

# INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, HERE AND THERE: MUSIC FROM BOSNIAN POSAVINA TO ZAGREB

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**Abstract:** The essay represents the synthesis of a fieldwork dedicated to the musical practices in use among the communities of Croatian refugees coming from Bosnian Posavina. It analyses the technical, stylistic and organological features of the expressive tradition, focusing primarily on the processes of transformation from the original rural custom to the current application within the urbanised communities. Finally, it looks at the role of making music as an antidote to the sense of material and human loss and of the loss of identity following the drama of the war and forced displacement.

**Key words:** rural culture in urban context; crossbreeding in music; diasporic movements; borders vs. links; ethnic identities in progress; music as cultural autopoiesis; ethnomusicology as interpretation means of the complexity.

The aim of this paper is to present a synthesis of the wider results of the fieldwork which I have conducted over the past few years, thanks to the support of the *Ministero dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca* (Italian Ministry of Universities, Education and Research).

This project – which originated with an idea of Italian ethnomusicologist and ethno-organologist, Febo Guizzi (1947–2015) – has now led to the publication of two books, written in Italian, entitled *La Posavina canta e piange* (Posavina sings and cries).<sup>1</sup>

With the goal of contextualising specific musical expressions, mindful of Italian and international readers, my survey began with a historical reconstruction of the Croatian and Catholic presence in southern Pannonia, and in the more circumscribed region of Bosnian Posavina. The window in

<sup>1</sup> The first volume of which I am the author has the following title: *L'universo musicale dei profughi croati della Posavina bosniaca* (The musical universe of the Croatian refugees of Bosnian Posavina) (Raschieri, 2016). The second, *Il movimento nella danza e nella performance strumentale* (Movement in dance and in instrumental performance) contains the contributions of other researchers: this includes a significant study on dance practice by Linda Cimardi; it also encompasses a theoretical summary of the use of kinetics in ethnomusicology, elaborated by my colleagues Ilario Meandri and Vixia Maggini. This article describes preliminary applications of this research, potentially innovative in the use of new transcription methods. (Cimardi, Maggini, Meandri, Raschieri, 2016)

time opens with the Middle Ages, takes account of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian occupations, and it closes in times more recent. The dramatic and profound inner transformations of both territorial and human affairs therefore appear particularly evident, as does the structure of the “delocalised” field of research which is at the centre of this study.

A second preliminary excursion was then dedicated to laying out a panoramic map of Balkan folk music. The aim is to capture the unique but not isolated position of Posavina music, emphasizing its nature *vis à vis* the tightly woven and ingrained cultural exchanges between various regions and ethnic-religious groups, all living side by side.

The next stage focused on the repertoires of songs and dances with the accompaniment of the *šargija* and the violin, originally found throughout the villages of the cultural region of Bosnian Posavina. A preliminary assessment identified the key bibliography on the subject, starting with the historical contributions of Bosnian ethnomusicology – specifically, articles by Cvjetko Rihtman (Rihtman, 1953; 1958; 1964; 1970; 1974; 1976; 1982;), Vlado Milošević (Milošević, 1962a; 1962b), Vinko Krajtmajer (Krajtmajer, 1982), Dunja Rihtman-Šotrić (Rihtman-Šotrić, 1990; Rihtman-Šotrić and Šilić, 1987), and extending to more recent works. The latter are based primarily on those of the illustrious Dragica Panić (Panić, 1986; 1987), Jasmina Talam (Talam, 2001; 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2014; 2015), Miroslav Šilić (1988; 2001; 2003; 2008), Zvonko Martić (Martić and Bagur, 2010), to mention a few, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. The essays of the authors cited are representative of various perspectives and interests: an initial attention to the technical and formal apparatus of the dances with the accompaniment of the *šargija*, the study of the presence of the chordophones in the Bosnian organological panorama, the collection and safeguard of the heritage of music and dance of the different geo-cultural areas of the BH Federation, the identification of expressions attributable to Croatian cultural identity in BiH. These writings are enormously useful in painting an initial picture that enables us to understand the musical context beyond the Bosnian borders, which for a considerable period of time remained a topic of very limited study.

