

ETHNOLOGY AND WORLD MUSIC. SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONTEMPORARY SUBJECT OF FOLK MUSIC TRADITION STUDIES

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Czech society has been interested in folk music, directly and indirectly, for almost two hundred years. The history of this interest starts with the first efforts to collect folk songs. There are many independent examples of these activities in the Czech lands at the beginning of the 19th century, during the period of developing romanticism and patriotic movements: the gubernatorial collection of 1819, the Slavophilism represented by F. L. Čelakovský and the development of Slavonic studies in general, as well as individual efforts of enthusiasts like Jan Jeník from Bratřice. The activities continued in the collections, now considered classic, of people like K. J. Erben, František Sušil, František Bartoš, and Leoš Janáček, which resulted in the fundamental image of 19th century oral folklore. In the 20th century, the studies were enlarged and focused on the functions of songs and singing activities in general (collectors such as Bedřich Václavěk and Robert Smetana), and on songs of nonrural people in general. After WWII, folk songs were used by the strongly increasing folklore movement, and in the 1950s especially they were misused by ideology in the "fight for new creativity". Later on, some popular ensembles used their links to folk music as a means of heavy media presentation.

These selected steps in the development of folk songs also include the study of group performance, singing activities, repertoire, and relation to dance and to tradition. It is evident that the interest in popular music covers vast, sometimes even unlimited areas. The field of folk music culture is supposed to focus on its tradition, its use, is transformation into

new contexts, back-transformation, as well as the choice of preferences. Some of these links have been studied professionally for decades, some have only been outlined, and some completely forgotten. All have been almost lost under the assault of world music in today's media-influenced world.

During a live broadcast of Radiožurnál on August 2, 2002, the announcer gave a somewhat vague and uninformed question to Karel Holas of Čechomor, a folk-rock band using folk songs: "What are the tendencies in [traditional] folk music?" She was evidently unaware of the fact that she had suggested at least two things: first, that there are definite tendencies, not in traditional folk music but in society, which admits or refuses in waves everything that comes from folk culture and music. Second, she applied the term 'traditional folk music' to denote what is not traditional folk music [that is, the popular folk-rock band]. Nevertheless, this reflects the way the general public and many performers understand and present the term.

Czech ethnomusicologist Jaroslav Markl says: "As a whole, Czech folkloristics is unable to face the devaluation of the basic and obligatory terms related to its contents." In 1976 Markl used this formulation against the interpretation of contemporary brass bands as traditional folk music. A quarter of a century later, the situation remains the same; only the genre has changed. In the general awareness, the term [traditional] folk music (and in the Czech lands the general term 'folklore' as well) has been applied to a sphere that is linked with many other terms, depending on the viewer, as is evident in the above-mentioned radio discussion: the second generation of folklore, folklorism, even music folklorism, as well as ethnic music and world music. From a certain point of view, these are the same; from another, they are not. Many social disciplines face problems of terminology, because they work with a living, ever-changing material. This paper does not aim to codify and define the terms; rather, it aims to outline and characterize some terms which have been the subject of overly loose, uneducated, and nonsensical use.

The presentation of folk song, music, and dance for purposes and interpretations other than the original has been recorded since the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, when the first wave of people took an interest in folk culture. There were performances for nobility and clergy. Later, patriotic performances focused on forming national ideas and the new state, and finally, performances to support the totalitarian ideology. Nevertheless, the development of the presentation of folk music has involved more than social and functional issues. Aesthetic principles, which are quite crucial for the use of folk culture, have been present (with a few exceptions) in all the above-mentioned manifestations of the use of folk culture. In individual cases, other functions have been stressed, such as the ethnic, entertainment, representative, symbolic, and other functions.

