

## A STUDY OF THE DOBROGEAN LIPOVAN RUSSIAN WEDDING REPERTOIRE

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### **Abstract**

Living mainly in the Romanian counties of Tulcea, Braila, Constanta and Ialomita, Lipovan Russians are a small ethnic group (consisting of about 40,000 people) of Russian origin (Eastern Slavs).

One of the most important events in human life is the wedding. The nuptial ceremony amongst Lipovan communities has preserved a very high number of ethnic features within the stages of wooing, engagement and the wedding ceremony itself. All these stages have been preserved and have gradually adapted to changing times under the influence of modernity and pressures from without.

Regarding the traditional music of the Lipovan Russians we can say that it bridges a period of profound change. All these changes demonstrate that the tradition has not disappeared, but that the music adapts to conditions imposed by society and progress. The evolution and development of the Dobrogean Lipovan Russian community has led to their adaptation of their repertoire to instruments borrowed from neighbouring ethnic groups: these include the electronic organ, the accordion, and percussion instruments. To preserve their Lipovanian folk culture within the mainly Daco-Romanian cultural context of the Dobrogea, demonstrates just how vigorous this traditional culture must be given their survival amidst an alien environment.

**Key words:** *Lipovan Russians, traditional music, traditional wedding.*

Living mainly in the Romanian counties of Tulcea, Braila, Constanta and Ialomita, Lipovan Russians are a small ethnic group (consisting of about 40,000 people) of Russian origin (Eastern Slavs). Small groups of Lipovans live in Moldova, including Bucovina. It is difficult to determine the Russian regions from where they migrated to Romania. Arriving from all provinces of Russia, these 'Starovers' ('Old Ritualists') took refuge in what is known as the transit areas of the Don and Kuban from where some of them made their way into Romania itself.

This migration took place in the middle of the seventeenth century as a result of the schism in the Orthodox Church which followed the Synod of 1654 and the reform of the Orthodox Church by the Russian Patriarch Nikon. When Peter the Great came to power the process intensified. Measures introduced by this Tsar in the interests of

Europeanisation led the Russian Lipovans to abandon Russia and embrace exile<sup>1</sup>. In Romania, the main ethnic group established itself between freshwater lakes and reed-covered marshes a few kilometers from the Black Sea. The sea provided a source of food while the reeds provided a source of fuel and the raw material necessary for the construction of their dwellings. Starovers are first mentioned on our lands in 1762, in the village of Sarichioi. In leaving their homeland and accepting the status of an ethnic minority, the *lipateii* (as Lipovan Russians are known in Romanian) have nevertheless maintained their traditions and customs relating to language, dress, and particularly, religion, within their adopted lands. Their choice of a precarious existence on hostile territory is testament to their determination to preserve the values in which they believed and in which they still believe.

Lipovan women have always been known for their hard work and talent in cooking dishes of great distinction. Lipovan men meanwhile turned to fishing and beekeeping, occupations which they still pursue. They are renowned for building coracles (in Russian 'lodka'). These coracles, built by *marangozi* (in Turkish 'carpenters'), are black, narrow, paddle-driven fishing boats, which can glide easily through the Delta reed-beds. Furthermore the Lipovans make their own nets and accessories necessary for the practice of their trade.

Whitewashed Lipovan houses were built from materials that were ready to hand: blue-painted walls of mud-brick, doors and windows of fretwork, and thatched roofs. The house was usually surrounded by a verandah resting on wooden poles (with or without a fence). Every house sported a *lejeanca* - a huge stove typical of the Romanian hearth itself - on which the Lipovans were accustomed to lie down to rest. The house proper was extended to include working annexes including storage areas, a summer kitchen, an animal coop, and a boat-house, if necessary, or an area for agricultural tools. Attached to Lipovan households even today, one can find sauna-like Lipovan bath-houses called *Bania*. In contemporary house construction, traditional building materials specific to the Dobrogean ('Lower Danube') area have given way to modern ones.

In every Lipovan house there is a special place reserved as a shrine. Icons are placed in a corner of the room on a wooden stand. A candle is lit as a matter of course on feast-days or during periods of prayer. In front of their icons the Lipovans open their hearts and enter into sacred communion with God.

In the past the Russian Lipovans were recognized by their traditional dress, both by that worn both in everyday life and by that worn in church. Currently this traditional dress is only encountered within the context of the community's religious practices or of performances of folkloric music. These traditional costumes have been recreated in order to confer the necessary authenticity on the artistic and cultural practices of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lipovans follow the Julian calendar which has remained unchanged since the schism in the Russian Orthodox Church and which lags behind the Gregorian by thirteen days.

Traditional men's costume consisted of boots or shoes, loose trousers and a 'rubaska' - a collarless shirt worn over the trousers and tied in the middle by a 'pois', a belt of coloured wool with tassels at the ends.

Women would dress in ankle-length skirts or pinafores, similarly hitched at the middle with a 'pois'. The woman's head was covered by a headscarf as a matter of course. Young unmarried would arrange their hair in a single plait tied by a ribbon.

