

The Ritual Bride's Song in Moldova and Bukovina: Perspectives on Musical-Ceremonial Discourse

Ioana-Alexandra MUNTEANU¹

Abstract: *In popular belief, the wedding is a defining moment in a person's life, marking entry into a new society – a true celebration that involves the entire community. This custom represents a true syncretic spectacle in which literary productions, such as chants and orations, merge with musical and choreographic productions into a single whole. It is the most extensive ceremonial, in which we find both melodies belonging to the occasional and non-occasional repertoire. Within the first category belongs the ritual bridal song and not from just anywhere, but from Moldova and Bukovina, areas where traditions and customs still preserve their authenticity, folklore being strictly conserved, considered as being a sacred gift received from ancestors.*

Keywords: *Wedding; bride; ritual; song; Moldova; Bukovina;*

Introduction

Folklore represents "an inexhaustible source of identification of some solutions for the development of the rich vein of folk music."² The diversity of Romanian traditions that it embodies – and which refer to important moments in human life – provides a clear direction for folk musical creation.

In our country, we find vast areas of history, art and folk culture. From a folkloric perspective, the geographical regions preserve an authentic mosaic of practices. The distinct character of each territory is highlighted through traditional architecture, music, dance, folk costume and oral literary creation, and despite regional specificity, a series of common elements national level also stand out.

Moldova and Bukovina are regions with a rich folkloric tradition that shelter an inexhaustible artistic treasure, composed of spiritual values of unquestionable permanence. Since ancient times, both Moldova and Bukovina have rigorously preserved their folklore, so that traditions and customs, culture, and folk art outline the image of the inhabitants of these two regions into an authentic whole that defines them. The degree to which folk customs have been preserved suggests that Moldovans and Bukovinians are conservative people. Thus, the archaic world is revived through the practice of various customs and crafts as they once were, through traditional vocal and instrumental music.

Among millennia-old traditions is the wedding, which is organized like a syncretic folk spectacle, full of originality in the succession of customs. This, together with birth and burial, is a tradition that the French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957) called rites of passage referring to a change in human life marked by the respective event, on which occasion vocal and

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

² Ulpiu, Vlad. 2009. *Repertoriul nupțial – cântecul de mireasă [The nuptial repertoire – the bridal song]*. Bucharest: Musical Publishing, p. 9.

instrumental music is present. Within the rites of passage, the wedding occupies a central place due to the scale and beauty of its ceremonial, which involves a large number of participants.

On an ethnographic level, researchers have highlighted the fact that, the wedding is not a simple festivity, but an ensemble of ritualistic acts which presuppose an entire succession of moments such as: the matchmaking, the wedding call, the adorning of the bride, the shouting of the gift, forgiveness, the spinning of the bride etc., all these being loaded with symbolic significance. In Moldova and Bukovina, these stages are preserved in an elaborate conservative form, marked by specific elements, which underline the archaic and well-rooted character of tradition.

The wedding in Moldovan and Bukovinian villages is one of the greatest celebrations, a moment of festivity and good cheer.

From an ethnographic perspective, researchers have highlighted that the wedding is not a simple celebration, but a series of ritual acts involving a succession of moments such as the engagement, inviting guests, the bride's adornment, the presentation of the dowry, the ritual of forgiveness, the bride's dance, among others, all of which are imbued with symbolic meanings. In Moldova and Bukovina, these stages are preserved in a refined, conservative form, marked by specific elements that underscore the archaic and deeply rooted nature of tradition.

Weddings in the villages of Moldova and Bukovina are among the most important celebrations, occasions for revelry and joy.

Historically, we can observe an evolution of the wedding ritual in modern times, from an archaic structure of great significance in folklore to an event influenced by various factors. In both Moldova and Bukovina, the traditional wedding custom is still alive, as many villagers continue the traditions inherited from their parents, preserved as a cultural treasure. This can be seen in the fact that in recent years many families have been organizing weddings in the traditional manner, observing all the customs of this complex ceremony, which strengthens the institution of marriage and is performed with love and enthusiasm. The entire custom unfolds before hundreds of witnesses, all sharing in the joy.

The wedding ceremony has its own language, both literary and musical, through which various clearly structured messages are conveyed—messages that can be considered distinct signs within the system of folk semiotics.

