

# Comparative morphological elements found in the *Căluș*, *Călușari* and *Căiuți* folk dances

Delia Claudia STOIAN-IRIMIE<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The rituals of Călușari, Căluș and Căiuți are practiced in different areas of the country and at different times of the year: the Căluș in Muntenia, but mostly in Oltenia, is practiced during the holiday of the Descend of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost); the Călușar in Transylvania, especially in Hunedoara county, is a Christmas tradition, while the Căiuți in Moldova is a folk dance celebrating the New Year. The Călușari, Căluș and Căiuți are complex, syncretic practices that exert their power through music, dance, costume, shouting, ritual objects, different rules, as well as certain interdictions. They are of great importance, as they symbolize the Latin origin of the Romanian people, their historical and cultural continuity. Melodically, the three dances are different, but similarity is present as well, from a morphological standpoint.*

**Key-words:** *dance; folklore; syncretism; ritual; melody.*

## 1. Introduction

The *Căluș*, *Călușari* and *Căiuți* are complex ritual dances, having different fertility, healing or apotropaic valences. Their complexity and the theatrical performance amazed the scientists, as the Oltenian *Căluș* became known since the sixteenth century in a Hungarian chronicle on Transylvania. The *Căluș* dance was described by Dimitrie Cantemir at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the *Description of Moldavia*,<sup>2</sup> which highlighted three important aspects of it: the warrior aspect of the dancers, the magical (thaumaturgical) functions and the esoteric character.

The *Căiuți* or *Călușari* are reminiscent of a cultural episode of horse demons during the winter solstice or spring equinox. In Bukovina, in the local tradition, black horses, as opposed to white horses, appear as demons of darkness, provide evidence of the figurative symbolism of the ancestral horse encountered in the present custom of the masks.

## 2. Etymology of the term *căluș*

From the etymological point of view, the following aspects were found:

- the term *căluș* is derived from the Latin *collusium*, *collusii*, which means group dance or secret society; this aspect is very close to *Căluș* for the dance groups in Transylvania or to the *Căiuți* in Moldova / Bucovina;

- *căluș* designates the diminutive of 'horse,' the mythical solar animal associated with the fertility symbolism; here reference can be made to Indo-European origins, on which the interpretations of magical gestures are based;

- *căluș* also means the piece of wood that muffles the speech, and here we refer to the figure of the mute or the ritualistic muteness in the solemn moments in the existence of a community.

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<sup>1</sup> „Gheorghe Dima” National Music Academy Cluj-Napoca, Piatra Neamț Branch, deliairimie@yahoo.com.

<sup>2</sup> Dimitrie Cantemir. 1909. *Descrierea Moldovei*. București: Editura Librăriei SOCEC&CO, p. 233.

### 3. The duration of the three dances

Although the *Călușari*, *Căluș* and *Căiuți* have a multitude of common elements, they still differ as to the period of time when they take place. Thus, the *Călușari* dance is practiced between December 24 and January 6 in Transylvania, especially in Hunedoara county, the *Căiuți* dance is practiced for the New Year in Moldova and Bukovina, and the *Căluș* (The *Călușari* Dance, *Călușari*) is performed during Pentecost in Muntenia and Oltenia.

### 4. The magic and symbolism of the dances

All three dances are masculine in character, being performed entirely by men. From a chronological point of view, they take place during the solstice or the equinox, which classifies them as the calendar practices (over the year). What renders them similar in a distinct way is the fact that, from the choreographic point of view, magical-symbolic elements appear that relate to the archaic rituality. Thus, we find the circular form of the performance of the dances, where a pole is placed in the centre, which brings to mind the solstice, and the dance in the circle represents the sun itself (solar symbol). The circular movement of the dances is realized in one direction and in the opposite direction, which represents the *making*, *unmaking*, and *remaking* of the circle of the sun.<sup>3</sup>

The rural community receives the *călușarii/căiuții* annually in the household, considering that as a consequence they will cast aside the curses and live a wealthy, healthy life. At the end of the dance, the girls enter the round dance in the hope that they will be lucky in love and marriage. The wormwood, garlic, salt, wool and water, all played by the *călușari*, receive prophylactic qualities and can bring about fertility. The high jumps that the *călușari* perform symbolize the high growth of wheat (an act of magic by analogy). The jumps of the *călușari* over the children are considered sacred acts of healing. The theme of death and resurrection, as well as mimicking the sexual act through the gestures of the mute, also have the purpose of invoking fecundity, fertility.

