THE FOLKLORE FESTIVAL: A CROSSROAD OF CULTURES?

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Folklore festivals are a phenomenon, which has not been comprehensively explored scholarly, despite the fact that for over a century they have been a permanent part of culture, at least from the European point of view. It is natural that the forms of festivals have changed, but the essential has remained: exhibiting folk culture manifestations, especially those connected with folklore, in front of the general public. The impulses behind the establishment of festivals have shifted with the changes in society; they reflect not only cultural streams, but quite often the political situation and interests of the ruling party as well. Up until the interwar period, you may find certain similarities in European folklore festivals; after WWII, in the 1950s especially, eastern folklore festivals started to fundamentally differ from western ones. The burden of ideology, which was added to all official cultural and social phenomena behind the Iron Curtain, was a certain negative feature, which, even after its fall, is still being continuously recalled by many witnesses. You cannot simply look at this historical situation in a black and white way, in spite of the fact that a folklore festival and all the historically related activities, which preceded it, included this contradiction. You must see both sides: the connection to official political streams and the broad ethnographical stream, which formed the festival contents.

The idea of a festival as a crossroads of cultures is not exactly new. It was discussed in general terms during the CIOFF world congress in Rattvik, Sweden in 1986 [1]; it was quite often seen in journalistic writing.

1) http://www.cioff.org/Publicatons/Bibliography.en.html (June 15, 2005).

The theme often focuses on linking world cultures. From the historical perspective of festivals, as well as the contemporary perspective, such a crossroads is not the only one; I would like to document selected examples from festival history and practice [2].

In the Czech lands, the beginnings of the tradition of manifesting folklore must be looked for at various organized festivals at the turn of the 20th century. A respected turning point came in 1895, when the Czecho-Slavonic Ethnographical Exhibition took place in Prague (in 1891, it was preceded by the Jubilee Exhibition there). Its live accompanying events were supposed to give more life to the static items that were exhibited; to a lesser extent festivals were co-organized along with the regional ethnographical exhibitions, which preceded the Czecho-Slavonic Ethnographical Exhibition. To organize such an event has always been difficult, especially when the opinions of the people involved substantially differed as to the contents and editorial aims. For most of the performers, taking part in such an exhibition was a completely new thing in their lives [3]. From what we can learn from the statistics and reports of the day, the interest of the audience and the subsequent success were enormous. The foundation for similar performances and programs was laid, later developing the newly formed folklorism [4] that is the use of folk culture in a new environment and new context.

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2) I have specifically studied three international festivals for this paper: Strážnice (Czech Republic), Sidmouth (Great Britain), and Schoten (Belgium).

3) Večerková, Eva. „Poznámky k prezentaci obyčejové tradice na výstavních slavnostech na Moravě koncem 19. století." In: *Slavnosti v moderní společnosti.* Strážnice, 1991, pp. 26-31; see also Pavlicová, M. – Uhlíková, L.: „Dílo trvalé – a ne prchavé". Nad jubileem Národopisné výstavy československé. *Opus musicum 27*, 1995, pp. 31-37. The document also published a 1891 letter of Martin Zeman, musician and collector from Horňácko, to František Bartoš on the occasion of the preparation for a performance for the Jubilee Exhibition, but which failed to be staged later on: "I urge people to arrange for new dress (or at least something as decent as possible), which is difficult, because they do not trust me, saying that it will all be in vain, because I cannot promise anything specific to them. Also, the girls do not feel like "showgirls"; they do not want to present themselves. They have no idea about the exhibition." (See p. 37).

A basic fact cannot be overlooked: the gradually changing rural traditions were not the only main impulses of the newly emerging movement. A large part of the uniting effort also drew on socio-political and national consciousness issues, coming from the intellectual circles. This stream of introducing folk culture was not always accepted everywhere though. The "ethnographical years" (festivals), which came about after the success of the Czecho-Slavonic Ethnographical Exhibition and gained further impulses after the inception of the Czechoslovak Republic, were already being criticized in their beginnings. One of the critics, culture historian Čeněk Zíbrt (1864-1932), says in his frequently quoted article "Against the Ethnographical Years" (published in *Český lid* magazine in 1929): "Ethnography can be without an entrance fee, beer, and sausages." One of the later critics, biologist and ethnographer Vladimír Úlehla (1888-1947), says in his important work *Živá píseň (A Living Song*, published 1949):