1. The Wedding Music Repertoire

The wedding music repertoire, in relation to other elements of folk traditions, is integrated into the ceremonial context, which it shapes. This integration reveals correspondences between music and ritual at different levels, such as function, structure, content, and expressive language. The repertoire includes the bride's ritual songs, the groom's songs, the mother-in-law's songs, the godparents' songs, drinking songs, wedding guests' songs, table songs, the bride's dance, the *La Găină*, *hore*, marches, and dance tunes. The melodies performed during the wedding occupy a well-defined position within the ceremony and are grouped into:

- ritual vocal songs (with occasional instrumental interludes), which include the bride's ritual songs, the groom's songs, the mother-in-law's songs, *Zorile*, and songs performed at the presentation of the dowry;

- ritual instrumental pieces that accompany or replace the vocal ritual songs, such as *Nuneasca* and *Chemarea la nuntă*.

In addition to vocal and instrumental songs, the ceremony also features marches – melodies performed at various moments: on the way to the bride, as the bride leaves her parents' home, on the way to the wedding ceremony, and from the church to the reception venue.

The category of vocal songs also includes ritual songs dedicated to the bride, which feature prominently in the wedding repertoire. This reflects the important role the bride plays in the ceremony, just like the groom; her presence is central to many moments of the wedding. The bride symbolizes emotion and the beginning of a new stage in life; she wears the most elaborate ceremonial attire and has the most intricate hairstyle, crowned with a wreath of fresh flowers or wheat ears in Bucovina, or decorated with colorful ribbons in other areas of the region.

2. The Bride's Ritual Song

From a musical perspective, the most diverse repertoire is dedicated to the bride, consisting of songs that evoke, through their melody and lyrics, a wide range of emotions, moods, and feelings.

Due to their significance in the unfolding of the wedding ceremony, the ritual bridal songs, known in our country as the *hora miresei*, *gogitul miresei*, *gogea miresei*, etc. – terms derived from various regional names for “bride” – occupy a central place in the musical repertoire of wedding ceremonies.

In the specialized literature, experts have documented various occasions on which the ritual bridal song was performed in the two regions studied: at the engagement, on the evening before the wedding, before the bride leaves her parents' home, on the wedding day during the bride's dressing, during her preparation, at the farewell, on the way to the groom's house, upon arrival at the church, and during the reception.

While in the past, during the sequences listed above, ritual bridal songs were performed exclusively by women – and in some areas by wedding guests, both women and men – today this song is also performed by musicians.

The melody of the ritual bridal song is adapted to different texts at other moments of the ceremony, such as the groom's song, the mother-in-law's song, or even march-like forms.

A careful analysis of the bridal repertoire demonstrates its grounding in tradition, continuously renewed by anonymous traditional creators, whose contributions have accentuated regional differences, melodic and typological diversity, and the variety of expressive means employed.

Although they have lost their ancient magical significance over time, much of the repertoire of ritual bridal songs has survived to the present through tradition, acquiring a new meaning that is ceremonial, festive, and entertaining; the specific melodies underscore the inner meaning of the rituals being performed.

3. An Analytical Study of the Bridal Ritual Song

To highlight the specific characteristics of this musical genre as found in the wedding repertoires of Moldova and Bukovina, we selected one representative ritual bridal song from each of the regions studied. Each selected example was systematically analyzed, considering the following aspects: the structure of the lyrics, the number of syllables in each line, types of rhyme, ornamental syllables, syllable elisions, anacrusis (upbeats), and refrains, as well as the musical characteristics of the melody, including the tonal system, range, general melodic profile, formal structure, rhythmic system, and ornamentation.

3.1. The Bride's Ritual Song in Moldova

With regard to the region of Moldova, following field research conducted during my doctoral studies, I identified a series of ritual bridal songs in Neamț County, which I collected, transcribed, and subsequently published. Thus, from the volume I authored, titled *In the Footsteps of a Referential Monographic Research: "Musical Folklore from the Land of Neamț" ~ Continuity and Transformation of Musical Folklore from Neamț in the 3rd Millennium*, edited in the year 2025, at MediaMusica Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, I extracted a ritual bridal song, which I analyzed.

The selected ritual bridal song *Și iar verdi ca sulșina*³ was collected from Borca, Neamț County, in 2019, from informant Vararu Maria, age 62.

Vararu Maria, 62
Borca, NT

♩ ≈ 57

Și-iar ver-di ca sul-și - na, Nu mă da ma-mă cu sâ- la,
C-ai ve-ni la săp - tă- mâ - na, Și ȝ-a si mai ma - re ni-la.