Following the introductory spaces of contextualisation, I considered the presence of the instrumental duo of *šargija* and violin, and in particular the thousand year history of the long-necked lute across East and West.

The dynamic use of the so-called *tambura* in the Balkans, in its multiple and alternating forms, is a living testimony to the processes of circulation throughout the Mediterranean basin of instrumental models of Middle Eastern origin. This vast and renewed field in which the long-necked lute was introduced follows the routes of expansion of territorial dominion and the spread of the Muslim religion, beginning with the Turkish Empire as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century and reaching the

regions of the Far East on one hand, and touching on the borders of Europe on the other. Some features of cultural influence, together with documented migratory phenomena, were also decisive for the entry of the specific typology of chordophones in territories that were not Islamized. This explains, for example, the related fortune of the long-necked lute, recognisable by the name of *colascione*, especially in Italy and France from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The work in tracing a historical-organological course of events was inspired by Febo Guizzi's initial embryonic suggestions. From the level of identifying past testimonies, it then turned to a parallel re-reading of contemporary European presences, such as the use of the *tambura* or *tamburica* especially in Croatia as an example of derivation from the same original root despite the total adaptation to the tempered scale system as well as to Central European structural and compositional models.

On the other hand, the *šargija* of Bosnian Posavina, especially in its use in immigrant communities, can today be considered the western representation of the older family of long-necked lutes, previously of eastern origin. In this way, Posavina music stands at the crossroads between the tonal language of Western Europe and a sound field of extraordinary otherness, which opens just below the Sava River.

My fieldwork thus concentrated on the analysis of the particular organological characteristics, based on the data gathered from the musical practice in Zagreb, thanks to interaction with players and instrument-makers active in that area. In doing so, I uncovered a scene where the preservation of original practices is enriched by an innovative programme – in line with the evolution of expressive language. The safeguard of conservative traits is guaranteed by a strong movement of cultural resistance, and through the cultivation of codes of musical expression.

On one hand, the instruments are constructed according to traditional practices, involving craftsmen, amateurs or semi-professionals. From an observation of the instruments used on a daily basis and the information gleaned from the instrument-makers Ilija Kovačević and Frano Sović, we can recognise a number of elements showing an overall tendency towards perfection with respect to the past; this progressive trend concerns the choice of woods, the precision of the measurements, the use of modern technical instrumentation, the growing quest for structural stability. The last of these is particularly evident in the scale intonation of the instruments, where the original material translation of the individual aural capabilities appears today to proceed more towards a calculated uniformity, where what has become the stable presence of the violin in duo with the *šargija* must have played an important part.



Figure 1. Examples of *šargija* by the instrument-maker Frano Sović. (Raschieri, 2015)



Figure 2. The instrument-maker Ilija Kovačević is showing dimension of a trunk for the construction of *šargija*. (Raschieri, 2015)

However, there remains an underlying respect with regard to the traditional norms, that govern both the material nature of the instruments as well as the immaterial nature of the expressive practices. In this regard, one of the most important encounters within this research was with the musician Ante Galić (born in Foča, Doboj, in 1952), who has played a leading role in transplanting traditional music in the communities of emigrants and refugees. Although he also took part in the re-emergence of traditional music in the 1960s and 70s, he is considered the preeminent figure in the safeguard of the authentic language. His reputation was further bolstered by his teaching activity, covering many decades, at first in Bosnia and among the communities of emigrants spread across Europe, and then more intensely in the transformed urban panorama of Zagreb.

Thanks to our new relationship and to his lessons, aimed particularly at younger generations, I was introduced to the fundamentals of the Posavina musical language. By taking part in learning the basic instrumental techniques, I was able to incorporate these in my study in analytical chapters and snapshots. I then observed the foundational unity and interdependence between instrumental language, choreology and singing. This inseparability is reflected in the teaching method itself so as to safeguard a primitive ingrained functionality of the sonorous practice, which today appears to be spontaneously renewed. In fact, despite the fact that a series of transformative dynamics have recomposed musical forms, contexts of performance, expressive solutions, there continues to be a relation of direct consequentiality between the acquisition of executorial competence and their performance in favour of occasions of community get-togethers. This form of service to the collectivity, although in some cases it grants a semi-professional status, is established within the confines of a rather wide practice, where the young learners have almost immediate access.