> "It's been a season of Moravian Slovak festivals and years, a thing that would not have entered the mind of a Slovak before. The Kyjov Year was a good example of this. Here, each community carried its customs to the market – people would never have acted like this before. When the main program was over, the participants met under a sign of particular universal Moravian Slovak merriment, which began to be identified with women publicly shouting and jumping about; this is how the people from Kyjov made their entrance on the

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4) For more details, it needs to be said that a certain folk type of festival *(Folkfest)* was already known in the 18th and 19th centuries; nobility organized such festivals as "festivals for the folk" on the occasion of coronations in 1791, 1792, and 1836. The 1836 festival especially had an ethnographical flavour. It took place in Prague and Brno and boasted detailed conception and preparation. It followed the model of the *gubernial* effort, which in 1819 came with the aim of collecting songs from all the countries of what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire; letters were sent to all the regions asking them to select customs, songs, dances, and instruments which the represented individual regions could present. An extended official correspondence of that period brought valuable information about folk culture. See Laudová, H. „Národní význam prvních veřejných lidových slavností." In: *Slavnosti v moderní společnosti*. Strážnice, 1991, pp. 14-16

exhibition grounds in Hradiště. What seemed unheard of before the war, what had repelled us in the girls from Pilsen or other distant regions who dressed in costumes just for the show, was emerging in the centre of the region. It was not life for life itself, ordered and directed by rules; it was a show for others, flamboyant on the outside, but hollow on the inside; costume as mask, song as gesture. The farmer stopped decorating his life with his art and using it in all its richness; he started to just boast about it occasionally. A system of folk culture started to transform itself into folklore. We cannot be cross with the people who turned away from all which used to "stink of the folk". Nevertheless, we may object that they stopped distinguishing between drama and parody; having good taste, they let the events run and did not attempt to change history..." [5].

Úlehla himself tried to direct the situation through his scholarly research (he collected folk songs and in 1931 he and sociologist Inocenc Arnošt Bláha initiated and worked on the interdisciplinary project called Velká; later it would be transformed into a movie called *Mizející svět (The Vanishing World)* and through the co-founding of the Moravian Dance and Song Choir in Brno in February 1946 (the other co-founder being his wife, Maryna Hradilová-Úlehlová). He did all this in spite of the scepticism he felt towards the activities of the so-called Moravian Slovak circles, as he frequently suggested in many of his memoirs [6]. It is important to mention Úlehla here, because in 1946 he was one of the co-founders of the ethnographical festival in Strážnice (its official name was Czechoslovakia in Song and Dance). The festival followed the above-mentioned inter-war activities and also reflected the post-war atmosphere, which set upon the whole of Europe. Thus the foundation of the oldest Czech (or Czecho-Slovak) festival was laid in the Czech lands.

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5) See Úlehla, V. *Živá píseň*. Praha, 1949, p. 201-202.

6) See Kosíková, J. „Vladimír Úlehla a počátky Moravského tanečního a pěveckého sboru." *Národopisná revue 8*, 1998, pp. 173 -181; also see Úlehla, V. Živá píseň, c. d., pp. 181-182.

Its history reflects the development of the folklore movement of the country practically like a handbook [7].

Historically similar situations can be found in other countries too. In Great Britain, the end of the 19th century is connected with an important collector named Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) and his interest in English folk music. After ten years in Australia, the London-native returned to England in 1892 and started to make a living as a music teacher. Practically a legend today, Sharp's entry to English folk music is linked to year 1899, when on Boxing Day he saw the Morris dancers performing in Headington, Oxfordshire. The Morris Dances allegedly used to be ritual dances of magical significance symbolizing power and performed by selected men. As Sharp himself stated, this experience was a turning point of his life. By 1901, he joined the English Folk-Song Society; in 1902, he published *A Book of British Song for Home and School*, a mixture of 'national' and folk songs arranged for piano and intended for schools. His other activities in the field of publishing folk songs were also intended for schools. On the one hand, Sharp believed that the English national musical language was suffering especially due to the imported music in the classic repertory (mostly coming from Germany); on the other hand, it was degenerating under the influence of mass music culture. Sharp devoted himself to folk dance as well, also connecting it to education. In 1905, he started to teach the Morris Dance at the Esperance Club for young working girls in London (the club manager was Mary Neale). There the dance came into a completely new environment not only when performed, but also because of the female dancers: traditionally, this was exclusively a male dance. In 1909, the dance was officially included in the school curriculum as a part of physical education classes [8]. In 1911, Sharp established his own organization

7) The festival's history is available especially in Jančář, J. *Strážnická ohlédnutí. 50 let Mezinárodního folklorního festivalu ve Strážnici.* Strážnice, 1995.

