

In search of musical folklore, in the Land of Neamț

Ioana-Alexandra MUNTEANU¹

Abstract: Located in the central-eastern part of Romania, the Neamț Region - "an inexhaustible treasure of folk songs"² - about which the ethnomusicologist Gavriil Galinescu wrote decades ago - aroused the interest of folklore lovers since the middle of the last century, when the first recordings were made of folkloric productions. Some of these creations, preserved for a long time at the Folklore Archive of Moldova and Bucovina, were valorised by several ethnomusicologists, teachers or simple people interested in folklore. The research strategy that I applied in the collection campaign from the period of my doctoral studies aimed at expanding the collections published until 2019, towards localities in the county which did not come to the attention of researchers, but also at the reconstruction of the collection routes from previous campaigns. The result of the undertaken ethnomusicological research certifies the fact that in Neamț, certain folk music genres have been passed on to younger generations.

Key words: Neamț, ethnomusicology; folklore; perenniality; transformation;

Introduction

The Land of Neamț is one of the areas of our country which has always attracted attention by the diversity and beauty of the relief, by the monastic settlements whose beginnings are lost in the mists of time, by the hospitality of the inhabitants and by the variety of folklore productions preserved and admired by those who inhabited or only visited these lands.

In the creations of the inhabitants of the entire Neamț land, one can find the image of the native landscape in which they were born and lived their lives. Optimism, energy, perseverance, taste for beauty, hospitality are just some of the attributes of the character of the peasant of these places, transmitted in their folkloric productions. The folk creation from Neamț, which added spiritual values of indisputable permanence to the treasure of national culture, has a pronounced optimistic background, expresses simply and profoundly the moral strength of a hardworking and talented people.

Over the years, extensive research actions were undertaken in Neamț in order to collect and study musical folklore by specialists in the field: Teodor T. Burada, Dimitrie Vulpian, Bazil Anastasescu, Alexandru Zirra, Gavriil Galinescu, Gheorghe Ciobanu, Pavel Delion, etc. Moreover, various figures and also simple people who love folklore recorded and rigorously studied the folklore of this area, including: Professor George Brăescu (author of the collection *Folclor literar din județul Neamț [Literary Folklore from Neamț County]*, 1996), Professor Ionel Apetrei (the collection *Ca la hora satului [At the village round dance]*, 2001), teacher Angelica Iașeșen and professor Mihai Iașeșen (the book *Pe-un picior de plai. Folclor din Vinătorii-Neamțului [Near a low foothill. Folklore from Vinătorii-Neamțului]*, 2006), professor Isidor Rusu (the collection of *Folclor muzical din Bicazu Ardelean [Musical Folklore from Bicazu*

¹ "Gheorghe Dima" National Music Academy Cluj-Napoca, Piatra Neamț Branch, aya7_85@yahoo.com.

² George Grigorică. 2003. "Folclorul muzical românesc și nemțean, în viziunea lui Gavriil Galinescu". *Țara Hangului* (year 8, no. 26), p. 12.

Ardelean], 2008) etc.. However, unlike other regions in Romania, the county's bibliography does not contain many printed collections, many of the songs remaining in the national archives or in the personal archives of the collectors. The few edited volumes did not represent for those interested, a sufficient documentary fund for information, study and valorisation of the folk repertoire. In light of the above, in 2008 university professors from the "Gheorghe Dima" National Academy of Music Cluj-Napoca, Ioan and Doina Haplea, together with the professor and ethnologist Ion H. Ciubotaru - the one who founded the Folklore Archive of Moldova and Bucovina, from the Institute of Romanian Philology "Al. Philippide," Iași branch- covered the gap that was found until that moment in the folklore of the county, publishing the volume *Musical Folklore from the Neamtului Region*,³ which sums up a rich musical repertoire⁴ dating from the period 1953-1998. This complex monograph of 800 pages gave me the idea to undertake a new research of traditional music and customs from Neamț county, as part of my doctoral studies. The approach to this vast field is due to justified interests in the cultural heritage of the native area, doubled by the desire to discover if in Neamț the musical folklore, recorded in the pages of the substantial volume mentioned, continued to be transmitted to younger generations.

