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## Gypsy Music versus the Music of Others

Speranța Rădulescu

The Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest

My lecture is an assemblage of personal notes of research worker. I apologize for choosing this unconventional formula, wich I have opted for, not out of narcissism or exhibitionism, but, as I must confess from the very beginning, because I am not an expert in Romany studies. Besides, I come from a country in which Romany studies were repressed for decades. The only pages I have thus far explicitly devoted to the Roma can be found in a small chapter in my doctoral dissertation, dealing with their traditional occupations, and in a travel journal which recounts in a humorous vein my miraculous adventures in Europe, in company with the musicians of Clejani, who have in the meantime become famous under the name of The Haidouk (Outlaw) ensemble. The journal, by the way, could only be published after the events of 1989. On the other hand, do not rush to consider me an impostor; I do have serious reasons for venturing before you today. I am an ethomusicologist and for the last about 20 years I have particularly occupied myself with the study of traditional Romanian music, as interpreted by rural professional musicians, the so-called lăutari. În Romania about 80 percent of the *lăutari* are Romanies. Moreover, I have written a book and a few studies on this type of music. Yet, none of the pages I published before 1989 mentions the word Gypsy a fact which, incidentally, was reproached to me

with innocent unconsciousness by the American ethnomusicologist Margaret Beissinger, in her book The Art of the Lăutar (1991). Apparently, her criticism is profoundly unfair: in the early years of my career the word Gypsy no longer was allowed in print except in specially approved publications and under the signature of authors selected for their political obedience. However, my friend Margaret is partially right: when you consistently avoid writing about a certain topic, you eventually stop reflecting sufficiently on it and end up eliminating it from your concerns. I am afraid this was, to a certain extent, my case too. I fell a victim to one of the most destructive and perfidious effects of censorship: the ban on word distracted my attention from the realities they cover.

But it is not less true that I have not even for a moment lost sight of the fact that the majority of the people I have been working with are Romanies; I never stopped noticing the peculiarities of their social and musical behavior; and I never stopped noting that, irrespective of the ethnic affiliation (often debatable) of the music they play – be it Romanian, Hungarian, Jewish, or of any other origin – the Roma always add to it something which no doubt bears the mark of their own ethnicity.

How did it come about that the word Gypsy became unacceptable in the publications of communist Romania? At first, the answer seems simple: the regime had a nationalist-chauvinistic orientation. To a great extent that answer is correct, but it is also worth explaining a little.

During the first decade of its establishment in Romania, Soviet communism was internationalist. The majority of the leaders at the top of the political pyramid, many of them come from Moscow together with the Red Army, were Jews, Hungarians, or Russians. The local rulers were then selected from among the ethnic minority groups, including the Roma. At the same time a fierce persecution was set in motion against the Romanians, whose elite was whirled away to jail, and against ethnic Germans, who were massively deported to Siberia. Of course, the people who accepted to collaborate with the power, at a time when active anticommunist resistance was still strong, were mostly unscrupulous, déclassé upstarts, who were thus seizing an unhoped-for opportunity to climb up the social ladder. Unfortunately, the natural animosity they drew on themselves was later reflected upon their ethnic group. About the mid-sixties the regime began to gradually change its ethnic minority policy and by the end of the next nearly two decades, in the eighties, it had already become plainly nationalistic with chauvinistic tendencies. Non-Romanians were step by step purged from key positions. The removal of ethnic Hungarians was slow, cautious, and in any case only partial, because their community was strong, enjoyed strong backing from abroad, and defended its privileges vehemently. But the Roma were ousted without difficulty; only few were able to cling to the power mechanism - the shrewdest and cruelest of them, those who had distinguished themselves by the fanaticism with which they had promoted the line of the one-party system. On the other hand, the power itself was keen on keeping up democratic appearances. To avoid giving rise to discussions, the power began shunning all ethnic problems and forbade everybody to tackle them in public. In the Romanian Socialist State all the citizens had equal rights, what did it matter to which ethnic group they belonged? To utter and especially to print the word *Gypsy* amounted to calling attention to the fact that they *exist* and that, however you put it, they are not the same thing as the Romanians. Banning the word looked like the ideal solution: *that which is not written or spoken about does not exist.* And the Gypsy question indeed ceased to exist in official political discourse, but it went on smoldering underneath in political actuality, in private and off-the-record conversations, in people's attitudes and behavior, and in real life.

