

The Stages of Ethnomusicological Research in Folklore Collections

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Abstract: *The field investigation of musical folklore represents the preoccupation of any ethnomusicologist in the course of time. The ethnomusicological research involves a rather difficult task because it has to follow a rather complex path to the end point, starting from field collections, music transcription, selection and classification. The attention of ethnomusicologists is always focused on collecting and researching authentic and unaltered musical material. In order to carry out a correct folklore research, over time, there were used various methods of research and selection of musical creations.*

Key-words: *folklore; ethnomusicologist; research; methods*

1. Introduction

In the cultural history of each nation, the first moment of artistic creation is represented by folklore. Its scientific research began in the eighteenth century, at a time when the rise of the Enlightenment embraced a keen interest in the spiritual culture of mankind. At the beginning of the twentieth century the first collections of folklore were published in France, soon gaining momentum throughout Europe.

In our country, over the centuries, written testimonies on the Romanian folklore are sporadically found in the writings of chroniclers, codices or manuscripts.

One of the oldest piece of information on Romanian folklore is attested from the thirteenth century, which documents the presence of Romanian singers at the Hungarian royal court of the Árpád dynasty.²

The concrete work of collecting folklore took on a large scale in the middle of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by various collections of folk literature. Starting with the twentieth century, in 1910, Dumitru Georgescu Kiriac organized permanent collections of folklore under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, laying at the same time the foundations of the Romanian scientific musical folklore research. Also during that period, several collections were compiled by Alexandru Voevidca in Bucovina, Tiberiu Brediceanu in Banat and Transylvania. Béla Bartók gathered extensive collections of Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak, Ruthenian, Croatian and Serbian folklore, achieving thus a comparative research of folklore in Southeast Europe. Furthermore, other representatives of ethnomusicology also carried out various field campaigns to collect folklore, such as: Constantin Brăiloiu, Sabin V. Drăgoi, Ilarion Cocișiu, Emilia Comișel.

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² Ioan N., Ileana S. and Traian M.. 1963. *Curs de folclor muzical*. Partea I. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică. p. 36.

2. Technical means of collecting musical folklore

Initially, folk songs were transcribed directly on the spot, from live performance, these being notated quite schematically, without highlighting all the ornaments. The first recordings were made on phonograph cylinders and gramophone records, with a rather poor quality. All these records were kept in the folklore archives existing at that time. The oldest recording on phonograph cylinders is preserved in the folklore archive, namely the folk tune *Cine hăuie pe luncă*, which was collected in 1912 by Dumitru Georgescu Kiriac.³

Starting from 1953, the field recordings were realised with a tape recorder, being a great leap from all points of view: the recordings were of a much better quality, covering a much larger catchment area, the playback of the song having a much higher accuracy than that of the phonograph. The musical repertoire of great value was recorded after 1949, after the establishment of the *Folklore Institute*. During 1950-1975, extensive collections of folklore were carried out in the country, being archived a musical material of inestimable value, on tape recorders.

After this period, starting with the post-December 1989 period, were used tape recorders, cassette players and video cameras, which had a much better quality.

At present, the means of field research of folklore have evolved, the digitization system taking the place of the analogue one. Thus, field recordings are made with high performance digital tape recorders and camcorders, having several advantages: digital information storage capacity, very good quality, much clearer playback, and a much more efficient archiving capacity.

3. The field research of musical folklore

Before starting a folklore research in the field, a well-established plan is needed in order to successfully carry out the project, resulting in an exhaustive research. This stage is quite difficult, from several points of view. First of all, ethnomusicologists must know very well the area they are to research musically, take into account the authenticity of the local repertoire, zonal interference, research of types and variants, the relationship between tradition and innovation, and the link between individual creation and the collective one.

A group of researchers is needed for a wider research, in order to be able to encompass all the moments of the artistic act in the case of syncretic artistic creations (of rites, ceremonies, customs).

One problem that may arise in the field is that of informants. They must be selected from those who have authentic musical productions and a good musical hearing. It is often very difficult to obtain what you are looking for from the beginning. Thus, in order to carry out a research as plausible as possible, different research methods are used, found in various specialized works. One of the most used research methods is that of Ovidiu Bîrlea.⁴

For a thorough research, several working methods are needed. Thus, the musical repertoire will be described in detail, observation sheets and performer sheets will be made. The observation sheets will contain various data regarding the date of collection, repertoire, the place where it is collected from, the time of singing. The interpreter sheets contain data about informants: name, surname and a short biography. All of these will have the same serial number as the recorded song, so that it can be identified at the time of transcription.

³ <https://academiaromana.ro/ief/ArhivaIEF/ArhivaIEF-Prezentare.pdf> accessed April 24, 2021.

⁴ Ovidiu Bîrlea. 1969. *Metoda de cercetare a folclorului*. București: Editura pentru Literatură.

Due to the high-performance equipment that currently exists, it is possible to record the entire musical repertoire encountered in the field, and perform the selection at a later date. For a quality recording it is necessary to record the best variants, without the informant being stopped or corrected during the performance.