1. The Campaign to Collect Musical Folklore in the Land of Neamț

Ethnomusicology is the science that sums up part of the national intangible cultural heritage. Research is the key word that marks the way to know folklore, or ethnomusicology in general. I began my ethnomusicological approach undertaken in the period 2019-2022 by recreating the itineraries travelled by the researchers of the volume *Musical Folklore from Neamț*, in their journey of collecting the published material, in order to ascertain whether the repertoire included in the volume under discussion was still alive in the area. Reflecting on the map of the previous collections, however, I discovered that an expansion of the geographical research area is necessary, because the previously published examples did not cover the entire land. Therefore, relating to the repertoire preserved through the collecting campaigns of previous decades remained as a secondary goal, one of the main reasons being the fact that meeting most of the informants from four to five decades ago was no longer possible, due to objective reasons.

The research strategy applied in the campaign aimed, therefore, at expanding the collections towards localities in the county that did not come to the attention of researchers in previous decades, but also at reconstructing the collection routes from previous campaigns. I made records in 32 new localities and in 14 villages located on the 2008 volume map.

Preceded by a necessary documentation on the county and previous approaches regarding the musical folklore of the area, the limited investigation that I carried out was based on two methods indispensable to the good knowledge of the reality in the rural environment: the main method used in the field research was that of indirect observation,⁵ but I also employed the method of direct observation,⁶ participating in some villages in some events with a set date.

³ Doina Haplea & Ioan Haplea & Ion H. Ciubotaru. 2008. *Folclor muzical din Ținutul Neamțului*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Arpeggione, p. 1.

⁴ The repertoire was extracted from the *Folklore Archive of Moldova and Bucovina* and completed in volume with songs found following field investigations by university professors Doina and Ioan Haplea, accompanied by students from the "Gheorghe Dima" National Academy of Music Cluj-Napoca.

⁵ Ioan R. Nicola & Ileana Szenik & Traian Mîrza. 1963. *Curs de folclor muzical*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 31.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

With the help of the mentioned methods, I found in the field both an active and a passive repertoire, which did not depend on the geographical area or the age of the informant. The research resulted in the collection of 278 songs, namely 185 vocal songs and 93 instrumental tunes.

I recorded the repertoire with a tape recorder, after which I downloaded the songs to my laptop, turning each one into Mp3 to make it easy for me to transcribe. With the help of the Sibelius 7 program, I transcribed the repertoire into a unitary musical typological classification system based on the "unifying principle in the notation of melodies"⁷ proposed by the ethnomusicologist Paula Carp (major melodies to be transcribed on the G final cadence, and minor ones on E); I transcribed only the carol genre according to the system developed by the ethnomusicologist Ileana Szenik (the major variants should be transcribed beginning on D, because this model is approved by Cluj researchers who believe that this is how the particularities of the genre are best highlighted⁸), according to which I have classified and analysed all the material.

2. Musical Folklore from the Land of Neamt Today

Following the field research campaign, we collected 185 vocal songs from 74 informants aged between 7-90 years, totalling an occasional repertoire consisting of: lullabies, soldier songs, wedding ritual songs, wedding songs, laments, *verșuri*, carols, carols with scholarly influence, songs from winter customs, plays from folk theatre. To these are added the non-occasional repertoire, consisting of: ballads, a shepherd's song, *doinas*, proper old-style and modern-style songs, vocal dance tunes.

2.1. *The song proper – a complex genre of non-occasional lyrics*

Among all the vocal genres that we have collected from Neamt County, a significant number are old-style and modern-style songs, 47 respectively.

The old-style songs proper display a pronounced structural differentiation regarding the melodic line, compared to the modern style. From a thematic point of view, the lyrics emphasize the inner feelings of the simple village man. The specific musical characteristics that define the collected material are: richly ornamental melodic line and different in the way of interpretation; strophic form, parlando-rubato rhythm with construction on eighths and quarter notes; the character of the song is both syllabic and melismatic, the melodic and rhythmic formulas are specific, and the refrains are almost non-existent.