As a person and research worker, I was, after all, brought up in the polluted climate of communist ideology and was, though unwillingly, marked by it. To me, therefore, there was no Gypsy question for a long time. There were, naturally, the real Roma, the people I worked with, the musical elite of the villages. I could not help seeing them. Most of them had lost their own language and had adopted the language of the majority population. They had households in villages eiher intermingled with the others or grouped together in a district on the outskirts. They were well integrated in the social life, especially those scattered among Romanians in mixed villages. They behaved like Romanians and appeared to be getting along quite well with their Romanian neighbors - in fact, many of them also have some amount of Romanian blood in their veins. They enjoyed the respect of the other villagers; they were lively, imaginative, and dynamic people whom I admired. Where could the "Gypsy problem" be? I never pondered that what I saw and learned about them concerned only the lăutari Romanies, the elite, the so-called silk Gypsies - for these are Roma who practice an important and valued profession at a high level of proficiency. This profession has shaped them in a distinct way: it has brought them into permanent contact with the majority population and has made them honest, trustworthy, moderate drinkers, and obliging individuals. By practicing it, they have earned the respect of their fellowmen. In other words, I was overlooking that the *lăutar*'s profession facilitates a good integration and opens up the way toward a social

status comparable with that of the others; in short, it gives them a chance which is not within every Romany's reach.

However, the lăutar's profession was not always as profitable and well-thought-of. The elderly told me that practicing it 50 or 60 years ago was a rather agonizing and unprofitable business. Then the musicians would go to the client on foot, dragging their instruments through dust, cold, or sleet for many kilometers. Oral or written contracts obliged them to perform standing for hours or even days on end with few breaks for relaxation. The client and his company treated them harshly whenever their music was out of tune, they mixed up dance melodies, or forgot song words. An error deemed grievous, enough was punished with a beating or other humiliations: they were left ladderless up in a tree, or their bows were smeared with lard or bacon. their clothes were daubed with paint on the back, etc. (To be honest, we must say that neither were the Romanian lăutari spared such treatment.) It is only now that the lautari have become "gentlemen": now the client takes them out and back home by car; at weddings they take turns with a rock band, which permits them to rest for minutes or even hours; the amplifiers they use help them spare their voices and instruments; the audiences are more casual and ignorant and no longer pester them with requests, as in the past, the feasts are shorter; and the pay is relatively more adequate. A highly rated *lăutar* can make over 80,000 lei at a wedding, which is the equivalent of only about \$60, but represents at the same time two thirds of a slightly above-average monthly salary. As at weekends he may be hired to play at two weddings, his income – to which earnings from agriculture or his worker's wages can be added - is not negligible at all. However, in a numerous family money is soon used up expeditiously. That is why, although he earns more than his farming neighbors, the countryside musician leads a rather poor life.

Nowadays the consideration his neighbors show him is also visibly greater. I have often stayed in Gypsy homes and saw how often the

householders were visited by neighbors with business or just for a chat, as among friends. I saw people greet them in the street and ask them how they are and saw women coming to borrow food and youths asking them to play at their wedding. However, the appreciation they get largely depends on the degree of their integration. Countryfolk rate their fellowmen - Romanians or of any other ancestry - according to precise criteria. To be held in good repute, a man must be hardworking, wise and thrifty, helpful, a moderate drinker, well-off (as much as possible in a poor country), and he must have a serious and united family. A Rom who meets these requirements is treated exactly as a Romanian who has the same qualities. Yet, it is also true that as soon as he commits a blameworthy act, his neighbors will say "The Gypsy!" about him. This exclamation might well be a belated linguistic reflection of an attitude that was once clearly disparaging. That attitude has changed in time, though, and, in normal circumstances, it stood a good chance to fade away. But the events of December 1989 have caused a great social upheaval that has brought to light all the conflicts that had been smothered by force for too long. Here and there anti-Gypsy prejudice has also been reinvigorated. Moreover, the debates held in the West on the Gypsy problem in Romania, so much based on at least incomplete if not distorted and speciously misinterpreted information as they often are, are inflaming the spirits instead of calming them down. Anyhow, even when the Gypsy lăutar perhaps was situated at the bottom of the countryside hierarchy, there still was a moment when he was praised to the skies: the moment of his music. Then he was hugged and kissed, rewarded abundantly, treated like a prince or as a friend. He endured without a murmur the torture of this glory and martyrdom, for both were part of his professional duties. Romanian lăutari, for that matter, were treated in the same way, more gently or as harshly, but essentially alike.

