

## Overlapping Patterns in Antiphonic Caroling from the South of the Apuseni Mountains

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**Abstract:** *As one of the most important musical genres in folklore, the traditional carol has been researched by several folklorists. Some of them - Sabin Drăgoi (1925) and Bela Bartók (1968) - also noted aspects regarding the interpretation of carols and were impressed by antiphonic caroling, in which the carols are sung in two groups. Subsequently, Ioan Bocșa (2003) made a classification according to how the groups follow each other, identifying three possible variants of overlapping. We take the research further, observing, in the southern area of the Apuseni Mountains, how the technique of alternating groups varies, what the logic of choosing the overlapping place in the structure of the carol is and how the carolers solve problems that may occur during interpretation. In practice, the overlapping place may vary during the interpretation of a single carol, depending on several aspects, but only one variant supersedes the others, thus appearing as the main place of overlapping.*

**Keywords:** *Antiphonic caroling; group of carolers; Christmas singing; singing overlapping;*

### Introduction

The traditional carol represents one of the most important musical genres in Romanian folklore, as caroling is a custom in which the entire village community participates, in one way or another. Starting from the first preoccupations related to the collection and preservation of folklore, several folklorists have leaned on the collection of carols, some being concerned with their lyrics, others with the unfolding of customs or with the morphological analysis of carols. Subsequently, thematic or typological classification systems appeared, used in several collections of carols. However, a detailed look at the interpretation of carols has not yet been made rigorously, although some collections do mention, in the preface or the introductory study, elements related to caroling. Bela Bartók confessed in the preface to his volume of carols<sup>2</sup> that "Unfortunately I did not have time in the early years of my research work to attend Christmas caroling to observe, in addition to music, the custom of the people." Sabin Drăgoi, in *303 Colinde cu text și melodie*<sup>3</sup> [*303 Carols with text and melody*], allocates a page to the subchapter *Cum se cântă colindele*<sup>4</sup> [*How carols are sung*], in which he describes how the carol singers were placed in the hosts' house and recalls several variants of interpretative formulas. A common thing that the two folklorists do is that they mention, without much detail, the fact that sometimes the caroling may occur in two groups, antiphonically (Drăgoi calls them *two series*, Bartók *two choirs*). Monica Brătulescu adds information regarding the character of the performance, by stating that "listening live to the antiphonic carols definitively removes the idea of a shy song, faintly intonated with a frail

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<sup>2</sup> Bela Bartók. 1968. *Ethnomukologische schriften Facsimiles-Nachdrucke IV– Melodien Der Rumänischen Carols (Weinachtslieder)*, Budapest: Editio Musica.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. XXX.

<sup>4</sup> Sabin Drăgoi. 1925. *303 Colinde cu text și melodie*, [*303 Carols with text and melody*], Craiova: Editura Scrisul Românesc, p. XLIV.

voice (...) the thunderous voices of men alternately erupt, flood the streets, imposing the carol as the energetic expression of the entire village community." <sup>5</sup>

A more detailed description regarding the ways of overlapping between the two groups and the effect that the overlap has on the shape of the stanzas is made by Ioan Bocşa, in the *Introductory Study* to the volumes *Colinde româneşti*<sup>6</sup> [*Romanian Carols*], on whose elaboration I have also worked.

### **Purpose of the Research and Methodology**

In this article we aim to take this analysis further, investigating whether there are, within antiphonic caroling, overlapping patterns of the groups or other important elements related to interpretation, such as specific roles of the carol singers within the two groups, aspects related to vocality, or ways of remedying some mistakes occurred during interpretation. The research will be based on a material that we have collected in the southern part of the Apuseni Mountains, as part of the team of researchers coordinated by Professor Ioan Bocşa, PhD, and Professor Ioan Haplea, PhD, under the aegis of the TerrArmonia Cultural Foundation.

As research methods, we will use the historical method, starting from the current stage of the research, through a bibliographic incursion related to the chosen subject. Furthermore, we will rely on direct observation, from the moment of the collection of the material in the field. We will repeatedly hear the documentary records, but we will also make a structural analysis of the carols presented and we will refer especially to the technique of interpretation and to the message transmitted with the help of antiphonic caroling, other than the one related to the theme of the carol texts.