Like the old-style songs proper, the themes of the modern ones also refer to the inner states of the man who expresses himself through singing, the joys or the unpleasantness that life presents him.

The musical elements that I discovered in this musical genre underline precisely the features of the modern style, namely: a complex number of melodic lines, a significant number of additional refrains, a wide range that often exceeds the octave, divisional rhythm and parlando rubato and some ornamentation elements such as simple, compound and multiple appoggiaturas, and glissandos.

⁷ Paula Carp & Adrian Vicol. 2007. *Cântecul propriu-zis din Muscel*, vol. I. București: Editura Muzicală, p. 30.

⁸ Ioan Boțșă. 2003. *Colinde românești*, vol. I. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Fundația Culturală TerrArmonia, pp. 42-43.

In order to highlight even better the current characteristics of the song itself, I made some comparisons between the examples played in the 2008 volume with those found recently, from which I concluded that the texts of some songs are similar, but it can be seen how the melodic line becomes simplified, as it tends towards a concise, syllabic expression, without many additional interjections and anacrusis. Here is an eloquent example of this:

♩ = 80

257. I Fe - i li-pă... fol - go - mal - bă Mier - li-ța cînd îi bolna - vă
 Vi-ne cu-cu și o-n - trea - bă Ce i-se ji - e so - ro - dra - ga
 Ce i-se ji - e so - ro - dra - ga

Ghindaoni - Neamț
 Inf. Leonora D. Nastasă, 43

AFMB, Mg. 192, I, 26 (Md 6/29)
 Culeg. L.B. și L.C. (1975)
 Tr. D. H.

Fig. 1. The song proper no. 257 collected in 1975

♩ ≈ 76

Urdă Casandra, 64
 Poloboc, NT

Mier - luș - ca cîn' îi bol - na - vă, Vi - ni cu - cu și o - n - trea - bă,
 Vi - ni cu - cu și o - n - trea - bă, Di ci plîngi su - rioa - ră dra - gă?

Cul. Munteanu I., 2021; Tr. Munteanu I., 2022

Fig. 2. The song proper no. 112 collected in 2021

♩ = 100

377. Hăi, hăi Foa - ie ver - de ca a - lu - na Foa - ie ver - de ca a - lu - na
 Sunt la mai - ca nu - mai u - na
 II. 1) 3) 4)

Nemțșor - Neamț
 Inf. Ion Gh. Tulan, 55

AFMB, Mg. 209, I, 6 (Md 8/24)
 Culeg. S.C. și L.H.C. (1975)
 Tr. D. H.

Fig. 3. The song proper no. 377 collected in 1975

♩ ≈ 56

Ionescu Ana, 62
 Grintieș, NT

Foa - ie ver - de ca a - lu - na, Sunt la mai - ca nu - mai u - na,
 Cum îi soa - re - le și lu - na, măi, măi,
 Cum îi soa - re - le și lu - na, măi, măi.

Cul. Munteanu I., 2021; Tr. Munteanu I., 2022

Fig. 4. The song proper no. 117 collected in 2021

Although the beginning is similar, both in terms of melody and text, the same transformations that give a different character to the contemporary, greatly simplified, can also be noticed in the following example:

218. $\text{♩} = 90$

J. lui Do-rie dor cu do-ru-ri - le, ai do-ru-ri - le, ai
 Do-rie dor. Ce do-ru-ri - le, ai do-ru-ri - le, ai Pe la le-ua: pu-ri - fi-
 le, Pe la: sos-te pu-ri - te pu-ri - te pu-ri - te ai

Apărăci - Neveș
 Inf. Maria M. Grădinaru, 34

A 55MI, Mg. 210, t. 16 (Vol. 9/23)
 Coleg. S.C. 511 II. C. (1975)
 Tr. D. II

Fig. 5. The song proper no. 218, collected in 1975

$\text{♩} \approx 84$

Brăzucă Silvia, 58
 Dobreni, NT

Du-te dor cu do-ru-ri - le, Pe la toa - te plu-gu-ri - le,
 Du - te și la do - rul meu, măi, Do - ru - leț, măi,
 Pă - nă din - co lo te tău, măi, Do - ru - leț, măi.