8) A comparison to the Czech environment may be useful: an ensemble from Tovačov presents songs and dances from the Haná region; it was founded and managed by collector Františka Xavera Běhálková after NVČ.

– the English Folk Dance Society. His further collecting and organizing activities were intensive, and the history of British ethno-musicology and ethno-choreology has reserved a corresponding space for it. I would like to stress Sharp's contribution in the field of pedagogy and enlightenment. Including folk songs and dance into curricula differentiated Sharp from other folk song collectors of his time, also linking him with the English folk revival [9]. Although Cecil Sharp died in 1924, the Morris Dance revival movement, initiated by him, grew significantly. In 1934, the Morris Ring movement originated, which drew together clubs of male Morris dancers. Douglas Kennedy, who was Sharp's successor at the English Folk Dance Society (the English Folk Dance and Song Society, EFDSS since 1932), brought about further transformations to the revival movement, including orientation towards traditional dances such as American square dancing [10]. The popularity of square dances grew even more in 1951, when Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip danced them in Canada [11].

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9)Sharp's work in collecting and enlightenment is wide. In the end of the 20th century, some of his theoretical opinions on folk music were criticized, as well as his collecting activities in the Appalachian Mountains, USA. Sharp worked there in 1916-1918 with Maud Karpeles. American scholar David Whisnat speaks of the "cultural interventions" in the region. See Atkinson, David. "Sharp, Cecil." In: *Literary Encyclopedia.* http//:www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec =true&UID=5512 (January 31, 2005). Nevertheless, Sharp's importance is indisputable.

10) Today's Square Dances are an American form of English Country Dances. Typologically, they represent contra-dances; they are group dances where individual pairs make a basic figure facing each other (in lines, a circle, a square form, and in one or several lines), meeting one after another in diverse dance formations. Round, line, and square dances were part of dance culture in many countries and could develop independently, but the origin of typical Contra Dances can be found in France and England (the first printed collection of Contra Dances was issued in France in 1650). It is supposed that the dances appeared at the English aristocratic circles as a result of the folk dance and folk life-style popularity (similar popular waves were known in the Czech lands too, for instance *hanatica*); they combined English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish influences. English Contra Dances became popular again and entered other regions, such as Scandinavia and North America. In the national revival period, new Contra Dances originated, among them national Quadrillas. See Kröschlová, E. *Dobové tance 16. až 19. století.* Praha, 1981.

11) See Schofield, D. *The First Week in August. Fifty Years of the Sidmouth Festival.* Sidmouth, 2004, p.11.

After WWII, the revival movement in Britain gained new impulses, as in other European states. One of the first great events that presented folk dance was the 1949 journey across Devon, organized by Nibs Matthews. There were hundreds of spectators throughout the cities and villages of the region. One of the stops along the journey was the town of Sidmouth, which would repeatedly host these performances in the following years. Since 1947, the town had a folk dance club; during summer holidays, local secondary school students performed dances regularly.

In 1955, the already-structured Folk Dance Festival took place in Sidmouth, successfully taking place for the next 50 years, up to 2004. The festival history provides interesting evidence of the features of development that can be found in foreign folklore festivals. First of all, here it was the meeting of local cultures, presented in the Morris Dance and social dances. In the early 1960s, the idea of the festival slowly changed: singing contests appeared, as well as children's performances, program workshops, and a festival newsletter. The most important thing was that more international ensembles started to come, even though it cannot be said that there was no international exchange of ensembles in Britain before: already in the 1920s, the EFDSS organized performances of English ensembles in Europe and the U.S.A.; in 1935, Maud Karpeles (1885-1976) [12] organized the Folk Dance Festival in London. In regards to the Sidmouth festival, the first international ensemble came from Ireland in 1963; in 1964 the organizers invited Israeli dancers. Since the

12) See Schofield, D. *The First Week*, c. d., p. 30. Common European features are obvious here; they were typical for the interest in folk culture in that period. Both the Czech and international organizers used to invite international ensembles to their festivals and folklore shows. The Samko Dudík ensemble from Myjava performed at the international festival Musik in Leben Völkern in Frankfurt am Mohan in 1927; the performance was arranged by Leoš Janáček, and the band won the folk ensemble competition there. See „Dudík, Samko", in: *Od folkloru k folklorismu. Slovník folklorního hnutí na Moravě a ve Slezsku*. Ed. Pavlicová, M. – Uhlíková, L. Strážnice, 1997, p. 26.
Maud Karpeles started to co-operate with Sharp in 1903; she supported his collecting and enlightening activites. She also wrote his biography. In 1947, she co-founded the International Folk Music Council (today's ICTM – International Council for Traditional Music).

