

**POPULAR ORGANOLOGY.  
ITS DYNAMICS BETWEEN TRADITION AND  
CREATIVITY**

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***Abstract:** This paper is the fruit of a long and painstaking process of research, analysis and processing of some ethnographic and musical materials presented to me by numerous informers, covering most of the Romanian counties.*

## **1. Introduction**

The research on popular instruments is one of the ways of knowing the musical culture of the Romanian nation. At the same time, the instrumental sources having been created in prehistoric times, their study is interesting in that they represent the prototypes of the instruments that form the orchestras and song ensembles of our days.

In essence, all the instruments of the contemporary symphonic music are “popular” instruments, borrowed in different epochs from different nations and submitted to different improvements in the process of orchestral development and of musical culture. It is almost impossible to understand and fully assimilate the popular creation without a thorough knowledge of the musical instruments specific for the Romanian area, which loves its instrumental values because they convey, in the most complete and expressive manner, the spirit of the popular music.

## **2. Content**

When the Romanian people borrowed different foreign instruments, many times it transformed them, adapting them to its own requirements. But whether it transformed them or left them untouched, it used them according to its own manner of execution, integrating them in the sphere of its musical instruments. That is why it is necessary to refine the knowledge on the musical instruments, especially concerning the way they have been adapted to the specific of the popular execution.

Contemporary ethnomusicology reconsiders the place occupied by popular organology in the economy of the folklore studies. If traditional instruments used to occupy a peripheral role, being left behind the vocal source, we can see that the ethno-musical preoccupations place the dynamics of the musical balances on an equal footing. The instrumental approaches appear around the introductory chapters, as if they were meant to draw the attention towards certain functional hierarchies.

The period when an instrument is certified in documents indicates neither its approximate age, nor its exclusive belonging to certain populations of the globe; even for the Romanians, the knowledge of most of the so-called traditional instruments was not achieved until recently.

Leaving aside the pseudo-instruments, the most “natural” sources, we can gradually localize the chronology of the different documentary certifications. Let us think, for instance, about the well-known trajectory of the aerophones, beginning with horn, Panpipe, shepherd’s pipe and bagpipe; later on, the public conscience was acquainted with the scholarly industry-made instruments that penetrated in the symphonic creation.

The „taragot” and the accordion earned an enviable position, still ignored by the cultivated music, though the sources indicate their origin. “Torogoata” has been greatly honored in Banat and not only there, ever since Luță Ioviță adopted it in the Romanian area.

The same thing can be stated about the chordophones, the first position being held by the kobsa, an instrument borrowed from the Persian-Arabic world, being followed by the cembalo from the confluence of the Orient and the Occident.

The popular organology has accumulated, in time, a huge and complete documentary patrimony, which is not only concrete, but includes as well pieces of information concerning the origin, the particularities of construction, the nature of the vibrating body and even the function of the sound sources. It goes without saying that the period when and the place where an instrument was first attested does not indicate the age, not even approximately, or the exclusive belonging of the instrument to a certain world population.

For the Romanians as well, the knowledge of most of the so-called traditional instruments was achieved recently, and for some of them an area of diffusion was identified as well. About the practice of some instruments (whose present-day correspondent cannot be identified, for lack of descriptions) speak the documents and remains of the old times. Theopomp mentions that, when sent with a message, the Getas used to take their guitars with them, and they accompanied the uttering of their message with them. Jordanes mentions the vocal singing and guitar playing of the Dacian priests; a bas-relief sculpted in the wall of a sarcophagus dating from the Roman period and discovered in Oltenia shows a Panpipe interpreter. Later on, during the Middle Ages (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) different writings and chronicles mention instruments as: lute, horns, cymbals, drums, “moscaluri” and Grigore Ureche mentions, in his chronicle, that “Aron Vodă (1451-1457) could not have enough of the bagpipe players’ songs”.

The oldest attempts of instrumental classification were made during the Antiquity, being present in China and India. Of the modern systematizations, we mention the successive contributions of V. Mahillon, E. Von Hornbostel, A. Cherbuliez, C. Sach, A. Schefner, P. Collaer. Special preoccupations in the domain of popular organology belonged to T.T. Burada (19<sup>th</sup> century) and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to Tiberiu Alexandru who adopted the classification according to the nature of the vibrating body. Recently, we must mention the extremely original, insistent and valuable contribution of the organologist and ethnomusicologist Ovidiu Papană, a distinguished professor of the Western University (Universitatea de Vest) of Timișoara.

Looking at the Romanian map, from south to north, we notice that the horn occupies a quite large (southern) area, which includes Argeș and Prahova County and Vrancea Area. The horn is also encountered in the south of Moldova, especially in Neamț County, in the villages situated on the northern side of the Carpathians. The alp(en)horn occupied a well-delimited zone, between that of the horn and that of the trumpet – the area of Apuseni Mountains, while the trumpet spreads well beyond the Romanian boundaries, at the Lithuanians, the Estonians and the Scandinavians; it is encountered, as well, at the populations from the west of the Alps and in the far eastern regions, towards Mongolia.