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

*Și iar verdi ca sulșina,
Nu mă da mamă cu sâla,
C-ai veni la săptămâna,
Și ȝ-a și mai mare nila.
M-ai da mamă sî ciudată,
Numa să ciu măritată.*

Example 1. Ritual bridal song „Și iar verdi ca sulșina”

Given the fact that the theme is unitary throughout the country, in the selected example, we find the bride's request addressed to her mother not to give her away from home, to strangers.

The versification in the analysed ritual bridal song is composed of only acatalectic tetrapodic verses of 8 syllables.

The rhymes encountered are feminine (when the rhyme occurs on the last two syllables of the acatalectic verses), but also imperfect (whose final syllables are not identical).

Example of a feminine/imperfect rhyme:

*Și iar verdi ca sulșina,
Nu mă dă mamă cu sâla.*

³ Munteanu, Ioana-Alexandra. 2025. Pe urmele unei cercetări monografice referențiale „Folclor muzical din Ținutul Neamțului ~ Perenitate și transformare a folclorului muzical din Neamț în mileniul III [In the Footsteps of a Referential Monographic Research: “Musical Folklore from the Land of Neamț” ~ Continuity and Transformation of Musical Folklore from Neamț in the 3rd Millennium]. Cluj-Napoca: MediaMusica Publishing, p. 38.

Elements that enrich the structure of a melody such as additional anacrusis, syllabic additions, syllable elisions, etc., are missing from the analysed ritual bridal song.

In bridal ritual songs from our country, refrains of varying lengths are frequently encountered, but in the Moldovan repertoire they are quite rare, being replaced by melodic lines, as can be seen in the analyzed example.

The melody follows a single form category: the strophic form. In this song, we identified stanzas with four melodic lines in the ABCD form, built on a vaulted melodic profile.

From a melodic perspective, the song is characterized by a modal sound structure, specifically in the major mode, based on the Ionian mode with chromatic passages:



Fig. 1. Scale

The final cadence is on the first degree (G).

The richness of the melodic line is complemented by the wide range of F#1–G2, resulting in a minor ninth interval. The melody's structure is enhanced by only a few ornaments, namely simple preceding and following appoggiaturas, descending double appoggiaturas, and descending triple appoggiaturas.

The rhythmic structure is *distributive*.

3.2. The Bride's Ritual Song in Bukovina

In the Bukovina area, numerous ethnomusicologists have worked on the research folklore, with the collected repertoires being inserted in specialized books and monographs. Among these is also the folklorist Alexandru Voevidca (1862-1931), from whose volume titled *Musical Folklore of Bukovina*, republished in the year 2015 at Liadana Publishing House, I selected the second bridal ritual song titled *Bulgăraș de apă rece*⁴, collected in 1909, from Boian-Hlinița, Suceava county, by the ethnomusicologist himself, from informant Eufrosina Suprovici, age 19.

inf. Eufrosina Suprovici, 19

Boian-Hlinița, SV

Cul. Alexandru Voevidca, 26 mai 1909

Tempo di hora

Bul - gă - raș de ghea - ță re - ce, Trai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai,

Hai mai-că și mă pe - tre - ce, Trai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai.

⁴ Voevidca, Alexandru. 2015. *Folclor muzical din Bucovina* [Musical Folklore from Bukovina]. Suceava: Liadana Publishing, p. 268.

*Bulgaraș de gheață rece,
Trai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai, (rf.)
Hai maică și mă pitrece.
Până-n cornu grădinii,
Pitreacă-te străinii.
Eu vreau maică dumniata,
De străini m-oi sătura.
Că străinu-i ca și schinu
Și-i amar ca și pelinu.*

Example 2. Ritual bridal song „Bulgăraș de gheață rece”

In the ritual bridal song from Bukovina, the thematic motif refers to the pain of the bride who heart is cold and sad, because she is about to part her mother and go among strangers.

Regarding the versification, it is emphasized by catalectic (7 syllables) and acatalectic (8 syllables) tetrapodic verses.

Referring to rhymes, we find both masculine (when the consonance is realized on the last syllable of the catalectic verses) and feminine, all being imperfect.

Example of masculine / imperfect rhyme:

*Eu vreau maică dumniata,
De străini m-oi sătura.*

Example of feminine / imperfect rhyme:

*Bulgăraș de gheață rece,
Hai maică și mă pitrece.*

In this example as well, elements such as supporting anacrusis, syllabic additions, and syllable elisions, etc., are absent. Instead, we encounter a proper regular refrain containing neutral syllables built on a catalectic tetrame: *Trai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai, lai.*



Example 3. Refrain

Referring to the melodic line, the song has four melodic lines, with the form AAv rf BC rf, built along a general descending melodic profile.

