

TRADITIONAL DANCES OF THE BANAT SERBS

SUMMARY

Foreword

Almost twenty years ago, in the spring of 1994, I started exciting and intriguing field research of traditional music of the Banat Serbs. As an undergraduate student of ethnomusicology I initially focused on the singing practice in the surroundings of my native town, the city of Pančevo (Литвиновић 1999b). Eventually, the geographical area of my research significantly expanded. The next ten years I devoted to examining the singing practice in the area of the Lower Banat (Rakočević 2002). During those years, I also started to go to the Banat villages in Romania. My initial focus on the vocal practice extended not only to the instrumental music, but also to the dance practice of the Banat Serbs. In my PhD dissertation I explored the performance of their traditional dances, their structure, and the dance process itself in the light of its relation to music (Ракочевић 2009; Rakočević 2011). However, numerous and heterogeneous data about dance events and individual dances from this region, as well as verbal descriptions of the style of their performance, have not been systematized yet and introduced to the wider public. The aim of this ethnographic book is to overcome this lack and to offer a historical overview of the summarized data and interpretations from literature and field research about traditional dances of the Banat Serbs. It is intended not only for experts from the field of ethnochoreology and dance ethnology, but also for dancers, dance teachers and choreographers, who perform these traditional dances on stage. That is the reason why the transcriptions of the most significant traditional dances of the Banat Serbs made in Labanotation and musical notation are added at the end of this book. The dance transcriptions have been made from video recordings. The singular performances of the individual dances from the video recordings I considered and interpreted as particular “dance realizations” (see more in Bakka and Karoblis 2010: 172-173), which I further on transcribed and analyzed.

Introduction

Banat is the geographical area that is bordered by the rivers Mureş to the north, the Tisa to the west, the Danube to the south and the Carpathian Mountains to the east (Поповић 1959: 7). Specific historical circumstances have largely influenced the cultural practices of its inhabitants. It seems that the fact that this area started to be considered as culturally distinct and separate from neighboring areas only few centuries ago is not only often neglected among scholars, but also among ordinary people. In fact, Banat was established after Prince Eugene of Savoy freed Timișoara and the area between the Danube, Tisa and Mureş from Ottoman rule on October 13th in 1716 (Милеќер 2003: 84). Two years later, in 1718 this territory was administratively declared as a part of the Habsburg monarchy and named Banat of Temeswar (Ibid). The Austro-Hungarian Empire was formed in 1867 and Banat stayed within this huge Empire for the next fifty years. After 1918, it was divided into three parts. Regardless of the dynamic and turbulent political history of each of the states to which Banat administratively belonged and the geopolitical relations between them, the tripartite division of the region has remained to the present day. Currently, Banat extends across western Romania, southern Hungary and northeastern Serbian territory.

In general, it could be said that the history of this region has been marked by many migrations, which caused constant and fluid demographic changes especially during the 18th century and afterwards. It is populated by Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs, Slovaks, Roma and other smaller ethnic groups such as Czechs, Karashovans, Bulgarians and others. Although there are many common characteristics between them, the traditional dance practices of each of these ethnic groups had certain peculiarities which functioned as markers of their ethnic identity especially in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. In other words, in terms of structural and stylistic features, the dance practice of the Banat Serbs, that was considered as ethnically distinct in the 19th and 20th centuries, was constant contact with the traditional dance practices of the other ethnic groups that lived in this region.

Fortunately, there are ample bibliographical sources, which enable a historical overview of the dance practice of the Banat Serbs. One of the oldest records of traditional dancing was made in 1774 by the German author Johan Jacob Erler who noted how “adults on Sundays and holidays had entertainment by dancing kolo

in circle” (“odrasli svake nedelje i za praznike se zabavljaju igrajući kolo u krug”) (Erler 2003: 15). So far, many writings have been published about the traditional dance practice of the Serbs from this region (among them are Шумарски 1846: 54-56; Ђурђулов 1951; Јанковић 1949; Илијин 1971, 1978; Путник 1991; Фелфелди 2003; Попов И. 2009; Попов И. 2012 a i b). In addition, there are many video recordings of traditional village dancing which have been made since the early 1980's. All this various data made it possible to survey traditional dances of the Banat Serbs from the second half of the 19th century until now.

Dance genres

With the aim of a systematic assessment of the traditional dance repertoire of the Banat Serbs and its positioning within the traditional culture of this region diachronically, certain dance genres could be conceptualized (see more in Rakočević 2011: 282-284). Each of them have their own structural and semantic characteristics (Ibid). Among kolo dances, the dance genres are: autochthonous kolo dances from Banat (autohtona banatska kola), town-craft dances (varoško-esnafska kola) and kolos from Šumadija (šumadijska kola). Among couple dances, the dance genres are: so-called 'in two' dances (po dvoje) and so-called turning dances (okretni plesovi).

It is necessary to note that turning dances (waltz, tango, step, fokstro', rumba), are not explored in this book because of the lack of data about their structural and formal characteristics.