In general the Gypsy *lăutar* is a strong and volcanic man. He is noisy in the street and at the pub, where he often lingers about for pleasure but also for professional reasons (here are contracts won and signed). He has a rich imagination, a gift for storytelling, but also an inclination for telling lies. Cowardly more often than not, he becomes brave and fiery in extreme situations. He makes friends easily, but as easily is he angered. Suspicious and credulous, loyal and timeserving, sentimental and cruel, the Rom seems to twin together all extremes. Very hospitable (just like the Romanians, for that matter), he immediately invites you to share his meals and home with him. If you refuse, he is saddened but does not insist, thinking that you refused because he is a Gypsy. If he is hardworking, serious, and thrifty, he owns a home as rich and clean as that of a prominent Romanian. If he is lazy and addicted to drink, he lives in indescribable squalor.

In this relations with the other villagers he is rather negligent and often breaks his word. But his professional contracts are handled with extrem seriousness. Failure to show up before his client on the agreed date and time is absolutely out of the question. If circumstances fall outside his control, he looks and pays for a susbtitute. I was surprised to learn that not even an offer of a well-paid tour in the West – a strong temptation to any Eastern European musician – can deter a self-respecting *lăutar* from keeping his word, which, at least in this situation, is far more important to him than money.

During his musical performance the *lăutar* tries more or less successfully to abstain from drinking. But after the show, he and his group members get very drunk. Then, his varices swollen and painful, he goes home exhausted and literally, lies in bed for two or three days. After prolonged performances fatal heart attacks are frequent occurrences.

The Gypsy *lăutar* believes in God and often calls on His name with reverence. But in his everyday life he nevertheless forgets the precepts of Christian morality. He is mobile, yet inert and

conservative. If he has adopted the Romanians language, beliefs, and customs, he has then preserved them with fidelity, at times with more fidelity than the Romanians themselves have. Not a few times have I collected from the Roma rare or entirely forgotten Romanian songs. On the other hand, the Gypsy is the first in the village to catch from the radio or the TV a new song, a new turn in a melody, or an unknown accompaniment formula. His attachment to tradition coupled with a taste for innovation might well be a trait in his race, but, over and above, the *lăutar* has cultivated it intently for professional reasons: at a feast he must know everything that is being, or has ever been, played or sung in the village and surroundings to be able to cater for all tastes regardless of the listeners' age, sex, level of education, marital status, or walk of life.

The Gypsy *lăutar*'s appraisal of a fellow musician is just and unaffected by bias or emotions. Consequently, the real virtuosos get the recognition they deserve if they are not too outmoded. As he grows old, the prestigious *lăutar* becomes a persona studiously built up in greater and greater harmony with a certain imago. He stands upright; makes firm and calm gestures; walks with dignified steps; speaks few, slow, and emphasized words; combs his brilliantined hair straight back; wears a suit, tie, and hat on all occasions; and greets ceremoniously and slightly condescendingly. There is also another imago, usually taken as a model by somewhat lowerrated musicians who are nonetheless much liked for their expansiveness: the clown *lăutar*. This character cracks jokes all the time, laughs aloud a lot, tells everybody smutty anecdotes or the most fitting parable, dances, flirts decently with the women, etc., - he is the master of ceremonies and entertainer at weddings in Muntenia and Oltenia (southern Romania; also known as Walachia).

The Gypsy *lăutar* has words of abuse and outrage against his tent-dwelling, vagrant brothers, especially against those who cause trouble to the respectable people. His attitude is motivated by a combination, in varying degrees, of timeserving,

sincere dissociation from anybody who commits antisocial acts, and the pride he takes in being a silk Gypsy, a settled and decent man, and on an equal footing with the Romanians and with the other nations.