### **1. Premises of the research**

In the first phase, Bartók does not turn his attention to the caroling custom, but only to the carols themselves (in the collections made in Maramureş, Satu Mare, Cluj, Arad and Timiş). Afterwards, the famous Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist changes his mind, and during the collection sessions held in Alba and Hunedoara he observes the unfolding of the custom, and is impressed by antiphonic caroling: "In Hunedoara, carols are performed by the carolers on alternative choirs (in unison, of course) as follows: the alternation is made stanza by stanza, without any break, and even sometimes the first value of the new stanza overlaps with the last value of the previous stanza"<sup>7</sup>. Bartók goes on to write that in Alba the overlap is more obvious, being of "one or two measures", stating that, as the phonograms prove, "the entry of the next stanza is always made *approximately* at that place" and adding that "this kind of interpretation must be examined closer"<sup>8</sup>. We will analyze, in the following pages, what flexibility the moment of overlap exhibits and what the factors that influence the timing and variability of the overlap are.

Drăgoi said about the antiphonic caroling that "this way of singing is practical because it gives the singers the opportunity to rest and it is aesthetic because, hearing the song from one side or the other, it produces a fresh effect on the audience." <sup>9</sup> Bocşa, in a more recent volume, cites the description of antiphonic caroling as it was made by a carol singer from the

<sup>5</sup> Monica Brătulescu. 1981. *Colinda românească*, [*The Romanian carol*], Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ioan Bocşa. 2003. *Colinde româneşti*, [*Romanian carols*], Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica.

<sup>7</sup> Bela Bartók, *op. cit.*, p. XXX.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> Sabin Drăgoi, *op. cit.*, p. XLIV.

village of Biia (Alba County) during a folklore collection session: to sing with two *runnings*. "One begins, then the runner goes after him, as he can't really head any further."<sup>10</sup> The peasant means that, if only one group would sing the entire carol, they won't be able to sing in this way, without interrupting it for breathing and because of that, antiphonal singing seems related to a relay race. About the choice of this term, which means *on the hurry, fugitive*, hastily, Bartók also said that antiphonic interpretation "gives the impression of a great haste."<sup>11</sup>

## 2. The relationship between the structure of carols and the place of overlapping groups

Regarding the structure of the carols interpreted antiphonically, Bartók said that this type of interpretation can be found in the carols consisting of 3 melodic lines, where "in the second row there is always the chorus"<sup>12</sup>, and in terms of the text, the second verse of the first stanza (of the form *a b(ref) c*) becomes the first verse of the next stanza, which does not bring a new verse but repeats it (*c b(ref) c*), then the first "choir" brings a new verse through the stanza of the form *c b(ref) d* and so on, drawing the conclusion that the first "choir" leads, because it is the only one that brings a new verse within the stanzas.<sup>13</sup> He also considered that this repetition of verse (4 times) has the role of better fixing the text, of facilitating its memorization.

In the carols consisting of three melodic lines, with verse repetition, we have met the variant in which each group brings a new verse, after repeating the last verse from the previous stanza, with the shape of the lyrics being a *b(ref) c*, the stanza II *c b(ref) d*, then *d b(ref) e*, etc. For greater clarity we offer the following example:

### Stanza 1

„Pleacă fiica la fântână,	[The daughter goes to the well	- <b>a</b>	
<i>Lelioară, lelioară,</i>	<i>Little lady, little lady</i>	- <b>b (ref)</b>	group 1
La fântână prin grădină.	At the well through the garden	- <b>c</b>	

### Stanza 2:

La fântână prin grădină,	At the well through the garden	- <b>c</b>	
<i>Lelioară, lelioară,</i>	<i>Little lady, little lady,</i>	- <b>b (ref)</b>	group 2
Cu ulcioru zdrăngăni <u>ndu</u> ,	With the can rattling,	- <b>d</b>	

