Modalities of transcribing the folk-musical repertoire for violin

Veronica Claudia CONSTANTIN [1]

Abstract: *The article entitled "Modalities of transcribing the folk-musical repertoire for violin" is structured in three chapters that discuss in detail the subject of transcribing a folk musical text. Transcription, a fundamental element of ethnomusicological research, has as its primary objective the graphics rendering of the rhythm, melodicism and stylistic peculiarities that instrumental folklore implies. Despite it being central to the methods of a musical discourse analysis, the transcription operation is in complete interdependence with the transcriber, whose judgment is often required to decide. Transcribing and providing notes are complex matters that often represent the difference between the dynamic of the instinctive, rudimentary interpretation of the waiter and what strikes the paper as a written substitute for the song. The question the raises uncertainty refers to the level of difficulty that the transcription should be made at. It is assumed that any transcription should extract the musical meaning and not induce it. Musical folklore has faced the problem of finding a unifying notation principle so that melodies could be melodically differentiated easily. The patterns of mono centration and major-minor dichotomy, already used by ethnomusicologists, have made a significant contribution to the notation of folk songs. The transcriptor's specialized training and knowledge can significantly influence the notation when it tackles asymmetric rhythms, ornamentation and stylistic elements specific to the country musician's interpretation.*

Keywords: *transcription, rhythm, violin, notation.*

1. Aspects of notation used in folklore transcriptions

Folklore studies, through their innate importance, have the role of proving the substrate from which the indigenous culture grows as compared to the ways in which our predecessors were feeling, thinking and living on the Romanian territory. Old habits such as *'The wheat garland, Nedeile, Căluşarii'* are traditions which could not possibly grow their roots on foreign soil. Especially in this context, a deeper

---

[1] Academy of Music „Gheorghe Dima", Cluj-Napoca, veronik10ver@gmail.com.

knowledge of our ancestral values is a solid starting point for a thorough and faithful research in musical folk culture. Out of all the disciplines which make up folkloristics such as literary folkloristics, ethnocoreology, traditional theater and ethnomusicology, the last one covers the largest research area, being present in all the other disciplines.

The necessity of acquiring ethnomusicological knowledge led the Romanian folklorists to establishing a methodology and study principles for the musical folklore. In the Transylvanian collections the Romanian ethnomusicologists showed their interest in reproducing as faithfully as possible the folklore phenomenon, in its existential parameters, by following aspects such as: the orality of folklore in relation to the social-spiritual environment; the folklore as a spontaneous creative act which relies on the psychological functionality of a group; the integration of individual creations coming from different social categories into the spirit and technique of the collective art; the permanent evolution of the folklore; the social-historic evolution of the collectivity; the traditional quality; its melodic and rhythmic structure; the existence of the musical folklore within various types of manifestation such as: dancing, singing, shouting, instrumental execution; the interdependency of the music to the entire complex of manifestations.

The notation methodology of folklore in the Transylvanian collections, edited since the beginning of the XX century to the present time, includes the following:

• understanding the instrumental folklore through means of its syncretism; writing down exactly all the shoutings and possible dance movements which could generate sounds or rhythmical elements in an instrumental melody;

• conserving and maintaining the musical materials by capture and recording so that the transcriptions from the collections could be confronted with the reality if needed;

• the level of transcription of a piece of folklore is influenced by the musical knowledge of the transcriptor;

• the basic function of a folklore collection is the conservation of musical materials dedicated exclusively to scientific research.

After researching the specialty collections, the idea of classifying the instrumental melodies based upon the context where they are played is looming:

a) instrumental melodies specific to the celebrations of Christmas and New Year;

b) wedding melodies, specific to weddings;

c) instrumental melodies with funeral character, played at funerals, mourning songs and melodies played on the way to the burial place;

d) instrumental melodies for dancing which could be accompanied by shoutings;

e) instrumental melodies specific to shepherding, which originate in the old repertoires for flute, bagpipe;

f) instrumental melodies not connected to a specific context: pieces originating in the vocal repertoire and being introduced later to the instrumental repertoire, as well as „*horea lungă",* which is an unlimited variation, a melody with an elastic shape but a strong instrumental character.