Figure 3. Players and dancers of the *Zavičajni klub Odžak-Zagreb* during a gathering of the community. (Raschieri, 2016)



Learning the instrumental technique, almost one and the same with an imitative methodology, and without the aid of something written, begins with the acquisition of the rudiments of the *šargija* to then go on to higher levels of technique and the use of the violin, usually considered the mark of superior competence.

A second important section of my research is dedicated in fact to the technique of the fiddle and to its related history and use. A considerable number of testimonies refer to the instrument's more recent acquisition and diffusion with respect to the remote regional vicissitudes of the plucked lutes. Beginning with studies on the traditional organological heritage in the most ample, plural but inter-connected area of the former Yugoslavia, it is possible to draw a historical map of the chordophones territorial distribution and also of the internal recurrence of areas of the violin use. A rather homogenous distribution in the regions to the north of the Sava River can be noted, contrary to a substantially empty picture in the territorial areas on the opposite side, starting with the circumscribed territories of Posavina. This spatial limit is reaffirmed in the most recent studies on the area's traditional instruments, when the use of the violin is not incorporated in a dimension which is however marginal, additional, ancillary. The oldest musical custom, reconstructed through the memory of our direct witnesses, also confirms similar positions. Frano Sović, already cited above, was among those who were central to our understanding of the practice of making the *tambura* in northern Bosnia; he spoke of a use of the violin so remote but in net disproportion in relation to the customary practice of the *šargija*, therefore to the respective number of players. Moreover, the long-necked lutes, as we were able to observe, were for the most part autonomously fabricated within a village, where the purchase of a violin properly-made outside would have been quite infrequent in an environment characterised by a subsistence economy, and musical activity that was almost never professional. Pavo Paćo Ćorluka, a singer coming from the heart of Posavina, provided us with a second exemplary affirmation. He in fact told us a singular story of how he had received the gift of his first *šargija*, an instrument used exclusively, in addition to the pastoral flutes, in Posavina's rural past. The violin was nearly unknown and still not used in the 1960s but was later introduced with the function of embellishment, then becoming a constant presence.

This affirmation is confirmed in the permanent use of the instrument which emerged in the course of the research update. The violin in fact clearly occupies a position of pre-eminence in the "writing" and execution of re-founded repertoires of song and in the corresponding fields of semi-professional and public performances, while the practice of the *šargija* is more often limited to moments of private and extemporaneous expression, free of the programmatic rules pertaining to a model today consolidated. A question that requires at least

an attempt at reply concerns the era and the modalities of an initial appearance of the violin in the musical tradition of Posavina. The hypotheses that can be found in the, however, scant literature are apparently not always in unanimous agreement. Ankica Petrović indicates the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the general period when the instrument was introduced among those of northern Bosnia's rural population. (Petrović, 2001, 62) Zvonko Martić, referring to the territory of Bosnian Posavina, apart from central Bosnia and the areas of Žepče and Kraljeva Sutjeska, speaks of a use only slightly prior to the Second World War. (Martić and Bagur, 2010, 74-75) Miroslav Šilić's is of a not very different opinion; it is based on the testimony of the player Joze Bratić, born in 1927 in Gornji Hasić, according to whom the violin gets introduced close to 1930. (Šilić, 2001, 30) Dragica Panić, in her analytical work on the *kola* in use in the area of Brčko, describes the process of the 20<sup>th</sup> century transformation of the instrumental ensemble, from the original autonomy of the *šargija* to its union with an identical instrument (a group of two *šargije*), or with the violin (two *šargije* and the violin, or *šargija* and the violin) in the period between the two world wars, and the introduction of the accordion during the successive post-war period. (Panić, 1986, 14)