Roma *lăutari* live within the cultural boundaries of their village. Here they have their own little spiritual world, distinct from but perfectly compatible with the outside world. Fundamental to the profile and individuality of that world are the language and culture of the majority population.

My on-site research has allowed me to see, from that standpoint, several typical situations that are mentioned below. I will even briefly describe the ones I think I know quite well. My descriptions refer each time to actual villages, in which I have once carried out deeper or less thorough research work because I want to avoid the risk of distorting the facts for the sake of some inevitably precarious generalization. Here they are:

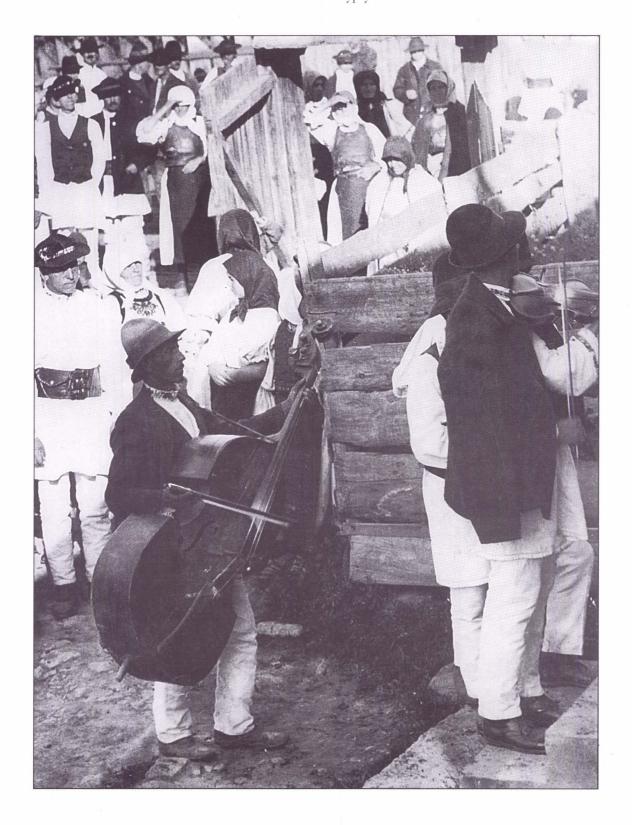
- 1. Exclusively or mostly Romany villages in which the mother tongue and the main intracommunity language is Romany, at times Romanian, or both.
- 2. Villages with dense and compact Romany districts in which the mother tongue is chiefly Romany, while the intracommunity language is, on occasion, either Romany or Romanian;
- 3. Villages with Roma districts in which the only language, or the clearly predominant one at all times, is Romanian;
- 4. Chiefly Romanian villages in which the Romanies live scattered among Romanians and in which the only language is, with rare exceptions, Romanian;
- 5. Villages with mixed population (usually Romanian, Hungarian, and Romany) in which the Roma have largely adopted the culture and at times also the language of one of the other ethnic groups;
- 6. Villages in which the Roma are an ethnic minority enclave in the midst of ethnic Hungarians. (This category is not described here.)

I. a) A village in Mureş County (in the center of Transylvania), the name of which I have long forgotten. I was only passing through. The village did not look stretched-out; the houses were miserable, almost caved in; the streets, muddy; the people's clothes, shabby. The children, women, and the old were almost always out in the street, playing and chatting. A few men – men were few anyway – were out to work. The *lăutari* were gone to make music. They are, in fact, the only ones who have a somewhat more substantial income. It was obvious that mal- or undernutrition undermined everybody's health.

I had come to the village to collect Gypsy songs. To my surprise women of varying ages sang classical Romanian songs with Romany-language words. I asked them about the words and was told that the songs were mere translations into Romany of very known Romanian song verses. They even explained to me how the translation and adaptation had been done. Not discouraged, I listened to more songs, hoping to hear something unfamiliar, but met with no success. However, it was no real surprise, for my quest was short and inevitably not thorough enough. Gypsy music must lie hidden somewhere, here or elsewhere.

1. b) The Romany village of Zece Prăjini in the center of Moldavia<sup>1</sup>. Like almost all the villages in the area, this, too, is a poor village, lying on barren and capricious land. The houses are poor but as well kept up as it is in the power of people with meager resources. Most men are *lăutari* but they also have jobs in the city. A few lucky ones are still being called on to make music at weddings, but most of them have lost all hope of ever getting an engagement: country brass bands are no longer in fashion.