mid-1960s, the content of the festival has been extending to music performances and activities for children, including village parades and performances in neighbouring communities. Everything was aiming at manifestations that now are considered an inseparable part of festival productions. The music scene quickly started to expand as a result of the great wave of folk revival and folk singing in Great Britain. As evident from festival documents, one of the aims was to "spread understanding among nations of the world" [13]. Consequently, the participation of foreign ensembles increased, including national regional ensembles that operated in Great Britain. Apart from showing local English culture, the festival allowed for the presentation of other ethnic group cultures, broadening visitors' horizons towards Europe (even past the Iron Curtain), and beyond Europe [14]. Such trends seem to prevail in the structure of all the festivals in what was then Western Europe.

If we look at another important festival, one, which has been taking place annually in Schoten, Belgium since 1959, we can see that international ensembles have been coming there since the 1970s, even though the event originated as a festival of neighbouring countries. The Schoten festival is one of the western European festivals whose establishment did not express a historical interest in folk tradition, but originated due to the post-war atmosphere of liberated Europe. Siegfried Verbeleen, the founder and long-term director of the festival, says that similar activities in founding international folk festivals were widespread in Germany, which tried to overcome the trauma of war in this way. In 1953, an influential meeting took place in Neustadt on the shores of the Baltic Sea. The participants suggested establishing the European Folklore Week, which would allow for the meeting of ensembles and presenting them without the need to compete [15].

13) See Schofield, D. *The First Week*, c.d., pp. 37, 54.

14) In 1974 the name changed – the Sidmouth Festival became an International Festival. Also in 1974, the first international ensemble came there, from Japan. See Schofield, D.: *The First Week in August,* c.d., p. 81. The Strážnice Festival has been using an "International" in its name since 1971.

Here we can see another path in the development of festivals: in Strážnice, a competition of folk ensembles in dancing the Verbuňk already took place at the festival's first year in 1946. Originally, the organizers followed the older tradition of the interwar period activities, but various competitions were running at the festival grounds even after it; in the 1950s, the festival hosted the top level [national] Competition in the Creativity of Youth [16].

The Neustadt idea was very influential and started to grow in various places of what was then Western Europe. New festivals originated, and many already existing local festivals started to invite international ensembles [17]. In 1990, this growth of international festival participants prompted the directors of festivals towards greater co-operation and

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15) In 1971, an ensemble from Equador came to Schoten; in 1972 it was a Japanese ensemble; in 2004 there were ensembles from Belgium, Russia, Senegal, Bolivia, Greece, France, Mexico, and the USA. The USA sent two ensembles; one of them presented Irish folklore.

16) Take for instance 1957. The new folk song competition jury included Otakar Horký, Vladimír Karbusický, and Vítězslav Volavý, and the awarded songs were: 1. „Muzikanti, hrejte" (lyrics by V. Boček, music by J. Hora, representing the Vlajka mládí ensemble from Brno); 2. „Hrajte, husle javorové" (lyrics and music by M. Vlkojan, representing the Fatra Napajedla ensemble); 3. „Povězte, povězte, co dělá Matěj" (lyrics by V. Tůmová, music by J. Rohlík, representing the Kpt. Jaroš Ensemble from Mělník). See Jančář, J. *Strážnická ohlédnutí*, c. d., p. 174.

František Hořák from Strážnice wrote in his memoirs: "*In 1950, the transformation continued of the Strážnice Festival. It changed from the original folklore activity without substantial stage arrangements into a new, urban-type young folklore festival. The young ensembles demonstrated the possibility of transformation folk dance and music culture into stage expression. The political orientation of the festival was increasing; it was shocking, and many participants of the festival disapproved of it. The festival was to document the joyous life in the new folk democratic republic. As a result an agricultural exhibition was part of the festival and the parade included for the first time ever tractors and other farming machinery. The programs included constructive songs, and street gates carried mottoes such as „We've been constructing a progressive and cultural village", and "We joyously welcome harvest with songs".* See Hořák, *F. Putovali hudci. Paměti Cimbálové muziky Slávka Volavého 1943 – 1993*. Strážnice, 2000, p. 29.

A comprehensive work on the crisis of the Strážnice festival is: Jančář, J. *Strážnická ohlédnutí*, c. d., pp. 61-87.