Besides dancing in pairs, some of the couple dances can be performed in trios (in English we generally use “trio” for three people and “triplet” for three babies or three musical notes in the place of one beat) formation (man and two women). Additionally, some dances can be performed only in trios. Dancing in trios, however, cannot be conceptualized as a separate dance genre (see more in Rakočević 2011: 284). Because of their numerous structural common characteristics, dances in trios and 'in two' will be discussed together.

In addition to kolos and couple dances, in the first half of the 20th century and before a separate dance genre performed only by males also existed. This dance genre can be termed as male competitive dances (see more in Rakočević 2010: 429-430).

Dance repertoire

According to available data (the written sources and field research), the traditional repertoire of the Banat Serbs was very rich and heterogeneous. List of dances in the entire repertoire is made primarily on the basis of individual dance names which are recorded by informants and/or researchers. The various names of individual dances, however, do not always point to the unique structure of the dance. That is why some additional explanations are given in footnotes.

Autochthonous kolo dances from Banat are: *veliko kolo*, *veliko banatsko kolo*, *malo kolo*, *banatsko kolo*, *malo banatsko kolo*, *Kolo vodi Vasa*,⁴⁷ *sitno kolo*, *gajdaško kolo*, *paorsko kolo*, *retko kolo*, *oro baba* and *ore*.

Town-craft dances are: *majstorsko kolo*,⁴⁸ *trgovačko kolo*, *bečkerečko kolo*, *libade*, *krecavi ketuš*, *Vidino kolo*, *kraljevo kolo*, *radikal* and *Srpkinja*.

Kolos from Šumadija are: *seljačica*,⁴⁹ *Kad se Cigo zaželi*,⁵⁰ *đurđevka*,⁵¹ *Rukavice s prstima*, *ruzmarinka*, *zaplet*.⁵² *Ej, Bože, seko*, *prkos*, *kukunješće*, *Žikino kolo*, *vranjevka*,⁵³ *šestica*, *užičko kolo*, *moravac*, and dances of the *lako kolo* dance types.

Dances 'in two' are: *mađarac*, *lidana*, *po dvoje*, *Cigančica*,⁵⁴ *vlaški*, *čardaš*, *momački*, *ficko*, *sirotica*, *Dara trndara*, *Oj, devojko*, *lepa si*, *grabac*, *erdeljanka* and *dubaj*.

Dances which are performed in trios are: *logovac* and *Kato, mi, Kato*.

Male competitive dances are: *šaranac*, *numera (tri putarke)*, *Todorova ljuba* and *karaba*.

47 *Kolo vodi Vasa* is also named as *banaćansko kolo*.

48 *Majstorsko kolo* is also named as *zanatlijsko kolo* (Јанковић 1949: 189).

49 In northern Banat this dance is also named as *seljančica*. In some cases, it could also be accompanied and named by a song „Selo sunce, stiglo veće“. In the area of the middle Banat in Serbia it is also known by a term *kisel voda*.

50 Dance „Kad se Cigo zaželi“ is also known as *seljančica* (Bartók and Lord 1978: 458).

51 *Đurđevka* is also named *đurđevica*.

52 This dance is also named *Opa, cupa skoči* and *Opa, cupa lepa*. In the city of Kikinda and the surroundings villages it is also called *Lepa, lepa*.

53 In northern Banat *vranjevka* is known as *vranjanka*. In the city of Kikinda this dance was called *ciganski* (Попов И. 2009: 127).

54 *Cigančica* is also called *ciganski* (Попов И. 2009: 127).

Dance events

Considering the fact that the main aim of this book is to summarize current knowledge about traditional dances of the Banat Serbs, which are mostly no longer performed in everyday dance practice, ethnographic narrative of the dance events refers to the former, predominantly rural, social context and emphasizes the time of performance within the annual and life cycles. Because of the lack of space in this book, only a few dance events, which are marked by the performers and researchers as significant for the traditional culture of the Banat Serbs, will be singled out in this English summary.

The ritual dance of the old women, known as *oro baba* (*oro of grandmothers*), has been performed in many villages in the southeastern Banat on Carnival Sunday (Poklade). This ritual dance is already described ethnographically (Филиповић 1958: 302-303; Босић 1996: 205-207; Литвиновић 1999а: 264-265). After the evening church service, women who have grandchildren (sometimes they may be in their fifties) dance the *oro baba* around the church. The dancer who leads the line could be a priest, a pregnant woman or a little girl (primer 1⁵⁵). This dance event is recorded exclusively in southeastern Banat in Serbia. It is still performed in the villages of Vračev Gaj and Kruščica.

Within the wedding ritual the co-called “bride’s dance” is still popular all over Banat. This dance is usually performed around midnight. Everyone who wants to dance with a bride should pay for it. In the first half of the 20th century *ficko* in southeastern Banat (primer 26) or *mađarac* in northern Banat (primer 23) could be performed as a “bride’s dance”. In recent decades those dances are replaced with the *waltz*. In the Danube Gorge, the “bride’s dance” is performed during the afternoon and can be danced continuously for a few hours.