The isolation that the Delta afforded them helped the Russian *Lipoveni* to preserve their traditions until early last century. For about 200 years life had remained unaltered for the Lipovans. After the Second World War, the communist regime imposed forced collectivization thereby triggering migration from rural areas to urban. The Lipovans were not spared the effects of communism. They spread into the industrialized cities effectively becoming ethnic minorities. Their situation became increasingly more difficult. The hardest blow was being barred from entering churches.

Lipovan customs, in common with most Orthodox peoples, are closely related to religious feast-days and the important calendrical events of human life.

One of the most important events in human life is the wedding. The nuptial ceremony amongst Lipovan communities has preserved a very high number of ethnic features within the stages of wooing, engagement and the wedding ceremony itself. All these stages have been preserved and have gradually adapted to changing times under the influence of modernity and pressures from without.

Both in the past and currently, the role of matchmaker falls on the godfather or a family friend of the groom. On a Sunday or feast-day, and always before sunset, the matchmaker goes to the girl's house. If she agrees to marry her suitor, she gives the matchmaker a red bandana to be passed to the prospective bridegroom. The engagement period - *svatastvo* - allows an opportunity for parties to be held both at the young man's house - *acolisnaia* - and at the girl's house - *devisnic*.

In the past, before the wedding ceremony itself (*svadiba*), gatherings were organized in which girls and women sang songs and made handkerchiefs with lace trimmings, to be given as gifts to the wedding contingent.

In accordance with tradition, the groom goes with family and friends to the girl's home on the day of the wedding. Here the tradition of the groom 'buying' the bride is enacted. In a loud voice, the groom's entourage finds various faults with the future bride, hoping thereby to obtain a lower purchase price. The future bridegroom haggles with the friends of the future bride until the amount offered is considered satisfactory and in line with the 'value' of the particular qualities of the young girl. The bargaining takes place against a musical backdrop, the group of girls singing throughout. The lad is put to the test over a prolonged period, during which the bride is often replaced by an older, and not particularly attractive, woman. The impostor-bride tries to tempt the groom to choose her as his wife, but he stands firm until his heart's choice is brought before him. From that moment the festivities begin.

Amongst Russian Lipovans, the wedding ceremony proper begins with the entrance of the procession into the church. Thanks to the strength of their faith, they have preserved the custom by which the wedding couple crown each other at the

church, dressed in costumes appropriate to a religious context. The bride and groom kneel in church in front of the icon, light a candle, and begin praying to God to bless their marriage and to ward off troubles.

In the past, for the wedding service, the bride would have worn a colourful traditional costume, stretching from neck to heel. Today, brides can opt for the costume to be in white but without any other changes. The girl's hair, which, until marriage, is worn braided into a single plait, is untied in the church and braided in two plaits by the godmother. This new hairstyle marks the transition from the celibacy of the young girl to a new state of being, that of wife. Meanwhile the two plaits symbolise a new family grouping. On the bride's head are placed the 'Kicika', that is a skull-cap, under which the hair is gathered, and the 'kaseak', a form of headkerchief. These are then overlaid and secured by the headscarf.

After the religious ceremony, the wedding entourage, headed by the newlyweds carrying an icon, process to the groom's house. There, the bride is welcomed with bread and salt.

There then follows a party, with food and dance. A traditional food, the rice pudding 'kasnic', is cut into diamond shapes and smeared with honey. The next day, the couple goes to the homes of close relatives and toasts them with red brandy, as a sign that the bride was a virgin.

In the past wedding guests used to give the young family, kitchen utensils, pieces of furniture, woven stuffs etc. All the gifts would be loaded onto a cart which would then pass the homes of all those present at the wedding.

Today weddings are held in venues appointed for the occasion: restaurants, cultural centres, marquees. The wedding guests now give money instead of gifts.

As a token of respect and gratitude towards those who had taken part in the marriage ceremony, the in-laws and the married couple are obliged to go to any future marriage ceremonies involving the families of those who had honoured them by their presence.

### **Organology:**

The traditional instruments of the Lipovan Russians are the balalaika and the harmonica. In the Dictionary of Musical Instruments the balalaika is defined as a plucked string instrument specific to Russian folklore. Extending from a small, triangular sounding-box it consists of a long neck with a long keyboard unit divided into keys. The sounding-box constitutes a hemispherical, acoustic orifice which amplifies the resonance of the instrument. The balalaika has three strings, tuned in accordance with the size of the instrument involved. The sounds are produced by plucking strings of metal or gut using a plectrum or a quill.

Regarding their second traditional instrument, we learn from the same dictionary, that the harmonica is part of the accordion family. It is a wind instrument with a resonator and keyboard. The right-hand keyboard consists of keys while the left hand keyboard consists of buttons called 'basi'.

From the wedding repertoire of the Lipovan Russians I have chosen the so-called "Jelaiu" song ('Desire'). It is a cheerful song, through which wishes of good-omen are expressed for the couple's health, peace, and happiness alongside their loved ones. It derives from Russian music and was immediately assimilated and applied by Lipovans for its appropriateness to weddings. The song has two verses and a chorus that is sung after each verse. At the end of the song the first verse and the chorus is repeated. Participants can dance in pairs to the melody, the exceptional popularity of which as a dance melody is owed to its cheerful character.

