

The Lyrical Song in Bihor from Tradition to Contemporaneity

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“Man sings by his voice, by his nature, by his inner state at that time. The one who takes over the song, enriches it with his own emotion, feeling and sensitivity... and this goes on and on”

Grigore Leșe

SONG, DEFINED in *The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language* as “a musical string of sounds emerging from the mouth or from an instrument”¹, accompanied the “human century”, from cradle to grave. The statement is also valid for the toilers in the villages of Bihor who, apart from being ploughmen, shepherds, craftsmen, also produced lyrics and music, expressing the innermost states of the human soul: *dorul* (longing), *jălea* (grief) and *urătul* (depressing state of mind caused by fear, loneliness, lack of occupation, dull life), of which the great philosopher Lucian Blaga used to say that it cannot be translated into another language, as they define the Romanian states of mind². Through song, made through the syncretism of poetry with music, and sometimes with dance, the villager expressed his individual state, his relations with his peers and with the community in its entirety, his perception of the world, the life and the universe. Occasional or non-occasional, ritual or ceremonial, *songs* remain evidence of the intense, profound and authentic spiritual life of the Romanian village in general, and of Bihor villages in particular.

The oldest forms of *popular song* appear in the poetry of ritual ceremonies of the *human century*, in the *triad of life* (birth, wedding and funeral). Themes such as *alienation*, *love*, or those related to the *traditional occupations* (shepherding, farming), experience a lyrical development in wedding songs and in carols. *The feeling of death* is pictured in *dirges* and *funeral ceremonial songs*; similarly, the *erotic lyrics* are pictured in the poetry of carols, especially through the portrait of the beautiful girl, carried in a silk cradle, along the waters or on a deer’s antlers³.

The songs that directly reflect the human being’s states of mind are *cântecelul lirice doinite* (the singing of the doina), called “hori” (hora- a Romanian dance in which the performers form a ring) on the Crișul Repede Valley or “trăgănat” on the Crișul

Negru Valley. Dorul (longing) and love, with their fulfilments and non-fulfilments, the alienation from the village and from the loved ones, the themes that give the name of some songs in the folklorists' classifications, occur at a higher frequency, as "No suffering is so great/as not to be turned into a song" as the poet says⁴.

The lyrical song in the Romanian area in general, and in the Bihor area in particular, found its identity and performers relatively late, although for hundreds of years we have been talking about the musical talent of the Romanian people, and the historical sources certify the innate talent for singing of the Romanian peasant. The great historian Nicolae Iorga used to say about Romanians that first you hear the song, and then the sun rises. Through singing, the peasant freely confessed his aspirations, thoughts, sufferings, as the elegiac folk song says:

"I don't sing 'cos I can sing
I sing to appease my heart"

Not often do we find in the Romanian ethnographic area a region similar to Bihor, rich in artistic manifestations, in those folkloric songs that were born thousands of years ago and were transmitted from generation to generation, through the talent and love of the anonymous people, up to present days. Bihor County was researched by renowned folklorists. Among them, honourable places are occupied by Bela Bartok, Traian Mârza, Tiberiu Alexandru, Constantin Brăiloiu, Emilia Comișel and many others. Through their studies, they concluded that Bihor is a representative area for the Romanian people, that folklore, especially songs, have lasted against all odds, that the Romanian peasant from Bihor carries the song in his soul, that it has been his life for thousands of years. He wrote his lyrics while shepherding, or while ploughing and sowing, he hummed them on his flute or bagpipe, sharing them with others at evening sittings and round dancing. The researcher Emilia Comișel was impressed by "such a diversity of colours, rhythms and forms in the folk song of Bihor. All these show the spiritual wealth of the people of Bihor, who, with modesty and love, played their role in the continuity of his genre, in the perpetuation of a thesaurus that was created over two thousand, or three thousand years ago, with the birth of the Romanian language and people"⁵.

The research of the folklore of Bihor, especially of the *lyrical song*, enjoyed a special interest from the part of the Hungarian musician Bela Bartok, who, ever since 1909, began several folklore collection campaigns in Bihor. He began his investigations in the area of Beiuș, probably on the 18th of July 1909, in the house of professor Bușița from Beiuș (his wife, Cornelia Bușița, was Bela Bartok's colleague at the Music Academy in Budapest), with two informers from Delani. In this campaign, Bartok gathered over 260 songs from the villages of Delani, Teleac, Leheceeni, Criștioru de Jos, Poiana, Hotârel, Budureasa, Cresuia, Sânmartin de Beiuș, Drăgănești and Săliște de Beiuș⁶. In the spring of 1910, Bartok returned to Beiuș, where he gathered over 100 Romanian songs from the villages of Cărpinet, Câmp Moși and Vașcău. This material, gathered on the upper stream of the Crișul Negru river, was the subject of the volume *Muzica populară de pe cursul superior al Crișului Negru* (Folk music from the upper stream of the Crișul Negru