As a closing dance of the wedding ritual, the dance *ore* was performed in the villages of southeastern Banat in Serbia (primer 2). It was described by the Janković sisters, but has also been recorded during field research (see more in Јанковић 1949: 183-184; Ракочевић 2009: 79).

Typical dance events, which were practiced all around Banat, were the balls (*igranke*). They were organized in the evening hours of the great Christian feasts (Christmas, Easter, the celebration of St. Sava and others). Although a diverse

55 The word “Primer” means “Example”.

repertoire could be performed, balls usually began with some of the traditional dances: *veliko kolo*, *malo kolo* or *Žikino kolo*. The evening balls are still very popular in Romania and Hungary.

Autochthonous kolo dances

The most important features of the autochthonous kolo dances are the round formation of closely linked dancers and the sharp stylistical division between genders during dancing. Round formations (*kolo*) may be various: dances could be performed in the formation of closed and open circles. As a rule, there should be an equal number of males and females, who are positioned alternately in the *kolo*. The connection between dancers, which is typical for this dance genre, could be described verbally as: the men's hands are held behind the back of the women's waists and the women hold the men's shoulders.

The division between genders could be described as follows: men perform in an active manner and are able to improvise to a large extent, while the women perform in a reduced manner using smaller steps and continuously flexing the knees (see more in Ракочевић 2011: 179-218).

The existence of the autochthonous kolo dances in Banat could be traced back continuously in historical sources up to the late 18th century. Today, some of them such as the *veliko kolo* and the *malo kolo* are used as the most significant markers of the ethnic and regional identity of the Banat Serbs within the practice of cultural-artistic and folklor dance groups.

Town-craft dances

The genre of the town-craft dances was established at the beginning of the 20th century, and to a large extent in the period between the two world wars (Илијин 1978: 203). Its basic choreological trait is performing in a semi-circle formation in which dancers are connected in the so-called W position with the hands joined at shoulder height, elbows bent. Due to the fact that the whole repertoire of the city dances has been found on the much wider territory (Зечевић 1983; Mladenović 2001: 16-17; Васић 2005: 51-59), according to this systematization the town-craft dance genre primarily includes not only dances which originate in Banat, but also popular city dances such as *kraljevo kolo*, *radikal* and *Srpkinja*.

Kolos from Šumadija

The performing of the so-called kolos from Šumadija in the period between the world wars dominates Banat dance practice. Following World War II, the trend of performing kolos from Šumadija increased significantly. This dance genre is characterized by a semi-circle formation with the kolo leader taking a prominent role. The dancers are connected in the so-called V position by the hands joined with arms extended downward.

Dances in two and those performed in trios

The main features of 'in two' dance genre and dances which are performed in trios are their formations. During the dance, couples and trios are freely arranged in space. In the couples, dancers can be positioned side-by-side or face-to-face. In the side-by-side couple position and in the triplets, the dancers are connected mostly in the same way as they are connected in autochthonous kolo dances. In the face-to-face couple position men hold the waist of the female, and females hold the shoulders of their partners.

According to the historical data dances which could be systematized within 'in two' dance genre were present in traditional dance practice in Central Europe in the 19th century, and possibly also in earlier periods (Martin 1965: 469-515; Giurchescu and Bloland 1995: 274-276; Фелфелди 2003: 49). At that time, dances from this dance genre in Banat, however, were not so often in the traditional repertoire (Фелфелди 2003: 49). Today dances 'in two' and trios are a significant part of the stage dance repertoire, but they are rarely performed at balls and weddings.

Male competitive dances

The choreological specificity of this dance genre was primarily distinguished by a diversity of formations (kolo in the shape of a semi-circle, solo and two-man formations). This dance genre has vanished from everyday dance practice since the mid of the 20th century, but still often appears on stage.

Closing remarks

Finally the main data about the traditional dance music of the Banat Serbs should also be pointed out. According to ethnographic and historical data, in the early years of the 20th century dance music in Banat villages could be performed on bagpipes and solo tamburitzas (tambura samica, bisernica, dangubica), and to a lesser extent on the flute (frula), double flute (dvojnica) and violin (Јанковић 1949: 126). In the cities, even earlier in the 19th century ensembles and small orchestras performed at balls (Vukosavljev 1990: 61-65; Ранисављевић 2011: 111). Although it can not be proved historically, it could be said that tamburitza ensembles were also present in the rural dance practice in that period. After the First World War tamburitza ensembles were supplemented by the addition of the accordion (Ivkov 2006: 48-49). Since 1960s, amplified ensembles with mandatory accordion as the solo instrument have been spread all over Banat. Tamburitza ensembles remain as an indispensable part of traditional musical milieu of Banat until today.

All dances that are mentioned in this book have been continuously used in the complex processes of (re)construction of the ethnically and regionally distinctive traditional dance practice of the Serbs in Banat. In recent decades, these dances are mostly performed within the stage performances of the cultural-artistic and folklore groups. This, however, has not diminished, but instead increased and strengthened, their significance in the processes of reproducing the cultural identity of the Serbs in Banat, not only in Serbia but also, and especially in Romania and Hungary. Therefore it seems important that the summarized ethnographic and historical data about them are presented to and interpreted for the wider public.