### Stanza 3:

Cu ulcioru zdrăngăni <u>ndu</u>	With the can rattling,	- <b>d</b>	
<i>Lelioară, lelioară,</i>	<i>Little lady, little lady,</i>	- <b>b (ref)</b>	group 1
Mânci largi în vânt trăgându. <sup>14</sup>	Wide sleeves in the wind pulling]	- <b>e</b>	

Another variant of the structure of the carol stanza consisting of three melodic lines has the lyrics in the sequence of *a b c(chorus)*<sup>15</sup>. Both variants facilitate antiphonic interpretation because the overlap is carried out:

<sup>10</sup> Ioan Bocșa, 2022. *Colinda în zona Mureșului Mijlociu: Studiu asupra unui grup tipologic muzical [Carol in the Middle Mures area: Study on a typological musical group]*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bela Bartók, *op. cit.*, p. XXX.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXIX.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

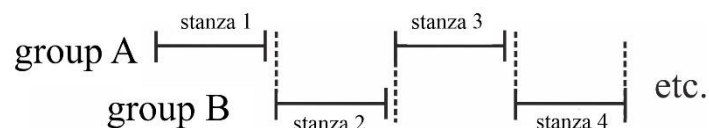
<sup>14</sup> Ioan Bocșa. 2003. *Colinde românești, [Romanian carols]*, vol. II, Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica, pp. 332-333, no. 827 (musical variant: no. 770, vol. I).

- on identical lyrics, a model in which the perception of the end of the verse is postponed, thus creating suspense among the audience, until the verse appears in full in the next stanza;
- on the chorus, which is not part of the epic structure of the text, with the complete structure of the chorus text appearing here only in the last stanza.

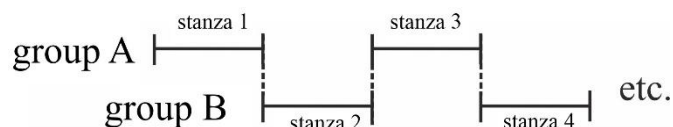
In both variants, therefore, the overlap does not affect the complete perception of the text, but only postpones it, so that it will be available at a certain point without overlapping with anything else.

From the point of view of the timing, when the second interpretative group intervenes, and of the relationship that is achieved with the first group, Bocşa observed the existence of several variants<sup>16</sup>:

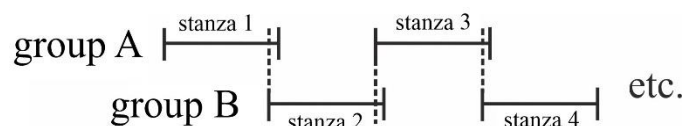
- **variant 1**, in which there is no overlap, and the groups interpret the stanzas successively;



- **variant 2**, in which the overlap is performed "on the last rhythmic pulsation" of the previous group;



- **variant 3**, in which the overlap is made earlier, before the previous group ends the stanza.



In the 10 antiphonic carols that we have collected from the Almaşu Mare area, the overlaps are usually made on the chorus. From the antiphonic carols collected, only one is without a chorus (Romanian Carols, vol. I, no. 595), with the overlap being made here on the last syllable of the verse. It is worth mentioning that in the first and second stanzas, upon the first intervention of group 2, we have no overlap, so the caroling uses variants 1 and 2 of the previously exposed graphic models.

### 3. Factors that influence the place of overlapping groups

By analyzing antiphonic caroling in the investigated area, we have noticed that the overlap is determined by several factors, including the confidence of the carolers in knowing the lyrics and the place of overlap. Another factor is represented by the carol structure, especially the kind of final entity within the stanza (verse or chorus). Most of the time, the

<sup>15</sup> Ioan Bocşa. 2003. *Colinde româneşti*, [Romanian carols], vol. I, Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica, p. 281, no. 1258 (corresponding text: no. 1116, vol. II).

<sup>16</sup> Ioan Bocşa. 2022. *Colinda în zona Mureşului Mijlociu: Studiu asupra unui grup tipologic muzical* [Carol in the Middle Mures area: Study on a typological musical group], Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica, p. 11.

place of overlap is not identical throughout the carol, as it is flexible in the first stanzas, and will consolidate during the performance, as we will be able to show in the analysis of the interpretation of the next carol.