river), a volume that appeared under the aegis of the Romanian Academy. The volume contains a vast variety of genres: the song itself, called in the area *hore* or *hora* (round dancing), the winter holidays songs (*carols, vișlaim, stea*), *wedding songs, dirges (groaning)*, *dance songs and shoutings (decăntece)* etc. Another campaign of Bartók's in Bihor started at the end of 1911 and took place in the villages of: Sâmbăta, Rogoz, Incești, Dicănești, Drăgești, Tașad, Cotiglet, Corbești, Rohani and Cociuba Mare, wherefrom he gathered over 200 popular songs⁷. At the beginning of 1912, Bartók was investigating the villages in the Crișul Repede valley: Groși, Luncoșoara, Bulz and Lorău where he gathered 90 songs, 52 of which were instrumental. The last important collection made by Bartók in Bihor was gathered in February 1914 in Dumbrăvița de Codru, Șoimi, Urviș, Borz Pocioveliște, Pântășești and Căbești, wherefrom he gathered over 150 songs, 39 of which were instrumental⁸.

The lyrical songs of Bihor, created by *the anonymous people of history*, found relatively late its performers or its initiators, the ones who could highlight it and transmit it to the generations to come. They were the animators, the ones who would carry on “cântecul doinit” (the elegiac folk song) and “horele” (hora - round dancing) of Bihor, giving them the charm and authenticity they enjoyed through the voice of the peasant, their maker. These *ambassadors of Bihor lyrical song* emerged only later because of the difficult historical conditions, but also because of a lack of involvement of the decision-makers in the organization and management of culture. Furthermore, from a demographic point of view, the cities of Bihor had an ethnic structure that was not at all favourable to the Romanian cultural manifestations. As for the rural areas, when Bartók used to gather folklore in Bihor, but also a few decades afterwards, the villages were undeveloped, mainly illiterate, with a domestic production covering almost all daily necessities, without ways of communication, where the only form of culture was the spoken one, the folklore, with its rare manifestations, at the important events throughout the year. Of course, there were in the past century some local instrumental bands—the famous “Transylvanian Trio”—that used to play at weddings or at other events, but, apart from their social function of “fiddlers”, these representatives of the active folklore did nothing for the promotion of the popular creations, on the contrary, they contributed to their distortion by the absorption of some foreign influences⁹. We can talk about a direct promotion at a national scale of the Romanian folk music only after World War II, when the “artists’ union” (formed mainly by Hungarians) would take the decision to set up the Danko Pista Orchestra in Oradea. In this orchestra, around 1947-1948, we can find among the performers a Romanian, the only Romanian as a matter of fact, Traian Hurgoi. From 1950, the Danko Pista Orchestra was included in the State Philharmonic of Oradea, changing its name into Crișana Popular Orchestra. Around 1960-1961, due to Traian Hurgoi's endeavour and arrangements, Maria Haiduc and Maria Dumitraș were brought in the orchestra.

Starting with Elisabeta Pavel, we can say that the folk music of Bihor goes out in the world. Elisabeta Pavel, through her collaboration with Radiodifuziunea Română (The Romanian Radio) and with a series of Bucharest ensembles, among which the Barbu Lăutaru Popular Orchestra, launched the famous songs: *Tragă-nă nană tragă-nă, Bună dimineața nană, Adă Doamne trenu-n gară, Mărs-o badea la Tînca* etc.

Another famous rhapsodist is Traian Hurgoi, who made the popular songs of Bihor known both in the country and abroad. With a rich repertoire, including songs from all the valleys of the Criș rivers, Traian Hurgoi activated at the beginning in the Danko Pișta Orchestra, where he brought Maria Dumitraș and Maria Haiduc, as mentioned above, then, in the Nuntașii Bihorului Ensemble, with whom he travelled a lot in the country and abroad. It is to him that we owe the songs: *Zi mai bine highighiș, Îți picior, ca la Bihor, Mamă eu mă duc cătană, Bihoreană, bihoreană* etc.

Sofia Popa, who proposed a true feast of Bihor folk music, can be regarded as an authentic performer of the songs of Bihor. On her disc recorded at Electrecord we can hear songs of great folkloric value such as: *Astăzi merg, mândră cătană, Roată, roată după masă, Cântec de joc, Bate vânt de primăvară, Cât îi satu de-a nîndu, Zăs-o maica că m-a da* etc. *Sofia Popa's* dancing songs are generally love songs; they reveal the longing for the lover that left the village.

