

Models of Transmitting Folklore Using Selected Examples from Slovak Folk Music

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Natural manifestations of traditional folk music may now be rapidly declining in our lives and culture, but it is possible to see, using traditional folk music's continuity as an example, that one of its most remarkable attributes is the ability to survive or even transform into various forms, hand in hand with new conditions and space for its existence that come with changing social context and functionality of folk music. In my paper, I point out that an apparently simple paradigm—disappearance of natural opportunities = the end of folk music traditions—does not always and everywhere work in the same way. Folk music tradition may be declining, it may address an ever smaller section of society, and it may be presented less often in the media, but it does not die away in the literal sense of the word. Actually, thanks to its magic power of survival, it is invoked in new forms in which the influence of the present and contemporary ways of life become stronger. Similar examples can be seen in many areas of music: vocal songs, use of folk instruments and instrument making, folk music, interpretation style, and repertory.

The internal power of a tradition, environment and suitable family background

As in the past, the most natural model of transmitting folklore today comes from strongly or continually preserved musical traditions within a region, locality or family. This is a process that has ensured the survival and development of the existence of many Slovak folklore groups that continue to perform today, as well as accounting for the interpretation style of many instrumentalists, singers, and dancers and making folk

music instruments. I will illustrate this with examples, focusing only on folk music.

The last thirty years of the twentieth century was marked by the disappearance of excellent string and cimbalom bands. They became a principal interest for ethnomusicologists in early regional projects since the 1960s and served as a model for a whole generation of folklorists. Zubajovci from the upper Liptov village called Važec, Paprčkovci from Hriňová or Paláčkovci from Hrochoť in Podpoľanie, Dudíkovci, Cibulkovci from Myjava or Radičovci from Kokava nad Rimavicou are just some of the examples. Today, however, thanks to a young generation of local musicians, new bands are formed that are directly linked to their predecessors through their choice of instruments, interpretation style and repertory. In some regions, the emergence of new rural folk music groups is so strong that today, considering actual numbers in the last fifty years, we might speak about their culmination. Podpoľanie, Terchová and the whole Terchová valley and Horehronie are some of the examples.

As the above examples show, continuity works best where a strong regional tradition is combined with suitable family background that passes musical heritage from generation to generation in a family environment. The following examples illustrate this:

- The string band of Martin Berky-Paláč from Hrochoť was one of the most famous and the most recorded folk music groups in Podpoľanie in the 1960s and 1970s. After the end of his active performance and the death of this generation of musicians, there was no one to continue either the local or family tradition because their children did not actively follow this kind of music. It was, therefore, an even bigger surprise when a new generation, the grandsons of the earlier musicians from Hrochoť, not only entered the scene, but also introduced themselves as mature musicians who had perfectly preserved the unique and characteristic elements of interpretation of their grandfathers in their virtuous and decorated playing, melodies, and characteristic harmonic and rhythmic playing in the

accompanying instruments. Probably the most surprising thing about young musicians is their knowledge of the repertory and their ability to accompany singers when performing the so-called *rozkazovačky* (unique and spontaneous competitive interpretations of local songs that are dominated by singers who change existing melodies and rhythms). It is understandable and generally true that a new generation of musicians is never an absolute copy of its predecessors; however, we might regard the preservation of the basic elements of interpretation in this style as a little miracle.

- When Július Bartoš-Šuko from Horechovce, probably the most famous *primas* (first-fiddler) in Slovakia, died in May of this year (2006), it was a great loss. He was a singer and *primas* of Roma background, an incredibly charismatic personality, and a representative of the second generation of musicians in the Bartošovci family band in Čierny Balog. Yet by July, his children were performing under the name Bartošovci at the Folklore Festival under Poľana in Detva. A similar model could be shown in dozens of other examples of folk music groups in which musical traditions have been passed immediately on from generation to generation within a region, locality, or family.
- It is possible to see similarly interesting and numerous examples of continuing music traditions even when just one of the two determinants—local folk music tradition and suitable family background—dominates. Here we must not neglect folk music groups within urban environment, which generally feature a higher degree of stylization and more or less supra-regional repertory than rural ensembles. With its real interest in preserving local traditions, traditional folk music groups such as Western Slovakia's Skaličan in Skalica, Brezovan in Brezová pod Bradlom, Kopaničiar in Myjava, have in the last years played a positive role and there are many similar examples throughout Slovakia.

Organized events and societies, their dramaturgy and ideological concept

Organized events represent a different model of transmitting traditional folk music.. The making and playing of traditional folk music instruments is probably the best example. Due to the critical state of makers and performers in the early 1970s, Ivan Mačák and Oskár Elschek initiated a competition for makers (and later for performers) called Instrumentum excellens - Ladislav Leng Award. It existed from 1975 until 1996, and since 2001 it has continued in a renewed form. The first years were devoted to specific instruments (bagpipes, *fujara* [the fujara is a large duct flute played originally by shepherds], whistles, helicons, etc.) and became a stimulus for the making as well as playing of traditional folk music instruments. The award, which was intended to revive these instrument traditions, proved extremely successful. That is, it gave an impulse for an unusual rebirth of these instruments, whereas it happened (and still happens) on more or less organized institutional ground. The most important moments concerning the revival of bagpipe making and the interest in playing them include:

- Bagpipe Carnival, an event that followed local bagpipe traditions and made space for all bagpipers (including beginners) to perform and meet, was organized for the first time in 1987. The event was organised in Malá Lehota and was an opportunity for all bagpipers, including beginners, bagpipe ensembles, and anyone interested in bagpipes.
- Since 1989, the event has included bagpipe workshops: specialized seminars dealing with problems of bagpipe making, tuning, interpretation, etc.
- The bagpipe workshops led to a great improvement in new instrument making, raised the quality and accessibility of instruments, and interested a growing number of young people in bagpiping while forming a new generation of players and makers.
- The Pipe Guild was formed in 1996 during Bagpipe Carnival as the

first organized association of bagpipers and pipe makers (it is registered as a civic association with the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic). Following the model of medieval guilds, the Pipe Guild has its own rules, insignia, and notables. It operates on a model of inner hierarchy of apprentices, assistants and masters and on an elaborate system of controlling the fulfilment of instigating criteria when moving into a higher guild category (see www.gajdy.sk).

- At first the event was not taken very seriously, and no one would have expected that between 1987 and 2006 the number of bagpipers would rise from 10 to approximately 60. There is probably no more homogenous group of performers and makers of traditional folk music instruments in Slovakia than there are bagpipers and bagpipe makers]. In addition, since 2006 another bagpipe festival has been organized under the name Gajdovačka in Oravská Polhora. It features cross-border cooperation between Slovakia and Poland.

Bagpipes are not the only instrument to have experienced a recent revival thanks to organized events. In 2002, the Society of Fújara Players was established, bringing together people interested in playing the fújara and other pipes. In 2005, the Violin Makers Guild was established from a predominantly amateur group of violinmakers. Helicon players created another well organized group mainly through a network of regional or local meetings and competitions. It is likely unnecessary to note that not all these activities of making folk music instruments and playing them take place on institutionalised ground. However, it is possible in this case to view festivals, societies, and competitions as especially strong institutions for preserving folk instrumental traditions.

New contexts for the use of folk music traditions

Slovakia's twentieth-century folklore movement was connected with fostering folklore in rural folklore groups and urban folklore ensembles of all sorts and age categories, as well as with a network of organized folklore events (festivals, exhibitions, competitions, etc.). Thus, it is no

longer centered in a traditional rural environment. Whether or not the folklore movement is criticized for fostering an artificial folklore in new, unnatural conditions or not, it is certain that the movement opened spaces for applying folk music and folk music instruments in new, untraditional contexts. In this vein, it is even possible to look for certain parallels between traditional music and other genres, especially modern popular music. In Slovakia, this also resulted in a musical wave of folk world music. It is possible to use the fujara to indicate, perhaps a bit heretically or provocatively, the precedent for this change based on the use of this instrument, which happened within the folklore movement. What was an exclusively solo instrument of shepherds and outlaws until the 1970s, the fujara has come to be commonly played with other instruments (whistles, jew's harp), or even with any type of folk music and orchestras. This process was negatively accompanied by a departure from traditional ways of making fujaras and the massive standardization of their tuning, which caused the old world of micro-tonal intervals to die out and lead to the opening of a space for the playing with, for example, fixed-pitch music instruments. However, the positive feature was an unusual rise in the number of fujara makers and fujara players, which led to the inclusion of the fujara in UNESCO's Third Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, issued in November 2005. It was just a question of time as to when the fujara would be heard in the world music playing with, for example, electronic musical instruments, as it was already prepared for it from an acoustic point of view. It is not just a coincidence that a new space for the use of the fujara also brought other structural, intonational, aesthetic and instrumental changes. For example, two-piece or three-piece fujaras (traditionally the fujara is made from one piece of wood) make transportation more comfortable when travelling. In addition, some instruments are now made of plastic or there are bizarre new forms like the "fujaridoo," a combination of the fujara with didgeridoo. Both changes of musical use of the fujara—no matter how we define them,

that is, whether it concerns the change from “traditional” to “less traditional,” “untraditional,” or eventually, “new”—show that it is possible to view the new functional context as another process of transmitting, preserving, or enlivening folk music, in this case instrumental traditions. Hopefully, there is no need to note that the “fujara case”, brings up much broader and more universal validity and it concerns, or can concern, other folk music instruments (*koncovky* [end-blown flutes], whistles, pipes, flutes, *dvojačky* [double duct flutes], bagpipes, signal horns, etc.) in the future.

Undoubtedly, there are certainly more models of transmitting traditional folk music than those discussed. Besides that, specific people and their enthusiasm, creative power, organizing skills, etc., bring about many specific results in preserving folk music traditions. But nothing would be possible were it not for the attraction and ability of traditional folk music to survive in new forms and, therefore, to address new listeners. It is not important to analyze whether the magic rests in archaic harmonies and modes, in centuries of refining and perfecting melodies and ornamentation, or in rich rhythm-harmonic composition, etc. Sometimes the right impulse is enough for its magic power not to vanish but to spread further.

More about the author on www.ff.ukf.sk/kfar/

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Fujara and world music



Bagpipe Carnival in Malá Lehota



The Pal'áčovci juniors from Hrochoť



A three-piece folding fujara