Cul. Munteanu I., 2019; Tr. Munteanu I., 2022

Fig. 6. The song proper no. 129, collected in 2019

Comparing the examples collected in the past with those recently recorded also attests to another phenomenon specific to folklore creation: the situation of adapting a text to different songs, which we found by putting together the versions of the vocal dance song *Cucule cu pene verzi* [Cuckoo with green feathers] - no. 155 in the 2008 volume and no. 138 transcribed by me.

Nr. 155	Nr. 138
ai, Cucule cu pene verzi, măi, ai, Cucule cu pene verzi, măi, Ce cânti seara prin livezi măi, Cântă și-n livada mea, măi Nu știu cui a rămânea, măi. De-o rămâne la străini, măi Să crească iarbă și spini, măi, (...) De-o rămâne la surori, măi Să crească iarbă și flori, măi. (...)	Cucule cu pene verzi, măi, Cucule cu pene verzi, măi, Ce cânti seara prin livezi măi, (...) Cântă și în livada mea, măi, Cântă și în livada mea, măi, Căci ca mâine o rămânea, măi, De-o rămâne la străini, măi, De-o rămâne la străini, măi, Să crească iarbă și spini, măi, De-o rămâne la surori, măi, De-o rămâne la surori, măi, Să crească iarbă și flori, măi, (...)

Fig. 5. The lyrics of the vocal dance tunes no. 155 and no. 138

The examples presented above illustrate the process of perpetual transformation to which folkloric creations are subjected.

Also, in the case of the other folk music genres, we can observe their passing through a phase of gradual involution (such as: the lullaby, the folk theatre, the soldier’s song, the lament), while others have evolved continuously (the *doina*, the song proper – so-called of modern style, the vocal dance song, etc.) due to the renewal that took place in the village life and mentality, but simplicity is the expression that emerges from each individual interpretation.

The above statement is also endorsed by the conclusions that emerged as a result of the analytical, syntactic and morphological approach, which I carried out on the recorded repertoire. Looking at each song through the prism of the genre that defines it and following the scheme of

the five defining elements of language in Romanian folk music: versification, melody, architecture, rhythm and ornamentation, I discovered the following:

- In versification, octosyllabic verses with catalectic and acatalectic forms predominate, and during singing, many of the genres, supporting anacrusis, syllabic additions and syllable elisions that modify the verse structure;

- At the level of the melody, the construction of all genres is modal, minor sound structures being predominant, the most frequent being the aeolian present both in its natural form and in various postures with inflections, with fluctuating steps etc. The most numerous final cadences they are on step 1, and the main ones oscillate, depending on the number of melodic lines, between two and eight, in the occasional repertoire, and between three and thirteen, in the non-occasional one. Ambitus is between medium and acute, oscillating to the wide, up to the thirteenth in the proper old-style song. The vaulted profile is representative.

- The form has simple to complex structures, which are due to verse variations or repetitions and amplification in some songs with chorus in proper regular or supporting form.

- The rhythm is diverse, from the free one (*parlando* and *parlando rubato*) to measured (*divisional*, *silabic giusto*, *bicron syllabic giusto*, *aksak*).

- Single, double and multiple appoggiaturas predominate in the ornamentation; we also find glissandos and mordants.

2.2. The role of ensembles in the transmission and evolution of Neamț folklore

Based on the collections, I identified the existence of several *taraf* [music band] or folk ensembles in Neamț County. Illustrious acts of local culture have symbolically defined the land over the years, starting from the specifics of the natural, historical, social, moral-spiritual framework, presenting and arguing some local cultural actions. Designed and applied starting from traditions, but taking into account the contemporary needs and wants of the inhabitants of the county, these "facts" are due to those who dedicate themselves to folklore acts, who want to carry the tradition forward through music and dance. It is about those folklore ensembles and groups that value and preserve the inherited cultural treasure, the musical tradition that sums up authentic folk songs and dances.