17) See Veerbelen, Siegfried. "Organizing an International Folklore Festival." In: *Sovremennyj festival folklora / A Modern Festival of Folklore*. Moskva, 1995, p. 94. In his effort to establish an international festival in Schoten, Veerbelen was also inspired by the world EXPO in Brussels in 1958; there he saw east European ensembles like Mazowse from Poland and Mojsejevci and Berjozka from the Soviet Union.

establishing a base, which would allow it. This is how CIOFF originated (Conseil International des Organisations de Festivals de Folklore et d'Arts Traditionneles). Today it is a non-governmental UNESCO organization that unites over 90 member states; international ensemble exchange is among its priorities.

Despite all the positive things, which come with contemporary international folklore festivals, one question must be asked: what does this "international" culture has to offer to the audience? The answer is attraction, general awareness about the existence of the Other, fun, and less often, although advertised as such, real insight into folk culture or the folklore of a specific country. With the growing distance from the mother country, there is an increase in the probability that state supported ensembles would come to present highly stylized folk repertory, or a high art author's repertory. The non-European countries use such oriented performances as a promotion of their country, sending their ensembles abroad with this aim [18].

Currently, you can meet local, regional, and national cultures at festivals, which is the way it used to be in the beginning of the festival era, except under slightly different circumstances. The experience is more diverse than you can imagine: we have been discussing mostly the ethnic or ethnographic background (in the sense of an ethnic group and an ethnographic group), from the performer's point of view. Various contacts and encounters (and consequently influences) also come from meeting with the audience, because the audience frequently takes not only the passive listener's role, but may be actively involved (which is how the widespread western European festival workshops work); they may become bearers of various phenomena in their transmission to

18) As an example: few years ago, the multicultural Malaysia had to develop a specific umbrella folklore, which would represent the country abroad; it was a governmental order. The task was fulfilled by artists and ethnologists; they selected typical examples from various ethnic groups living in the country, and created a picture of "Malaysian folklore". A paper on this theme was presented at an international conference in Johor Bar within CIOFF congress in Malaysia in 1994.

various traditional forms. Last but not least, the encounter of all types of ethnic based cultures has been influenced by mass and popular cultures, which adds one more dimension to the above-mentioned phenomenon due to its global essence. One of the goals of ICTM (International Council for Traditional Music; an international organization which originated after the IFMC) is to study the revival, folklore movements, and festivals in their historical, ethnological, sociological, and psychological aspects. Evidence of the attention that this phenomenon deserves is in its international character and the attention of professionals. Nevertheless, the last image of the meeting of cultures at folklore festivals has always been conditioned by economic and organizational means; western European festivals were structured this way earlier and to a greater extent than eastern European festivals [19]. On the other hand, eastern European festivals, in spite of some negative features in the history of their development, were supplied with more erudite background and programming, which carried within a great potential of the theoretical view on the use of folk culture. [20] Today, both

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19) The Sidmouth Festival finished in 2004; at least in the form which had developed during the 50 years of its existence. The end came mostly of economic reasons. The Schoten Festival budget depends to a certain extent on entrace fees, the organizers must cover up to 80% of expenses from their own sources. That is why they provide alternative scenes in case of bad weather, the organization board is based on volunteers, and most of the performers are accomodated in families, etc. This is similar to majority of European festivals. See Veerbelen, S. "Organizing an International Folklore Festival". In: *Sovremennyj festival folklora*, c. d., s. 96-98. Also see Rukavina, V. "Maribor Festival. Experience of Working with Sponsors". In: *Sovremennyj festival folklora*, c. d., pp. 114-118. Its author, lawyer and director of the multicultural LENT festival in Maribor, has been involved in various volunteer folk festival activities since his youth. It was only when he grew older and met a director of an American folk festival that he understood that festivals are a certain kind of "showbiz". For the first time he heard about the difference between a sponzor and a donor; it was all new to him.

20) This is obvious in the development of the Strážnice festival too, especially in the period of re-evaluating the 1950s, which were burdened with ideology. The natural direction within the festival content was formed above all by ethnologists. See Holý, D. „Kritika, strážnické slavnosti a národopisci". *Národopisné aktuality 1*, 1964, no. 1, pp. 27-41; see also „Z diskuse ke koncepci Slavností lidových písní a tanců ve Strážnici". *Národopisné aktuality 2*, 1965, no. 1-2, pp. 30-44.

sides take pride in inspiring each other, which may be good news for the further development of the folklore festival phenomenon.

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