The villagers are calm, hardworking, honest, polite, and never get excessively drunk. Their efforts to give luster to poverty are downright heroic. From among them have risen intellectuals they are proud of, people in high positions in the city, engineers, and university professors. The Romany school teacher is taking courses



Gypsy *lăutari* from Năsăud (center of Transylvania) in 1930 Photo: The Museum of the Romanian Peasant collection.

from the Law School<sup>2</sup>. In homes either Romanian or Romany are spoken; in the street, only Romanian, but, who knows, maybe they wanted to make a "good impression" on me.

Despite all efforts, I was not able to see or hear anything that could distinguish them from the Romanians. Even their temperament is quiet. Maybe they have taken it on from the Moldavians, who have an unfailing reputation for gentleness. They dance just like the Romanians, too. As to their music, it is the oldest I have ever heard in central Moldavia.

2. Clejani – a Walachian village in Muntenia (southern Romania), about 50 kilometers south of the capital (Bucharest). Somewhere in its surroundings there was once a monastery which had Roma bondmen. After their liberation they were put in possession of land, apportioned among them from an estate on one side of the village. The descendants of those freedmen still live on the so-called "Gypsy line." Their streets are muddy; the houses, crooked and neglected; everywhere, overwhelming squalor. Yet, the streets are full of life, the theater where all their dramas are consumed: quarrels with wives, children's pranks, scenes of jealousy, disputes over money, etc. Romany, Romanian, or a mixture of both are spoken, depending on speaker, situation, or topic, but Romany is predominant. However, their customs, beliefs, and practices are mostly Romanian.

Contacts and dealings with the other (non-Romany) villagers are rather superficial but good. No wonder, for they look terribly agitated, as if made from another stuff. The mayor, a serious and moderate man, told me that they were crazy, but they never really gave him serious trouble. Besides, they make such beautiful music...

Most men are *lăutari* – high-class musicians. Apparently about 50 years ago there was in the village a kind of "private school", kept by the grown-ups for their sons and grandsons. The musicans' repertoire is chiefly Romanian. It includes old and new songs from the entire area.

The words of the old songs are always Romanian, but their newer repertoire also includes songs in Romany, at times mixed with Romanian. These newer creations do not sound genuinely rural, but rather suburban and heteroclite: they are the melodies I now and then hear on Saturday evenings in my district of Bucharest, where there are not many Roma. The words must be very sentimental, for all the Romanies cry their hearts out when they listen to them. If I were to pick out for someone some Gypsy music, I might choose this one, but I would waver a lot before doing it and would select it without much conviction.

The *lăutari* of Clejani make admirable music. Their temperament, passion for music, and *joie de vivre* in general are irrepressibile. They improvise as they breathe. They gesticulate a lot and rivet their gaze on you, so that your attention will not slip away from them even for a moment. If you want to meet them, go to a concert of the Haidouk ensemble – you will not regret it.

3. The village of Soporu de Câmpie, Transylvania. Of course, here too there were once an estate and a monastery with Roma bondmen. In mid 19th century there came freedom and landownership for them. Then the Gypsy district was established, which has existed until today. It is neither too wealthy nor too poor. The impression you get is that the Roma villagers are hardworking, but not beyond measure. At any rate, most of them are as poor as the other villagers -Romanians and a few ethnic Hungarians. Street life is animated, especially in the evening. The Roma speak Romanian in public and at home. Those over 70 years old still remember Romany a little, but cannot speak it with ease. In nice weather the ceterași (violin players) come out in the street and play dance music - everybody, including five- or six-year-olds, starts hopping heartily. Their songs and dances are Romanian, only certain choreographic motions<sup>3</sup> are somewhat more peculiar.

The *ceterași* of Soporu are the best musicians on the Transylvanian Plain. The respect the peasants from the village and from the whole area show them is quite high. But it is as true that they have earned and deserved it by their decent behavior (though a bit superior) and particularly by their admirable instrumental music. For the past about ten years they have teamed up with a vocalist, a Romanian peasant who is considered to be the best singer in Transylvania. The Romanian's life among these Romanies is not easy: the group leader misses no occasion to remind him that he is a nobody and that he owes the little fame he has gained exclusively to the leader. The Romanian bears it: he himself is too good a musician not to realize that he would not easily find such good partners.

