

The traditional dance in Dâmbovița county – general and particular aspects

Florin ȘTEFAN¹

Abstract: *The traditional dance is still an active element in the fiddle music practice in Dâmbovița county. This consistency of it reduces the risk of becoming an inactive musical category in the local fiddle structure. Gradually, the dances of The traditional dance of the village (“Hora satului”) - with the disappearance of this institution – to the stage environment brought the performances of various local, county and national dance ensembles. It is well known the variety in which the traditional dance from Dâmbovița manifests itself or has manifested itself in the cultural landscape. This category can be observed in three modes of operation: in the village institution “Hora satului” in the framework of private events in the life of the community and in the scenic environment (shows, festivals, county and local contests).*

Keywords: *traditional dance; fiddlers; cultural context; Dâmbovița county;*

Introduction

The dance category is still an active element in the musical practice of the fiddle in Dâmbovița county, this demonstrating a specific resistance over time, without being affected, only partially by cultural and social factors (for example, the appearance of new musical genres, the variety of musical preferences of the beneficiaries of the music played by fiddlers related to different historical and cultural contexts). This consistency of it reduces the risk of becoming an inactive musical category in the local fiddle structure; in addition, this stability over time suggests a special importance of the Dâmbovița dance, that is imposed in the local fiddle culture.

1. Different issues of the popular dance from Dâmbovița

An essential aspect regarding the Dâmbovița dance is its affirmation in relation to the other folklore categories. How much and how often is the traditional dance found in Dâmbovița musical practice? A certain research started between 1967-1970 by Gheorghe Văduva (master choreographer of popular dances) with fiddlers from Glodeni, Gheboiaia, Pătroaia, Bărbulețu, Pucioasa, Șotânga, Târgoviște and Teiș, all towns part of Dâmbovița, it demonstrates the richness and the variety of traditional and local dances: besides the three lyric songs, a ballad and seven vocal-instrumental songs, were recorded over 100 dances performed on the accordion or executed by small taraf formulas (violin, dulcimer, accordion), some of them in several forms, depending on the specificity of the area². In those years, the dance was imposed in the cultural landscape and in the musical practice of Dâmbovița county. The current condition of the traditional dance it's not the same anymore, but it still finds it's plays in today's musical reality:

¹ The “Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy from Cluj-Napoca, florin_stefan37@yahoo.com.

² I am in the possession of the research materials that belong to the Gheorghe Văduva master (with his consent) in January 2017.

our field research indicates a constant presence of this musical category in the private contexts where fiddlers offer their musical services.

Another problem of the Dâmbovița dance is the occasion for its manifestation. In the past decades *The traditional village dance* which took place, most of the time, in the center of the commune on holidays and every Sunday – represented a kind of institution of the village in environment where young people, not only had the opportunity to learn local dances, but above all, to get to know each other resulting in marriages. Finally, the village hall contributed significantly to the gathering and reunion of the local community. The fiddlers were indispensable at these events, and they were the only ones who knew the whole process in detail³. Gradually, the dances found at this event – with the disappearance of this institution – moved to the stage environment through the performances of various local county or national dance ensembles. Obviously, the initial functions of the dance have been modified, the process itself being affected, no longer presenting that initial depth or complexity. However, we feel compelled to emphasize an aspect not without importance: in parallel with the dance of the village the popular one, also took place in private contexts (weddings, baptisms etc.). Unlike its removal from the village dance, as a result of the abolition of this institution, private events still offer the opportunity to village communities to actually participate in traditional local dances. Therefore, the private context of manifestation remains the only way that keeps the practice of local dances alive and can be considered a replacement or a supplement to *The traditional village dance (Hora satului)* of yesteryear.