In the carol *Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri* [What are you asking me, good Lords], (Colinde românești, vol. I, no. 80), group 2 enters with the 2nd stanza on the last syllable of the chorus, respectively on the "last rhythmic pulsation" from the exposition of the previous group, thus variant 2 of the classification made by Bocșa is valid (I will use *group 1* and *group 2* instead of *group A* and *group B* as Bocșa did, to further show the subordinations of the groups).

**Fig. 1.** "*Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri*", the first overlap on the last syllable

Listening further to the recording, we notice that, at the attack of the 3rd stanza, the 1st group enters faster, with the overlap occurring after the pronunciation of the syllable *bu*, from the chorus (*Joinelaș, joineului bunu*) [Little young man, good little young man], but before the melisma is achieved by descending to D note. In this case we have the 3rd variant, where the overlap is no longer performed on a rhythmic pulsation, but precisely between two pulsations. During the analysis, we will explain that this process offers much greater flexibility, as the overlap is not conditioned by the fixed moment of the metric pulsation accent, but has a longer time interval, between two pulsations, whether they represent the syllable change or constitute a melismatic fragment, executed on the same syllable.

In the 4th stanza, group 2 returns and performs the overlap just like in the 2nd stanza (Fig. 1). At this point we can form the idea that each group performs the overlap in a different place but, at the 5th stanza, group 1 enters much earlier, achieving the overlap immediately after the beginning of the second half of the chorus, on the syllable *ne* (*Joinelaș, joineului bunu*). By looking further at the locations of the overlaps, they are carried out as can be seen in Fig. 2.

Grup /97  
Almașu Mare, AB

The figure displays a musical score for the song "Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri" by Grup /97 from Almașu Mare, AB. The score is written in a single treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Joi -ne - laș, joi - ne - lui bu - nu, Ntre -ba - țî -mă Să vă spui eu De ce mur-gu-i De-a-su - dat și De ce-a fost el În ca - le de Mur-gu cal - că-n". The score is divided into eight stanzas, labeled "stanza 2" through "stanza 8". Vertical lines of various colors (orange, red, green, blue) indicate the boundaries between stanzas, showing significant overlap between them. Stanza 2 is marked with a green line, stanza 3 with a red line, stanza 4 with a green line, stanza 5 with an orange line, stanza 6 with an orange line, stanza 7 with an orange line, and stanza 8 with an orange line. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some syllables overlapping across stanza boundaries.

**Fig.2.** "Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri", the overlaps of the first 8 stanzas

From the previous example we can see that the first group manifests a preference for overlapping on the second half of the chorus, achieving here 2 out of 3 overlaps, while group 1 manifests a preference for the last syllable of the chorus, where it performs the overlap twice. The problem comes at the 6th stanza, where no overlap is made anymore, with group 2 entering with the stanza after the end of the chorus (variant 1). Listening further to the carol, we can provide a model in which it becomes apparent how the overlap of each group is achieved. After the *ne* syllable is heard (*Joi-ne-lui*), the next group has 1 pulsation and a half to start the next stanza, which must occur before the posterior *appoggiatura* on the F sharp, so before the note changes. On the other hand, this advantage related to time, and implicitly to the flexibility of the moment of entry, constitutes a disadvantage in terms of the synchronization of the group that must enter. With no clear, unique moment of entry, the responsibility is left on the shoulders of the group leader, with some members joining him after a small gap, sometimes omitting the first consonant or syllable at the beginning of the stanza.

Grup /97  
Almaşu Mare, AB

Joi - ne - laș, joi - ne - lui bu - nu,

GROUP 2  
GROUP 1  
GROUP 2  
GROUP 1  
GROUP 2  
GROUP 1  
GROUP 2  
GROUP 1  
GROUP 1

**Fig. 3.** "Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri", the overlaps of each group, first 9 stanzas

As can be clearly seen in Fig. 3, group 1 is more steadfast, except for the first overlap, while group 2 oscillates between several variants, finally adopting the moment of overlap of the other group.