The instrumental melodies with a ritual character had been played more than a century and a half ago solely in the ceremonials they were destined for and interpreting them with other occasions was completely forbidden. But this sacredness and seriousness of a life moment is not found nowadays in the music of the modern culture, the instrumental music is played in any context and under any circumstances that the interpreter and the listener would feel like. Historical context and the urbanization of the rural environment led to a sharp decline in the spontaneous folklore processes in Romanian traditional culture. In the past few years it was noticed that several folk materials, brought to the urban environment, have been used for commercial purposes by mass-media, by producers of traditional music shows, who transform them into a music likened by the city public.

In this way a new genre is created, a genre that can be easily differentiated from the rural folklore. We often see, identify, or even have the unfortunate occasion of playing folk materials which belong to collections created empirically and in a manner that lacks professionalism, whose fundamental quality is their quantity, the actual number of records, to the detriment of real quality, of an honorable and clear transcription of the live sound material. The lack of ornamentation, the errors of rhythmic nature, the absence of tempo indications are negative aspects which strike us when we get in contact with some of the Transylvanian collections of modern times.

2. Methods of transcription of the musical text

Musical folkloristics faced the problem of finding a unifying principle in the notation of melodies with the help of which melodies would be placed next to each other on the stave in such a way that they could be differentiated easily from melodic point of view (Carp 1960, 7). The two patterns present in the Romanian folklore, the monocentric and the major-minor dichotomy, known and accepted by the Romanian ethnomusicologists, have led to the development of the four proposals of notation:

a) Notating the melodies with unique final on *Sol* used by Béla Bartók;
b) The *relative notation*, proposed by Paula Carp, in which the conventional center is *Re*;
c) The *major-minor notation*, according to which the melodies with major character have the final on *Sol*, and those with minor have the final on *Mi*;
d) The notation with *stable center*, which proposes the integration of the two patterns (mono-centration and *major-minor dichotomy*) in a single unifying system, finding the stable height relationship existent between their centers and establishing one and only one tonal conventional center for all monocentric scales, both major and minor (Haplea 2005, 71).

According to the studied repertoire, researchers of the XX-XXI centuries have defined four methods of notation, which comprise multiple situations of affirming the sound center, as you can see in the following table (Haplea et al., 2008):

The modality of notation	The situation of ambiguity in the interior of the monocentric pattern	The uniqueness of the tonal center of monocentric major-minor scales	The existence of a unique center for both modal patterns	The immunity to alterations of the unique center	The ambiguity between the two modal patterns
Unique final	*	*			*
Relative		*			*
Major/Minor			*/2		*
Stable center		*	*	*	*

Table 1. *The modalities of unified notation*

Oskar Elschek (citation by Mihaela Chețan and Nicolae Teodoreanu in '*The analytical musical transcription, instrument for configuration of the structure of the melodies of calus'*)[2] speaks about three types of transcriptions, structured based on the scientific interest manifested at diverse levels. It emphasizes in this way the *transcription of structure,* sufficiently schematic and useful for noticing the 'macro' organization of the text (sound material, cadencing systems, caesure, tonal-functional plan, rhythmic canava etc.). The *detailed transcription*, called also '*ethical'* is the one from the Bartók and Brăiloiu line. The main objection raised to it is the overload, the difficulty at reading. And finally, the third type, the *synthetic transcription,* attempts a center-like configuration by intentionally removing the

---

[2] in „Anuarul Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor", serie nouă, tom 28, Editura Academiei, București, 2017, p. 99-122

accidents, but keeping the constituent variations of the melody, extracted from researching several songs in the same repertoire. This kind of notation, named also 'emics', indicates only the significant elements from the executing musician's point of view (Rădulescu 2011, 29). The above study proposes also a fourth way of notating, named by the authors 'analytical'. It consists of a more comprehensive and explicit reproduction referring on one hand to the generic shape, viewed as a diacronical disposition of the distinct paradigms and on the other to the syntactic relations which define the construction of the musical segments (Nurbert-Chețan and Teodoreanu, 2017, 120). This method of transcribing, spaced and arranged in such a way as to facilitate the analysis, optimizes the comparative observation of the constructive segments, repetitions, transpositions or modulations. The small component elements imply numerous repeats, making in this manner the understanding of the musical discourse more explicit.