From a mythological point of view, the horse was not only considered a beautiful nimble animal, but was also encountered in the expression of complex habits. It represents the apotropaic valences of a demonic being from distant times, being invoked at the end of the year, when different evil spirits appear in nature, thus the role of the horse is to purify it. This action of the apotropaic demons is practiced through different forms: the sounds of the bells, the agility and the energy released at the time of the dance, as well as their jumps.

### 5. The costume of the *călușari*

The costumes of the two dances are quite similar. They wear folk holiday clothing, which differ by area. The *călușari* from Muntenia / Oltenia wear a wide-brimmed hat, adorned with multi-coloured beads and ribbons, and the Transylvanian *călușari* wear a black lambskin hat, which has a peacock wedge fastened to the right side of it, together with fir branches, red wool tufts or artificial flowers. According to some photographic images, it was found that, in the nineteenth century, in several localities in Teleorman, Olt and Dolj counties, the *călușarii* wore on their heads a Turkish red hat, which hung on a long tassel. This hat was found in the clothing of the *călușari* until 1965, after which it was replaced with the black hat<sup>4</sup>. They are dressed in folk shirts specific to the aforementioned areas, and the waist is tied with multi-coloured sticks or ribbons, stuck across the chest diagonally. The ones from Transylvania

<sup>3</sup> Ioan Viorel Boldureanu. 2006. *Cultură tradițională orală, Teme, concepte, categorii*. Timișoara: Editura Marineasa, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Doina Ișfanoni, *The Căluș Ritual, Costumul călușarilor*. 2018, July 19. National Institute of Heritage. Retrieved March 15, 2020, from <https://patrimoniu.ro/images/imaterial/ritualul-calusului.pdf>.

wear a black ribbon with different multi-coloured floral motifs over one shoulder, and a tricolour ribbon is attached over the other shoulder. In order to be able to be different from the others, the *vătaf* (group leader) wears two tricolour ribbons over the shoulders, which hang over the chest and attach to the hip. The *călușari* from Muntenia / Oltenia wear embroidered handkerchiefs at their waist. Both types of *călușari* have bells and tassels attached below the knees and at the ankles, tied over white trousers of linen or wool fabric. The shoes of the *călușari* have spurs, which rattle during the dance, along with the bells, on rhythm. All the *călușari* have a stick in their hand, performing with it different choreographic figures.

The Moldavian / Bukovina *căiuți* are different from the others, due to the horse mask they wear. They are dressed in folk holiday costume, but they will dance all the time in a hole in a horse mask. The horse's head is carved from wood, in the most natural way. The neck and head are covered with coloured cloth, fitted with horsehair and rich mane, adorned with multi-coloured ribbons and kerchiefs. In order to be worn during the dance, the horse head is fixed in a wooden support, covered with a woven rug or a white cloth skirt. The dancers have bells and tassels attached at their feet, the same as the *călușari*.

## 6. Description of the custom

The three dances, even if they are quite similar, from the point of view of the custom they have different features, and therefore they will be described separately.

### 6.1. The Călușari

Within the custom of the Transylvanian *călușari*, we notice two distinct stages in organizing the group and carrying out the dance. In the beginning there is a preparatory stage, in which the dance group is organized. All preparations start from the beginning of the Christmas Lent until Christmas Eve. They choose the host where they will rehearse to prepare the dance and learn the carols. For the *călușari*, choosing the host is the most important aspect, as this will provide them with all the necessary conditions for preparing the *căluș* performance. The host is chosen according to their social status, namely from one of the richest families in the village.

Also at the beginning, the *călușari* divide their roles in the group. The lads choose one of them to play the role of *vătaf* (group leader). He must meet several conditions: he must be a good dancer, have good looks and be a good speaker. Another important moment is to establish the place of each *călușar* in the formation, taking into account age and height.

The group is composed of an odd number of men: seven, nine or eleven. Besides the *călușari*, there are also other young people who have certain roles: the *cepar*, two *țurcași* or the *jupâni*. In many villages in Transylvania, older people also participate, having the experience of dancing the *călușari* and thus teaching young people how to execute difficult figures.

### 6.2. The Căluș

At the base of the practice of Călușul, stands the dance group which has a rather rigorous order, being composed at the beginning of seven or nine young men or lads. The group has a leader, called *vătaf*, and a masked character, called the *mute*. The one who plays the role of the mute is not chosen, but is required to have good dancer qualities. During the dance he is forbidden to speak, and the non-observance of this prohibition is punished harshly by the other dancers. Those who are part of the group must take a secret oath, as well as obey the

internal rules of conduct. The membership to the *căluș* group lasts several years (3, 5, 7 or 9), and the oath is renewed annually, especially when a new member enters the group.