4. Musical transcriptions

The transcription of the Romanian folk songs preoccupied over time the great personalities of the Romanian ethnomusicology. Thus, to date, several methods of transcription are known, used throughout history.

Béla Bartók was one of the first researchers of Romanian ethnomusicology to implement a unique system for scoring folk songs. Bartók transcribed the pieces and grouped them according to a system that was later used by the Finnish musicologist Ilmari Krohn, who applied it to the collection of Finnish folk songs *Suomen Kansan Sävelmä*.⁵ In order to reach a better classification, Béla Bartók transposed all the songs with a the final cadence on G, ordering them starting from the simplest, to the most complex, depending on the number of melodic lines, the main caesura (main cadence) and last but not least according to the caesuras of each melodic line.⁶ If several songs contain the same number of melodic lines and cadences on the same notes, they are grouped according to their range (starting from the smallest to the largest). In order to know the real pitch of the song, Béla Bartók notes in the score the real sound (for women and children voices in G-clef, and for the male voices in F-clef). The instrumental repertoire was transcribed in the real pitch, without the need for transposition.

At first, Bartók was not concerned enough with detailing the transcripts, so that the first collections were made in a rather sketchy manner.

Leleşd.

Poco rubato.

Pe - la noi pe - la pă - du - ră nu - mai,

Pe - la noi pe - la pă - du - ră nu - mai,

Nu nu nu și ia - ră nu - mai.

Fig. 1⁷

In time, he realized that the detailed transcripts are much more valuable, so that, returning to the transcribed musical material, giving importance to any detail, resulted in the most complex musical transcriptions of that time. These details also resulted due to the fact that

⁵ *Culegeri și studii, XIV, Cântece populare românești din comitatul Bihor (Ungaria)*, culese și notate de Béla Bartók, in Academia Română. 1913. *Din vieța poporului român*. București.

⁶ Tiberiu Alexandru. 1958. *Béla Bartók despre folclorul românesc*. București: Editura Muzicală, p. 33.

⁷ "Culegeri și studii, XIV, Cântece populare românești din comitatul Bihor (Ungaria)." Culese și notate de Béla Bartók. București. in Academia Română. 1913. *Din vieța poporului român*, p. 58.

he transcribed the folk songs using the speed slowdown, which resulted in the notation of some aspects difficult to perceive at the time of normal playback.

345a. B, B, F, 12,

2. Un-de mă cul-cam, dur-mi-meu, *Un-de mă cul-cam, dur-mi-meu, mă, Măi, măn-dra-mă, dra-ga-mă, Me-rie
pă drum ca și-o stă-lă, do-ru-lă, mă;
1. -le-meu, Măi, măn-dra-mă, dra-ga-mă, Me-rie
pă drum ca și-o stă-lă, do-ru-lă, mă;
Măi, măn-dra-mă, dra-ga-mă, Me-rie
pă drum ca și-o stă-lă, do-ru-lă, mă;

Fig. 2⁸

Sabin Drăgoi followed Béla Bartók closely, using the same methods for transcribing Romanian musical folklore.

Constantin Brăiloiu brings a new method of transcription, being convinced that the songs in major keys must be classified together, and those of minor keys in another group. Thus, the major ones are transcribed with the final cadence on G, and the minor ones with the final cadence on E.

Tiberiu Brediceanu considers that the transcription at the real pitch is the most plausible. This is also due to the fact that a large part of the material transcribed by him is notated directly in the field, which did not allow him to transpose it on the spot. Thus, a large part of the transcribed material can be found at the real pitch, but in some transcripts he also applied Béla Bartók's transcription system.

Paula Carp wants to bring a change in the way of transcribing folk tunes, considering that what her predecessors brought is incomplete. Thus, she developed with a new method, namely, the transposition of the songs with the final cadences on D and E, and less often on G and A.

Today, contemporary ethnomusicologists use these methods of transcribing folk songs, each approaching one they consider most effective.

5. Selection and classification of musical material

Once collected and transcribed, the musical material becomes an object of study for researchers. However, before performing a complex structural analysis, the repertoire must be selected and classified according to certain requirements. To begin with, a selection will be

⁸ Béla Bartók. 1967. *Romanian Folk Music*. volumul II. Haga, p. 402.

made of the entire collected repertoire, in order to establish whether it meets all ethnomusicological criteria (authenticity, text-melody ratio, tradition-innovation ratio, interferences with other geographical areas).

The classification of the musical material is made according to what is to be prepared. It will be selected by genres and dialectal territories, followed by a typological classification, which is currently used by ethnomusicologists.

After this approach, various monographs, anthologies or collections for didactic purposes will be compiled, their purpose being to preserve and capitalize on folk traditions.

6. Conclusions

The ethnomusicological research revealed from the very beginning valuable works of art, true musical creations, which in one way or another were sheltered in the folklore archives in the country and abroad, or we encounter them written in various collections, which are true masterpieces that will benefit generations of specialists.

Further on we will witness various stages in which ethnomusicology will take an even stronger momentum and will become an increasingly well-defined and present discipline, able to answer various questions related to the relationship between music and people.

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