In the same direction of promoting the songs of Bihor, it is also worth mentioning performers like Elena Hașaș, Dumitru Sopen, Gheorghe Sărac, Dorel Moș, and Mariana Stănescu, who, through their rich and various repertoires, honorably represented the authenticity of the popular songs of Bihor through their performances both in the country and abroad. They are considered to be a treasure of soul and song, a spring of everlasting life, who not only provided songs and new moments of emotion, but who also illustrated the beauty of that hard worker of the ancient homeland, who was an authentic text writer and performer of popular songs.

A special place in the folk music of Bihor County is held by the performers Maria Haiduc, Elvira Lerișiu, Viorica Flintașu, Florica Ungur, Florica Duma, Florica Bradu and Florica Zaha. With these performers, a new page in the folklore of Bihor was opened and, moreover, the folklore of that region opened towards the Romanian world and towards universality. Apart from the special fragrance given to the lyrical song of Bihor through the voice of these nightingales, the song puts on the coat of ancientness and authenticity. The song used to accompany the peasant of Bihor to work, to parties, to evening sittings, and even in times of trouble, quenching his longing and grief, having therefore a healing and purifying purpose, both for the performer and for the listener.

These *horitoare* (folk singers) were soon accompanied by other well-known performers of the lyrical songs of Bihor, such as: Vasile Iova, Maria Sidea, Irina Mihoc, Voichița Mihoc, Radu Potoran, Leontin Ciucur, Cornel Borza, Florica Ruja, Viorica Bradea, Felicia Costin, Domnița Săbăduș Pop, Luminița Tomuța, Cornelia Covaciu, Florina Hinsu, Florin Hinsu, Viorica Marc Bulzan etc. Their songs have an air of strange melancholy or nostalgia, a controlled exuberance, coming from somewhere deep and faraway, from a strange cohabitation of the sky with the land, of the paradisiac gardens with the inferno inside us and next to us. The message of these songs is meant to be the triumph of life, of a balanced life, without any overindulgence. We can see in their songs a sublime connection between sacred and profane, a fascinating gateway into the mind of the anonymous creator, of the peasant in general, a development of the symbolism of the fountain, spring, house and yard, village pub, meadows and forests, but also of the *bădița* and *mândruța* (the pair of sweethearts).

The study of *traditional elements* has preoccupied various researchers, from ethnographers, anthropologists, geographers, and sociologists, to folklorists. The research that was carried out was based on the interest of preserving the traditions of the village, its customs, crafts, architecture, rituals and folklore elements, an unsuccessful attempt, as the village communities are in an endless evolution and transformation, at all levels. On the other hand, the investigations that took place revealed an extremely valuable documentary material, stored in folklore archives, in ethnographic museums or as subjects of some studies published in specialized journals. Of course, the socio-cultural changes led to some mutations in the world of *the Romanian village as well*. Alongside the habitat, crafts, architecture, occupations etc., the folklore has suffered transformations as well, with different forms of manifestation in music, dance, or songs.

The understanding of the implications of these transformations and the role of renewals within *folklore* is based on the fact that the folklore, strictly as a historical notion, has a specific content in every age, different from the one of the previous ages. Therefore, contemporary folklore does not include everything that the masses have created throughout the centuries. Some of these creations have been lost, others no longer correspond to the present life experience of the people, to its present state of mind, and, therefore, they vanish¹⁰. Thus, we should keep in mind that *the Romanian folklore* preserves and exploits today the values of the songs, the dances, the popular literature, the instrumental music and the genres that encompass the crystallization of the popular wisdom and wit. For example, from the songs mirroring the people's wishes in their fight for freedom, we have preserved the outlawry songs, the sad songs, the military songs and the songs of alienation.

The Romanian village was an autarchic society, having at the same time a well defined cultural life, manifested through customs, rituals, poetry, prose, dance and songs. All these used to represent the cultural artistic language of the communities whereby they would communicate to the members of the community ritual, ceremonial or artistic messages, the literary, musical and choreographic products that today we call *popular*. This is how we can explain why Bela Bartok wrote in his notes that in Bihor he found "wonderful surroundings, villages where people never left their birthplace, where house production was sufficient for the daily necessities of all the inhabitants". He also wrote that "no event in their life, [whether] harvest, wedding, death etc., would take place without certain traditional rituals carried out according to strict rules, including the singing of certain songs".

The passing from one stage of the folklore to the other, throughout history, took place at shorter or longer intervals. Therefore, during the renewal process, *the old* does not disappear and *the new* does not appear at once, the old creations that go through the process of transformation live for a while together with the new ones, which emerge gradually¹¹.