4. The village of Mârşa on the Danubian Plain. Like all the villages in Muntenia, it is not too rich or too well-off. The Roma are scattered all over the place. My musicians are rather fortunate: they have new and healthy houses on the asphalted main street, they have relatively secure jobs in the public-service sector, they continually get engagements to make music at weddings and baptisms, and they also derive some income from agricultural and animal husbandry work. They are neat-looking and fairly well-off, but not really rich at all. They speak Romanian at home and out in the world. They do not have any problem whatever with the Romanians, although their village is only 20 kilometers away from Bolintinu, the site of interethnic conflicts protractedly commented on in the Romanian and European press.

These musicians play purely Romanian music for Romanians and Roma alike (of course, insofar as one can seriously speak about "purity"). However, their singing and their instrumental execution feature such exuberance and pathos as could be attributed to their specifically Gypsy interpretation. For some time now the *lăutari* have become accustomed to associating newer suburban tunes with Romany verses which they have learned off-hand from musicians from other villages. Like all the musicians in Romania, they too have heard that Gypsy

music is an "in thing" in the West and consequently want to be always prepared for the eventuality of a tour. It does them no harm either because there are also villages in which Romany-language songs are in great demand.

The best *lăutar* in Mârșa is Dinu Vasile – a dependable, hardworking, likable and open man of an admirable moral rectitude and proud of the honor shown to him by everybody in the village. He once commented in the presence of his band members on the tragic incident of Bolintinu. (Where, following a homicide committed in the middle of the street, all Roma evildoers were driven away from the village and their homes were burned down. Then the Romanians demonstratively took under their protection the "decent" Roma, with whom they have continued living together in the same village.) On that occasion Vasile said,

"What were the Romanians to do, poor fellows, if they no longer could live because of their wrongdoing?... But then the Romanian (the victim was Romanian), he too, maybe he was drunk, maybe he was picking a quarrel. ... But killing a man is killing a man. ... Woe, poor Gypsies, they're in a pretty bad shape now, becoming homeless like the vagrants. ... But killing a man is killing a man. ... "

5. The village of Sărmaşu, Transylvania. There live in almost equal numbers Romanians, ethnic Hungarians, and Roma. Before the war there were also several Jewish families in the village. Some of them were butchered between 1940 and 1944 by gangs of Horthyite invaders (the village was situated on the then frontier and was particularly exposed to recurrent raids). The surviving Jews resettled in Israel after the war. After a while they returned to bury their about 130 dead, who had been thrown into a mass grave at one end of the village, and to raise a monument to them. Among their dead they also found the bodies of over 100 Romanians, who were identified as former intellectuals and prominent people from the village. It is not known why these latter victims have never been

spoken or written about. Nor would I have known anything, had not the Romany musician Moni Varga told me about them. Those were unusually hard times for his people too. At each Horthyite raid the Roma would take their women and children to the shelter of the woods, waiting there until the Romanians' return. Some of the Roma died, others survived. Moni has survived too. In spite of his Hungarian name, he is a "Romanian Gypsy". His soul has been scarred by such fear and abhorrence that even today reflect on the Hungarian inhabitants of the village. Yet, feelings are feelings and business is business. Moni makes music at Romanian, Hungarian, and Romany weddings alike. For the Roma he plays "about the same music as for the Romanians"; for the Hungarians his repertoire and style of interpretation are different. He performs as gladly for all. He even remembers the music he once used to play at Jewish feasts and celebrations. Or, more exactly, he still remembered, for Moni died two months ago, before being able to make recording for the disc I wanted to devote to him.

In conclusion, the Roma interpret their music and the music of others. There should be, at least theoretically, sufficiently great differences between them to justify their different categorization. During the past few years I have tried to distinguish and highlight the differences between Gypsy music and Romanian music (the latter being well-known to me and constituting, therefore, a solid system of reference). Without having reached a firm conclusion yet, I have noticed several things which I am now putting forward to you as tentative theses.