The *vătaf* is the one who leads and oversees the entire ceremony. Once elected, he becomes the sacred character, respected by the *călușari*, being considered to be endowed with magical powers over the others in the group. He must have certain qualities, be familiar with the mysteries of the *Căluș*, to know the enchantments, spells and charms that will only be revealed to the following foreman.

The ritual scenario comprises three important sequences that take place within the narrow frame of the group: the raising of the flag, the oath and the breaking of the *Căluș*. The beginning and the final sequence are full of mystery, the villagers being forbidden to participate, in order not to attract the evil spirits. The median sequence has as a manifestation framework the village, where the group interacts with the community.

When the day meets the night, the *călușari* go to the outer edge of the village, or to a river bank, places where they will meet the supernatural power, taking with them the costumes of *călușari*. Only the *călușari* are allowed to assist at the great mystery of the *Căluș*, the fiddlers being denied the access. Here, the *călușari* shape the beak of the *Căluș*, made of a twisted or carved wood, in the form of a horsehead and neck. Once it is ready, it is dressed in a rabbit skin in which different healing plants are put, as well as threads to help the *călușari* wear it. They are initiated into the new role by jumping over the *Căluș* and taking the oath.

The *Călușari* also have a flag - a long rod, at the top of which is tied a kerchief and plants that are thought to have healing or prophylactic effects (wormwood and garlic).

After this sequence, the group goes round to the houses of the people, dancing an impressive dance, which imitates the movements of the horse. The dance figures have elements in common with the old shepherd and warrior games, danced with a club or with a sword. During the dance, the beak is carried in a bag or in the arms by the mute or the *vătaf*. The main character during the dance is the mute, who plays theatrical sketches, with the theme of death and resurrection. He walks on his hands, does not listen to the leader, jokes with the audience and symbolically punishes those who do not dance well. The dance ends with the *Căluș* round dance, in which mainly women and children participate. In the end, the dance is paid, and the mute sells to the women the wormwood and the garlic *played by the călușari*. The sequences are linked by a procession (walking on the road) from one house to another. In this sequence, the dance is the central element, at the same time being a ritual instrument and an artistic act. If on the road they meet another group, a *fight* between them begins with a competition character.

In this way, the *călușari* travel along the whole village until sunset. In some areas, the custom ends on Tuesday, when the break of the *Căluș* takes place. Once the carolling period is over, the *călușari* will go and bury the beak in a hidden place, from where will be taken again the following year for a new covenant. In this sequence, the ritual dissolution of the group takes place, the breaking of the oath and the restoration of the balance by reintegrating the group into the daily life of the village.

### 6.3 The *Căiuți*

The young people who play the dance of *Căiuți* must be odd in number (13 or 15), be good dancers, dancing in a circle or linearly, face to face, at the command of a *vătaf* or captain. The whole dance, given its complexity, denotes the image of ancient mythological practices, when the animal was present as a demon in the areas where its growth was a basic occupation.

The group of dancers reaches the entire village community, accompanied by the fiddlers, forming a procession throughout the village.

## 7. Structural similarities and differences in the musical repertoire of *Călușari*, *Căluși* and *Căiuți* dances

Even though from the point of view of the ritual, the three dances present a series of analogies (common rites), from the musical point of view they stand somewhat differently.

The melody of the *Călușari* from Transilvania is the same throughout the researched territory, respectively *Banul Mărăcine*. In some areas it is performed on taragot and accordion, and in other areas on violin and accordion.

### Banul Mărăcine



It is a simple melody, which does not pose many problems of interpretation, and the tempo varies according to each group of dancers.

The rhythm is a distributive one, embedded in a 2/4 measure, with different rhythmic and melodic formulas. The rhythmic formula present in almost all the melodic lines is the dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note, that is, a division is extended voluntarily, in favour of the following one and the so-called *balanced values*<sup>6</sup> are formed. This rhythmic formula clearly distinguishes this dance from the ones that will be presented.

The processes of organizing and combining the expressive elements are based on repetition and variation. Thus, the first motif of the first melodic line is repeated in the same way as the first motif of the second melodic line:



The first motif from the third melodic line is repeated in varied form with the first motif from the last melodic line:



Also, the second motif of the first melodic line is identical with the second motif of the third row:



<sup>5</sup> Own transcription.

<sup>6</sup> Mircea Cîmpeanu. 2008. *Pe urmele lui Béla Bartók după 100 de ani*. Cluj-Napoca: Centrul Județean pentru Conservarea și Promovarea Culturii Tradiționale Cluj, p. 66.

Similarly, the last motif in the second row is identical with the last motif in the fourth row:



The range of the song is not a very wide one, reaching a seventh, and the architectural form is also quite simple, consisting of two repeated phrases, each phrase having two melodic lines.