Also regarding to the popular dance from Dâmbovița – but, this time, we can take into account the dance in general, regardless of the county or region in which it takes – the question of the protagonists involved in the actual syncretic-musical process can be raised. We limit ourselves to exposing these particularities exclusively for games executed within private contexts. Instrumental music is always produced by a fiddle band (which may include fiddlers and various subcategories⁴), and the participants of the dance may differ depending on the specificity of the dance: there are dances intended only for men (such as *Brâul*), others only for women⁵, but in especially in Dâmbovița county, most dances are mixed (played by both men and women)⁶. During private events children and young people can dance alongside adults and the elderly; there are no rules that do not allow different age categories to join in the actual dance. Referring to our investigations in Dâmbovița, the dances performed in private context are mostly intended for the whole community gathered. Therefore, dances addressed to a single category of people (as I mentioned men's dances, women's dances etc.) are very rarely observed on such occasions⁷. But in addition to the mixed dances – mostly in private events – dances in pairs (*Ciobănașul*, *Brașoveanca* etc.) are performed, but in such a large proportion⁸.

³ Speranța Rădulescu. 2016. *Muzica de joc*, course (unpublished) for the National University of Music Bucharest students, p. 3.

⁴ We refer to the fiddlers typologies: subcategories of the professional musicians, semi-professional, amateurs or standardized.

⁵ Speranța Rădulescu, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁶ Gheorghe Văduva. 2004. *Jocul popular dâmbovițean*, manuscript unpublished, Târgoviște, p. 7.

⁷ Florin Ștefan. Interviews (unpublished) made with fiddlers Vasile Mihaiu (57 years old, Puchenii: August 18, 2020), Florin Valentin Ilie (18 years old, Hăbeni: October 4, 2020), Ionuț Apostol (18 years old, Hăbeni: October 14, 2020), Sorin Sanda (23 years old, Comișani: October 15, 2020), Ionuț Banu (24 years old, Glodeni: October 17, 2020) și Robert Necșoiu (23 years old, Ocnița: November 1, 2020).

⁸ Florin Ștefan. Interview provided by the master of dances Gheorghe Văduva, 83 years old, Târgoviște: January 9, 2018 (published: Florin Ștefan. 2019. *Viziuni etnomuzicologice*. București: Editura Muzicală, pp. 66-85).

2. Different postures of the popular dance from Dâmbovița related to the context of its operation

It is known the variety in which the Dâmbovița traditional dance manifests itself or has manifested itself in the cultural landscape. This category can be observed in three modes of operation: in the village institution a *The traditional village dance*, in the framework of private events in the life of the community and in the scenic environment (shows, festivals, county and local competitions). Looking at the current condition of the popular dance from Dâmbovița it is only found in private context and in the scenic setting (different cultural manifestation) as a result of the abolition in the village's dance. Referring to its three appearances⁹, we believe that certain clarifications are necessary regarding the status of the dance for each of the three operating positions. Are dances the same even in the circumstances of execution different? As far as we know however, addition can be made to issue at anytime, certain dances (such as *Hora*, *Sârba* și *Ofițăreasca*) can be observed on all three mentioned occasions. There can also be dances that stand out only in certain moments: for example *Marițica* și *Chindia* dances meet exclusively in the stage setting. Some dances tend to assert themselves through certain manifestations, but there is the possibility of being and encountered on other occasion as well: for example, the *Brașoveanca* dance is specific with a preponderance in private operating environments¹⁰, but there is the possibility of its representation on stage – but quite rarely – in various festivals or other types of cultural projects. Therefore the dances from Dâmbovița can be classified in to three distinct groups related to the three context in which they occur: dances with a general status (those dances that can be observed in all three mentioned circumstances), dances with a partial status (the ones which can have two of the three possible operating postures) and dances with special order status (those dances that meet in a single musical cultural context, the barriers being quite defined compared to the other two contextual types of performance).