Jasmina Talam, for her part, indicates the end of the '60s as the beginning of a massive use of the violin in duos with the *šargija*. She cites information taken from Stjepan Vrdoljak (Derventa, 1927–Zenica, 2012), attesting to an expansion in the use of the violin beginning with the period following the Second World War. Finally, she observes how "in recent times, numerous ensembles can be found that also include the *šargija*" together with the "violin as well as the accordion, the guitar and percussion instruments". Drawing therefore a net distinction between authentic groups and areas of innovation links the latter to a field of use "for commercial purposes, and not within the framework of traditional popular culture". (Talam, 2013, 131-132)

Regarding the increasing tendency to include the violin over the course of the past fifty years, the declarations of the player Ante Galić - *Gale*, whose wealth of memory and personal musical ability guided us in the discovery of innumerable aspects of a complex expressive organism, are of new inestimable value. He was practically personally involved in observing and participating in central and pioneering processes of rethinking instrumental groups that took place in parallel with the partial re-founding of forms of singing. In this process, the violin, originally relegated to a marginal and sporadic role solely in the chore repertoires, saw an initial phase of experimental use in the habitual vocal practice, then establishing itself in a laboratory of new composition in progressive expansion. (Galić, 2014)

Without a doubt the versatile nature of the violin, particularly on the structural level of elasticity in terms of scalar solutions, found an appropriate

place in the non-temperate musical system of Bosnian Posavina. Based primarily on the modalities proper to vocal expression, it thus inserted itself in the primitive and resistant expressive codes of the area of destination rather than carrying its characteristics towards the well-established tonal system in the area of Central Europe from which it has descended either directly or indirectly. Moreover, the entry of the violin took place on a ground where the previous practice of bowed lutes was quite deep-seated and persistent. Considering the overall territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the sub-Western and coastal area witnesses on one hand the presence of the *lijerica*, a short-necked lute with three strings, closely related to the Eastern Turkish *kemençe*. The intonation of its strings (*Sol-Do-Fa*) testifies to an overlaying organisational system to which we have observed that the plucked lutes also belong. On the other side are the *gusle* string instruments characterised by a wider distribution, even beyond the specific national borders. Testimonies of the past document their capillary use – from family and domestic contexts to the sphere of a specialised vocal practice. The *guslarske pjesme* are the compositions intrinsically connected to the instrument, which has one or, more rarely, two strings on which the player executes melodic sequences introducing or sustaining the sections sung.

The instrumental presences described, although not exempt from factors of crisis and passages of contemporary re-functionalization, have not abandoned their original expressive sign. Furthermore, the trait that emerges most importantly in that itinerary of relative continuity is in fact intertwined with the story of the violin use in the area. Borrowing from a recent synthetic historical treatise composed by Zvonko Martić, we find that solo singing could be accompanied, other than by the *gusle*, by “*šargija*, and for roughly the past sixty years by the *violina uz debelu* in the region of Usora and in Bosnian Posavina” (Martić and Bagur, 2010, 70-71). The definition *violina uz debelu žicu* (or *uz debelu* for short) identifies the violin played “with the thick string”, i.e., using melodic sequences executed on the fourth string in *Sol*, and imitating the techniques of accompaniment typical of the most archaic string instruments. The fact that the territory where it is used corresponds substantially to the area covered in our survey, and that its location in time coincides almost entirely suggest the vision of communicating vessels between the above-described solo use in epic-narrative songs and the parallel absorption of the violin in the execution of lyrical and dance repertoires initially sustained by the *šargija* on its own.

The crossing of a dividing line, marking the different degree to which stable violin practices were followed, must have come about gradually from the time of the descent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into the central area of the Balkan Peninsula. While the effect that the new domination exerted on Bosnian urban culture – therefore on its artistic expressions, cultured music included – is certain and better documented, an in-depth survey should also be undertaken of the



external sonorous practices of a popular kind and their influence on the previous ones, within the plan of forced settlement of community groups coming from different and central areas of the imperial territory. A second slope, intersecting with the former, of potential descent of the practice of the violin is related to the compact zone of historical popular use that embraces vast areas of the Northeast (Estonia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Czech Republic, and Slovakia) and reaches as far as the area close to Romania. Here, and in particular in this area's southern appendages, bordering directly on the Balkans, the musical profession of *lăutari* undoubtedly generated a solid expressive model, mobile and penetrating, whose reverberations are sometimes heard in the style of execution of the repertoires we have examined.