The melodic line of the Moldova / Bucovina *Căiuți* differs depending on the area. In Bucovina, the core of the song remains the same, only changing some cells or even motifs, depending on the locality. Also, in Moldova the melodic line is different from that of Bucovina, in some places it differs even from village to village.

Although the melodic line encountered in the two areas differs to a large extent, their morphological structure is similar. The following example is found almost entirely in the localities of Neamț County.

### Jocul Căiuților

The melodic line is quite simple, as is the song of the *Călușari* from Transylvania. It is performed on trumpet, accordion and drums. From a melodic point of view, it is composed of two phrases A B, each having two melodic lines. The first melodic line of the first phrase is identical to the second melodic line, with a variation only in the last measure. And the second phrase has two identical lines, which vary only in cadence. The rhythmic system to which it belongs is the distributive one, using a 2/4 metre. The last cell in the first melodic line is found in the second phrase in the two melodic lines:



The range of the song is one that spans over an octave, being characteristic of the instrumental folklore.

If the *Călușari* and *Căiuți* have a single song for each dance, in regard to *Căluș* we cannot state the same. Thus, here the discussion encompasses a series of songs that differ from one community to another and even from one area to another. They express the close

<sup>7</sup> Own transcription.

relationship between the figures of the dance and the illnesses, having the capacity to facilitate the energy transfer between the *călușari* and the sick person. Going back to the songs of *Căluș* we can mention some examples of dances of the different extra-Carpathian areas of the country: *Calul*, *Florica din Căluș*, *Murgulețul*, *Sârba*, *Hora*, *Călușul*. They express different characteristics, even if the choreographic musical typology classifies them as round dances (*horă*, *sârba*, *brâu*), being part of the non-occasional repertoire. Even though in the past, the songs of *Căluș* were specific to the custom, nowadays they dance on the songs of these dances, becoming more and more a theatrical performance.

## Călușul



Unlike the first two songs (the *Călușari* and *Căiuți*), the melody of the *Căluș* has three phrases that are repeated each. The first two phrases are repeated each identically, and the third one varies only in cadence. The range spans over an octave, which together with the tempo confers it a purely instrumental style. The melody of the *Căluș* is part of the rhythmic distribution system as well, the pattern being 2/4. Usually, the songs of the *Căluș* are played on traditional instruments, or even by the local *taraf* (band), during the entire dance the songs are linked together forming a suite.

## 8. Conclusions

The research conducted on the three customs (*Călușari*, *Căluș* and *Căiuți*) have revealed different features both from the point of view of the folk custom, as well as some distinct morphological elements in the music of these dances.

Regarding the mentioned rituals, even if they have a different period of unfolding, nevertheless they share a series of common elements both in terms of magic and symbolism, as well as their costume, and even some moments in the unfolding of the custom.

Similarities are found in the formation of the groups, all having an odd number of participants, choreographic figures similar to dances, as well as the motivation for practicing these rituals. All three groups are accompanied by fiddlers.

Regarding the musical repertoire, we have found that the three songs are different from each other in terms of melody, but present some similarities in the features of the instrumental dance repertoire. The melody of the Transylvanian *Călușari* presents very simple melodic-rhythmic characteristics, but these are constantly complemented by the choreographic side. Nor does the song by the Moldovan / Bucovina *Căiuți* pose melodic or rhythmic problems.

<sup>8</sup> Gheorghe Oprea and Larisa Agapie. *Folclor muzical românesc*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 177.

What distinguishes it quite a lot from that of Transylvania is the tempo, which is much faster than that of the *Călușari*.

The essential dissimilarity of the *Căluș* is noticeable in the fact that, from a musical point of view, it is danced on several melodies (forming a suite), which produced over time the multitude of choreographic figures (over 150 figures in some areas).<sup>9</sup>

In all the mentioned songs, the monochronic distributive rhythmic system is encountered. The architectural form of the songs of *Călușari* and *Căiuți* consists of two repetitive phrases, each having two melodic lines. Unlike these two dances, the melody of the *Căluș* presents an architectural form consisting of three repetitive phrases, each containing two melodic lines.

The range of the three musical examples is enclosed in the instrumental style: the melody of *Căiuți* and *Căluși* spans over an octave, and the melody of *Călușari* encompasses a seventh.

If in the past all the three dances had a ritual function, today in the vast majority of areas of the country their function has disappeared, they are danced more for their entertainment character, the traditional costume, as well as the form of their performance. They still remain dances of a rare beauty that reveal the specificity of the Romanian folk dance.

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<sup>9</sup> Emilia Comișel. 1967. *Folclor muzical*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 204.