Also theoretically, the differences should be recognizable on several different planes:

- a) that of the musical structures,
- b) that of the stylistic preferences and, implicitly, of entire musical repertoires, and
- c) that of the way in which the ones and the others perceive certain music as belonging to themselves or to the others.

- a) The differences on the level of musical structures proper (i.e. the objective differences per se, unaffected by the way in which the Roma or the Romanians evaluate them) are small. They manifest themselves especially in details: when performing for themselves, the Roma's execution is rhythmically freer, with a surplus of ornaments, more nuanced, with dynamic contrast, and more emphatic - even if the majority of the musical pieces they play are the same as those they play for the Romanians. Though the generalization is a bit stretched, the truth is that it is, more often than not, difficult or even impossible to distinguish a performance given for the Romanians from one given for the Roma, or one given by Romanian läutari from another given by Roma lăutari.
- b) The truly important difference is found on the plane of the preponderance of certain stylistic registers, manners of interpretation, and musical pieces in the repertoires of Roma lăutari as opposed to Romanian lăutari. For instance, in the south of the country the Roma decidedly prefer, at their feasts, the latest suburban music with strong Oriental overtones (consequently, they also prefer musical pieces from this category); in Transylvania they appear more inclined toward café concert music, which they color with southern elements; in Banat they are more inclined toward the so-called Serbian popular music - and so on. Thus, it is obvious enough that the Roma's tastes are conditioned by the general climate of the cultural area in which they live: it is known that Muntenia (and implicitly Walachian music) has for several centuries exposed itself to Turkish and Greek influences, that Transylvania has echoed Central European reverberations, etc. In my opinion, the styles for which the Roma show preference can by no means be attributed to them; they are nothing else but the styles preferred by almost all of the inhabitants of the suburbs and by a great many of the present-day countryside. At the same time it is, nevertheless, as true that the Roma have contributed substantially to the cre-

ation and circulation of those styles – first, as professionals obliged to keep up on the latest developments; second, as people innately receptive and mobile; and finally, as people whose cultural background contains a marked Oriental component.

Within the realm of vocal music, the Roma's preferences are given to sentimental lyric and epic verses that are firmly tied to the immediate present and everyday life. The verses are sung in Romany or, most often, in Romanian. From my point of view (which might perhaps disconcert you), language is in this case irrelevant; what matters is the poetical universe outlined by the verses.

c) The aforementioned differences are evaluations (rather approximate, in fact) that can be made by an outsider to both cultures. But those appreciations do nor necessarily coincide with those made by the Roma or the Romanians themselves. And it seems to me that we should also consider what the Roma perceive as belonging to them and representing them musically, as it is equally important to know what the Romanians think about the same things.

I said before that there are villages in which the Roma have entirely adopted the music of the majority Romanian population. In those villages the Roma's music is as much the music of the others; it is the music of the entire rural community or cultural area. In this case the dichotomy **our music versus yours** becomes meaningless. The Roma know this thing and acknowledge it unreservedly. Since such a categorical assertion must be supported with arguments, please allow me to digress a little and relate to you episodes which I witnessed and which, maybe, you might find convincing.

In the fall of 1992 a Western manager organized a tour of shows in France by the musicians of Soporu de Câmpie (the Transylvanian village I spoke about at item 3. above). I accompanied them as art manager, responsible for artistic arrangements, and translator-interpreter. The whole advertising campaign of the tour gravita-

ted toward the collocation Gypsy music. It did not matter that it is false; it was attractive and it was winning more public. The tour took place at a time when one of the fashionable topics in the media was the persecution of the Roma in Romania and their expulsion to Germany, a country in which an equally ruthless treatment was awaiting them. Now, the musicians of Soporu, five Romanies and a Romanian, do not normally read the press, so they had not been informed that they were victims. They were only surprised to see large crowds of journalists swarming around them and pestering them with bizarre queries. Some of the questions they were asked referred to the way in which they were being persecuted (the persecution itself being questioned not even for a moment). Other questions inquired about the specific features of Gypsy music as opposed to Romanian music. I will reproduce now from memory the essence of a dialogue which I mediated then.

"The music you interpret is Gypsy?" The Romany group leader answered without hesitation, "No, it's Romanian."

"Is there a difference between the way you play this music and the way the Romanians do?" Says the leader, "None".