3. Levels of transcription

The operations of the transcribing act, in the order of their deployment, according to a study on transcription could be: analysing the musical discourse which will be the subject of notation; identifying the elements covered in the analysis; graphic rendering of the musical text by assigning graphical values to the identified and analysed elements (Barterş and Haplea 2009, 15). The question which generates uncertainty refers to the level at which transcription should be undertaken. It starts from the premise that any transcription needs to extract the musical sense of the discourse and should never induce it. One of the suggestive systematizations created by Ioan Haplea and Ovidiu Barteş in the research paper *Transylvanian Trio-stylistic peculiarities* notes five levels for the receiving of musical text. This structuring of the transcription requires parsing of a route from *simple* to *complex*, the transcriptor having the possibility of choice of the convenient level of difficulty based on the desired analytical segment. Following the pattern of the five levels we propose to illustrate it on an instrumental piece through which we observe the following peculiarities of the transcription levels:
- level I is a melodic scheme of the musical discourse, which is insufficient with regards to rhythm;
- levels II and III are useful in establishing the 'macro' plan of the piece including the simplified rhythmic structure;
- level IV leads us to aspects of ornamentation, rhythm, connections, all of them noted with an orientation character in mind.

• level V refers to transcription on to the finest details of the sound material.

This deeper level of transcribing imposes a detailed graphical record of the ornamentics of the rhythm, elements of agogics, stylistics and interpretation. It would be the preferred method to be used in the scientific research of the folklore. The multitude of information this type of transcription offers can lead to difficulties in reading and understanding of the details, which is why it is preferred to be addressed to scientific research exclusively. In many situations the simple 'taste judgement' of the transcriptor can lead to a correct or an erroneous result (the hyperbolization of the transcription).

Musical example

Ethnomusicologist Emilia Comișel writes in one of her papers about two types of notation: brief (a rhythmic-melodic notation of a melody, without transcribing the rhythmic variations from each stanza, ornamentics and other specifics related to the interpreting style) this way of notation would correspond to the first three levels of transcription previously presented; final (it implies noting at a deep level all the rhythmic-melodic elements specific to the interpreting style) corresponding to the IV and V levels of transcription.

4. Conclusion

When expanding the context and trying to analyse the situation of the Romanian folklore, considering also the social factor, namely the way in which the oral creation finds its place in the contemporary society, we notice that this immortal art is more and more intensely threatened by the concepts and ideas of the modern society.

Throughout the history of this nation deprived of its freedom by the domination of other nations and in a Europe which for a long time now has imposed the highly cultured creation against the oral one, we believe that the essence of the Romanian spirituality is the folklore. In the contemporary times, the transformations that occurred in the technological plan generate major changes in the spiritual life and due to requests from people in a certain collectivity we notice an enrichment of musical styles. We can thus talk about an evolution from one gender to another and one region to another, owning through evolution both the wins and the losses suffered by the indigenous folkloric creation.

References

Barteş, Ovidiu, Ioan Haplea. 2009. *Trio Transilvan – particularități stilistice-* [*Transylvanian Trio – stylistic peculiarities*]*.* Cluj-Napoca*:* Editura Clear Vision.

Carp, Paula. 1960*. "*Notarea relativă a melodiilor populare pe baza integrării lor într-un sistem organic [The relative notation of traditional melodies based on their integration in an organic system]". *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor*, nr. 1-2: 7-21, București.

Comișel, Emilia. 1992. *Etnomuzicologie* [*Ethnomusicology*], vol II. București: Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor și Muzicologilor din România.

Haplea, Doina. 2005. *Folclor instrumental românesc din Transilvania-ritmuri asimetrice și tipare modale* [*Romanian instrumental folklore from Transylvania- Asymmetric rhythms and modal patterns*]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Arpeggione.

Haplea, Doina, Ioan Haplea, and Ion H. Ciubotaru. 2008. *Folclor Muzical din Ținutul Neamțului* [*Musical Folklore from the Neamțului Land*]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Arpeggione.

Nurbert-Chețan, Mihaela and Nicolae Teodoreanu. 2017. "*Transcrierea muzicală analitică, instrument de configurare a structurii melodiilor de căluș* [*Analytical Musical Transcription, instrument for configuration of the*

structure of the căluș melodies]". *Anuarul Institutului de Etnografie și Folclor „Constantin Brăiloiu"*, new series, tome 28: 999-122. București: Editura Academiei.

Rădulescu, Speranța. 2011. "Un reper durabil: Constantin Brăiloiu [A lasting reference: Constantin Brăiloiu]". In *Memorie Activă (Active Memory)*, coord. by Laurent Aubert. București: Editura Martor.

Sulițeanu, Ghizela. 1989. "Principiile și legile folclorului în etnomuzicologie [The principles and laws of the folklore in ethnomusicology]". *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor* 5: 397-411. București.