primijenjenoj etnomuzikologiji,” *Narodna umjetnost* 32, no. 2 (1995): 231.

help them to engage in world scientific trends. In those years, Svanibor Pettan provided the first and most important assistance.

*I was thrilled with Prof. Dr. Ivan Čavlović's initiative to organize the first postwar meeting of (ethno)musicologist from the former homeland in Sarajevo in 1998. With his wholehearted support and help from older colleagues Tamara Karača Beljak and Jasmina Talam I started writing a new chapter of Bosnian ethnomusicology. It was with joy and pride that I accepted the invitation to participate in that process. It was followed by lectures, mentorships, reviews, memberships in commissions, participation in projects, organisation of scientific events, presentation of reports and publication of papers.<sup>10</sup>*

In addition to the expert help, Svanibor Pettan brought us extremely important and recent literature. His warm and friendly support, cordiality and the desire to re-invigorate Bosnian ethnomusicology was an incentive for all of us. Since 2006, when I started working at the Academy of Music, our collaboration has become very intense. Thanks to Svanibor Pettan, after almost 20 years, we participated in the international ethnomusicological project *Perception of the Turks and the East in folk music in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia: Ethnomusicological Parallels* (2008/2009). Members of the project team were Svanibor Pettan, Katarina Juvančič, Vojko Veršnik, Tamara Karača Beljak and me. Project activities included guest lectures, workshops, joint research and participation at conferences. When I think about my first stay in Ljubljana, special memories come to mind. Tamara and I were supposed to hold guest lectures at the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts. We prepared the lectures very carefully, but there was still anxiety (or rather a fear) of whether our topics were interesting to Slovenian students and whether we would justify the trust Svanibor placed in us. To our great astonishment, the classroom was full of students. In the first row, there were also a few elderly listeners who we did not know. Although we had teaching experience (Tamara has worked at the Academy of Music since 2000 and I also previously taught at school), our nerves were in tatters. Svanibor was fully aware of our state and, in a very discreet way, helped us at any given time. The lecture was very interesting for the students, what could be concluded from the numerous questions that followed the lecture. And finally, the people sitting in the first row came to us – professors Kjell Skjellstad and Manfred Heidler – and congratulated us. It is hard to describe the happiness and pride we felt at that moment. At the same time, we were very grateful to Svanibor for giving us the opportunity to gain the first lecture experience outside the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This stay in Ljubljana was a milestone in my professional and private relationship with Svanibor. In him I saw a person with whom I could share all my thoughts and ideas, but also someone who – without any hesitation – offers advice and every kind of help. In private, in Svanibor I saw a great friend who tried to make our every moment unforgettable.

---

10 Svanibor Pettan, section "Rekli su...", in: *60 godina Muzičke akademije u Sarajevu (2005–2015) – Deset novih godina* (Sarajevo: Muzička akademija, 2016), 25.



*Picture 4: Excursion in Bled, Slovenia, 2008.*

*From the left: Kjell Skjellstad, Tamara Karača Beljak, Jasmina Talam and Svanibor Pettan*

In this short text, I want to look at one in a series of events in which Svanibor showed His qualities as an extraordinary scholar of personal and professional integrity. In December 2009, I applied for the position of Assistant Professor. According to the rules, I was obliged to hold an inaugural lecture. One of the members of the commission was Svanibor Pettan. He had to come to Sarajevo the day before the lecture. That afternoon, very rapidly a thick fog descended upon the city. When I came to the airport, I saw the plane, instead of landing, changing direction and returning to Ljubljana. After a little less than an hour, I intended to call the dean and tell him that we will have to cancel the lecture because the plane from Ljubljana did not land. At that moment, Svanibor called me from Ljubljana and said briefly: "The battery is empty, and I can not talk for a long time. Soon, I will be on a plane to Vienna and come from Vienna to Sarajevo. Do not worry, I'm coming tonight." I did not manage to utter a single word, I just started crying. And he arrived with the only plane that landed that night in Sarajevo. I waited for him at the airport in a bad mood because he had to go through so much trouble because of me. When he arrived he said cheerfully: "I said that I had to be in Sarajevo tonight, the plane was full and they gave me a ticket for the business class. I had a really nice flight." And in the years to come, Svanibor Pettan was our driving force. He constantly transferred his energy and work enthusiasm to us. Thanks to his initiative, Tamara and I gathered all Bosnian ethnomusicologists and established the ICTM National Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2012), organized the symposiums of the ICTM Study Group of Maqam and the ICTM Study Group of Music Instruments, and other activities that significantly contributed to the development of Bosnian ethnomusicology. Without any doubt, it can be said that Svanibor Pettan opened a new chapter in Bosnian ethnomusicology. Through his research and social engagement, he pointed to the suffering of Bosnian refugees in Norway, helped them to overcome the most difficult moments in

life and contributed to better communication between the Bosnians and Norwegians. This research was his unique voice to stop the war and to stop the suffering of all of us in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the postwar period, Svanibor Pettan was unselfishly assisting his Bosnian colleagues, opening our views, directing and encouraging us to follow new approaches of research and to present our research results at international conferences. Through his direct and indirect action, he significantly contributed to the development of Bosnian-Herzegovinian ethnomusicology.

On behalf of my colleagues and myself I want to use this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and respect to Svanibor Pettan for his continued support of his Bosnian colleagues and contributing to the development of Bosnian-Herzegovinian ethnomusicology.

## References

- Bosnian institute. "Save Bosnia!" *Bosnian institute*. Accessed August 1, 2018. <http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/oct93/saveb.cfm>.
- Levin, Ted and Petrović, Ankica. *Bosnia: echoes from an endangered world*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian / Folkways SF40407, 1993, compact disc.
- Pettan, Svanibor. "Uloga znanstvenika u stvaranju pretpostavki za suživot: Ususret primijenjenoj etnomuzikologiji." *Narodna umjetnost* 32, no. 2 (1995): 217–234.
- Pettan, Svanibor. "Making the Refugee Experience Different: 'Azra' and the Bosnians in Norway." In *War, Exile, Everyday Life*, edited by Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Maja Povržanović, 245–255. Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996.
- Pettan, Svanibor. "Applied Ethnomusicology and Empowerment Strategies: Views from Across the Atlantic." *Muzikološki zbornik/Musicological Annual* 44, no. 1 (2008):85–99.
- Pettan, Svanibor. Section "Rekli su...." In: *60 godina Muzičke akademije u Sarajevu (2005–2015)*. *Deset novih godina*, 25–26. Sarajevo: Muzička akademija, 2016.
- Talam, Jasmina, and Karača Beljak Tamara. "Ethnomusicological Research and Fieldwork Methodology – Experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina." In *Approaches to Music Research: between Practice and Epistemology*. Vol. 6. of *Methodology of Music Research*, edited by L. Stefanija and N. Schüler, 97–102. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011.