After analyzing this interpretation, we can already draw some conclusions, which are indeed confirmed by the rest of the material. Group 1 is most often the leading group, being made up of more experienced carol singers, and the variant used by them, in terms of the place of overlap, is the correct one. The term should not be interpreted as having the meaning of *norm*, in the sense that there are no correct variants and wrong variants in what overlapping implies in antiphonic caroling, but there is a place where the overlap should be carried out, according to the model transmitted over the years. Considering these, but also the number of stanzas that overlap in one place or another, I have concluded that there is one *main place of overlap*, which clearly stabilizes during the interpretation, and several *secondary places of overlap*, which occur more often until the main place stabilizes, and, sporadically, afterwards.

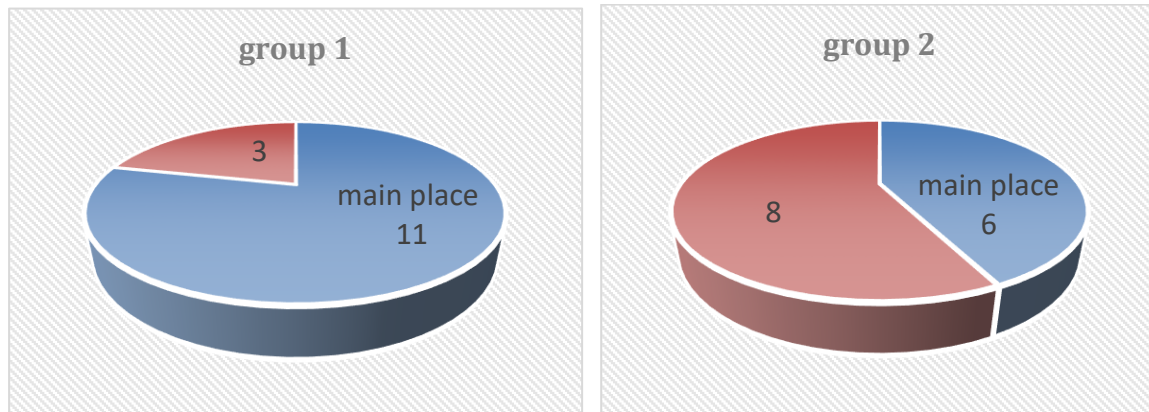
As for the presented carol, it is somewhat logical that the place of overlap is after the beginning of the second half of the verse, as this place gives the most freedom to the groups, since it represents *the longest syllable value within the chorus*.

After hearing the whole carol, we were able to draw a table in which to clearly observe the distribution of the two groups, depending on where they made the overlap. Note that the main place of overlap is a single one and the secondary places of overlap are several.

Place of overlap	Main	Secondary	Total stanzas
group 1	11	3	14
group 2	6	8	14
	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 1.** *The two overlapping variants (main place or secondary place), differentiated by group 1 and group 2, in the carol "Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri"*

To further clarify the differentiation between groups in terms of the balance between the choice of the main place of overlap and the secondary ones, we present below a comparison graphic regarding the inputs of the two groups.



**Fig. 4.** *Graphic with the shares of the main overlapping place and of the secondary places in the two groups, in the carol "Ce mă-ntrebați, mari boieri"*

#### 4. Conclusions

Although the custom of caroling is in a continuous change, due especially to the influences coming from outside the Romanian area, coming through mass-media, but also influenced from the inside, by economic or demographic factors, there are places where things change at a slower rate, with the traditional imprint being a deep one and kept with ambition and insistence. Of the old variants of caroling, antiphonic caroling is more affected, because it requires the division of the carolers into two groups, requiring more "attacking" carolers to watch over the good conduct of caroling. Viewed for a long time as a simple technique, the only rule of which seemed to be the alternation of the group, upon closer look, I have discovered that there are other rules and practices that lead to the realization of this style of interpretation. I have shown in this article that, in the targeted area, there are several areas of overlapping of groups, within the same carol, but of these only one variant is dominant, which we have called the *main place of overlap*, the others being secondary, due to the momentary circumstances within the interpretation. It would be interesting to see if this technique is also found in other areas where antiphonic caroling is performed, but this requires either direct participation in caroling/carol gathering sessions, or audio or audio-video documentary recordings containing the carols in full (or as much as possible).

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