Ethnology, as much as folkloristics, makes use of several terms which cover the transformation of originally traditional manifestations. The need for discussions on terms originated simply: it was because the term folklore – which denotes manifestations of music, dance, and oral and dramatic manifestations of folk culture – could not be applied without changing such manifestations, which have been changed along the way. They may be rooted in folk culture and may essentially be folklore manifestations, but the original conditions were changed or disrupted during their presentations: both outer conditions (such as the original environment) and inner conditions (the style). Little by little, the studies of the uses of folklore helped to increase the subject of research of folkloristics; they began to address issues behind the limits of traditional culture. These discussions were widespread in the European, and especially German, folkloristics of the 1960s; as a result, Walter Wiora coined the term ‘second generation of folklore’. Another term, folklorism, had similar origins. It was theoretically formulated by Hermann Bausinger, above all. Connected with these two terms, one can find in the literature the term “fake-lore”, which can be understood as “false folk lore”.¹ American folklorist Richard M. Dorson, author of the

term, connected it with the presentation of spurious and synthetic writings under the claim that they are genuine folklore. Fakelore is the product of writers, not the product of the folk and folklore process.' Dorson did not link the term 'fake-lore' with the 'second generation of folklore' in general, so we must be careful in the correct use of the terms.

Both folklorism and the second generation of folklore have become established over decades. Folklorists and ethnologists use them properly, both when describing the changes in outer and inner conditions and when describing features which have been inspired somehow by folklore. These bordering features which overlap into other social and natural sciences have not been researched in full details so far, and are somewhat vaguely stated. This was evident for instance during the preparatory work on the book *From Folklore to Folklorism*.¹ It finally managed to cover only the mainstream of interest in folklore, that is, folklore ensembles and their focus on stylistic changes in folklore material. Some conclusions were made as a result of previous studies. Other features were covered only marginally and unsystematically: the leaps into high art, entertainment, popular music, painting and folklore, and folklore in literature.

It is evident that the succession of terms 'folklore manifestation' and 'its second existence' has so far been the most clearly defined link in this field. When the links are loosened or become unclear, when the stress is put on authors, and when the point of view is not ethnological, then there are problems.

I believe that it is in this widely indistinct area that one meets the term world music. The term originated for commercial reasons and it strived to cover border genres that were rooted in music of different ethnic groups. Czech publicist Petr Dorůžka, who specializes in world music, wrote that the term was just an auxiliary phrase that looks for a unifying term for many different terms such as global music, afro-beat, and world-beat. Producers and people in the music business offered this term to the general public "as a new field which can easily cover all creative efforts

that would fit neither into rock music nor into pure ethnic [!] folk music," says Doruška.

As is evident from the international charts quotation in the appendix of the article, world music in 1993 consisted mostly of recordings from non-European areas; in Europe it included some projects of Scandinavian production. (It is well known that the presentation of musical folklore in Scandinavia, as well as in Great Britain, with the exception of some clubs and societies, is markedly different from the presentation of musical folklore in central and eastern Europe.) We may conclude that music on the charts did not present the music of folk ensembles; presented there was mostly popular music, which to some degree made use of traditional music and forms of a specific ethnic group. In many cases, I would prefer to use the term 'ethnic music': it is not always traditional folk music that musicians work with; in many cases, especially outside of Europe, musicians work with non-folk material that is linked with the high culture of a specific ethnic group in that region. The difference between understanding the term 'traditional folk music' inside and outside of Europe has been reflected in science using the term 'ethnomusicology'. Unlike folkloristics, ethnomusicology can also include in its research artificial music of non-European origin. Nevertheless, the term 'ethnic music' has been used more or less at random at present.

If I return to the history of world music, it is evident that, in the general point of view at present, the term should include genre fusions with features of traditional folk music, as well as music inspired by traditional folk music and by folk culture generally. Basically, it is music that fits, from the point of view of musicology, into what is called non-artificial music, or it borders on artificial music. Nevertheless, this classification is an auxiliary one as well, because by stressing aesthetic criteria in some genres, it is difficult to distinguish the border between artificial and non-artificial music. This paper focuses predominantly on the prevalence of signs, which are usually sorted out in non-artificial

music and should have their place in world music as well: musicologists define structural, receptive, and socio-functional specifics. These include clear form, communicative musical idea, adherence to the general model of genre and style, mass production, special distribution structure, and commercial character.