The sound system is modal, of minor mode, Eolic.



Fig. 2. Scale

The melodic contour is centered on the first degree, the note E, and the overall range is wide, spanning a perfect octave (E1–E2).

The rhythmic structure is measured in *distributive*.

No ornamentation was identified in this ritual bridal song.

4. Conclusion

“Since ancient times, the wedding has been regarded as a mystery, just like birth and death; unlike these, however, a person consciously participates in the ceremony at the prime of their life. If birth corresponds to the dawn of life and death to its twilight, the wedding is the hour of noon, the clearest for man, but also the most difficult precisely because of this clarity.”⁵

Thus, the wedding ceremonial constitutes a true rite of passage. Both the groom and the bride break away from their previous condition – that of unmarried youth people – to integrate into a new social structure: the family. The wedding thus marks a symbolic threshold that the two cross together, assuming a new status within the community. The process of modernizing weddings has led to a fusion of traditional elements with various contemporary trends. prime example of this is the ritual bridal song, which has retained its diversity in both lyrical themes and musical style. This musical genre is found throughout the region in vocal, instrumental, and vocal-instrumental forms. In their vocal form, ritual bridal songs from the regions of Moldova and Bukovina have preserved their authenticity to this day, as they are still performed at weddings.

Following the analytical endeavor based on the five defining elements of Romanian folk music language – versification, melody, architectonics, rhythm, and ornamentation – the musical structure of the two selected ritual bridal songs from Moldova and Bukovina reveals both similarities and differences. The comparative analysis offers a broad perspective on how the wedding custom reflects the values and identity of the communities.

In both regions, the ritual bridal song expresses deep feelings of longing, suffering, and resignation, highlighted through similar literary themes in the two examples, the central subject being the bride’s sadness as she prepares to separate from her mother and family. The verses are structured in pyrrhic tetrapody; in the song from Moldova, the acatalectic form is present, while in the Bukovina example both catalectic and acatalectic forms occur, along with diverse and imperfect rhymes. The presence of a refrain in the Bukovina example indicates a repetitive and balanced melodic structure. All these features that characterize the melodic and rhythmic aspects of the analyzed songs define an archaic musical aesthetic.

The homogeneous character is supported by the ritual function of these songs, which requires the preservation of traditional patterns transmitted orally from generation to generation.

Thus, the bridal songs from Bukovina and Moldova share a similar expressiveness, based on lyricism, solemnity, and melodic continuity.

Through the musical elements detailed above, as well as the form and modal structure that define the analyzed examples, we can affirm that this musical genre is complex in both studied areas and is undergoing a continuous process of transformation.

In conclusion, the ritual bridal songs from Moldova and Bukovina represent a profound expression of the cultural and spiritual values of traditional communities; thus, this genre of folk

⁵ Alexandru, Ioan. 1989. *Semnificația nunții în Nunta la români. Orații* [The significance of the wedding in Wedding at the Romanians. *Orations*]. Carefully edited by Ioan Moanță. Bucharest: Minerva Publishing, p. 5.

music is a true testament to Romanian identity, which must be preserved and passed on to future generations.

5. References

● Books

- Alexandru, Ioan. 1989. *Semnificația nunții în Nunta la români. Orații* [*The significance of the wedding in Wedding at the Romanians. Orations*]. Carefully edited by Ioan Moanță. Bucharest: Minerva Publishing.
- Munteanu, Ioana-Alexandra. 2025. *Pe urmele unei cercetări monografice referențiale „Folclor muzical din Ținutul Neamțului” ~ Perenitate și transformare a folclorului muzical din Neamț în mileniul III.* [*In the Footsteps of a Referential Monographic Research: “Musical Folklore from the Land of Neamț” ~ Continuity and Transformation of Musical Folklore from Neamț in the 3rd Millennium*]. Cluj-Napoca: MediaMusica Publishing.
- Ulpiu, Vlad. 2009. *Repertoriul nupțial – cântecul de mireasă* [*The nuptial repertoire – the bridal song*]. Bucharest: Musical Publishing.
- Voevidca, Alexandru. 2015. *Folclor muzical din Bucovina* [*Musical Folklore from Bukovina*]. Suceava: Liadana Publishing.