Today, more than ever, we can see how the archaic forms disappear from the folklore, namely, those ritualistic ways that led to a particular custom, incantation, dance etc., to last over time. If a dance such as *călușul* had at its origins the fulfilment of the ritual

of “healing those taken in căluș”¹², today it is a great folk show, despite the old ritualistic meanings. The same holds true for the *incantations* as means of healing, as, since they are no longer in accordance with today’s views on the world, they are disappearing. *Doinele* (elegiac folk songs) are less and less present, while *the modern version of this song (mancaua)*, gains in popularity and tends to generalize. The shoutings are more often used in dance shows, but also in the songs having a satirical hint. It must be said that they really become richer from performer to performer and from song to song.

Today the setting that has preserved, revived and affirmed in the world of the Romanian village the *shoutings*, namely the *hora*, the horn-violin, has disappeared. It is here, in this area, that the shoutings were born as improvisations satirizing aspects of the peasant life: love, hate, loose morals, laziness, drunkenness etc. They have disappeared from the folklore of the villages, as their framework of expression and reception has also disappeared.

Based on the findings of our field researches, we have drawn the conclusion that today the renewal force dominates beyond any doubt the preservation force of tradition. For example, instead of the *traditional lyrical songs* with slow, drawled melodies, of great regional value, people prefer songs with more rhythm, taken from the dance songs repertoire. Parts of these songs are taken from the radio folklore and TV folklore shows, or are created in haste, by “uninformed” text writers, on a melodic line many times inadequate to the text. We are witnessing at the same time on-the-spot improvisations, which convey no message at all. Another characteristic of the contemporary lyrical song is the consumerist standardization, a leveraging, due also to the fact that the performers are accompanied in their shows by folk music bands or orchestras, which have made certain accompanying patterns¹³, in comparison with the *traditional lyrical song*, which was unaccompanied and coincided in terms of pronunciation.

The *funeral ceremonial* songs have disappeared, even if the mourning still persists as a common remedy. We no longer find the good old storytellers of the village world or the customs that fulfill ritual functions. We can still encounter bands of carolers in the villages of Bihor, but their mission is to obtain *money*, not the performance of an old ritual.

The traditional songs used to convey the messages of the people that created them, with diverse purposes for the members of the community, but always clearly stated by the entire traditional context in which they took place. Today, *the lyrical song* falls under the category of *replica*, similar to the replicas in plastic arts. Those who make reproductions from the traditional or professional point of view are not interested in communicating a traditional folkloric message, but an artistic message that can be perceived as a pleasant way of spending time within a *great, essentialized artistic feeling*¹⁴.

We can infer, without fear of being wrong, that we can feel more and more the presence of the consumption-driven, cheap folklore, which does not convey deep feelings, but only superficial and fleeting feelings, which people however enjoy. Today, *the songs* and *dances* have the role of enhancing and coloring the party and the gaiety of spending time together and enjoying a drink, the *shoutings* are being barely heard in shows, and their message has faded as they are covered by the loud music of the folk band or orchestra or by the drumbeat.



Notes

1. *The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, Ed. Academici RSR, 1975, p.158.
2. Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia Culturii*, Minerva, Bucharest, 1985, p. 291.
3. Mihai Pop, Pavel Ruxândoiu, *Folclor literar românesc*, Ed. Didactică și pedagogică, Bucharest, 1978, p. 353.
4. Lucian Blaga, “Catren”, in *Poezii*, Minerva, Bucharest, 1936, p. 272.
5. Ioan Degău., Miron Blaga, *Cântecul de după cântec*, Primus, Oradea, 2010, p.11.
6. “Bela Bartók și Bihorul”, in *Cântecul de după cântec* (Ioan Degău, Miron Blaga, coordinatori), Primus, 2010, p. 316-317.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 319.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
9. Ioan Degău., Miron Blaga., *op.cit.*, p.12.
10. Mihai Pop, *Folclor românesc*, vol I, Grai și suflet, Cultura națională, Bucharest, 1998, p. 66.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
13. Mihai Pop, *op.cit.*, p.245.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

Abstract

The Lyrical Song In Bihor From Tradition To Contemporaneity

The present study is a research on *lyrical songs* in the villages of Bihor. Such an investigation encompasses the ethno-folkloric research in the villages of Bihor, offering us, from this perspective as well, an understanding of the preservation of the folklore, of *song*, in this collective memory. This aspect is also highlighted by the new mutations that take place in villages, from an economic, social, and demographic perspective, with repercussions for the spiritual universe, especially for *folklore*.

Keywords

folklore, lyrical song, Bela Bartok, folkloric traditions