It is natural that the commercial world would easily take everything that is connected with traditional folk music in any way. Nevertheless, it would not be good to take it all for granted and include such data in our academic and journalistic writing, since the data may be misleading. Under the influence of world music, Czech publicists include in this genre everything from local music that even theoretically touches this topic. Take for example the CD published by Jiří Plocek from the archives⁷, and the reviews on it by Jan Sobotka and Jiří Černý. No distinction is made between traditional folk music and folklorism; the signs of quality are also confused in a mixture of archive recordings and live presentations. The educated listener will understand it in spite of the confusion; the uneducated one will not care and will take this information as it is.

Another example is taken from the Slovak TV station STV2, who on August 8, 2002 broadcast an edited version of the 40th Anniversary of “Jánošík’s Days in Terchová” festival. The announcer advertised it as a traditional folk music programme, but the real show was more than surprising. It was so bombastic, tasteless, and trashy that it was better not to remember the name of the festival. Unfortunately, the list of attendees and their presentations looked like a bad joke. It included the Muchovci brothers in folk costumes accompanying pop singer Pavol Hammel, all singing together his hit “While drinking the last liter of wine/everybody likes to look back and remember”. (The Muchovci brothers are still considered the authentic bearers of the local tradition. Normally they perform folk songs based on local music tradition.) The list also included contemporary folk bands, traditional folk bands, the Čechomor band, an opera singer performing “Santa Lucia”, another with

a Russian song “Kalinka, kalinka”, and a symphonic orchestra from the village of Terchová (the piece had a traditional folk music theme, of course). In conclusion, all performers joined a rock singer to sing “Yellow Submarine” together.

It would be worth studying the program selection from different points of view. This should include the issue of the development of traditional folk music festivals (which in fact is one of the themes that we are going to research deeply soon) and folklorism as such; the issue of reception (the young audience was eager to dance, it welcomed enthusiastically all performers, and made no distinction between genres); the issue of value and taste, as well as the issue of world music, because some of the musicians made comments on this topic. (Pavol Hammel noted that his program cooperation [!] with the Muchovci brothers had lasted for four years already.)

A musicologist can clearly see the above-mentioned festival as an example of non-artificial music. An ethnologist can see it as an example of folklorism. Its values are marginal, its reception is important – if there were at least 1000 visitors, they cannot be overlooked. The general public may consider this event a world music festival. To conclude this example, I would like to stress that any event can include good and bad selections. The bad ones reflect popularity only, have no deep sense, and offer cheap entertainment. The question is whether this approach, which tries to attract young people to traditional folk music, folklorism, and world music, is leading to a dead alley. What will remain is entertainment and commerce. The organizers use certain values for short-term aims and purposes only, without perspectives on any further development of the event. In fact, these are the rules of show business. I wonder if people who – as I believe - have found a new way of working with traditional folk music are aware of this.

One more example: in April 2003 the Slovak media heavily advertised the festival of the ‘best world music ensembles in the world.’ The list was based on traditional folk dance ensembles such as the

SLUK, Lúčnica, and Gymnik. These ensembles have had a long tradition, and I hope their plans in dramaturgy and repertoire have not changed. It is just the invisible hand of the market which has discovered them and used them.

There is one more often neglected issue: that which is inspired by folk music. The work with traditional folk song material is never-ending, both in folk ensembles and in world music groups. Folk music has inspired a large part of high, serious music, quite often without any prior social tendency. Many composers have been inspired by folk songs to a high degree: from arrangements of folk songs, to highly creative activities with folk music inspiration, including music of non-European cultures. A whole scope of various genres has been influenced by traditional folk music, and they all may converge at some point. World music, as it is presented today, reflects the contemporary state of music and does not look back to the past. This is why the musical development of specific areas has almost been a secret both to the artist and to the listener, despite some prior successful renditions of music from such areas. As a result, music that is neither new nor innovative is presented as an original step in the development of the connection with world music, and attracts too much undeserved attention. I agree that it is impossible to learn all about the development of world music; nevertheless, it would be nice if Czech and Slovak publicists knew a bit about the development of local traditional folk music. There were great artistic achievements in folk music in the Czech and Slovak lands even under the totalitarian regime, and this should not be neglected.