A specific functional context is the tending of the sheep, within which a series of artistic values were created in time as well, connected to this profession, one of the most coherent and representative of the Romanian area. The ethnic and cultural dimensions of the pastoral life were highlighted satisfactorily by numerous research works completed so far, which showed, from different viewpoints, the originality and the shapes of a horizon that is defining for the local spirituality. Involving a certain isolation and also a circulation of the values on large areas, the respective environment generated, on the one hand, some original creations, and on the other hand, it adapted folkloric categories of the general repertoire to its

own specific. It actually integrates a collection of somewhat heterogeneous musical materials taken from different genres and species and adapted.

Referring to the specific pastoral repertoire, the researchers appreciate that its most particularized nucleus from a musical viewpoint is the horn music. The signals represent a somewhat singular category in the Romanian folklore, evolving on archetypal formulas that cannot be lent to other genres without bearing the obvious imprint of the original configurations.

The sensation aroused by the Romanian Panpipe makes many people believe that the old instrument, created according to the legend by the god Pan out of the being of the delicate nymph Syrinx, turned because of its fear into a flexible reed, survives in the hand of the Romanian performers. The experts know however that the Panpipe is, on the one hand, older than the Greek mythology and, on the other hand, one of the most widespread world instruments. It is always made up of several pipes of different lengths, sometimes also of different thickness, open or closed at the lower end, joined together in all the imaginable ways.

As for its origin, a probable hypothesis is that of its simultaneous creation in different places and times. The wind whistling in the pipes of the broken reeds implicitly led to the idea of the building of an instrument using reed as a raw material. The imitation of the bird's songs by the Romanian Panpipe players (in the well known "Ciocârlia" – The Lark) guides our thoughts to Lucrece's verses, quoted by the French musicologist Andre Schaeffner.

Paraphrasing the words of Cella Delavrancea about George Enescu – "work was the flag that he carried", we can say that this explains the fame acquired by one of the greatest Romanian artists, whose celebrity is almost unequalled in modern times, a fact acknowledged throughout the world: certainly Zamfir is one of the most fascinating artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a fame that continues, as we can see, beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Concerning the reflection of folklore, a clearer delimitation should be operated between the local and the stylish creation, when we state that by its "doina", the Romanian folklore made its presence known in the universal musical cycle. As we know, there are folklore interpreters that have identified themselves with the style of the traditional community, becoming themselves folklore creators, like Maria Tănase, Maria Lătărețu, Domnica Trop, Achim Nica, ... Gheorghe Zamfir.

Among the chordophone instruments, kobsa has a long tradition with the Romanians, even though it does not have an autochthonous origin. It appears on the frescos of some churches (Vroneț, Sucevița, Horezu), in the icons depicting David singing for king Saul. The cembalo is presented by the European iconography beginning with the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but its origin is much older.

"The deal board, the village merriment" – this description of the violin as a popular instrument proves that it spread throughout the Romanian provinces. The penetration of the violin in the world of the popular instruments and the foremost place it acquired did not remain without consequences on the professional repertoire, which it took over and which it turned into a repertoire bearing the mark of the specific violin possibilities of execution. In its turn, the violin, just as other musical instruments adopted by the people, had to undergo different transformations, which in some places and in certain cases affected its structure, its number of strings and its attuning. All these transformations were determined by the requirements of our popular intonations. In the violin's music we can often hear the voice of the long shepherd's pipe, of the shepherd's pipe, of the bagpipe or of other ancient instruments.

The viola is also called "braci", "contralăută" and has been practiced especially in Transylvania, having the role of accompaniment; the cello and the contrabass started to be

used relatively recently, but they acquired gradually a determining function in marking the harmonical pillars.

An outlining of the regional instrumental types is relatively recent, the specialists becoming interested in it especially during the interbelic period. The predominantly monodic character of the Romanian folklore music can explain the phenomenon; even dancing, a category supposing almost obligatorily an instrumental backup could take place only with a single instrument.

### 3. Conclusions

Highlighting the aesthetic value of a melody cannot be accomplished completely using a borrowed language, except starting from its modal structure. It is rejoicing that there are practitioners who are beginning to replace the sensitive spots of the reduced accord when their appearance is unaccounted for, or the march in parallel thirds, trying to respect the specific rhythmic formulas of certain areas.

In this sense, an encounter is necessary between the theoretical arguments of the folklorists and the solutions of the practitioners. Therefore, an agreement is necessary between the theory of musical ethnology and the instrumentists' practice, in order to maintain the authentic vein of the popular values.

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