Without intending to trace connections that are in any case certain, the exploration of multiple channels of access can cast new light on episodic attestations of remote encounter between instruments rooted in local use, and those imported in the course of a constant re-composition of traditional organisms. The validity of this reading is reconfirmed in the vision of manifestations of contemporary Bosnian musical dynamism, where the update of the same ensembles, that would appear to be radical and totally disconnected from preceding itineraries, conceals on the contrary recognizable spaces of continuity or remediation.

Similarly, insofar as the repertoires and the forms and functions of expression are concerned, I reconstructed the musical customs of Bosnian Posavina – their original functions and stylistic features – through an examination of texts in combination with direct observation. This enabled me to chart both the past and present, observing the current musical tradition with the goal of capturing its union and its evolution, as well as the permanent elements of the Posavina region which, because of the displacement of its population, have moved beyond the traditional geographic and semantic borders.

In so doing, I sketched as detailed a picture as possible of the performance of song, with or without instrumental accompaniment, and of dance, with a focus on weddings and community celebrations, particularly though the forms of *prelo* and *sijelo*, of rural and pastoral life.



©Ijelo im Winter.

Figure 4. Ajdukiewicz, 1901, 351.

The fieldwork carried out in the Croatian capital underscored the primacy of musical expression in the area between Derventa and Doboj through evaluation of the past. This perspective, in parallel, also led to the identification of the tradition in sacred spaces, with particular importance paid to the district of the destroyed, and nowadays rebuilt, Franciscan monastery of Plehan.

Starting from this circumscription of internal borders, I retraced the stages of an initial partial transformation in the musical practices of the area. While the fundamental customs of dance and song in the churchyards of Catholic villages at the end of the Mass remained constant, from the second half of the twentieth century, important changes took place. These were evident in the circulation of new repertoires in the different areas of Posavina and even beyond its unstable southern borders.

Some testimonies attribute an important role to singers in the diffusion of old and new *kajda* (melodies). These singers were employed as conductors of the *Ćiro* train, which passed through that region to reach central Bosnia, going to performances in the usual places. This story, rich in narrative, succeeds in charting a new course. It is said that during a typical meeting in front of the church, the singer Lukica Senjak would, in front of the crowd, lift up Ilija Begić, who at that time was only a boy, praising his singing talent. The elements of inner

connection and handover are valuable in the creation of communal history. They are furthermore useful to us in understanding the evolutionary progress of the tradition.

Indeed, in 1969, Ilija Begić and Marko Begić were the protagonists of the first commercial initiative to record the traditional musical expressions of the Bosanska Posavina region. The *Braća Begić's* (Begić brothers) first recording, *Kad zapjeva Ilija i Marko*, marks the beginning of this itinerary and the inaugural step in the genesis of a new traditional genre. In particular, the Begićs' first works were devoted to the recording of traditional repertoires, with a selection which could encounter the tastes of a new listening public.

From the point of view of technique and style, the songs were modelled on the previous structures of the sung *kolo*, but were at the same time creating an autonomous form, endowed with new features that attested to changes in mediums. As newspapers of that time report, the enterprise achieved an immediate and unexpected success and could count on the demand of the community of refugees present in Germany and other central European countries – even more than on the domestic distribution. It was in fact the population who emigrated looking for work who saw this as an opportunity to establish, through listening, a virtual bridge with their native land.