The Brno Orchestra of Folk Instruments (BROLN) can serve as a good example of the long-term achievements. They performed many average arrangements of folk songs, as well as some outstanding renditions of traditional music. The dramaturgy was done both by professional music managers, by cooperating editors, and by outstanding composers. In many cases, the results surpassed the standards of today's [Czech] world music. Nevertheless, there have been

some differences between the past and contemporary projects. The BROLN instrumentalists perceived themselves as performers only. In world music, the instrumentalists identify themselves more with the music they play. Nevertheless, the dramaturgy of an ensemble as large as the BROLN could involve various types of work, including experiments. Contemporary ensembles prefer to focus on details and specific views mostly, leaving the rest of possibilities out of their interest.

It is more than evident that the uncertainty in terminology, especially in media, will last. The subject of research has been changing constantly, as has the reception of new genres. In addition, the reviewers' and listeners' knowledge of music is not always adequate. To be frank, it is difficult to provide the correct media evaluation of a performance which links contemporary bands and singers with bearers of traditional music, such as Čechomor and Martin Hrbáč, or Pavol Hammel and the Muchovci brothers. The study of roles, functions, and transformations of traditional folk music in the broader social context has not been fully researched yet. Following the genre and its transformation, we should bear in mind its historical memory and its links. The renaissance, revival, and reminiscences of specific themes and features, which have always been present in society, have been recorded in professional literature. This includes the work of Walter Wiora in the field of traditional folk music, and Josef Kotek, who researched Czech non-artificial music and its mechanisms. Nevertheless, no one has yet focused on comparative studies, on the individual revival waves and their unifying and dividing features.

Karel Plicka [1894-1987] was an outstanding Czechoslovak collector of folk songs as well as a photographer and film-maker interested in folk music. When he was asked which of his documentary films he liked best, he answered that it was *The Land Is Singing*. "It is a song about a paradise lost," he said. With the help of historical facts we are able to state the driving force behind the interests of Romantics in folk songs, or why the totalitarian regime supported the so-called folk

art, and so on. Unfortunately, we are not able to see and formulate such a driving force behind contemporary activities. We can only assume that the interests are multiple, as has been reflected in the above-mentioned lines, and as can be seen from the changes in terminology. In order to avoid starting from the beginning over and over, researching the uncertain traces of folk music of uncertain origin, we need to establish more systematic and analytic studies.

Notes:

1. See Markl, J. "Hudební folklór národního obrození a dechová hudba." *Český lid*, 1 (1976): 23.
2. See Leščák, M. – Sirovátka, O. *Folklór a folkloristika. O ľudovej slovesnosti*. Bratislava, 1982, 252.
3. See Brunvand, J. H., ed. *American Folklore. An Encyclopedia*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1996, 242.
4. Pavlicová, M., Uhlíková, L., eds. *Od folkloru k folklorismu. Slovník folklorního hnutí na Moravě a ve Slezsku*. Strážnice: Ústav lidové kultury, 1997.
5. Dorůžka, P. "World music dobývá Evropu." *Gramorevue*, 4 (1993): 7.
6. The research of non-artificial music is focused especially on two musical fields: social singing and popular music. See *Encyklopedie jazzu a moderní populární hudby. Část věcná*. Ed. A. Matzner, I. Poledňák, I. Wasserberger a kol. Praha, 1983, 294.
For the borders between artificial and non-artificial music, see Kotek, J. "Proč a jak si osvojujeme nonartificiální (populární) hudbu," in *O české populární hudbě a jejích posluchačích /Od historie k současnosti/*. Praha, 1990, 14.
Musical folklore fits more into non-artificial music. Jiří Fukač says: "It is more because of its contemporary use than its original functional heteronomy position." See Fukač, J. *Mýtus a skutečnost hudby. Traktát o dobrodružství a oklikách poznání*. Praha, 1989, 245.
7. See Kotek, J. "Proč a jak si osvojujeme." *Ibid*: 12 - 15.
8. *Proměny v čase/Transitions in Time. Traditional Folk Music in Moravia in the 20th Century*. Jiří Plocek – GNOSIS Brno 2001, G-music 020.

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