At the same time, the actual process of creating the Dâmbovița folk dances is considered to be an important aspect: the question is whether this is the same with every performance, though unfold on different occasions. Regarding this issue, given the fact that the circumstances of executing the dances are not the same, there are certain changes that inevitably occur in terms of internal organization and performance of the dancing act itself. If compared, the dance performed within the institution of *The Village Round Dance (Hora satului)* and the one performed on a private event (such as a wedding, the most popular private event) will underpin certain differences: at *The Village Round Dance*, the actual context of the performance consists exclusively in the young generation's opportunity to meet, the culmination being represented by local marriages, while the wedding represents the celebration of the newlyweds, a unique event (without being repeated weekly as in *The Village Round Dance*) that requires invitations addressed to the participants in advance, unlike *The Village Round Dance* that offers the possibility of the whole local communities to take part in. Differences can be observed in the performance of the dances as well: if at *The Village Round Dance*, those targeted in the dancing action are mainly the young people in the community (a large part of the dances being organized in pairs), at the wedding, the dance is not specifically addressed to a certain category, but to all participants, and most of the dances are performed in a circle or semi-circle (by holding hands),

⁹ We also take into account the dance performed on the occasion of the folk round dance, even if this has not been performed for more than four or five decades.

¹⁰ We refer exclusively to current fiddle practice.

dancing in pairs not being predominant (as in the case of *The Village Round Dance*)¹¹. There is also a common aspect for these two contexts: in both situations, a freedom of the actual dancing act is highlighted, without there being a strictness of the steps (momentary improvisations may result, both on the part of the dancers and on the part of the folk fiddlers¹²) or of the dancers' position; thus, the two occasions of unfolding the Dâmbovița folk dances suppose a certain unpredictability and variety in expressing the dancing phenomenon.

Comparing the dances produced on scene (officially) to those within *The Village Round Dance*, the differences are much more pronounced compared to the first comparison presented above. First of all, the artistic act significantly influences the dancing phenomenon itself, adapting the process itself (taken from the folk culture) to the artistic requirements that are in contrast to the initial ones (the original context). The "official" dances or suites assume strict rules, such as the imposition of certain dance steps (without giving any freedom of improvisation), synchronization with perfection tendencies, or the realization of certain types of stage locations related to the specificity of each suite dance¹³.

Also, from a stylistic and musical point of view, certain changes may result, following as much as possible the impact on the audience, often resorting to melodic artifices directly related to the dancers' activity. At the same time, the purpose of the dancing action is completely different from that of *The Village Round Dance*: the role of the dance on scene is exclusively related to the actual artistic act, it is not actually produced in the village world (in peasant culture) and is not based on certain well defined functions (we refer, for example, to the nuptial function, which secures the marriage of young people, as a result of meeting and getting to know each other within *The Village Round Dance* institution). The stage dance is, therefore, a suppression of all dancing functions within the village and can acquire new ones, such as the artistic function (the adaptation and processing of the dancing process in pleasant and captivating moments of artistic representation) or the regular function (which implies a strict performance of the entire artistic manifestation, prepared and thought out in advance to the smallest technical, melodic and clothing details; spontaneity is completely absent). Referring to all the peculiarities of the stage dance presented above, we can consider the two instances of the folk dance (the stage one vs. the one functioning in the village environment) as opposite: the two assume different conditions for the whole dancing process, distinct aims and purposes. Thus, it is difficult to identify similarities for the two types of dancing-musical manifestations. Though it cannot be fully considered a common feature for the two forms of dancing, the only congruence (not total, but partial) is the names of the dances and their originality (on stage, one starts from the genuine form of representation of the dance, even if new elements appear at the musical or choreographic level). Another aspect that we consider a priority regarding the condition of the dance in the traditional culture is represented by the possible influences, more or less highlighted, on the melodic-rhythmic structure of the dance, on the choreographic schemes, which can generate different changes, sometimes inappropriate to their functional context. These possible transformations of the dance can occur as a result of multiple executional instances. For example, can the "official" dance represent a threat to the dance practice in the current life of the community? Several explanations can result, according to the perspective we want to consider,

¹¹ Do not understand that during private events (weddings etc.) pair dances are completely absent.

¹² We refer to possible musical improvisations, which do not affect the local style or the formal peculiarities of the dances.