Here the Romanian singer interposed, "There wouldn't be differences. ... But, you know, the Roma are different from the Romanians. They pick up music ever since they're little. They're very talented. ... But in dancing there is a difference, though: when they dance the *Hārtag* (fast dance for couples), the Roma shake their hips, raised hands, and bodies<sup>4</sup>. ..."

In spite of all their democratic enthusiasm, the journalists could not extract from the musicians more sensational information. A few even realized that they were being told the truth.

A year leater the Soporu band made another tour, this time in Switzerland. Just as we landed at Geneva, we were retrieved directly from the airport to take part in a TV show devoted to the International Wold Day of the Roma. There was no time for explanations for us: all that counted was for us to know that, at a certain sign by the

studio director, the artistes were to start playing music and dancing.

The TV program consisted mainly of a panel discussion. There had been invited three important leaders of the Roma communities from Spain, Switzerland, and Romania to debate on the present problems of the Roma. The delegate from Romania was the chief of the Roma Confederations, sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe. At a given moment the moderator exclaimed in the cheerfully grandiloquent voice characteristic of his profession: "And now you will listen to a piece of beautiful Gypsy music from Transylvania!" At the right sign the Roma musicians and the Romanian dancers (now the group also included dancers) started their performance. When it ended, sociologist Gheorghe suddenly said, in a clear and slightly irritated tone:

"You have in fact listened to a beautiful piece of Romanian music from Transylvania. Regrettably, this confusion, annoying to Romanians and Roma alike, is being made a bit too often. Let us understand clearly – this music was Romanian. Please let us, the Roma, determine which music belongs to us!"

True. Only that the Roma's appreciations are seldom so firm and consonant, because the real circumstances seldom are so unambiguous. In towns or more urbanized villages, where the music is diverse and eclectic, the Roma pass different, and in my opinion rather subjective, evaluative judgments. Some of them count as Gypsy music that music which the ethnomusicologists label as suburban music. But concurrently they also acknowledge that the same music is as much interpreted and listened to by the Romanians too. Others are of the opinion that only vocal music with Romany words is Gypsy music. A third category identifies Gypsy music with the newest stratum of suburban music and particularly with the so-called manele - a kind of lascivious dance melodies believed to be of Turkish origin (which is wrong). However, most of them

have confused opinions, from which it can be concluded that there *does exist* a Gypsy music, but they find it impossible to point out *exactly* which musical pieces are purely Gypsy. As fuzzy as it seems, this point of view is in fact the most reasonable one: people do feel that there is a Romany distinctiveness, but they cannot point it out in a given musical piece or group of pieces but only on the abstract plane (which is also inaccessible to their verbalization ability) of the creation and interpretation style.

The view of a Rom musician from Bucharest is also worth mentioning. An intelligent, clear-headed man, who is old enough to have had the occasion to make music at all sorts of feast and celebrations, he once said:

"Let's be honest, madam. There is no Gypsy music. Whatever music we play for us we also play for the Romanians. It's **fiddler's music**, that's what it is!... Now they (he referred to Roma *lăutari* in general) go from village to village to learn Romany, at least a few words, to insert them in their songs. Because they, too, have heard that this is in great demand now – you know, a tour here, a festival there...".

Then he suddenly remembered that I had looked for him with a view to his possible participation in a gypsy music festival in Germany: "But, if you will, we can make Gypsy music, too. Look, I've brought along this boy who knows Romany. ..."

The Romanians' opinions about what is and what is not Gypsy music are also as fuzzy as possible, but quite close in general to those held by the Roma. Only some intellectuals – usually those who have vague and idyllic ideas about the traditional music of their people – are inclined to think that any newer music, usually ugly and noisy, that is interpreted by a folk band (taraf) is Gypsy music. Perhaps they dislike it too much to admit that, such as it is, it nevertheless represents them, too, one way or another. And then they prefer to attribute it to the Roma.

#### Notes

- 1. In Romanian Moldova. Historic Moldavia is now split between Romania and the newly independent Moldova, a member state of the C.I.S.
- 2. Within the framework of the Romanian system of nonattendance higher education.
- 3. Some motions, called *de cingărit* in the local speech, include hip and body shaking and the raising of the hands above the head.
- 4. The Romanian word is "cingăresc", see footnote 3, "de cingărit".

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