Figure 5. The singers Ilija Begić and Marko Begić during a *prelo* gathering in Zagreb. (Raschieri, 2015)



Figure 6. Picture of the *Braća Begić* on a poster advertising the TV programme *The voice of the diaspora*. (Raschieri, 2014)

That initial experience, and the climate which it produced, led to the creation of parallel musical groups – that is, of numerous epigones. Not long afterwards, in 1971, the ensemble *Baščovani* (gardeners), was founded around the singers Pačo Ćorluka and Luka Anušić. Their work was central to another renewal on the level of musical and textual composition. While musically speaking, the group standardised violin practice (which was still absent from the Begićs's initial production), the real turning point came with the treatment of themes inspired by contextual situations. The song with which they opened their career, *Baščo moja*, took on the role of a hymn for the Croatian community of Posavina. It represents a moving metaphor of abandonment, reminiscent of the funeral song. Because of its mode of universal expression, the message transcended the events which led to the creation of the piece. It instinctively resonated with people's global sense of tragedy, heightened still by the perception of displacement and distance.

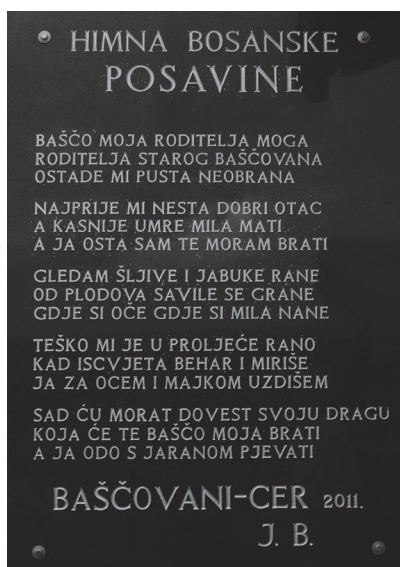


Figure 7. The song *Baščo moja*, engraved on a stone in the village of Cer (BiH), as an anthem of Bosnian Posavina. (Raschieri, 2014)



Figure 8. Luka Anušić with Ante Galić, singing in Johovac (BiH). (Raschieri, 2015)



With the compositions launched by *Braća Begić* and which matured with *Baščovani*, a nearly new style had been invented, characterised by themes and tones of nostalgia, grief, and deprivation. The new poetic rhetoric and the sentimental expression immediately appealed to people's state of mind even before the breakup of Yugoslavia and the tragedy of war.

Such poetics then appeared prophetic and at the same time expressed the aesthetic basis of the form which we can identify today as the new tradition. Tracing its origins and observing its contemporary display is like witnessing the creative process behind similar phenomena such as the *fado*, the *rebetiko* or even the *blues*.

Recording generated a new form of semi-professionalism in which the protagonists were increasingly involved in musical entertainment, even in communities by socio-economic factors displaced from Bosnian villages.

The reversal of the previous socio-political structure came with war, when thousands of people abandoned their villages to look for new lands and means of subsistence. Zagreb is certainly the place where the population density is highest and where many key representatives of the Posavina musical world reside today. Despite the initial problems of settling in a new context, groups hailing from different areas organised themselves in cultural-artistic associations (*KUD-ovi*), following a model of social and cultural coalescence of notable importance in Croatia. Even though it retains features of folkloristic groups and performances, the case of the Croatian refugees from Bosnian Posavina must be considered independently. Beyond the stage performances, which typically centre on selected groups, the various communities maintain an incredible musical vitality and spontaneity. The generating power, which governs the activity of the group, is exhibited in the musical expression, which is a unique means of reaffirming their culture.



Figure 9. Some components of the *KUD Rodna Gruda* of Dugo Selo, near Zagreb, playing and dancing in a folk festival. (Raschieri, 2014)

The encounter with these associations in the urban district allowed me to examine multiple aspects and elements of musical life: group rehearsals and informal meetings; performances in public festivals and instances of ritual and celebration; the semi-professional nature of singers and players and the wider musical and dance practice; the maintenance of local peculiarities and the characteristics of a *koiné* of expression – a mixture of conservative attempts to safeguard remote cultural and ethical horizons together with innovative currents and new compositional methods launched by younger generations.

We are speaking here of a dynamic universe where a range of impulses coalesce and succeed in avoiding the ambiguous, static and self-referential purity of many other contemporary manifestations of traditional music.

The Croatian diaspora community of Posavina has abandoned any hope of a return to its place of origin because of a sense of surrender and the recognition of an irreversible condition. Music therefore remains the principal unifying force, and periodically crossing the Sava River represents re-joining an ancestral aural homeland.

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