Voice

Солн- це яр- ко све- тит и сме- ю- тся де- ти И мы ру- ка об ру- ку

Vo. 4

и- дем сто- бо- ю ря- дом И го- во- рить не на- до все и так по- нят- но

Vo. 7

И мне при- я- тно всем вам го- во- рить Же- ла- ю

Vo. 10

что- бы все бы- ли здо- ро- вы и что- бы над ва- ми Си- я- ло солн- це ярче

Vo. 13

чем на Ма- да- гас- ка- ре Чтоб до ста лет жи- ли чтоб го- ря не зна- ли

Vo. 16

И чтоб ва- ши де- ти вас ра- до- ва- ли Наи на на на на на

Vo. 19

Наи на на на на на Наи на на на на Наи на на на

The tempo is allegro, with the crochet lasting 132 M.M.

The metrical pattern varies from heptasyllabic catalectics, to heptasyllabic catalectics and octosyllabic catalectics. As we see, the catalectic style is not maintained throughout the song. Accommodating the lines of music to an octosyllabic format is achieved by the anacrusal structuring of this song, which produces a broadening of the pattern of heptasyllabic and heptasyllabic lines along with isometricisation to harmonise with the octosyllabic pattern. The rhyming of the verses is a result of the symmetrical combinations of the final feet which link the lines to each other. The

relationship between the verbal and musical line determines the way in which the length of the line of melody and the length of the octosyllabic line are brought into harmony with each other.

The verses are composed of eight musical lines, a result of adding four lines of the verse proper to the four lines of the refrain. The melody of the song is structured around the contrast and coincidence of rhythmico-melodic cells, much use being made of syncope.

The rhythm is 'giusto-syllabic' and the form of the verse melody is fixed, being of a ternary type ABCCvar.

The sound sequence is a diatonic hexachord in minor mode. This hexachord has its origins in a pentatonic scale that we are able to determine on the basis of sounds that are conditioned by the melody. These sounds are *la (la#)-and-do<sup>1</sup>-re<sup>1</sup>-mi<sup>1</sup>*. They impose stability on the song and the *fa<sup>1</sup>* sound which is heard three times, is actually a paean which through its emancipating effect contributes to the evolution of the sound sequence in the direction of a hexachord.

The overall range of a minor sixth *-la- fa<sup>1</sup>* -, defines the structure of the song. The melodic formulae that make up the phrases consist in intervals of a minor third and perfect fourth. In the melodic line of the chorus there are two wider intervals: a perfect fifth interval *la-mi<sup>1</sup>* and a minor sixth *fa<sup>1</sup>*. The profile of all the melodic lines follows a crenellated pattern.

The internal cadences are based on intervals of a fourth, fifth, fourth (with a major seventh) and, at the beginning of the sequence, the second interval being predominant. The final cadence is produced based on the first interval in relation to the second. This relationship to the second interval through which the cadences are produced proves that the sound sequence has evolved on the substratum of a pentatonic scale.

Desire:

The sun is shining strongly and the children are happy.

Together with you I go hand in hand.

I do not have to say anything, because everything is so clear.

I'm so happy and so I'd like to say:

Chorus:

This is my wish for you: that you all remain healthy, that above you the skies are always blue.

That the sun shines as strongly as in Madagascar.

That you live a hundred years, unacquainted with troubles.

And that your children ever bring you joy

I wish you peace and much bountifulness.

And to each and all good I wish all health

I do not need much,

Only that family and friends be by my side

In conclusion we can say that our analysis of the song proper which derives from the nuptial repertoire of the Lipovan Russians has highlighted the following features:

- A melodic profile predominantly descending;
- Internal cadences based on intervals of a 4th and 5th;
- The final cadence based on an interval of a first;
- The architectonic structure of the melodic verses is fixed, of a ternary type;
- The rhythm system is giusto-syllabic;
- This song constitutes a melody of play.

Regarding the traditional music of the Lipovan Russians we can say that it bridges a period of profound change. All these changes demonstrate that the tradition has not disappeared, but that the music adapts to conditions imposed by society and progress. The evolution and development of the Dobrogean Lipovan Russian community has led to their adaptation of their repertoire to instruments borrowed from neighbouring ethnic groups: these include the electronic organ, the accordion, and percussion instruments. To preserve their Lipovanian folk culture within the mainly Daco-Romanian cultural context of the Dobrogea, demonstrates just how vigorous this traditional culture must be given their survival amidst an alien environment.

#### **About the author**

**Mirela Kozlovsky** is associate professor at the Faculty of Arts, "Ovidius" University of Constanța (Romania), where she teaches Theory of Music, History of Music, and Romanian Folk Music. Her main research interests are Romanian culture, current folk music of the Daco-Romanians, Megleno-Romanians and Aromanians. She plans to expand her research to the Romanian communities in Bulgaria and Serbia, to the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia, as well as to other ethnic communities in Dobruja, such as Turks, Lipovans, Tatars etc.