To the contributions of ethnomusicologists, made over the decades, are added those members of folklore ensembles and groups who want to capitalize on folklore and present it on large national and international stages, in various festivals, competitions or on days of celebration, or at various artistic events. Many of the events are held for the enjoyment of the public wishing to listen to songs with which they resonate, being known to them from childhood, and which represent for them a return in time and space. At the same time, the indisputable success of the folkloric performances from Neamț, on the stages of which both ensembles from the country and from abroad perform, highlight the tradition, respectively the culture of the Romanian people and even that of other peoples.

In the area, many of the artistic manifestations are organized annually, such as: the Festival of traditions and customs *Steaua sus răsare* Piatra Neamț and Târgu Neamț, *Șezătoarea* from Humulești, *Parada portului popular* [Parade of folk costumes] from Târgu Neamț, the Feast of *Războieni*, the Feast of *Ceahlău*, *Florile Ceahlăului* Piatra Neamț Festival, *Padurea de Argint* Folk Festival, Folk Theater Festival etc. and other local, communal or inter-communal events. All those listed mark, along with ensembles, a form of expression of traditional local

spirituality that also highlights the role of cultural animators who understood how important it is to preserve the traditions.

Among the folk ensembles of the county are: *Codrii Neamțului* Piatra Neamț Folk Ensemble, *Nemțișorul* Piatra Neamț Folk Song Ensemble, *Floriciță de la Munte* Folk Ensemble of the Carmen Saeculare Neamț Culture Centre, *Brâul Roșu* Piatra Neamț Folk Ensemble, *Doina Ceahlăului* Piatra Neamț Folk Ensemble, *Ozana Pipirig* folk ensemble, *Florile Stânișoarei* Borca folk group, *Izvoarașul Tazlău* folk ensemble, *Dor Vânătoarean* Vânători-Neamț folk ensemble, the Girov troupe of dancing bears, etc.

In addition to performance, the ensembles also contribute to the collection, preservation, promotion and dissemination of the melos, dress, dance and many other folkloric and ethnographic values. They do what they do with pride, but also with a duty that consists in sharing the beauty of folk music with their peers, they strive through the work they do to keep the folklore tradition alive.

3. Conclusions

The Land of Neamț is a consistent keeper of Romanian traditions even today. This statement would not have had foundation without the hearty people who gave unconditionally their time and skill to bring to light and play for me songs from the area's musical treasure.

I believe that my approach – based on the book entitled *Folclor muzical din Ținutul Neamț* [Musical Folklore from the Land of Neamț] –, along with my entire fieldwork activity and the syntheses carried out, manage to bring back to attention the beauty of the traditional music from this part of Moldova, as well as to complement the previous collections with a rich repertoire, reflecting the transformations that have occurred in the folk culture of the area during the last five decades.

Although the traditional vocal music from Neamț carries new values, I can ardently state that the occasional and non-occasional vocal genres are still an active presence in the life of the village community and are passed on to the younger generation, a process to which the many folklore groups in the area also contribute. The occasional genres are more conservative, so that there was no significant departure of the recorded examples from the already known local style recorded by previous research. As far as the songs in the non-occasional lyric category are concerned (such as the song proper), I noticed a modern evolution, although the repertoire preserves the specific features of the Neamț area, not being totally influenced by the music of other folk areas or other musical genres that belong to the cultivated creation.

Therefore, the wealth of Neamț folklore is harnessed through the folkloric peculiarities of the folk song. Since ancient times, man has consciously let his soul speak through music. The melodiousness present in preserved repertoires conveys a certain mood and evokes feelings, even without hearing the lyrics of a song. Melodic lines are nothing more than a statement with a subject and a predicate, sometimes also using attributes or even mood complements, which summarizes the entire melodic we are talking about.

An authentic repertoire is a precious treasure. There is so much charm and life we can absorb from traditional folk music, if only we listened carefully and with receptiveness, as it can convey to us unique feelings arising from the experiences of our ancestors! Like other genres of

classical music, traditional ones must be cultivated with ardour; it's only in us that the beauty of folk songs overcome the barrier of time and modernization.

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