¹³ Dancing artistic acts do not involve a single dance, but a suite of dances carefully chosen, so that they have artistic potential and be presented successively, to correspond stylistically, sometimes rhythmically (progressively, from slow tempos to as fast tempos as possible).

when we have in view this aspect. Thus, the stage dance originates in the folk dance, so that defining elements of the latter are inevitably borrowed (there is a very strict connection between the dance steps and certain melodic-rhythmic fragments, the changes between the two levels – both the dancing and musical ones - being hardly acceptable¹⁴; the names and order of the dances are preserved as well. However, the transformations observed on the stage dancing organization (inconsistencies between the artistic environment and the current peasant practice, in terms of clothing, referring to the strict rules applied on stage, those that require that all dancers should wear identical folk costumes, in order to be in consonance from an aesthetic and artistic point of view¹⁵; different choreographic schemes with a strong artistic character, completely different from everything that the dancing practice of the community means, sometimes exaggerations regarding the choreographic route or even theatrical moments realized through possible suggestive scenes¹⁶, but quite limited as time, integrated in the actual performance of the suites) can lead to certain behavioral-dancing tendencies of an artistic nature even within private manifestations, coming from certain participants¹⁷.

3. Conclusion

Therefore, we have the opinion that the popular dance can involve various forms of manifestation (including in the current days), which are nuanced more or less, depending on the regional culture in which it takes place (but it may differ even within the same county), but also depending on the stylistic predispositions of the community to which it is addressed. Also, we cannot overlook the very important role that fiddlers have in retaining the dances (we are generally referring to those village fiddlers who still know the local traditions). However, in order for the local dances to constitute that living traditional village element, it is necessary to maintain a certain consistency in terms of the connection between the fiddlers and the beneficiaries of their services.

¹⁴ Possible changes can be made, but not so obvious as to deviate too much from the original functional form. However, there are cases in which the stage dance hardly corresponds at all to the dance it originally started from. Therefore, artistic patterns can sometimes pass over certain barriers of traditional culture, ultimately leading to a strong error, which can generate numerous confusions for the general public.

¹⁵ In the rural environment, the participants dancers have always chosen their own unimposed clothing, to their liking, (in the past decades they used to wear folk costumes, and in most cases they belonged to the family, they were rarely borrowed; nowadays, folk costumes have been radically replaced with "civilian" clothing).

¹⁶ The scenes usually consist of certain verbal dialogues between the dancers (a very small part of them being targeted, the rest participating indirectly in the theatrical act), but others do not involve spoken lines, but only suggestive theatrical attitudes. Most of the suites that involve theatrical moments contain dances that are associated with various local customs (such as The Bride's Round Dance, *Nuneasca* - thus, moments within the wedding custom - or *Călușul*, although this is no longer practiced in any Dâmbovița locality).

¹⁷ We are referring, for example, to restraints regarding the free and natural manifestation of the dance itself and to the approach of a controlled dancing attitude, the main attention being paid to the synchronization with the other participants in the dance, ultimately resulting in a certain uniformity, which in no way allows a certain improvisational dancing character (unpredictable, spontaneous choreographic intentions).

4. References

● Books

- Rădulescu, Speranța. 2016. *Muzica de joc*, course (unpublished) for the National University of Music Bucharest students.
- Văduva, Gheorghe. 2004. *Jocul popular dâmbovițean*, manuscript unpublished, Târgoviște.

● Interviews conducted by Ștefan, Florin

- Interview made with fiddler Apostol Ionuț (unpublished), 18 years old, Hăbeni: October 14, 2020.
- Interview made with fiddler Banu Ionuț (unpublished), 24 years old, Glodeni: October 17, 2020.
- Interview made with fiddler Ilie Florin Valentin (unpublished), 18 years old, Hăbeni: October 4, 2020.
- Interview made with fiddler Mihaiu Vasile (unpublished), 57 years old, Pucheni: August 18, 2020.
- Interview made with fiddler Necșoiu Robert (unpublished), 23 years old, Ocnîța: November 1, 2020.
- Interview made with fiddler Sanda Sorin (unpublished), 23 years old, Comișani: October 15, 2020.
- Interview made with master of dances Văduva Gheorghe, 83 years old, Târgoviște: January 9, 2018 (published: Ștefan, Florin. 2019. *Viziuni etnomuzicologice*. București: Editura Muzicală, pp. 66-85).